

Texas Center for Disability Studies

2022-2023

Annual Report



The University of Texas at Austin
Texas Center for Disability Studies

A Letter from the Director

Dear TCDS Community,

We are excited to share with you our accomplishments from the past year in each of our core function areas. As we continue to expand our programs and add new ones, our team is growing too (see staff profiles of our newest team members below).

Our pre-service preparation function is going strong. Our Critical Disability Studies (CDS) program included 164 UT students who took our CDS courses, and 73 students participated in the CDS minor and graduate portfolio programs. These programs are important as they prepare students with varying majors to understand disability from critical perspectives which will help them to engage and advocate with people with disabilities in their chosen professions. Our Department of Education funded BRIDGE program included 6 UT graduate students across 3 disciplines. The ACT LEND (Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental and other Related Disabilities) program grew in its second year with 15 long-term trainees across 11 disciplines. ACT LEND includes not only UT graduate students, but also graduate students from Baylor University, family members, and self-advocates.



In the core function of community education and services, we have updates from E4 Texas, our post-secondary program, including the outreach work of E4's new outreach coordinator, Kat Hernandez. We continue with our community education projects such as the Genetics Education Program conducted in partnership with Baylor College of Medicine, the Road to Recovery Program funded by the Hogg Foundation, and the ongoing training we provide on Person Centered Practices. The Technology Access Program (TTAP) provides essential assistive technology through the State of Texas and is making a name for itself by providing accessible gaming workshops at conferences such as Comicpalooza, and creating adaptable tools using their cool 3-D printer. A new community education project includes a partnership with the Texas Institute for Child and Family Wellbeing in the Steve Hicks School of Social Work. This project is state funded and aimed at collaborating with organizations to build capacity if these organizations to better serve children with special health care needs in areas of Texas that are undeserved.

In the research core-function, TCDS became an Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring (ADDM) Network site. The ADDM network is sponsored by the Center for Disease Control (CDC) and is responsible for publishing the autism diagnostic rates among children in the US. This is the first time that Texas has been included in this important monitoring project. CDC also funded the City of Laredo Public Health (who are partners of our LEND program) to be a second site in Texas. Our TCDS research team is continuing to receive grants to expand our research on autism and intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Of course, our dissemination core function is alive and well with conference presentations and workshops, our newsletter, website and social media presence. We hope you enjoy reviewing this report and all of our latest updates!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sandy Magaña".

Director | Texas Center for Disability Studies
Professor | Steve Hicks School of Social Work

New Faces at TCDS

TCDS welcomed a host of talented employees in the 2022-23 fiscal year!



Mary Alfar

Mary is the **Academic Program Coordinator** for the E4Texas Program. With over five years of experience working extensively and inspiring a variety of people with different skills, Mary has made it her mission to show that everyone can achieve self-determination and success. Armed with extensive knowledge of systems in Texas, she is committed to helping others gain the independence they need in order to lead meaningful lives.



Stephany Brown, LMSW

Stephany Brown, LMSW, is a **Research Program Coordinator** for both ASPEN and PODER projects at UT Austin's Texas Center for Disability Studies (TCDS). Stephany holds a master's degree in social work focusing on children and their families from the Texas State University and an undergraduate degree in social work from the Stephen F. Austin State University.



Kat Hernandez

Kathleen (Kat) Hernandez is the **Senior Outreach Program Coordinator** for the E4Texas program. She leads outreach efforts, working closely with community partners, non-profits, and schools to recruit potential students and expand program partnerships. Kat is dedicated to ensuring that E4Texas students have access to the resources and support they need to succeed in their academic and professional pursuits.



Leslie Jackson, MSW

Leslie Jackson, MSW, is the **Senior Administrative Program Coordinator** for the Autism Consortium of Texas Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental and Related Disabilities (ACT LEND) program. Leslie received her MSW from the University of Texas at Arlington. Leslie has experience working in interdisciplinary pediatric clinics and as an advocate and volunteer for parents of children with Autism and feeding challenges. Leslie is the parent to an Autistic teen.



Adra Mersinger

Adra Mersinger is the **Social Science & Humanities Research Associate III** on the Texas Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring (TX-ADDM) project through the ADDM Network at the Center for Disease Control (CDC). A Central Texas Native, Adra graduated from Texas A&M University with a Bachelor of Science in Psychology. She has experience working within multiple facets of healthcare and education.



