

Vicki Niedermayer

CEO of Helping Restore Ability

*Interview conducted by
Nicholas Fields
In 2016 in Arlington, Texas*

Disability Studies Minor
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Biography

Vicki Niedermayer graduated from Texas A&M University with a Bachelor's of Science in Psychology in 1980. She received her Masters from the University of Texas at Arlington in Applied Behavior Analysis in 1986. She began her career with MHMR of Tarrant County (Mental Health Mental Retardation) as it was beginning to deinstitutionalize residents of state schools. After establishing a group home for women from the Denton State School, she became the residential program director and eventually also the director of behavior treatment and crisis team coordinator at MHMR of Tarrant County. After 17 years, Niedermayer moved to Fort Worth's Lena Pope Home in 1999 to become director of training. After two years at a disability-focused non-profit in Dallas, she came back to Arlington in 2001 to serve as the CEO of disability rights and independent living organization Helping Restore Ability (HRA). Under her leadership, HRA has become the largest nonprofit provider of attendants for daily living activities in the state.

Today, she serves on the board of Texas Association of Home Care and Hospice and the international nonprofit advisory board for the executive leadership training organization Vistage. Niedermayer has received numerous awards for her work, including the Legacy Woman of the Year Award (Health and Human Services), the Outstanding Not-For-Profit Organization of the Year from the Arlington Chamber of Commerce in 2010 and the Aggie 100 Award in 2011.

Topics Discussed

- What is Helping Restore Ability (HRA)?
- Career prior to Helping Restore Ability: MHMR of Tarrant County and Lena Pope Home
- Role as CEO of Helping Restore Ability
- Origins and development of Helping Restore Ability
- Staff, volunteers, and community partners for Helping Restore Ability
- Political and financial dynamics faced by Helping Restore Ability
- Building relationships with state legislators

- Niedermayer's service with the Texas Association of Home Care and Hospice and Vistage
 - Future of Helping Restore Ability
 - Importance of volunteering
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Fields

This is Nicholas Fields interviewing Vicki Niedermayer for the UT Arlington Texas Disability Oral History Project. Today's date is May 4th, 2016 [This was an error on the part of the interviewer. This interview actually took place on May 3rd], and I am at Helping Restore Ability's office in Arlington. I am here today to talk with Vicki Niedermayer about her work with Helping Restore Ability. Thank you for participating in the University's Oral History Program.

Niedermayer

You're welcome.

Fields

<topic>What is Helping Restore Ability (HRA)?</topic>

So, my first question, what is Helping Restore Ability and how has it helped people with disability in the Arlington area?

Niedermayer

Helping Restore Ability was first established in 1977 by Sam Provence, and he was the last person to be diagnosed with polio in Tarrant County. He was a fiery, red-headed Irish man and he weaned himself from an iron lung. In Houston at that point in time there wasn't much in the way of treatment or community integration options for people like Sam.

He was in an iron lung and he would lay there all day, which is essentially an iron coffin with his head sticking out. And his family would come down to visit him and he would have a list of things for them to do. And then the next time they came they were to report back on their homework and actions.

From that, that was May 23, 1977, was when Sammy and his family originally started Helping Restore Ability as a 501c3 non-profit with the mission to support people with any kind of disability in remaining active and independent in their communities and able to live, work, and play in their homes and out in the community, like every other citizen.

That was 1977, this year we're celebrating our 39th anniversary. Today, HRA—Helping Restore Ability—is a state-wide organization. We only have this one office here in Arlington and from this office we serve people of all ages, with any kind of disabling condition statewide. We've grown tremendously. Our reach today, in addition to being geographically the entire state of Texas is all encompassing. It originally was right here in Arlington. You asked "How does it impact people here in Arlington?" Do I need to limit to Arlington?

Fields

No.

Niedermayer

Because it is a state-wide organization.

Fields

Whatever the group...

Niedermayer

Ok. Since we are formed and originate from here, our strongest base of clients that we serve is here in the Tarrant County area, seconded by Dallas County. I would tell you that probably 80 percent of those that we serve are here in the North-Central Texas area, and the remaining 20 percent scattered throughout the state. We provide that in-home care. Primarily non-medical assistance with activities of daily living.

