

Dateline

April 2024

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"Helping people to live, learn and work in our community"

Hundreds gather at Statehouse to celebrate and advocate

More than 500 people attended this year's Developmental Disability (DD) Awareness and Advocacy Day at the Ohio Statehouse, sharing experiences and using their voices to advocate for community inclusion.

"Don't be afraid to sell yourself," panelist Kelsi Weaver of Belmont County told the crowd. "There is no one out there with that lived experience who knows this life better than you."

The annual event aims to educate and empower Ohioans with developmental disabilities, their family members and other allies to come together to advocate on policy issues affecting people with disabilities. Participants also heard from speakers in the disability community, including state officials, and met with legislators and their representatives.

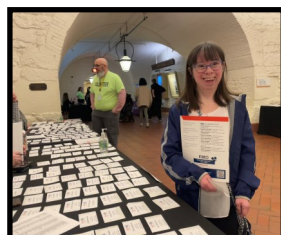
"It was eye-opening," said Chelsea Jackson, a Franklin County resident who attended for the first time. "There was such a wide variety of people. I thought it was great."

Jackson said she spoke to her state senator's aide about the need for more affordable housing for people with disabilities in suburban municipalities. Advocates also told legislators about the need for improved transportation, technology and assistive devices, and discussed how supported decision-making can be an alternative to guardianship.

Kim Hauck, Director of the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities, said that while Ohio has made historic budget investments and progress, "Our work's not over. We know that our communities are better when people with disabilities are included."



Chelsea Jackson, FCBDD board member Marci Straughter, Superintendent/CEO Dot Yeager and Christine Brown were all smiles.



Plan ahead for safety, traffic during solar eclipse

Starting around 3 p.m. on Monday, April 8, the moon will slowly cover the sun, providing a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to view a total solar eclipse in Ohio. The last total solar eclipse visible in the state took place in 1806 and the next won't happen until 2099.



The Franklin County Board of Developmental Disabilities joins the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities and other public agencies in urging safe viewing – only with specially designed “eclipse glasses” -- and careful travel.

West Central School, Early Childhood Education classes and transportation services at FCBDD will be closed on April 8 due to the solar event and expected heavy traffic. All programs resume the next day.

Though the path of totality covers much of northern Ohio, parts of central Ohio will see significant coverage or moments of total darkness.

Family members and direct support professionals should take special care to ensure that people with developmental disabilities only view with eclipse glasses that meet international standards.

For more information, go to eclipse.ohio.gov

FCBDD administrator Jack Brownley remembered as advocate and friend

During a career in education that spanned more than half a century, Jack Brownley never stopped imagining ways to make school – and life – better for young people, especially those with disabilities.

“He often spoke out against some of the more challenging issues that our students face in public schools,” said Rebecca Holthaus, principal at the Franklin County Board of Developmental Disabilities’ West Central School. “Jack was solution-based and had a mind that just never quit when it came to creatively addressing many of those challenges.”

Brownley had cancer and passed away at his home on March 3. An administrator at FCBDD for nearly 20 years, he was named Director of Schools in March 2005. In his most recent role, he served as Director of Schools and Special Services, overseeing School-Age Services, Special Olympics and Community Recreation, as well as the agency’s Transportation and Psychology departments.

He served as President of the Ohio Coalition for the Education of Children with Disabilities while at FCBDD.

“Jack was a lifelong advocate for people with developmental disabilities,” FCBDD Superintendent/CEO Dot Yeager said. “He will be greatly missed.”

Brownley also held positions as an administrator and athletic director in several area school districts, including Columbus, Gahanna, Bexley and Tri-Valley. From 1979 to 1988, he was principal of the A.G. Bell School and supervisor for the Hearing Impaired Program with Columbus Public Schools, where he fine-tuned his ASL fluency. He also had been principal of Mohawk Alternative Middle School in Columbus, helping to start many innovative programs in the arts and connecting students with business mentors.

