**Abstract**

Founded in 1970, Paraquad was one of the first Centers for Independent Living in the country. Paraquad empowers people with disabilities to increase their independence though choice and opportunity. Paraquad’s programs and advocacy efforts promote integration and inclusion for people with disabilities.

As a leader in the disability field, Paraquad is committed to innovation and evidence-based practices. However, applying evidence-based practices in community settings can present challenges. What works in the lab or the clinic does not necessarily translate to home, school, work, or community settings.

Paraquad has addressed this issue by engaging in community-based research projects. Following a general overview of the work, specific research initiatives and their results will be discussed. The need for community-based research for individuals who have complex communication needs and use speech generating devices will be delineated and strategies discussed.

**Bio**

Aimee Wehmeier is the third President and CEO in Paraquad’s 48-year history. She continues the agency’s excellent tradition of passionate leadership to promote opportunity and independence for people with disabilities.

At Paraquad, Wehmeier, 47, directs eight main program areas serving about 2,500 people with all types of disabilities annually. She is responsible for the strategic vision of the agency, as well as for increasing its profile and visibility.

Wehmeier, who has muscular dystrophy, uses a power wheelchair and has never walked. She received a bachelor’s degree from the University of Missouri and a Master of Business Administration from William Woods University. She believes in the value of Paraquad services, as they have been instrumental in her own independence. She has a passion for public policy, advocacy, and increasing opportunities for people with disabilities. Employment and economic self-sufficiency are her highest priorities.

Wehmeier’s leadership skills have been recognized across the state. In addition to leading Paraquad, Wehmeier serves as member of the Missouri State Rehabilitation Council; Missouri Foundation for Health Community Advisory Council; the Regional Chamber of Commerce Board; Diversity Awareness Partnership Board; Metropolitan St. Louis Equal Housing and Opportunity Council Board; Fontbonne University College of Education & Allied Health Professions Advisory Board; Washington University Program in Occupational Therapy Academic Advisory Board; MO Better Foundation Advisory Committee and the President’s Council. A recipient of the 2010 Governor’s Council on Disabilities Inclusion Award and the 2015 *St. Louis Business Journal* Diverse Business Leaders’ Award, Aimee has been described as “the face of disability.”

Wehmeier received a bachelor’s degree from the University of Missouri and a Master of Business Administration from William Woods University.