We do have two licenses now. One is for the medical licensed care. We are a licensed home health agency, so we are able to provide physical therapy, occupational therapy, nursing care, those licensed kinds of care, medical care. But predominately what we've done historically and today is under the personal attendant service license, which is helping with just...they call them ADLs (activities of daily living): bathing, dressing, cooking, cleaning, laundry, light housekeeping, running to the grocery store, and picking up groceries and the prescriptions that the pharmacy...that kind of non-medical care. So that's what we do for about a thousand people, day-in, day-out with a workforce of about twenty-three hundred employees and staff.

Fields

Your employees, are they professional...volunteer?

Niedermayer

They are a combination. As I mentioned, we have some licensed care, which of course, that requires...you can't have a nurse that isn't licensed and have that credential, but most of the people who are doing the day-in, day-out non-medical care, there's no requirement for them to have any kind of licensure. We do prefer CNA (Certified Nurse Assistants) because they've had some training that is above and beyond just a passion for helping those we serve, but we do put people through a very comprehensive training program.

Our clients, some just need a little bit of help, and maybe an elderly person that has rheumatoid arthritis, that can no longer lift the grocery sacks, for example all the way up to a person who is a quadriplegic that cannot do anything without some assistance. That person may need a hundred hours of service a week. So...just depending upon that individual's particular health issues and diagnoses and needs for assistance. Every person gets their own individual assessment. And from that we derive exactly what support they do need and then match that need up with the appropriate staff person that has that training and ability.

Fields

<topic> Career prior to Helping Restore Ability: MHMR of Tarrant County and Lena Pope Home</topic>
Ok. How did you become involved in Helping Restore Ability?

Niedermayer

Well, my background is...I have a Bachelor's in Psychology. I have a Master's in Applied Behavioral Analyses and I'm a board-certified Behavioral Analyst. I actually went to UTA, which is where I got my Master's degree. I started working at the local Mental Health Mental Retardation center here in Tarrant County.

I started many, many years ago back when the state was closing state schools and deinstitutionalizing people who lived in state schools with intellectual disabilities. So I hired on at MHMR [Mental Health and Mental Retardation] and was charged with opening a home here in Tarrant County over by General Motors that would serve eight young women that were leaving Denton State School. And I just progressed...

During that time, I was going to school to get my Master's Degree. And I became Director of Residential Programs there. At first it was for people with intellectual disabilities and then it broadened to mental health issues as well and also to sex offenders. During that time, I got my Masters and became board certified. I was there for seventeen years. I got to the point where I was the director of behavior treatment. I was the crisis team coordinator. I had 24 residential programs. I was over the case management team, the psychiatrist. I pretty much learned everything I could learn and gone as far as I could go within MHMR.

And so then I left there and I became the executive director of a non-profit in Dallas that serves people with disabilities for a couple of years and realized that that commute was not conducive to being a single parent of a young girl, so I came back to Tarrant County and was the director of training for Lena Pope Home [a Fort Worth organization that started as an orphanage but which now provides early intervention, counseling, and education services for children and families]. I did all the staff training but also the training for the foster and adoptive families and oftentimes the children that were served through Lena Pope Home had special needs.

With that being my background, that leant itself very well to that. And then the state decided to move six hundred children from Lena Pope's responsibilities back to CPS [Child Protective Services]. There had been a trial experience where they moved those six hundred children from CPS to Lena Pope to see if the children had better outcomes, and they did but it cost more. So then they took those six hundred kids and put them back under the auspices of CPS. At that point they released 52 staff that had been supporting those six hundred children, and that's when I applied to come to work at Helping Restore Ability.

That was fifteen years ago. At that point we had a \$1.2 million dollar budget with one contract with the state, serving only adults with physical disabilities in the Dallas-Fort Worth area. And today our budget's right at \$24 million. And as I said, we serve all ages, all disabilities, state-wide.

Fields

<topic>Role as CEO of Helping Restore Ability</topic>

What has been your role within the organization and how has that changed from when you began working with Helping Restore Ability to today?

Niedermayer

Night and day difference.

(Laughs)

It was just a little tiny organization that the board recognized was at risk of no longer existing because, as I said, we only had one contract to do one thing, and if that contract changed significantly or went away then so did Helping Restore Ability. My charge from the board was to diversify their funding streams, diversify the services, diversify the contracts that we had. They pretty much said "Let us know what you need and go to it." And that was fifteen years ago.

Fields

How did you manage to diversify these contracts? What areas did you try to diversify into?

