

**THE HELP GROUP HOSTS TASK FORCE ON
EARLY IDENTIFICATION & INTERVENTION FOR THE CALIFORNIA,
LEGISLATIVE BLUE RIBBON COMMISSION ON AUTISM**

Sherman Oaks, CA (November 14, 2006) – The Help Group hosted the first of three task force meetings on *Early Identification and Intervention* for the **California Legislative Blue Ribbon Commission on Autism** at The Help Group’s Sherman Oaks Campus. The meeting was led by Blue Ribbon, Vice Chair and Task Force Chair Dr. Barbara Firestone, President & CEO, The Help Group, and Dr. Lou Vismara, Policy Consultant to the Senate President Pro Tem, Don Perata. This task force was convened to determine the most pressing issues related to early identification and intervention for children with autism and their families; and to consider public policy solutions to address these issues. Blue Ribbon Commissioner, **Eleni Tsakopoulos-Kounalakis** serves as Task Force Vice Chair.

The meeting was called to order by **Dr. Firestone** who stated that “The Commission and its task forces have the critical responsibility of charting a course for change that has the potential to positively impact the lives of individuals with autism and their families throughout California, and to serve as a model with national implications.” Dr. Firestone acknowledged the “bold efforts” of **Senate President Pro Tem Don Perata** and **Assembly Speaker Fabian Nuñez** in providing the innovative vision and leadership to tackle the autism crisis that is impacting children and families throughout California. This Commission, Chaired by **State Senator-Elect, Darrell Steinberg**, was established with a legislative mandate to identify gaps in programs, services and funding related to the early identification of autism spectrum disorders and provide recommendations to close the identified gaps. These findings will be presented to the Legislature and Governor by fall 2007.

The five-hour meeting was attended by task force members, representatives of elected officials and others from the general public. The members identified the most critical issues in early identification and intervention. Public policy change to address these needs will be identified at the next meeting to be held in December.