

DRAFT

2025 Annual Action Plan



As approved by the Board on: _____

Franklin County DD Strategic Plan Progress Report (for the year ended 12/31/2024)

Overview

County boards of developmental disabilities establish long-term strategic plans and provide periodic progress reports on those plans, as stated in Ohio Administrative Code section 5123-4-01. Franklin County DD is midway through the current strategic plan for the period from 2019 to 2028. Three types of strategies are outlined in that plan. First, there are those that cover basic regulatory requirements administered by the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce, the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities (DODD) and the Ohio Department of Health. Next are focus areas required by DODD, including but not limited to: advocacy efforts, emphasis on integrated settings, gaps in services and waiting lists, competitive integrated employment and sufficient provider pool. Third is the major initiative identified for this planning cycle: to cease providing direct Home and Community Based Services on or before February 28, 2024, to meet the “conflict-free” case management requirements of the federal government.

Summary of progress

1) Regarding the major initiative to cease providing direct services, the completion date of February 28, 2024, was met. In 2019, a major milestone was reached when the Franklin County DD adult services department was privatized by ARC Industries. Franklin County DD’s alternative transportation function continued to be delivered by third party contracted providers and managed by the Franklin County DD Transportation Department until December 2023, when transition to ARC Industries was completed. The final milestone occurred in February 2024, when Goodwill Columbus began billing DODD for the Work and Community Services program. Collaboration among DODD and our partners on behalf of those we serve made this transition as seamless as possible.

2) The following provides highlights of progress on the focus areas:

Advocacy: While all of our staff are expected to advocate on behalf of those we serve, Ryan Phillips took on the new role of Director of Communications, Advocacy and Community Relations, which was created in 2024 to be the primary coordination point of our agency efforts. During 2024, four meetings were held to include both the legacy Self Advocate Advisory Council members and to also more widely encourage people served to participate. Over 40 attended the December meeting. Based on an idea presented by a self-advocate, a “Trunk or Treat” event also was held in October, drawing 500 people to the disability-friendly event. Franklin County DD continued to sponsor both the annual Synergy Conference for professional development, where advocates and professionals learn side by side, and the annual Project STIR (leadership training by and for people with disabilities), as well as promote the virtual WeThriveTogether platform to support people with disabilities.

Integrated settings: Franklin County DD and Child Development Council Head Start have been in partnership to provide inclusive classroom settings for preschool children since 1991. During the 2024-25 program year, approximately 70 children with disabilities and 140 typical children participate in this program. In July 2024, Goodwill Columbus opened its first ever site with all of its service areas under one roof in Grove City: retail, donations, workforce development, digital skills and adult services for persons with DD. This site is in a major shopping center that includes Target and Home Depot. In addition, Franklin County DD took advantage of funding from DODD to provide grants to community partners to install universal, adult-sized changing tables at public places in Franklin County. A total of 14 grants were awarded to organizations throughout Franklin County, including Blendon Woods Metro Park, OSU Schottenstein Center, Ohio Theatre, Ohio Expo Center, and Franklin County Fairgrounds.

Reduce people waiting for services: During 2024, 195 people were newly enrolled on Medicaid Home and Community-Based waivers and the needs changed for another 126 already enrolled who changed to a different waiver type (primarily Level One to IO). Also, the Early Childhood Department added new technology tools and streamlined documentation requirements to create capacity to serve an additional 255 children under the age of three needing early intervention.

Plan and set priorities: The following priorities were established in 2024:

- Early Childhood Education and Home-Based Services, including early intervention/prevention services
- School-aged services, including collaborative services with school districts for ages 6 -22 and continued development of transitional services for youth (ages 14-22)
- Adult services, including community employment services with focus on “Employment First,” expanding vocational habilitation and training options and day supports for the most medically fragile and senior citizens in integrated settings where possible.
- Service Coordination and other mandated services
- Specialized support services, including residential services for adults, family resources services, summer programs for children, Special Olympics and community recreation services, therapies and transportation
- Maintain stable finances, consistent with levy commitment to maintain services without requesting additional property tax funding until at least 2028.
- Strive for diversity, equity and inclusion in all services and relationships.