Niedermayer

Well, I think my experience lends itself very well to knowing what other kinds of services were needed in our community. I think one of the roles that I have is to assess those unmet needs in the community and then determine how to position Helping Restore Ability in a way that we could step into that gap and provide a needed service that wasn't readily available otherwise. With all the background that I had in the various positions that I'd held...

And I grew up here in Arlington. I've been here since I was three years old. I think that has been tremendously helpful also in that I know the community leaders. I went to elementary school and junior high and high school with people who are now in leadership positions that I can reach out to who have known me for many, many years. Those relationships are important, but also the experience that I had in the positions helped me understand the scope and the breadth of what was out there and then what was lacking.

I had served on state-wide committees and boards and task forces, so I also had connections in Austin to reach out to and to get on the list of notification if a request or proposal came out or if they were considering expansion of services. I was on that list to be notified and to look at that and match that up with Helping Restore Ability's mission and see if that was a good fit for us to step into. It was just being open and aware of what opportunities existed and seeking them out and then really spending some time evaluating that matchup with our mission.

Fields

<topic>Origins and development of Helping Restore Ability</topic>

What do you think are some of the most significant accomplishments of Helping Restore Ability, both before you came to the organization and after you started working with them?

Niedermayer

Well, I think Sam was a visionary and he surrounded himself with people that also believed that things were possible, probably in the face of evidence to the contrary. This was far before the Americans with Disabilities Act or any kind of legal obligation that people had or institutions had to really pay any attention to what Sam's dream was.

As I said, he was a fiery red-headed Irish guy and he parked his wheelchair in the middle of Cooper Street and he demanded to meet with the president of the university because he wanted to go to UTA, he wanted to go to college, he wanted to get a degree. He wanted to have a career and a job and make his own way and earn a paycheck and pay taxes and he didn't take no for an answer. I think he was so passionate about it, even those who, maybe, didn't want to get swept up in the wave couldn't help it. He just brought you along with him. To his credit, he created opportunity where none existed and there was no roadmap to follow.

The original services that they developed were things like a shared apartment program right across from UTA on Peach Street where people in wheelchairs and with disabilities could live in an apartment. Then they had staff that they shared that would also live on premises and go from apartment to apartment helping people as John Dycus, one of our founders and a friend of Sam Provence, would tell you, to get "packaged and unpackaged for the day." To be there when you got home from a date and make that possible not to be reliant on parents and your family and to truly have an independent life as much as possible...

They started with donated space in a recreation center, and also a church here locally donated some space, I believe. We have scrapbooks and things in the file folder, I mean in the filing cabinets...yellowed, torn pieces of paper with pictures of the partners that stepped up and helped: the Hugh Smith Recreation Center that let the group come over there and participate in an aquatics program, and there were people who did range of motion exercises, physical therapists and things that just donated their time, others that were more connected with the employment community that came in a helped people write resumes and look in the newspaper—that's how you used to look for a job—for employment opportunities.

And even just volunteer work. Just something to get people out and you know, as I said, my experience with MHMR was on the cusp of beginning to look at closing some of the state institutions and/or transitioning those who could into the community and into less restrictive environments. That was...that all happened following Sammy's push to start Helping Restore Ability. But you know, somebody has to stand up and push, and from his seated position in a wheelchair he stood up and pushed.

Fields

How did some of that reaction against Helping Restore Ability change after some landmark events like the Americans with Disabilities Act and some of the other changes?

Niedermayer

Well, I wasn't with Helping Restore Ability back then. At that point I was with the MHMR, but people no longer had the excuse that they didn't know, they weren't aware. They couldn't possibly spend the time, the effort, the expense to consider what might need to be done to make things accessible. And so when you have a law put into place, then professionals begin to arise in an industry that didn't exist prior to that.

One of those people that I went to high school with that I mentioned, a good friend, he had started out in architecture and wound up, because of the timing, becoming an accessibility specialist [Michael Love, whose oral history is also included in the Texas Disability History Collection]. People like that who are knowledgeable, realistic and pragmatic so that they can look at a building. For example, when we moved into this building, that person was on our team that went and looked at over fifty buildings here in this area. And his eye was focused on things that I wouldn't even catch. I'm eyeballing the width of a door and saying, "I think somebody in a chair could get through that."

(Gestures to the door of the conference room.)

But he knows that specifically. And there were lawsuits that were filed that forced the issue. But by and large I think it created a much stronger awareness and some professional expertise around that is still to this day aimed at helping people comply in a way that is more cost-effective and yet achieves the outcomes that the ADA intended.