“Jack’s love of sports, savvy leadership and passion for people with disabilities led to incredible opportunities for our Special Olympics athletes,” said Ryan Phillips, Director of Special Olympics, Community Recreation and Aquatics at FCBDD. “We’ll miss him very much.”

Holthaus, a veteran educator who joined FCBDD in 2022, said Brownley was an inspiring and supportive supervisor, always willing to listen and offer honest feedback. “Every conversation I had with Jack about our program, our staff and our students was full of energy and exciting possibilities,” she said. “I know he is still listening, still cheering on West Central.”

A Maryland native, Brownley attended graduate school at Ohio State University, where he received master’s degrees in deaf education and school psychology. He and his wife, Linda, were married for more than 50 years and have three daughters and six grandchildren.

Memorial contributions may be made to the Arthur G. James Cancer Hospital and Richard J. Solove Research Institute.



DSACO launches ElevateDD advocacy platform

The Down Syndrome Association of Central Ohio (DSACO) recently announced a new, statewide advocacy platform to reflect its work on behalf of the broader developmental disability community.

ElevateDD aims to elevate the voices and needs of Ohioans with developmental disabilities and their families, and to bring advocacy issues to leaders and decision makers. DSACO will continue to offer the same programs, services and events, while remaining a strong, unified voice for the Down syndrome and developmental disability community, the organization said.

“From an advocacy perspective, so many things that benefit the Down syndrome community benefit others, too,” said ElevateDD President and CEO Kari Jones.



ElevateDD

In recent years, DSACO has developed new statewide educational programs – Learning Aid Ohio and Adult Literacy Ohio – that have served thousands of children and adults with various types of developmental disabilities. Creating ElevateDD, Jones said, “positions us to evaluate what other things we can offer that are important to the broader developmental disability community.”

The availability, cost and quality of child care, for example, is an important issue for many families whose children have developmental disabilities and delays. “Is it an exclusive fight for the Down syndrome community? No,” Jones said.

To learn more about ElevateDD (pronounced like the word *elevated*) go to <https://elevatedd.org>

Good For You

Notable achievements in the FCBDD community

Thanks to the Franklin County Commissioners' Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion for featuring FCBDD – and some of our best advocates – during an online lunch-and-learn session. Board member Marci Straughter participated and is always happy to spread the word about our efforts to help the community become more inclusive for all.

We were thrilled to have the Mid-Ohio Food Collective shine a spotlight on our monthly drive-thru produce pantry during DD Awareness Month. Mid-Ohio communications staff visited our Johnstown Road offices for a story on the success of the pantry and the dedication of our Early Childhood staff volunteers, led by activity coordinator Sarah Gillilan.



Thanks to FCBDD Self-Advocate Advisory Council member Christine Brown for working with the Columbus City Council on a proclamation recognizing Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month, which was celebrated in March. Way to advocate, Christine.



We appreciated the sneak preview of *Something To Be Proud Of*, an in-progress docuseries about the work of direct support professionals and the people they support, produced by the Ohio Alliance of Direct Support Professionals and Silfies Media. Open Door Art Studio & Gallery artist Wallace Peck does a great job showing how DSPs help him lead a fulfilling life.

Career Milestones

35 Years
Deborah Seeds

25 Years
Angel Carter

20 Years
Winston Tidwell
Sherry Wade

15 Years
Allison Grimes
Robert Piper

10 Years
Sara Hodge
Emmanuel Owusu-Boadi



Hats off to Larry Macintosh, Service Coordination supervisors and the many other staff members who organized this year's Franklin County Provider Fair. It's a mammoth undertaking for FCBDD and also an important event for the local disability community. There's no substitute for in-person connections!

Perspective: It's past time to end the marriage penalty

Love seems to always be in the air during spring. My husband and I will soon celebrate 42 years of marriage, and we feel so very blessed.

Though I was born with cerebral palsy, I have never received Social Security benefits related to my disability. So when we got married, I didn't have to worry about losing any SSI (Supplemental Security Income) or SSDI (Social Security Disability Insurance) benefits.