Community integrated employment: In 2024, Franklin County DD’s West Central School provided vocational opportunities for 36 transition age students with potential employers, including but not limited to, Mount Carmel, Columbus Public Library, and Mid-Ohio Food Collective. A summer experience in collaboration with Hattie Larlham served 40 students, 13 of whom were referred to Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities (OOD) for more intensive vocational support. This summer experience offered opportunities with 19 employers, including but not limited to, Hilliard Parks and Recreation, Linden Fresh Market, and Marc’s. Franklin County DD also continues to partner with the Ohio State University Nisonger Center for the Pre-Vocational Integrated Campus Experience (PIECE) program, which provides an on-campus skill building experience and vocational experience for adults, with employers such as OSU dining, COSI, and Barks and Rec.

Recruit sufficient providers: There are approximately 2,000 providers who have signed up to provide services in Franklin County. About half of them are actively providing services. The large number of providers creates difficulty in helping individuals and their families to select the ones that best match their needs. One solution to this is known as the Connector Program. Providers can express interest in being matched with people who are seeking a provider. During 2024, approximately 632 people requested a connection through this means, with over 500 participating providers.

Identify gaps in services: 1) Habilitation support services for adults with severe and profound disabilities will expand and facilities will need to be adapted to better meet the specialized needs. At present, there are 155 people attending programs at three different locations supported by ARC Industries. A second shift was added in late 2024 to accommodate seven additional people to be served. 2) Stable transportation will be critical to the success of the Employment First initiative. The Franklin County DD alternative transportation services were transitioned to ARC Industries beginning in January 2024.

Franklin County DD 2024 Community Survey Summary

Overview

To help assess the progress of Franklin County DD in meeting the needs of the people we serve, our annual community survey was widely promoted. Nearly 500 people submitted responses and provided 250 individual comments. The survey questions and responses are included as an Exhibit with this summary. To better understand some of the survey responses, several parents and people served participated in a focus group, where an additional 125 comments were provided. All of the feedback received has been reviewed in detail by the respective department heads. Where enough specific information was provided, follow-up has occurred.

Strengths

Franklin County DD received 45 comments that they were very satisfied with their services and mentioning 35 staff by name for recognition. Staff for our Early Childhood and West Central programs were seen as especially caring and Service Coordination staff as supportive with providing a person-centered approach. The Ohio State University Nisonger Early Intervention program received positive comment.

Areas of improvement

The responses to several questions indicate there are areas for significant improvement with customer experience. Focused attention on these areas will be outlined in the 2025 Annual Action Plan.

1) Customer experience: While 349 responses, or 76%, said they were very satisfied or satisfied with their services, Franklin County DD would expect a much higher percentage should be satisfied. The answers to some of the other questions touch on the underlying issues.

- Are people treated with courtesy and respect? 39 said “sometimes” and 11 said “never.”
- Regarding helpfulness: 82 said “sometimes” and 14 said “never.”
- How long does it take to hear back? 61 said 3 to 5 days and 53 said more than 5 days.
- Satisfaction with voice being heard: 72 were somewhat satisfied and 33 were not satisfied.
- Overall satisfaction: 74 were somewhat satisfied and 41 were not satisfied.

The analysis of the comments provides even more insight into the customer experience. Lack of timeliness was noted by 20, responsiveness/helpfulness by 19, and lack of proficiency and/or consistency 13. Lack of knowledge or information about what supports are available for people served, how to proceed after determined eligible, and how services flow through different stages of development were recurring themes. Based on experiences with school districts, pediatricians and hospitals, there appears to be continued opportunity for general awareness about Franklin County DD.

2. Adequate number of providers: 15 comments addressed the difficulty in finding a provider for people with complex needs and/or quality of provider services. Independent providers find it difficult to navigate the different tools and platforms to accomplish the required documentation. Being able to use Uber was a positive, along with friendly drivers.

