

Tuesday Topics March 5, 2024  
Summary

President Mary Lou Davis welcomed everyone to Tuesday Topics and introduced our speaker, Zach Ahrens, President and CEO of Capper Foundation. Ahrens began his presentation explaining he would be speaking informally about his current position and telling about his previous employment with the Topeka Capital Journal.

The Foundation was founded in 1920 during the polio epidemic by Arthur Capper, Senator, former governor of Kansas and newspaper publisher. He wanted to help those who were left physically in need of assistance.

Capper Foundation serves all ages who have an intellectual or developmental disability. The number of those with an intellectual disability is growing. Now 1 in 33 individuals have an intellectual disability. In the past it was 1 in 46. Various reasons have caused the increase. One possibility is earlier and better diagnosis.

Funding sources for Capper Foundation include Kansas Medicaid allocations, grants, fundraisers, private contributions and Dialogue Coffeehouse profits. Other fundraisers besides the Blarney Breakfast have included a car detailing service, which is no longer available, a gift shop (Hunter & Laine Boutique and Gift Shop at 824 S. Kansas Avenue) and an auction. Ahrens asked everyone to contact the legislature to expand Medicaid.

The Kansas Legislature has done a good job supporting Capper Foundation, but the funding is still too low. Two years ago, Capper Foundation received a 25% rate increase. Other organizations are vying for funding as well. Ninety two cents of every dollar Capper Foundation receives is used for service. No one is turned away because they can't pay.

Dialogue Coffee House allows disabled adults to interact with other workers and with patrons with earning a wage. Ahrens showed a short video of Dialogue Coffee House. Besides its Topeka location at 29<sup>th</sup> and Gage, Dialogue can be found at Fellowship Bible Church, Blue Cross/Blue Shield and in Silver Lake.

Capper Foundation has a day program for adults and pediatric outpatient services. Occupational, speech, and physical therapy are provided individually.

Ahrens said the good news is Capper Foundation is changing lives. Earlier in his presentation, he told of an unwanted bird (a blue parakeet) that was given to Capper Foundation. The bird was then given to a little girl who was a selective mute who refused help from staff. Soon the little girl and the bird were talking to each other. Yes. Capper Foundation is changing lives!

President Davis spoke about upcoming legislative and league events. The annual meeting will be the first Tuesday in April. Sherman Smith, editor of the Reflector, will speak at our May Tuesday Topics.