Meghan Schrader

Meghan Schrader is the **Academic Enrichment Assistant** for the E4Texas program at the University of Texas at Austin. She has a Master's degree in Special Education from the University of Texas at Austin and a Master's in Musicology from the University of New Hampshire. She has served as an affiliate faculty member in Disability Studies at UNH. She maintains a personal blog called Diary of a Learning-Disabled Academic, through which she expresses her perspective on disability rights issues.



Hilda Torres, MSSW

Hilda Torres, MSSW, is the **Research Program Coordinator** for the Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring (ADDM) Network. She is also part of the assessments team for PODER. Hilda graduated with her master's degree from Steve Hicks School of Social Work at UT Austin. She has 4 years of research experience working with Spanish-speaking immigrant populations and caregivers of children with IDD.

Our Year by the Numbers



Assistive Technology

- **1,776** reused and refurbished devices were provided
- **3,030** participants received training.
- **304** hands-on device demonstration sessions across 16 demonstration centers in Texas.
- **515** individuals were provided technical assistance at Education Service Centers.
- **16** AT items were sourced and made available on TTAP's 3D Printing Storefront.

1,496
people received
informational support

24,585
website visits

Transition and University

- **164** Critical Disability Studies students enrolled across **5** courses
- **73** students participated in the Critical Disability Studies minor and graduate portfolio programs.
- **19** students have graduated with a CDS minor as of Spring 2023.
- **10** students graduated from the E4Texas program, which was modified for the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **6** scholars completed and **6** new scholars were accepted into the BRIDGE program to provide quality services to children transitioning from public schools to adulthood.



Research



- **95** conference presentations and posters presented
- **21** peer-reviewed publications published
- Promoting Obesity Prevention among Children with Developmental Disabilities and Families through Engaged Research (PODER) program enrolled **22** Latina mother of children with IDD, with almost half of participants completing all **10** sessions.
- The PACT program continues their ongoing analysis of **1351** individuals to help improve family/child outcomes.

Family Support

- **126** individuals were trained at Genetics Education Workshops.
- Through our Intistute for Person Centered Practices, there were **11** activities, with **174** people impacted.

Health and Wellness

- **772** individuals received onsite & web-based community training on Trauma Informed Care/IDD Population
- Master Trainer Support was provided to **23** Master Trainers
- **477** attendees to Genetics Series events across webinars and resource fairs in rural towns across Texas.

Community Advisory Committee

The past year at TCDS was spent focusing on implementing our EDI plan. We began having regular quarterly EDI meetings for staff to help generate ideas, promote teamwork, and discuss action items to promote our EDI goals. TCDS provided educational opportunities for staff through the Disability Employment Technical Assistance Center (DECTAC). The center also took steps to provide evidence-based training and technical assistance to the Administration on Disability (AOD) grantees aimed at improving competitive, integrated employment and economic outcomes for individuals with disabilities across the nation.

Looking forward, TCDS plans on utilizing input from the CAC to create a roadmap for improving our resources and we hope to integrate EDI concepts into existing work, keeping this in mind at the onset of new grants and projects. We aim to be more accommodating to the populations that need our services, with staff traveling to meet with local individuals and community leaders face to face while also embracing hybridity and making sure virtual meetings are available to those that need it. We also plan on revitalizing our resources and updating materials that may be using out of date language. Finally, we want to solidify a shared vision and create a longer term 5 year plan to focus on further improving EDI at our Center.

Finance and Funding

Total leveraged dollars for the fiscal year:

