

TASH Lifetime Achievement Award 2018: James W. Conroy, Ph.D.



At the annual conference of International TASH on November 18, 2018, Pennhurst Memorial and Preservation Alliance Co-President James W. Conroy received TASH's highest honor, the Lifetime Achievement Award. Dr. Conroy received the award for his extensive work over more than 40 years demonstrating the benefits of community inclusion for persons with disabilities.

Dr. Conroy is the Founder and President of the Center for Outcome Analysis, a nonprofit firm specializing in research, training and policy analysis in disability, health care and long term care. He has served as PMPA's Co-President since 2009.

Dr. Conroy is considered the leading national scholar of the outcomes of deinstitutionalization of persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities. He has designed and conducted studies of those outcomes in 19 states and the District of Columbia with meticulous methodology and immense scientific integrity. His studies demonstrating that people who move from institutions to small community homes are better off in every way we know how to measure unquestionably meets the scientific test of replication. Those studies not only are consistent with one another but have been confirmed by other researchers in the United States and other countries.

Dr. Conroy's work exploded the myths and stereotypes that many people held about institutions in the 1970s, when his work began: That people with the most significant disabilities, particularly severe and profound intellectual disability, needed to live in institutions because only in such settings could their need for intensive services be met. Dr. Conroy's evaluations turned the myth on its head. He demonstrated that in fact, people with the most significant disabilities make the most impressive gains in skills and quality of life when they move to the community. His work also showed that people who move from institutions to community receive more services in their new homes. His research refuted the notion that institutional residents benefit from "economies of scale." It shows that employment outcomes, community inclusion and family satisfaction increase dramatically when people move to small community homes, and that a person's opportunity for inclusion is inversely correlated with the number of persons in the home.

Dr. Conroy broke new ground with the work he did as National Evaluator for the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's National Self-Determination Initiative from 1997 to 2002, demonstrating the outcomes of control by persons with disabilities and their families in 19 states. The results of those studies were overwhelmingly positive, and set the stage for a host of federal and state-funded initiatives supporting participant-directed supports.

More recently, Dr. Conroy has consulted with and investigated conditions for citizens with disabilities in at least 17 nations, working with governments and advocacy organizations including Disability Rights International to improve quality of life. His current research projects include outcome studies of college attendance for persons with significant disabilities and closure of sheltered workshops.

Dr. Conroy's impact on policy, funding and design of services for persons with disabilities has been profound. He has helped turn scientific research into practice by disseminating the results of his work with more than 60 articles, books and chapters in professional publications, more than 300 reports to government and private agencies, more than more than 500 technical workshops, training seminars, legislative testimony and other professional presentations at the local, state, national, and international levels. His audiences have included scientific groups, advocates and self-advocates, the United States Senate, state legislative bodies and legislative and executive departments abroad. He has shared his work in numerous media appearances and interviews. He has shared his work in numerous media appearances and interviews including interviews by the New York Times, the Philadelphia Inquirer, Philadelphia Weekly, National Public Radio, the Chicago Tribune, public television, public radio, Philadelphia's NBC News, the ABC Evening News with Peter Jennings, Nightline with Ted Koppel, and 60 Minutes with Ed Bradley. He has been called to testify in numerous class action lawsuits throughout the United States that resulted in favorable adjudication of the right of persons with disabilities to live and work in the most integrated setting.

It is impossible to think of any other single individual, let alone a scholar and researcher, who has had a greater impact on the lives of persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities, in the United States and now, throughout the world. PMPA is fortunate to have such a leader as we move toward our goal of founding a national museum devoted to the disability experience.

International TASH is the leading organization in the United States dedicated to promoting the rights and interests of persons with significant disabilities. Founded in 1975, its mission is to promote the full inclusion of persons with significant disabilities and support needs in every aspect of their communities and to eliminate injustice. It does this through advocacy, research, professional development, policy, and information and resources for parents, families and self-advocates. TASH chose to confer its Lifetime Achievement Award on Dr. Conroy because of his singular contribution to its mission.