Fields

What was that man's name? The architect?

Niedermayer

Mike Love. The name of his company is Atelier. I can send you that link or his information.

Fields

Ok. Thank you.

Niedermayer

He's just right up the street on Matlock.

Fields

Since you came to work with Helping Restore Ability what do you think some of your biggest achievements have been?

Niedermayer

Well, broadening the scope of what we do. Being creative and innovative about how to partner with local community organizations, as I said to meet community gaps in the needs of the community.

I am by nature an introvert, and so that's been a push for me to overcome my inherent desire not to be in the forefront of things. I would much rather someone else step up to the podium and give the speech at our fundraising luncheons or someone else give the testimony to the legislature in Austin. But I make myself do those things because if someone doesn't do those things, if we all sit back and wait for someone else to do that, then it doesn't get done. So I force myself to do it. And it is not a comfortable position to be in. I do enjoy standing shoulder-to-shoulder with other people that are as passionate about it and force themselves to do the same. I find myself in amazing stead with amazing people.

(coughs)

So there is some positive reinforcement that goes along with that but it is not my nature. But when you see things happen as a result that you know wouldn't have happened otherwise it makes it worth it.

Fields

<topic>Staff, volunteers, and community partners for Helping Restore Ability</topic>

Alright. So, you mentioned people helping work with you. What are some of the important people, you think, who are working with Helping Restore Ability today and in the past?

Niedermayer

Well there are local people, local partners. For example, we work with an area agency on aging. As I said, we serve all ages, so everything from the Pediatric Palliative Care Coalition here in Tarrant County: Medstar, Cook Children's Hospital, Child Study Center, Easter Seals, REACH [Center for Independent Living], either MHMR both in Tarrant County and Dallas Metrocare.

We work with state entities: Department of Assistive Rehab Services, which is DARS. DADS is our primary source of funding—Department of Aging and Disability Services. DSHS— Department of State Health Services—they have some children's services we contract with them for. But there are so many.

And then we work with local universities. We are an internship placement site for UNT Health Science Center in Fort Worth, also for UNT in Denton, the rehab department. We are an internship site for their students. We've been an internship site for UTA's School of Social Work students and rehabilitation students and now with the Disability [Studies] Minor under Dr. Sarah Rose. We are also an internship site for those students as well.

So there are a number of different ways that we partner with our local community: the for-profit, the not-for-profit, private sector, public sector. Local high schools have the...oh goodness what's it called? The advanced students that have to do community placements—we are an internship site for those places. Is it AB students? It's something. I forget what it's called. Or IB? I think it's IB.

Fields

I think so.

Niedermayer

And that's a win-win because the student gets some real-life, practical hands-on experience working with the population they think they might want to eventually work with as a career. And we have, as a nonprofit, we're always struggling to meet the growing need at the same time we are restricted by revenue and the low reimbursement rates because our agency typically serves people that are very low-income and could not afford to pay for those services themselves. They receive those services because we have those contracts and those partnership agreements with other funding streams.

And so our revenue stream is very limited and we have to constantly seek out...which is kind of a sharp-edged double sword. You don't have the money to grow and expand the way that you need to, to meet the need which forces you to become innovative. And one of those ways that we do that is partnering with the local schools and education systems and offer those internship opportunities. And ultimately we have, often, hired those same students once they complete their educational requirements as an employee here. So like I said, you look for those mutually beneficial partnerships.

Fields

<topic>Political and financial dynamics faced by Helping Restore Ability</topic>

How has Helping Restore Ability's finances changed over the last couple of years and how has shifts within the state legislature and changes in priorities in the Texas government affected that?

Niedermayer

Well it affects us tremendously. Every two years the legislature meets and they create a two-year budget: a biannual budget. Those legislators also come up for reelection every two years. So it's a constant push to educate not only those who have been in office who have maybe heard some of those arguments in front of them, they've seen some of those bills in the past and have had a hand in creating and crafting the social services that we have here in Texas. But also, every time there's an election, then new people are elected, people who previously held office may re-up and decide to run again or they may step aside, in which case that educational process starts all over again.

And then, because Texas is a very conservative state...with the opportunity to expand Medicaid in the last several years, many states opted to do that, Texas did not opt to do that. I'm not going to espouse my own personal political views, which might surprise you actually, but...as I said, you have to be at the table. You have to present your information clearly and objectively. Which is what I think one of the benefits that we bring to the table is: we are not a large, national, for-profit entity. I often tell legislators and politicians, "I welcome you to our office, come look at our books. I will show you exactly what our revenue figures are. I will show you what that pays for, what we do to minimize our costs."