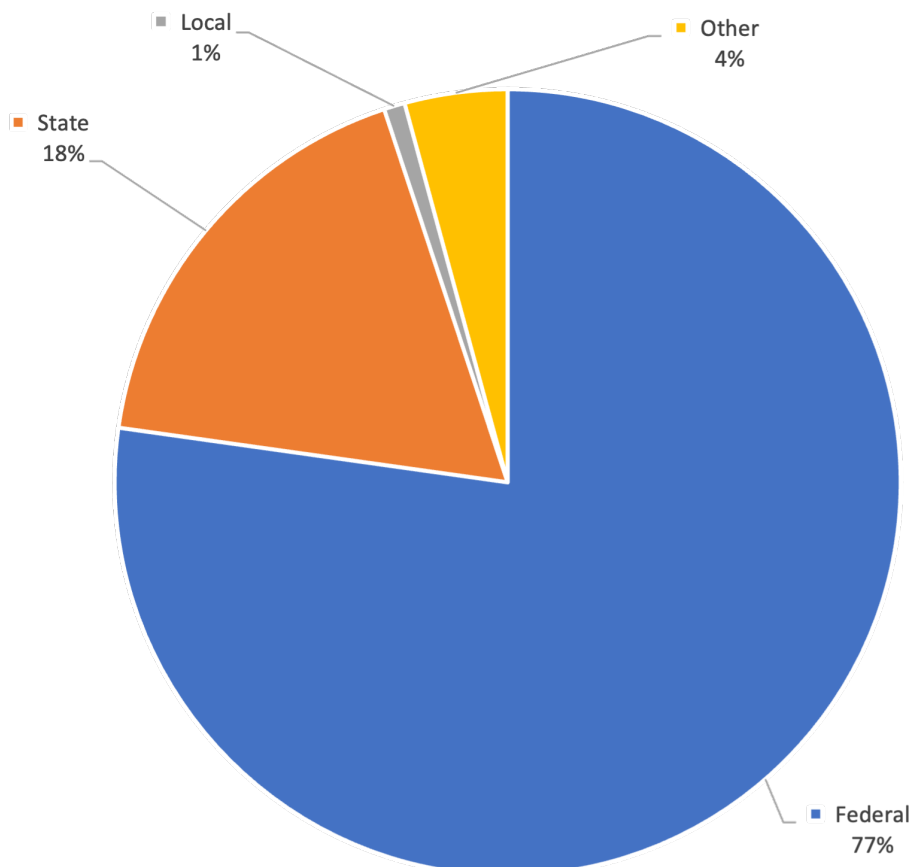
\$3,885,755

Federal: \$3,000,618.00

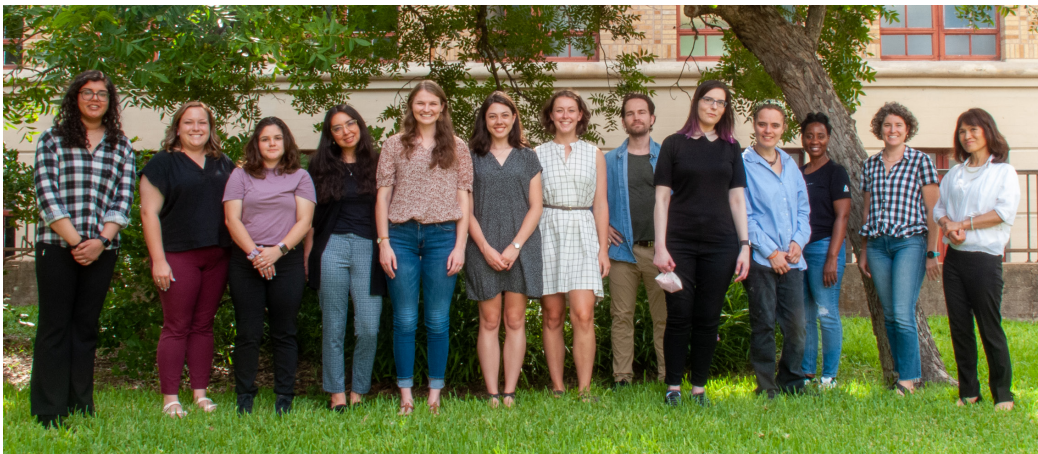
State: \$687,408.00

Local: \$33,494.00

Other: \$164,235.00



ACT LEND 2022-23



Disciplines Represented

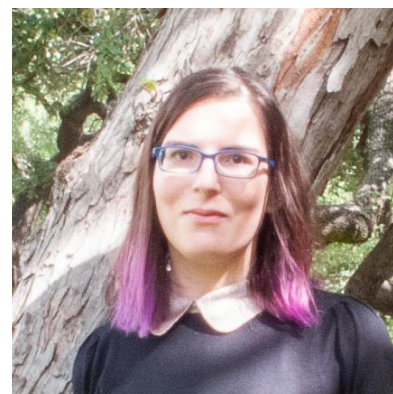
Audiology • Family • Nursing • Physical Therapy • Public Health • School Psychology
Self-Advocate • Speech and Language Pathology • Social Work • Special Education

TCDS had a diverse group of students in its second year of the ACT LEND Program. The Autism Consortium of Texas (ACT) LEND seeks to train graduate students, family members, and self-advocates in culturally informed diagnosis, support, and advocacy for children with autism spectrum disorder and other developmental disabilities throughout the Capital Region and Central Texas.

