

Published by the Franklin County Board of Developmental Disabilities
"Helping people to live, learn and work in our community"

DD Council member passionate about helping others

As a new member of the Ohio Developmental Disabilities Council, Columbus resident Essence Unique Easley is eager to share her story and to learn about the journeys of others. She hopes that's a recipe for accomplishment.

"Some people get left out," she said. "I hope to be, not necessarily an example, but someone who can help give voice to everyone. There's a way to get help and resources at all ages."

Though she suffered from seizures throughout high school, Easley wasn't diagnosed with a neurological condition until college. Now 29, she lives with epilepsy and pseudotumor cerebri. "My body makes too much spinal fluid," she said. "My brain thinks it has a tumor, but there's no mass. Medication doesn't work well, but a shunt helps redirect the fluid."



Easley has endured 20 surgeries in the past 10 years and keeps moving forward. She launched a nonprofit called Enduring Minds to assist others with rare neurological conditions, operates E&E Tea Company with her husband, wrote a children's book and has a 2-year-old son.

She's especially interested in finding ways to make life easier for parents with disabilities. "When my son was an infant, I wanted a carrier that allowed me to carry him with one hand, since I use a cane," she said. "Elevated baby tubs can help. And having epilepsy, I always changed him on the ground so that if I were to have a seizure, we were safe."

Easley also would like to provide more educational resources for kids whose parents have disabilities. Her children's book, for example, explains her condition in ways a child can understand.

Carolyn Knight, executive director of the 31-member Ohio DD Council, said Easley's perspective will enrich the council's work. "And she'll have a chance to mix with many different people," Knight said. "That's what's so wonderful about council – all those different voices, coming together to advocate, educate and learn."

From the superintendent's desk

Parents, guardians, caregivers invited to family support meetings

Here in Franklin County, there are many parents, guardians and caregivers providing support for children and adults with developmental disabilities. We want to make sure we're helping the helpers, too.

Every other month, on the fourth Wednesday, I host an online Family Support meeting. The format is open, casual and aimed at making sure families and caregivers have the resources, information and opportunities necessary for their loved ones to thrive in our community.

Because we recognize that families are the best resources for each other, the meetings also offer a chance for people to connect and share experiences. Sometimes staff members join in with program updates or other relevant happenings.

These meetings are an avenue not only for communication, but for feedback about our services. Participants can let me know if they have a question or a

problem. I'll do my best to answer – or find an answer – as soon as possible. Of course, we also love to hear what's working well.

We have two more meetings this year, at noon on Sept. 25 and at noon on Nov. 13.

Hope to "see" you there!

**Dot Yeager is Superintendent/CEO
of the Franklin County Board of
Developmental Disabilities**



FCBDD Family Support

Zoom link: <https://bit.ly/3JvZSUJ>

Meeting ID: 488 125 2353

Passcode: fcbdd2020

Zoom call-in number: 1-929-205-6099

Provider agency uses rate increase for big DSP-wage boost

For the first time in a long while, Mary Hall feels as though the profession she loves is finally moving forward.

A historic investment by the state of Ohio and county boards of developmental disabilities that fully took effect in July has allowed Hall's Gahanna-based provider agency – Living in Family Environments, Inc. (L.I.F.E.) – to dramatically increase wages for its direct-support workers.

"I think a lot of our staff love what they do. They feel a real sense of purpose," said Hall, who has been in the field for more than 45 years. "This raise has allowed us to give better pay, bonuses, and makes it possible to recruit new workers. We're very, very grateful."

L.I.F.E. administrators decided to pass along a \$5 hourly raise to direct-support staff, an increase that moved starting pay to between \$17 and \$19 per hour, depending on how many people live in the home. "We were at \$12 an hour a year ago," said Jim Westlake, fiscal officer at L.I.F.E. "We spent some time on this, started with \$4 an hour, and got to \$5."

Many employees have been with the agency for years and now earn more than \$20 an hour, Program Director Christine Clark said. On a recent August afternoon, Clark smiled as she noted the difference higher pay is making. "We don't have openings right now."

The budget increase for Medicaid reimbursement rates did not mandate DSP raises. But officials at the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities have said the expectation is that hourly raises will rise to an average of "at least \$18," and higher if possible.

L.I.F.E. employs nearly 90 workers and serves many medically fragile people, as well as several who take part in the Ohio Shared Living program, said Hall. A licensed social worker, she raised three children with severe disabilities. Hall also started a foster care agency for medically fragile children and still sits on the organization's board.

Her goal has always been for people with disabilities to have choices, voices that are heard and to live fulfilling lives. "We're not competing just to take care of people," she said. "We're competing to prevent institutionalization by being good stewards of this money."



