



CSD NEWS

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Notes From the Director

Mutual Aid: How, What, and Why?

A common theme you will see throughout this newsletter is that of mutual aid. But what exactly is mutual aid? My definition of mutual aid includes involving others in one's life. It is a way to deal with problems or situations that we all face on occasion—discussing these with others who have had similar experiences, and learning new coping strategies from them. Self-help groups such as Recovery, Inc. practice mutual aid. But mutual aid can include much more than self-help alone. It is also a feeling of community. It's sharing a common goal with others and working together to achieve it. It is the knowledge that you are not alone.

Facilitating and promoting mutual aid is an important component of the services that we provide at the Center for Students with DisABILITIES (CSD). This is because research has proven that mutual aid works. Mutual aid methods have proven to be effective for numerous self-help groups, ranging from those who have a fear of public speaking, to those struggling with addictions, to those who are facing a life-threatening illness. Mentor programs are widespread in business, education, and non-profit organizations.

The self-help movement has grown in leaps and bounds over the last two decades.

Estimates of the number of people who participate in self-help in the United States range from 20 million to 56 million.

You are not alone is the central theme of most mutual aid or self-help groups and mentoring programs. Common components generally include facilitating reduced feelings of isolation, creating a sense of community, exchanging ideas and ways of dealing with situations, learning new skills, taking control of attitudes and behaviors to produce desired results, and ob-

taining a sense of control in one's life.

As I recently reviewed the research on self-help I was reminded that the people who provide help to others as mentors or sponsors reap the most rewards from the process. Teaching something to someone can also be one of the most effective ways to learn it yourself.

A student told me that when he was in a serious car accident his eyes were opened to some of the **challenges** people with disabilities face. Because of this experience he wanted to help UH students who have disabilities. He presented his idea to the Provost's Office to create a program at CSD to do this, and the Disability Awareness Program (DAP) was created. A description of this peer mentor program is included on page 2.

On June 8 CSD will begin hosting a new mutual aid activity called *Summer Fun* to provide a forum for students who have disabilities to get together, enjoy snacks and discuss issues that are important to them. (Please see page 2 for detailed information about these meetings.)

The CSD Building is named after Justin Dart, Jr., an internationally-renown disability rights activist and UH alumni. Justin always said that all of his accomplishments came to fruition because of the people who helped him. Justin believed in mutual aid, and incorporated this into all that he did. I will conclude this article with one of Justin's quotes from the final letter that he wrote before he passed away.

I call for solidarity among all who love justice, all who love life, to create a revolution that will empower every single human being to govern his or her life, to govern the society and to be fully productive of life quality for self and for all.

Justin Dart, Jr.

On behalf of the CSD staff, thank you for the mutual aid that you provide to us, and to each other.

By: Cheryl Amoruso
Director, CSD