Our agency operates on a five percent admin rate, which is extremely low. And we struggle to even have enough funds to have a five percent admin rate frankly. With the recent legislative changes there's a lot of information in the newspapers nowadays about a lawsuit that's happening around pediatric therapy rates and home pediatric therapy rates being slashed. Our agency does not directly provide therapy to children. We serve children who get those therapies. And it is through some of the Medicaid waiver programs that offer those services.

I do know that it is a tightrope that you have to walk. I appreciate the difficulty in making those kinds of decisions as a legislator because the state of Texas has hundreds...more than a hundred thousand people on waiting lists for those services, so you have people who have come off the waiting list...and there was a lawsuit, actually it's not called a waiting list any longer, it's called an interest list because the state got sued for having a waiting list, so now they call it an interest list.

And they did in fact change the way that they go about creating and keeping up that list. They used to ask some preliminary screening questions, "What is your diagnosis and what age were you diagnosed with that?" and things like that. To ensure that, or at least minimally try to do some screening to see that the people who were going on the waiting list actually might qualify for services. After the lawsuit they called it an interest list and now they don't ask you anything other than name, date of birth, address, phone number, email, you know, that kind of thing. They do no screening at all. And so rule of thumb is that, probably, about fifty percent of the people on the waiting list right now, once they are screened and asked those eligibility questions will not be eligible for those services.

But the fact is that there are people who don't have any services at all, and when you think about some of the people that are on those lists, I think about children with autism. We've had some people that are coming off the waiting list that have been on the waiting list anywhere from fifteen to twenty years. Well if your child is diagnosed with autism at age two, and then at seventeen they come off the waiting list and begin to receive services, you can never recover that track that you've lost, that time that you've lost.

And so, while there are ongoing lawsuits in conflict around the rates that therapists are being paid for pediatric therapy, at the same time there are children who are receiving zero. And as I said, the legislators are charged with, "How do you balance those competing demands? How do you make sure that the children who need any of those services are receiving them in a way that is impactful to their development?" I'm sure it's difficult.

Fields

<topic>Building relationships with state legislators</topic>

You mentioned trying to build a relationship with legislators and educate them about what you do. How do you go about getting that relationship with legislators and how do you get in contact and relate with them?

Niedermayer

Well, each legislator, you know, the legislature meets in the spring every other year, for about six months. So, really, the best time to do that is when they are not in session. Which, right now, they're not in session. So when a session is going on, everybody is trying to get in front of them and be heard and argue their point and just bolster their stance. When that person is not in session is the time, because they do have home offices throughout the state, they represent various areas of the state and so it's a matter of figuring out who is your local representative, calling up their office and going and meeting with them.

I don't know if you saw the newspaper article recently for Helping Restore Ability where we partnered with representative Chris Turner here in Arlington. I went and met with him. I explained to him some of the struggles that our agency was having, that I thought he could help us with in Austin. And he and his team went to that for us, and started looking into some of those issues and was able to clear the path for us and get some of those revenues in our bank to help us keep the doors open. That's part of it.

<topic>Niedermayer's service with the Texas Association of Home Care and Hospice and Vistage</topic>
I also sit on the Board of Directors for Texas Association of Home Care and Hospice. I was a member for, oh gosh, probably ten years. As a home healthcare agency we are mandated to go to a certain amount of training and continuing education to stay current in our field. And so I would go to those meetings, go to those trainings, meet some of the people who were involved at the state level. And ultimately I wound up signing up to serve on a couple of the subcommittees. I served for, I think about six years, on the governmental affairs subcommittee where they do some training with us on, how do you become involved politically and what is the process and when are they in session and who is your local representative and who sits on what committee, because that's important too, if they're on health and human services or various committees. I don't want to go meet the guy who's over on oil and gas. That's not my business. Helping you understand: how do you figure that out and then get in front of those people?

So I was on the Governmental Affairs committee for several years and I was also on the Community Care Program subcommittee and those are time-consuming. It's time away from Helping Restore Ability. Those meetings are held every three months and because it's a statewide organization they rotate the location. Next week...well this week I'm going to Austin for some meetings, next week I'll be in San Antonio for some meetings. The next time that they meet will be here in Irving so I won't have to travel but they are statewide so they rotate the meeting locations, and that's time away from our business here. But it's important.