Community Survey

The Franklin County Board of Developmental Disabilities wants to hear from you!

Responses to our 2024 Community Survey will help us know how we are doing and identify ways to improve. Feedback also helps guide the development of our annual action plan, which will be shared with the community.

Please complete this brief, anonymous survey by Oct. 4.

Scan the code below, return the printed form included in this edition of *Dateline*, or go to:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/DNF5V87>



Self-advocates host voter information event

The Franklin County DD Self-Advocate Advisory Council and Disability Rights Ohio are teaming up for a presentation on voting. People with disabilities, family members, providers and others are invited to attend:

- ⇒ **10 a.m. to noon Tuesday, Sept. 24**
- ⇒ **Franklin County Board of Developmental Disabilities**
2879 Johnstown Rd.
- ⇒ **RSVP to ryan.phillips@fcbdd.org**

Disability Rights will share information on registering to vote; ID requirements; the rights of voters with disabilities; and absentee, in-person and early voting.

The building is accessible and includes a universal changing table. If other accommodations are needed, please call 614-342-5161.



Good For You

Notable achievements in the FCBDD community

Big shout out to Franklin County athlete Lakota McMillion and Unified partner Nehemiah Tanga for representing the Columbus Crew and leading the East Team to victory in the ninth annual Special Olympics Unified Sports All-Star Game! And our very own Franklin County Special Olympics Manager Megan Bender did a great job coaching.



Congrats to Franklin County Special Olympics powerlifter Kevin Cantrell, who was recognized by the Franklin County Commissioners for his many achievements and wins in Ohio Special Olympics events. Cantrell, his family and supporters met commissioners in July during Disability Pride Month.



Thanks to all our Early Childhood, West Central and Transportation staff members who organized trainings and professional development days before the start of the new school year. We also have five new, smaller-size buses, all equipped with iPads.

Career Milestones

15 Years
Barbara Durthaler
Heather Legg

10 Years
Casey Goleb
Nicholas Smith

5 Years
Jennifer Brooks
Catherine Burke
Madeline Meglich



Caregiver in need of kidney transplant

As both a service provider and caregiver for her sister, Aleta Churchill has long been an advocate for people with developmental disabilities. Now that she's been diagnosed with end-stage renal disease, she's also become an advocate for herself and others in need of a kidney.



Churchill and her sister, Tina, plan to take part in the 2024 Central Ohio Kidney Walk on Sept. 29 to raise money and awareness about a disease that affects an estimated 37 million people in the United States, or more than 1 in 7 adults.

"When I first started this journey, I was told to advocate," Churchill said. "I have bumper stickers, a video that my church has shared, and I wear a jacket with donor information on the back."

Nicole Nawman, Tina's service coordinator at the Franklin County Board of Developmental Disabilities, said the sisters are close. And as in so many families, the health of the caregiver can have a significant effect on the person with disabilities. "If anything happened to Aleta, Tina would have to seek placement," she said.

Churchill is working hard to educate others about the prevalence of kidney disease and praying that she'll find a donor soon. "She's been with me about 20 years," she said of her sister. "I'm her only living relative."

To learn more about donating a kidney to Churchill or others, call the Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center Living Donor Program at 614-293-6724 or visit osuwexmedlivingdonor.org

Advocates gather to promote outdoor play

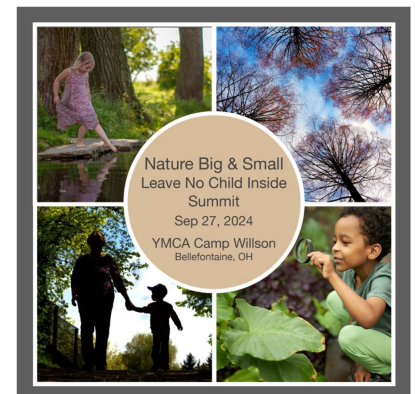
The Leave No Child Inside Central Ohio Collaborative, a group that advocates for more outdoor play in nature for children, is hosting its 12th annual summit on Friday, Sept. 27.

Parents and professionals from the developmental disabilities community are invited to join the gathering at YMCA Camp Willson in Bellefontaine, Ohio, about an hour from Columbus. Speakers and participant-led small group discussions will focus on access to nature big and small, from National Parks to backyard puddles.

"Kids of all backgrounds and abilities respond and relate to nature, whether it's feeling a breeze on your face, or touching grass or flowers," said Darren Thompson, an associate director for the Franklin County Board of Developmental Disabilities Early Childhood Education program and a board member for the Leave No Child Inside Central Ohio Collaborative. "There's a way into nature for every child, regardless of ability."

The one-day conference, from 10 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., costs \$35; conference plus an overnight retreat is \$75.

