

# Building Inclusive Higher Education Programs in Places Where They Don't Exist: A Series of Family Perspectives

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## About this Series

This profile is part of the series, *Building Inclusive Higher Education Programs in Places Where They Don't Exist: A Series of Family Perspectives*. Author **Elise McMillan, J.D.** is the retired former director of the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDD) and was the founding faculty member of Next Steps at Vanderbilt University, the first inclusive higher education (IHE) program in Tennessee. In this series of briefs, Elise presents an introduction to IHE, shares lessons learned, and presents the stories of parent leaders who helped create IHE programs in places where they didn't exist. This spotlight highlights the work of parent leader, **Mary Hauff**.

## Mary Hauff

### Introduction

Mary Hauff is the Director of the Minnesota Inclusive Higher Education Consortium (MIHEC).<sup>1</sup> Her daughter, Jean Hauff, is a second-year student at Augustana University working on a three-year certificate with a concentration in communications and graphic design.



### Why?

While Mary Hauff's daughter was still in elementary school, she learned about IHE for students with intellectual disability (ID).<sup>2</sup> Hauff researched the topic extensively, followed its developments, and began discussing the possibilities with a small group of parents in Minnesota. Hauff was on the Minnesota Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities at the time and began advocating for the need to expand IHE options in Minnesota. She also began talking with disability leaders at the University of Minnesota's Institute on Community Integration (ICI).<sup>3</sup> Then in 2019 a small group of parents got together and realized they were all advocating for the same thing and needed to work together.

<sup>1</sup> The MIHEC is a parent-led collaborative group hosted at the University of Minnesota ICI. The collaborative consists of IHE institutions, state and local agencies, students, advocates, family members, legislators, and nonprofit organizations committed to expanding IHE opportunities for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). Learn more about MIHEC on their website: <https://mihec.ici.umn.edu/>.

<sup>2</sup> The Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA) includes a definition of a student with an ID. Provisions of the HEOA including federal financial aid, Comprehensive Transition and Postsecondary Programs (CTP), and Transition and Postsecondary Programs for Students with Intellectual Disabilities (TPSID) are specifically provided for students with ID. The term IDD is often used to describe students with both ID and another developmental disability (DD) or students with ID or another DD. Some of the alliances mentioned in this series are working to build programs and services for the broader category of students with IDD who in some cases may not have an ID. Find out more information at <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/highered/leg/hea08/index.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Find out more about the ICI at the University of Minnesota here: <https://ici.umn.edu/welcome/overview>.



After high school, Hauff's daughter, Jean, who has Down syndrome, wanted to pursue a career in mass media. So began the search for a college that was not only inclusive, but also had a program aligned to Jean's career interests. At the time, only four Minnesota colleges offered higher education programs for students with ID, but none offered programs specific to Jean's interest in mass media and journalism.

## How?

Hauff and other parents of people with ID formed MIHEC.<sup>1</sup> Hauff noted that they were strategic about building relationships and made connections with key stakeholders including state agencies, non-profits, school districts, institutions of higher education, and most importantly, prospective students with ID and their families. They also identified public policy solutions and addressed barriers through state legislation.

"Know that you can be the change, you can be the catalyst. Relationship building is one of the most important factors. When I started my advocacy for disability related issues over 20 years ago, I had no idea it would lead to something like this. Know who the key players are. Know your audiences and invest that time into building those relationships." *Mary Hauff*

Hauff and other parents utilized two legislative reports that identified barriers to the development of IHE, including a lack of funding and faculty and staff feeling like they did not have the expertise for such programs. Hauff shared that she found every single state that was passing legislation that supported IHE and learned about other successful programs nationwide. They worked collaboratively with The Arc Minnesota and a coalition of disability advocacy organizations to raise awareness about the barriers faced by Minnesotans with ID and proposed solutions. Their efforts resulted in legislation that was passed into law in 2023, when the Minnesota Legislature allocated \$2 million for IHE. Hauff shared, "People with disabilities were the experts. My daughter testified about her college interests and the barriers she experienced."

Most of the money will go to colleges to fund new ways to include people with ID. Of the allocated funds, \$500,000 is designated for the technical assistance (TA) center operated by MIHEC at the ICI. Hauff is the director of MIHEC which provides TA for students, families, and Minnesota institutes of higher education.

"In planning for the center, we want to be very intentional about being accessible to everyone, regardless of their background. We cut across all demographics across the state. We know that if colleges put together quality programs, they will attract more students than they can enroll." Hauff said. Funding will be available for various colleges, including public and private institutions, as well as the four tribal colleges in Minnesota.

By statute, at least half of the MIHEC TA center advisory committee must be people with ID and family members. MIHEC provides a website, resources, learning community events, and other information about IHE. Registration for learning community events goes through the roof any time we have students and prospective students present." Hauff said.

Another key area of focus for MIHEC is outreach. Hauff reported that MIHEC reaches 30 to 40 new contacts each month, focusing on getting the word out to disability-related nonprofits and other organizations. Hauff also presents to people attending the Minnesota Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities' Partners in Policymaking sessions, including the October 2023



education weekend. “It’s so important to get families thinking and planning for the possibility of college.” Hauff shared.

## **In Closing**

Hauff continues leadership of the Minnesota Consortium. MIHEC is also part of forming a larger multi-state regional alliance in the Upper Midwest part of the country including Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wyoming. This alliance is important as Hauff reports that all of the stakeholders that are part of this alliance are trying to achieve the same goals, so they share and distribute information and resources far and wide. For other parents, families, and community groups wanting to start programs, Hauff offers the following advice.

### **Advice from Mary Hauff**

**Family involvement is integral to the work in Minnesota, and in the regional alliance.** *“Parents and students are a big part of our consortium already, and there will be additional opportunities through the TA Center Advisory Committee.”*

**Keep students with ID and their hopes, dreams, and goals front and center.** Hauff shared that they are building a space on the MIHEC website to feature students’ hopes, dreams, and goals of students with ID that want to go to college to keep their perspectives top of mind.

**Don’t forget to include the voices of people with ID who were not included in higher education in the past.** *“I think that [remembering the voices of people with ID who were not included in higher education in the past] helps shed light on the fact that young people with IDD didn’t just start expressing an interest in college and employment in the past 10-15 years. As a child, I recall a neighbor with an IDD who bled University of Minnesota gold and maroon. He did not have any opportunity to go to the public school, let alone the chance to go to college at the University of Minnesota. We want him to be able to share what his hopes and dreams were. The aspiration to go to college is not new. We want to widen the pathway to postsecondary education for all Minnesotans with an ID who want to go to college.”*