ACT LEND Trainees are required to complete 300 hours of interdisciplinary training, including classroom instruction, clinical training seminars, and policy leadership seminars. Their training culminates in a poster symposium at the end of the program year.

Trainee Spotlight: Larissa Minner

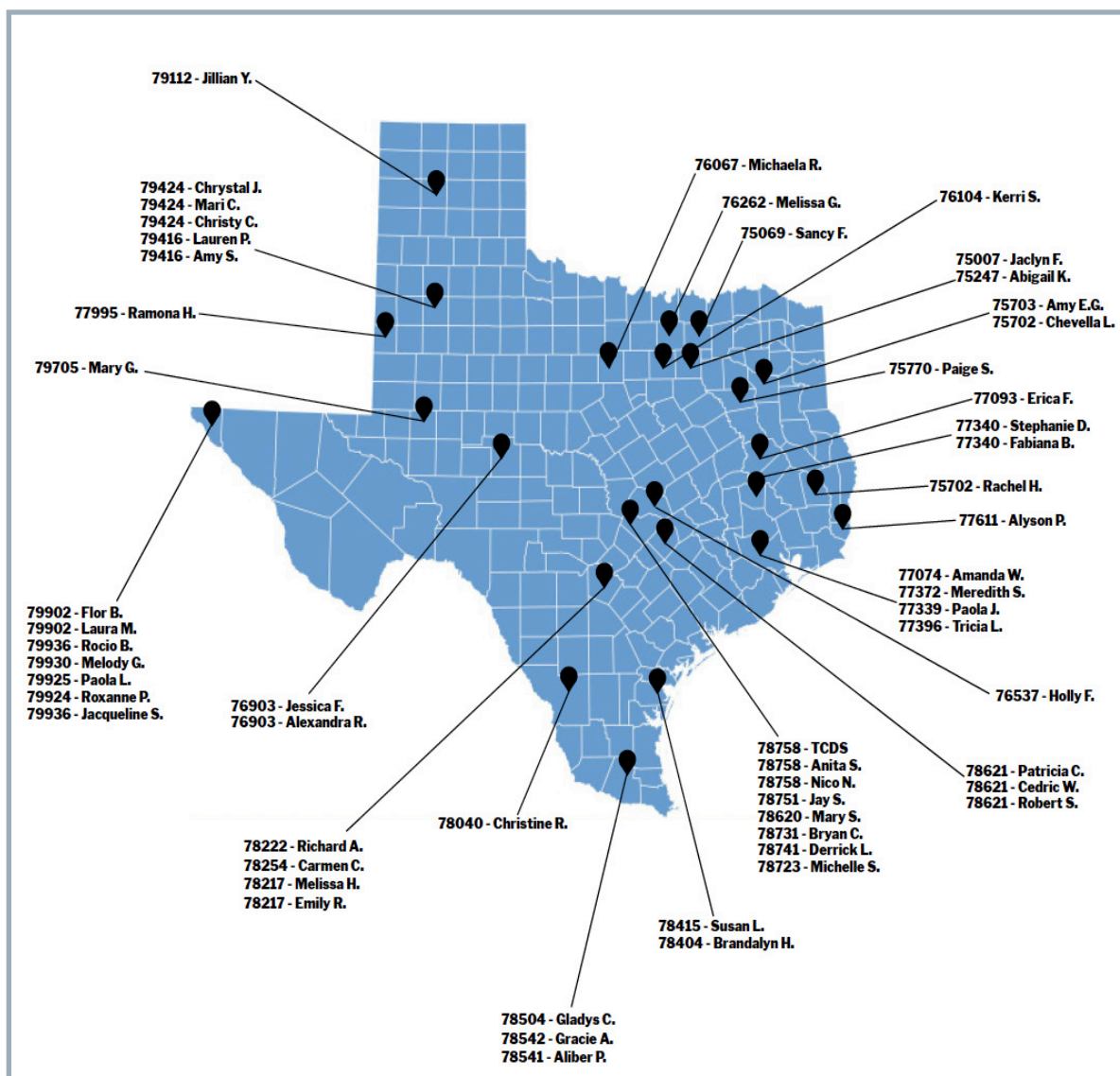
ACT LEND Trainee, Larissa Minner, won 1st Place in the People's Choice Award category at the 5th Annual Interprofessional Health Showcase held at the University of Texas at Austin. She developed her project, "Supporting Helpful Accessible Person-centered Environments in Healthcare (S.H.A.P.E.) in Healthcare: A Pilot Study on Autistic and Non-Autistic Adults," as her research project during her LEND traineeship, with a focus on healthcare disparities.