For more information and to register, go to: summit.kidsandnature.org



2023 Annual Report available online, copies by request

Want to learn more about the mission and reach of the Franklin County Board of Developmental Disabilities?

The agency's 2023 Annual Report provides an overview of the services, supports and programs provided during the past year. Franklin County DD served an average of nearly 13,000 adults and children each day, invested \$9.7 million in higher wages for direct-support professionals and hosted a monthly produce market that provided free, fresh food to 4,450 people in need.



Read more here: <https://bit.ly/3YJVNxi>

To request a copy, email
communications@fcbdd.org

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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Information about the Franklin County Board of Developmental Disabilities is always available on the internet at:

www.fcbdd.org



Calendar

September, 2024

- 2 Labor Day – Early Childhood, School classes and offices of the Franklin County Board of Developmental Disabilities closed
 - 3 ECE classes begin
 - 12 Self-Advocate Advisory Council meeting, 2879 Johnstown Road.
 - 13 Ohio Self Determination Association Central Ohio meeting to be held at 2879 Johnstown Road. For more information about the Central Ohio SDA, and to RSVP for the meeting, email Christine Brown at Christine.Brown@osumc.edu
 - 19 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.
 - 24 FCBDD Self Advocates host Voter presentation by Disability Rights Ohio; 2879 Johnstown Road, Columbus, 10 a.m.
 - 25 Family Support meeting, via Zoom, 10 a.m. Meeting is open to all family members.
- 26 Franklin County Board of Developmental Board committee meetings and regular board meeting. Board meeting to begin at **12:30 p.m.** at 2879 Johnstown Road, Columbus. Please contact Amy Magginis at 614-342-5950 for details.

FCBDD Family Support Link:
<https://bit.ly/3JvZSUJ>

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

Celebrate DSP Recognition Week Sept. 8-14

The Franklin County Board of Developmental Disabilities encourages the community to celebrate and highlight the direct support workforce during Direct Support Professional Recognition Week, Sept. 8-14.

DSPs are the heart and soul of supports for people with disabilities, and a key to full community participation and inclusion. They are caregivers, advocates, friends, mentors and more.

Advocates also are urging supporters to send a message to Congress in September calling for passage of the Recognizing the Role of Direct Support Professionals Act. The legislation would recognize DSPs as a distinct profession and allow the Department of Labor to collect better employment data and inform policies to address workforce challenges.

<https://www.ancor.org/actions/call-on-congress-to-recognize-direct-support-professionals/>

Community Survey

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Responses to this brief, anonymous survey will help us know how we are doing and identify ways to improve. Feedback also helps guide the development of our annual action plan, which will be shared with the community. **Please complete and return by Oct. 4 to FCBDD Communications, 2879 Johnstown Rd., Columbus, OH 43219.** For assistance with language or other accommodations, email ryan.phillips@fcbdd.org

1. What is your relationship to Franklin County DD?

- Person receiving services
- Parent or guardian of the person receiving services
- Direct service provider
- Partner agency staff member
- Other (specify) _____

2. What program area affects you the most?

- Service coordination
- Waiver provider services
- Early intervention/Early childhood education
- School-age and transition services
- ICF (intermediate care facility) services
- Other (specify) _____

3. Do you feel that Franklin County DD staff treats you with courtesy and respect?

- Always
- Most of the time
- Sometimes
- Never

4. Does Franklin County DD answer your questions and provide helpful information?

- Always
- Most of the time
- Sometimes
- Never

5. The last time you contacted a Franklin County DD staff member, how quickly did you hear back?

- Same day
- 1-2 days
- 3-5 days
- More than 5 days

6. How satisfied are you that your voice is heard and that you can make decisions about your life? (If you are responding on behalf of a person receiving services, answers should reflect their views.)

- Very satisfied
- Satisfied
- Somewhat satisfied
- Not satisfied

7. How important is it for you to be informed about employment opportunities for people with disabilities?

- Very important
- Important
- Somewhat important
- Not important

8. How important is it for you to learn how technology, such as assistive devices and remote support services, can help people with disabilities?

- Very important
- Important
- Somewhat important
- Not important

9. Overall, how satisfied are you with the programs and supports provided by Franklin County DD?

- Very satisfied
- Satisfied
- Somewhat satisfied
- Not satisfied

10. Please use this space to tell us what we are doing well, where we need to improve, or anything else you would like to say.

If you would like to speak to us about your experience, please contact Ryan Phillips at ryan.phillips@fcbdd.org; Rita Price at rita.price@fcbdd.org; or call 614-342-5161. You also can provide your contact information below and we'll reach out to you.

Name _____ Phone _____

Email _____