



## Randall Hagar

As a university student in the early 1970s, Randall Hagar already had the look of a leader and policy maker. As chair of the campus media board at the University of California Davis, he was publisher of the university's two campus newspapers and owner of the campus radio station. As a student, he was working toward a degree in behavioral science that he had designed himself. As an intern, he was studying and learning in the California state legislature. In other words, like countless other university students, he was on the road a bright and productive future.

Then, just fifteen units short of graduation, his road hit a series of obstacles. Hagar's wife lost her job. A week later, the couple learned she was pregnant. Hagar dropped out of school to go to work. The son who was born to them grew up to develop severe schizophrenia. Like so many others with the crippling disease, he was soon caught in the revolving door of living in streets, jails and psychiatric hospitals. When the Hagers' marriage ended, Hagar took sole responsibility for their son, who by then was extremely disabled. When the father eventually found himself between jobs and confronted with the reality that he couldn't provide the medical care his son needed, Hagar became a welfare dad in order to ensure the young man had access to public medical benefits.

Today, Hagar looks back on those two decades as "a 20-year detour" that ultimately carried him back to where he had begun - and beyond. In 1995, he returned to UC Davis and completed the degree in behavioral studies he had designed years earlier. By then, he had connected with the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) affiliate in Sacramento and become a political volunteer. Not much later, he was back in the state legislature, now deeply involved in the campaign to get the assisted outpatient treatment (AOT) law known in California as [Laura's Law](#) in passed. As an unpaid volunteer, he helped draft the law and then lobbied for its passage. A year after its passage in 2002, he joined the California Psychiatric Association (CPA) as its lobbyist. Randall still pushes for mental health reform, now wearing both his professional hat with the CPA and his personal hat as the father of mentally ill son and co-coordinator of the California Treatment Advocacy Coalition's efforts to get Laura's Law implemented statewide. Only one California county has so far implemented the law - Nevada County, where the law's namesake, Laura Wilcox, died in a preventable tragedy in 2001. That program is already an award-winner - honored by the County State Association of Counties (CSAC) for "showing that county government works." The state organization has produced a five-minute video, "[Nevada County: First in the State - Assisted Outreach Treatment Program](#)," showcasing the results of Laura's Law in Nevada County.

That Laura's Law is on the books at all is testimony to the reality that advocacy can produce results, and those results can change - and save - lives. The Treatment Advocacy Center in 2010 recognized Randall Hagar's advocacy by naming him winner of the [Torrey Advocacy Commendation](#), which honors the courage and tenacity of individuals who selflessly advocate for those too severely disabled by mental illness to secure their own care.