Road to Recovery

The Road to Recovery Project is a training curriculum designed to teach basic knowledge, skills, and values about working with children with IDD who have had or are at risk for traumatic experiences, and how to use this knowledge to support children's safety, well-being, happiness, and recovery through trauma-informed practice.

As a result of this project, we have Trauma Informed Care Trainers across the state of Texas. And the program continues to expand! This year, 23 new members were part of the fourth cohort of the program.



New Programs and Projects

Staff have been hard at work acquiring more projects to bring under the TCDS umbrella.

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History of Disability on Campus

The University of Texas at Austin has created a campus collaboration of researchers studying the histories of UT as it pertains to various communities via the Contextualization and Commemoration Initiative. Nick Winges-Yanez is leading this project, as her work specifically studies the history of disability on the UT at Austin campus up to the present day.

The goals are:

1. Identify accessibility of the campus throughout its history
2. Document disabled student activism
3. Document the archival materials associated with disabled student inclusion (and exclusion), legal policies (such as Section 504 and the ADA), and the changing landscape of how disability was defined via policies on campus

This work will highlight the grassroots activism necessary for change, predating landmark legislation such as Section 504 and the Americans with Disabilities Act. Additionally, what a disabled student was conceptualized as on campus has changed over time.

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Texas Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring (TX-ADDM) Network

Dr. Sandra Vanegas was awarded the Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring (ADDM) grant funded by Center for Disease Control (CDC) to collect data to better understand the number and characteristics of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and other developmental disabilities living in different areas of the United States. As the second largest state in population and second largest in land area, Texas captures much of the diversity in population and geography observed throughout the United States. These features significantly contribute to existing public health surveillance of autism and developmental disabilities, especially considering the impact of health disparities among children and youth with autism and their families.

The goal of this project is to engage with education and health sites throughout Bexar County to capture cases of autism and developmental disabilities within education and medical records, working with community organizations, including the Act Early Ambassadors, and other providers to provide training, disseminate data and surveillance outcomes, and share resources on early autism and developmental screening.

These activities should result in greater adoption of valid and reliable tools for autism and developmental screening, increasing the number of children identified in early childhood and the number of children enrolled in early services, including early intervention services.

Public Health Outreach

This project aims to expand the public health workforce within disability networks and specifically at the Texas Center for Disability Studies (TCDS).

Collaborating with the Texas Technology Access Program, one public health worker, Nicholas (Nico) Nelson, was hired. In his role as public health worker, Nico completed the ACT LEND program as part of his training in IDD, fostered collaborations with the City of Laredo Public Health Office, helped with outreach to underserved communities for TCDS and TTAP, helped to prepare a report on the vaccine survey, developed videos and educational materials for TTAP, and served as the TCDS representative to the Texas Partners for Inclusive Access (TPIA). Nico also completed his Masters in Public Health while serving in this role.

This grant will also partially fund a self-advocate who will be engaged in our health related research projects.



Children and Youth with Special Health Care Needs TA Project

The Texas Department of State Health Services has contracted with Texas Institute for Child and Family Wellbeing (TXICFW) for the Children and Youth with Special Health Care Needs (CYSHCN) Technical Assistance project. This is a capacity building project to improve family supports and community resources for children and youth with special health care needs (CYSHCN) in areas around the state.

In particular, the hope is to collaborate with organizations to build capacity in areas with CYSHCN that are underserved or where more support is needed. TXICFW analyzed county-level data related to health disparities and have identified some regions that could be appropriate for additional supports offered through this project.

The CYSHCN Technical Assistance team is conducting outreach interviews to learn more from organizations and community members who provide services and supports to children and families in each identified region. The team conducted about 7 interviews with organizations from diverse and underrepresented areas in Texas with the goal of identifying service and support needs. For the next fiscal year, the team will develop a technical assistance and training program to deliver.