And so after serving on those subcommittees for several years they put out a call to recruit people onto the board of TAHCH [Texas Association of Home Care and Hospice] and there is a board position

representing nonprofits. So I applied for that and I've been on the board representing agencies like ours that are nonprofits for two years now. And also...as I said I get notification, through email, typically, and I also get some written publications that say "Here's an opportunity." And I read through those and I assess whether it's really worth the time away from here, to apply.

As a result of those kinds of things I was appointed by the Health and Human Services commissioner two years ago to serve on the Texas Nonprofit Council, which is twelve people that are appointed. The charge is for those twelve people to look at ways for the government, the Texas state government, the nonprofit sector, and the faith-based community, to work together, to collaborate and strengthen social services in Texas. So that's been an interesting experience.

And then I belong to a...another thing that is incumbent upon me as the leader of this organization is to continue to surround myself with people who know things and have experience and expertise and connections that I don't have.

And to that end I joined a group called Vistage, about three years ago. And it's an international entrepreneurial leadership group. My group is composed of people that are CEOs. I think there are sixteen to seventeen people in my group. Each group is all for-profit, entrepreneurial, brilliant, businessmen and women, and they allow one nonprofit in each group. I joined that and so from that I have been in a constant state of education and training from those peers that I now have that I can reach out to. As the CEO of a nonprofit that's a social service and with my background as most of us are in social services, we don't go to Harvard Business School, we don't know how to write a business plan, we don't know how to negotiate a strong banking relationship. Those kinds of things are not part of my learning curve. But by joining Vistage, I've been able to surround myself with people with that expertise.

And so as the leader of a nonprofit, you are operating a business. It's a nonprofit, you don't have shareholders that you pay, and you don't pay dividends and you don't...any money that you make.... I think that's a misconception that a nonprofit doesn't make money isn't allowed to have a, quote-unquote "profit"...that you should not have money left at the end of the year. That's not the case. You hope you have more revenue than expenses or you go under because you are a business, and the number one thing is to remain in business so you can offer those supports to the people that your mission is designed to support.

They have helped me think like a businesswoman and surround myself with people who can help me do that successfully. So that's another aspect and as I said I've been a part of that for about three years and recently they established an advisory council for nonprofits which are just a tiny piece of Vistage as I mentioned. And there are seven members, it's an international group, there are seven members of the Vistage nonprofit advisory council. And only two of those represent, actually work in the nonprofit sector. The others are Vistage leaders and things like that. And so it's myself and a woman who runs a nonprofit in Australia that are now representing nonprofits globally on this advisory council. Well that's a whole different arena.

As I said, I'm an introvert by nature, but I push myself to stand up and raise my hand and say ok, I'm willing to do this. And then, last week actually, I got an invitation to apply to the Health and Human Services...is forming a Medicaid manage care taskforce, and nonprofit is a tiny sector of that but it's a real important link that can't be overlooked. So I submitted my application to be on that.

(Laughs)

But I couldn't do that if I didn't have exceptionally talented and passionate people here in Arlington to do what needs to be done on a day to day basis, so that I can go to Austin or San Antonio or serve on state or national or international boards and workgroups to better further our mission.

Fields

<topic>Future of Helping Restore Ability</topic>

Where do you see Helping Restore Ability going from here and what are some of your plans for the future?

Niedermayer

Well, we have a three-year strategic plan. It's very difficult given the political environment. Of course, we have a presidential election coming up as well, which could significantly impact the work that we do here. It's really not possible...I mean you can dream, obviously Sam had dreams, but realistically beyond about a three-year period, it's very difficult to project because of the changing landscape. So we do have a three-year plan that looks at, as I said community needs and also, how do we build the service structure here at Helping Restore Ability in a way that continues to diversify those revenue streams. Hopefully strengthens the bottom line through new ventures that will not be dependent upon legislative action, which means you've got to get away from government funding. So, we look at a number of different ways to support our clients in remaining active and healthy in their communities that don't completely rely on government funding and what the legislator does.