3. Access to and/or understanding of services: 10 comments indicated difficulty accessing services for children; 8 comments indicated difficulty accessing respite and/or recreational services. Access to residential services was described as “difficult” and “requirements are hard.” Community integrated employment was described as varying with the support of the immediate supervisor. Addressing sensory issues was difficult. One person’s case was closed due to the OOD definition of “employable.”

Franklin County DD 2025 Annual Action Plan

The following identifies the proposed tasks to support both the focus areas required by DODD and additional areas identified by Franklin County DD after receiving feedback from the Community Survey, follow up meetings with parents and people served, and also with key staff.

Promoting advocacy: 1) Expand membership in Franklin County DD supported self-advocacy from the initial 12 who had been appointed to an average meeting attendance of 20, open to all who would like to attend. 2) Continue to sponsor one Project STIR workshop and increase the number attending from 10 to 15. 3) Continue to sponsor 20 attendees at the annual Synergy Conference. 4) Support the self-advocates planning the biennial Central Ohio Legislative Advocacy Day to be held on April 4, 2025, at the main Columbus Metropolitan Library. 5) Identify opportunities for public speaking and create “Telling my story” videos to assist self-advocates with their personal goals. 6) Inform and assist up to 25 self-advocates about the option for supported decision-making, assuming pending legislation passes this year, assisted by Advocacy and Protective Services (APSI).

Support the delivery of services in the most integrated setting appropriate for the needs:

1) In collaboration with the Ohio State University Allied Therapies Department, support a project to teach water safety to a minimum of 100 children with disabilities and the wider community at our therapeutic pool at West Central School. The first phase of this project will launch in summer 2025. 2) Offer opportunities for individuals and families to learn about assistive technology and remote supports by hosting presentations for self-advocate meetings, family support meetings and Service Coordination Department trainings.

Reduce the number of people waiting for services: 1) Because of the continued population growth in Franklin County, the demand for early intervention services is expected to grow. In partnership with Franklin County Family and Children First Council Help Me Grow, Franklin County DD will create additional capacity to meet the demand through collaboration with our community partners on resource allocation and outcomes and through continuous review of internal processes. 2) Franklin County DD plans to enroll 358 people on the current needs list for home and community based Medicaid waivers during 2025, for a projected number of 6,404 people enrolled at the end of 2025. 3) There was a 30% increase in the number of eligibility determination requests during 2024. Franklin County DD’s Intake Department is collaborating with MEORC, a council of governments serving county boards of DD, to identify ways to streamline the intake process.

Plan and set priorities: 1) Continue to collaborate with Franklin County Children Services, Franklin County ADAMH and provider I Am Boundless to support young adults who are served by multiple systems to receive the intensive treatment needed. The final phase of the building renovations needed to support a total of 16 youth at a single site, specifically designed to support their complex needs, will occur in early 2025. 2) Increase participation in the annual Community Survey from 500 to 600 by exploring additional ways to reach out to people served and their families.

Increase community integrated employment: 1) Increase the number of students in the Transition to Work summer experience from 31 to 48. 2) Communicate broadly about the new and improved transportation service, effective January 1, 2025, designed to better support people in community employment.

Recruit sufficient providers: 1) Implement the new provider selection tool under development by DODD to assist families in narrowing their review of the 2,000 providers in Franklin County. 2) Continue the Star Awards annual recognition program to assist with elevating the role of direct service professionals. 3) Communicate broadly to encourage individuals served and their families to speak up with their service providers (including county board staff) about how well their needs are being met. 4) To support provider quality, Franklin County DD will facilitate in-person training for a minimum of 300 providers. 5) To ensure provider quality, Franklin County DD, in collaboration with DODD, will perform compliance reviews of 200 independent providers by March 31, 2025.