Notable Events

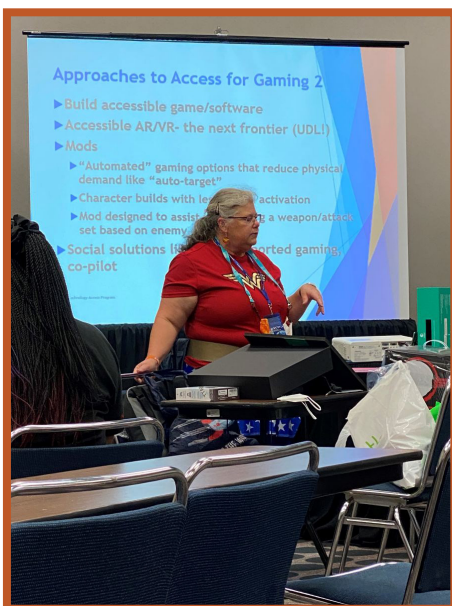
32nd ADA Birthday Celebration

Amerigroup, ADAPT TX, E4Texas and the Texas Center for Disability Studies partnered to host the 32nd ADA Birthday Celebration hosted at the Pickle Research Center. Vendors included ADAPT, ARCIL, E4Texas, Peak Performers, and Amerigroup. Students from the E4Texas Program presented work on Disability Rights advocates Judy Heumann, Wade Blank, and Bob Kafka. Finally, Stephanie Thomas of ADAPT discussed the ADAPT Online History Museum, a large collection of articles, videos, music, artifacts, ephemera and more that represents over 30 years of history of a grassroots disability rights organization.



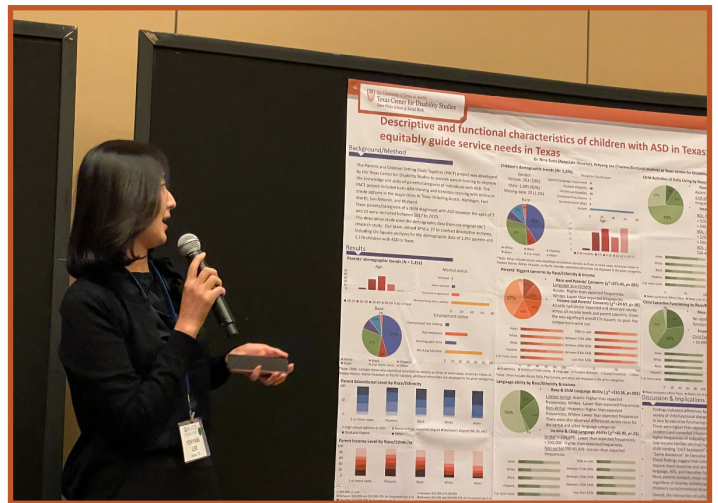
TTAP Workshops Accessible Gaming at Comicpalooza!

The Texas Technology Access Program provided an accessible video gaming workshop at this years' Comicpalooza on Saturday, July 16th.



TCDS Faculty and Staff Presented TCDS at AUCD National Conference in Washington, D.C.

TCDS was well represented at the 2022 AUCD Conference! Attending the conference was Yehyang Lee, Kristin Padilla, Sandy Magaña, Sandra Vanegas, Kate Thompson, and Nicholas Nelson.



Projects Presented:

Towards health equity for Latino families of children with IDD: A study examining determinants of health and health behaviors

Authors: Weiwen Zeng, Sandy Magaña, Nazanin Heydarian, Vanessa Errisuriz

Texas Response to Health Equity: Texas Partners for Inclusive Access (TPIA)

Authors: Sandy Magaña (TCDS), Vanessa Richards (CDD), Sean Jackson (DRTx), Weiwen Zeng (TCDS), Beth Stalvey (TCDD), & Anita Swanson (TTAP)

Assistive technology to inhibit social isolation in elders and persons with disabilities

Author: Anita Swanson

Using music and technology to reduce stress, anxiety, and depression

Author: Anita Swanson

Square Pegs and Round Holes: Considerations for Applying a Hybrid Model in Post-Pandemic Training Programs

Author: Kate Thompson

E4Texas Graduation

The E4Texas Graduation Ceremony was held on May 13, 2023 at the Steve Hicks School of Social Work.



Emily Shyrock provided the keynote address



2022-23 Salutatorian Eliana Bautista



2022-23 Valedictorian Alejandro Alvarez

Crip Conversations: What 10 Years of Activism Taught Me as a Black Disabled Macro Social Worker

Vilissa Thompson, LMSW, joined the popular Crip Conversations series to share her journey as a disabled macro social worker. She shared her insight on important issues and why she proudly makes good trouble in the name of social work.



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