But others do have to worry. Too often, people with disabilities cannot get married without losing their benefits, or at least having them greatly reduced. Advocates refer to this as "the marriage penalty."

This federal policy hasn't been updated since 1989. That means the income guidelines that were used do not coincide with pay rates and the cost of living today. While there are times when people who rely on SSI or SSDI are able to legally marry without penalty, that is the exception rather than the rule. Most of the time, they will face some type of loss of benefits, especially SSI. Here in Franklin County and elsewhere, people with disabilities often choose to marry "in the eyes of the church" or in another type of commitment ceremony that is not legally binding.

Currently, the asset limit for people receiving benefits is \$2,000 for a single person and \$3,000 for a married couple. They can own a car or a house, but since they cannot have much money in the bank, they don't necessarily have funds to pay for unanticipated expenses. This keeps people impoverished. People generally can work only limited, part-time hours if they want to keep all of their SSI or SSDI benefits.

All of us can encourage our legislators to eliminate these marriage penalties and update the 35-year-old policy. For more information and to take action, go to www.thearcofohio.org and click on Public Policy, then go to the Action Center. Look for the tabs urging Congress to update SSI and eliminate marriage penalties.

Ohioans with disabilities and others across our great land should have the right to marry if they choose, without having to ponder a devastating loss of benefits. They deserve the simpler worries that accompany married life – like why your spouse didn't change the empty toilet paper roll.

Denise Blackburn-Smith has been a service coordinator at the Franklin County Board of Developmental Disabilities for 16 years.



Calendar

April, 2024

- 1-5 Spring Recess for Early Childhood Education programs and West Central Schools. FCBDD's Administrative offices and Service Coordination offices open.
- 8 Solar Eclipse - West Central School, Early Childhood Education classes and transportation services at FCBDD will be closed on April 8 due to the solar event and expected heavy traffic. All programs resume the next day.
- 18 FCBDD Early Childhood Education and the Mid-Ohio Food Collective Produce Drive Through from 5:30-7:30 p.m. in the ECEFC Bus Lane (accessed via Marilyn Lane). For more details, contact Sarah Gillilan at 614-342-5803.
- 25 Franklin County Board of Developmental Board meeting, **12:30 p.m.** at 2879 Johnstown Road, Columbus. Please contact Amy Magginis at 614-342-5950 for details.

FCBDD Board Meeting Link:
<https://bit.ly/3JvZSUJ>

- 26 West Central School Prom

Dateline

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The Franklin County Board of Developmental Disabilities does not discriminate in employment or services on the basis of race, color, creed, sex, national origin, or disability.

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www.fcbdd.org



Give to the FCBDD Operation Feed campaign in April

The Franklin County Board of Developmental Disabilities encourages everyone to help community members in need by donating to Operation Feed during its spring campaign in April, May and June.

Operation Feed is both the Mid-Ohio Food Collective's biggest fundraiser and a crucial support for thousands of low-income households struggling to put food on the table.

Contributions help stock the shelves of hundreds of food pantries, soup kitchens and emergency shelters in central and eastern Ohio. Because of the giant food bank's purchasing power, donor support and reach, every dollar raised allows it to distribute \$4.56 worth of groceries.

During the 2023 fiscal year, Mid-Ohio distributed nearly 80 million pounds of food across its 20-county service area, enough to provide 181,917 meals.

Nearly 70% of households served by Mid-Ohio's network include at least one child or senior.

To donate, go to <https://give.mofc.org/OpFeed>.
OR

To make a donation through the FCBDD team, go to <https://give.mofc.org/FranklinCounty> and select Franklin County Board of DD as your team.



DSP conference set for May 8 in Columbus

Registration is open for the 2024 Ohio Alliance of Direct Support Professionals 2024 Summit, a professional conference designed for DSPs, frontline supervisors and independent providers.

In addition to keynote presentations, breakout sessions will address ways A.I. (artificial intelligence) can benefit frontline workers, MUI reporting, investing and budgeting, community belonging, and using improv to build skills.



Scan the QR code for information on registration, discounts and ordering T-shirts.