And so that's a charge that we have, is to be, like Sam, dreamers about what the future might look like, and that means you've got to have people at the table whose lives you're directly impacting. That's one of the things that I think was another piece of vision that Sam left here at Helping Restore Ability is the bylaws here require that our board have at least one representative that is receiving services from Helping Restore Ability so as we're talking about changes or strategic plans or community needs, he's at the table and I'm saying, "Tell me what do you think about this? You're representing the thousand or so people we're serving today. Speak for them." And, he understands that. We've had numerous people throughout the years that I've been here that do that. Our board term is a three-year term, and they can serve up to two terms so a period of six years, but when we are looking for people to serve on our board, we are looking for that link to those that we actually are here for because we need their voice at the table. I think that's another piece of vision that Sam had, is to build that in to the bylaws, to ensure that that always happened.

Fields

<topic>Legacy of Sam Provence</topic>

You've mentioned Sam's name several times. How do you think his memory has continued to impact Helping Restore Ability?

Niedermayer

Can you tell that he lives today?

(We both laugh)

I never met him. I wish I had. I was actually at UTA the same time he was and never crossed paths with him, that I know of. But his legacy lives on. There are so many people...Allan Saxe, I hope you've interviewed him or will interview him, had Sam in his class. And we've interviewed him and a number of people that did.... I know that the disability project over at UTA went out and visited with Sam's family too and captured their stories and their memories and that kind of thing.

I think in a little bit we'll just take a break and I'll walk you into the boardroom where his picture...his picture is throughout this building. We've got his diplomas hanging in our boardroom. He had two diplomas from UTA, they're prominently displayed. When his family lived here, we were in contact with them and they were a part of all of our celebrations and things like that. I'm sure that there are others that were at the table with Sam helping those things happen but Sam was the driving force behind it and I think his memory and his legacy lives on today in so many ways and touches, literally, thousands of lives today.

Fields

<topic>Importance of volunteering</topic>

Are there any other thoughts or comments you'd like share today?

Niedermayer

We need more people like Sam that are willing to...and like I've forced myself to be, that are willing to get involved. I think if someone is listening to this, that something resonates with you to reach out, whether it's to Helping Restore Ability or to whatever that passion is that kind of makes you tick. Find out how you can get involved, whether that's being a volunteer or...you know our board members are volunteers. They come to meetings and make decisions on behalf of those we serve and they don't get paid for that. They share their time, talent and treasure, and their connections in the community to make a difference.

It can start small. It doesn't have to be a big, life change to have an impact. If Sam can do it from, literally an iron coffin with his head sticking out to this today. As you said, he still lives on, his legacy lives on but he passed away many, many years ago. Just dip your toe in it. Try it out and if that doesn't feel like the right fit for you, tip your toe in another pond and see how you can get involved, whether that's volunteering for a weekend at an event, like we have a casino night coming up this weekend and we always look for volunteers: a photographer that can take pictures at the event or someone that can make change at the cash bar or walk around and ask people if they need help finding the bathroom. I mean you can get involved in a zillion different ways. And it doesn't mean that you have to change your major in college and pursue it your whole life like I did.

(laughs)

There are other weird ducks like me that want to do this 24/7, but it doesn't have to be that way. And the scope of what we do here today is so broad, people are always amazed that everyone.... I think one of the things that makes us really unique is everyone knows someone that if they only knew that Helping Restore Ability was here, we could be helping them because we're not the MS Society, where you have to have Multiple Sclerosis. We're not the American Cancer Society that's only for people with cancer.

We are here for people that...children who are born with a disability, or that get it through accident or illness. They fall off the playground swing and they have a spinal cord injury or a head injury or they are diagnosed, they have cancer or a middle-aged person who gets a diagnosis of MS or a child at age five who gets diagnosed with autism or an elderly person who have congestive heart failure or rheumatoid arthritis or dementia. So many people have Alzheimer's or dementia. We serve people that need a little bit of help staying in their homes and in their communities. And regardless of what that disability or that diagnosis is, I think the last time I ran the report, we had 539 primary diagnoses of those people that we serve. So it really doesn't matter what that diagnosis is, if that person needs a little bit of help that's what we're here for.

As I said, I think everybody knows somebody that...that when I sit down and say, let me tell you what Helping Restore Ability does and the people that we serve, the light bulb invariably goes off in their head, whether it's an aging parent or their best friend who just got diagnosed with breast cancer or their neighbor who had a premature infant. Everybody knows somebody that we could be helping them. We touch lives everywhere. Not just those that we serve directly but all those families and friends of those people. But I would say, figure out what makes you tick get involved because we need your help.

Fields

Thank you for meeting me today to answer these questions.

Niedermayer

You're welcome.