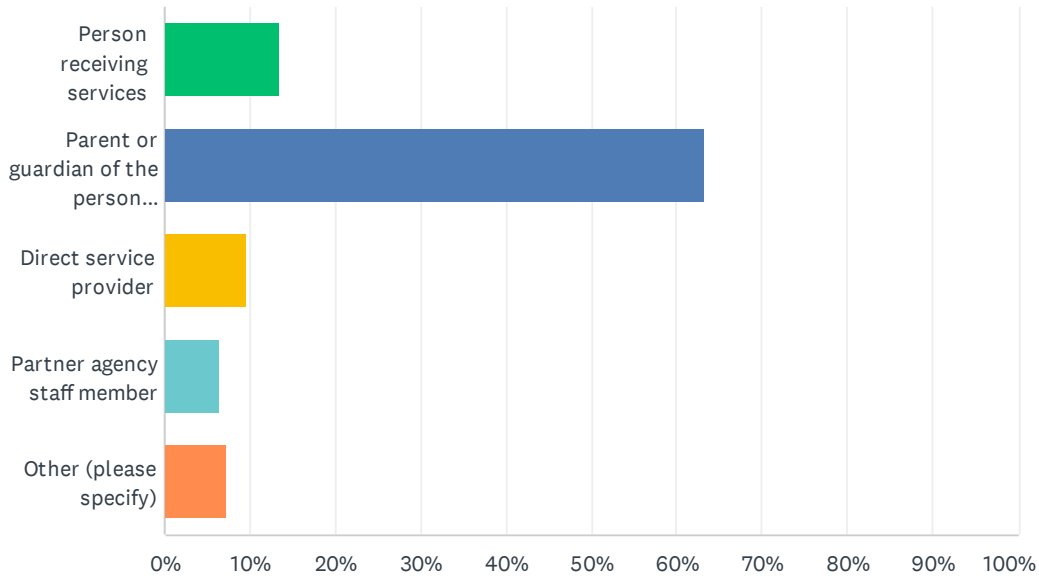
Identify gaps in services: 1) At the end of 2024, there were about 6,000 children from Franklin County receiving services through Ohio RISE, the Medicaid program for children with complex behavioral health needs, an increase of 30% over the previous year. Accordingly, Franklin County DD's long standing collaboration with Franklin County Children Services and Franklin County ADAMH will likewise need to grow. 2) In collaboration with Nationwide Children's Hospital and the Franklin County Family and Children First Council, a) hire a dedicated Help Me Grow service coordinator at the hospital to engage with families before their family member is discharged and b) identify and remove cultural barriers that may be adversely impacting the enrollment of eligible children. 3) Collaborate with community partners to expand in-home respite options for children with complex needs between the ages of 3 and 8. 4) Communicate broadly about the options for facility-based respite, both through waiver services and also through family resources funding. 5) Continue ongoing support for dental services for underserved children and adults to the Ohio State University Nisonger Center dental clinics at the Franklin County DD Early Childhood Center at Johnstown Road and at the Nisonger Center.

Improve customer experience: 1) Service Coordination Department will remind staff of timeliness expectations in January 2025. 2) To address proficiency of Service Coordination Department staff and achieve consistency, Franklin County DD will benchmark with other county boards to develop a process and tools so staff can remain current in an environment with regulations continuously evolving. 3) Develop updated communication materials to address frequently asked questions: what supports are available, what happens after determined eligible, how do services change over the life span (school aged child, adult), parents as paid caregivers, housing resources, etc. Identify multiple channels to disseminate the information. 4) To offer more opportunities for people served and their families to learn about services available and make connections with each other, a minimum of 30 persons will attend intensive in-person workshops presented by the Franklin County DD Service Coordination Department.

Sustainability: 1) By April 2025, perform an in-depth analysis of the current Medicaid waiver enrollment and project the required funding for the non-federal share of the respective costs. 2) Identify opportunities to increase revenues and reduce costs as part of ongoing efforts to "Close the Gap" between expenditures and revenues in an environment where revenues are relatively flat while expenditures grow.

Q1 What is your relationship to Franklin County DD?

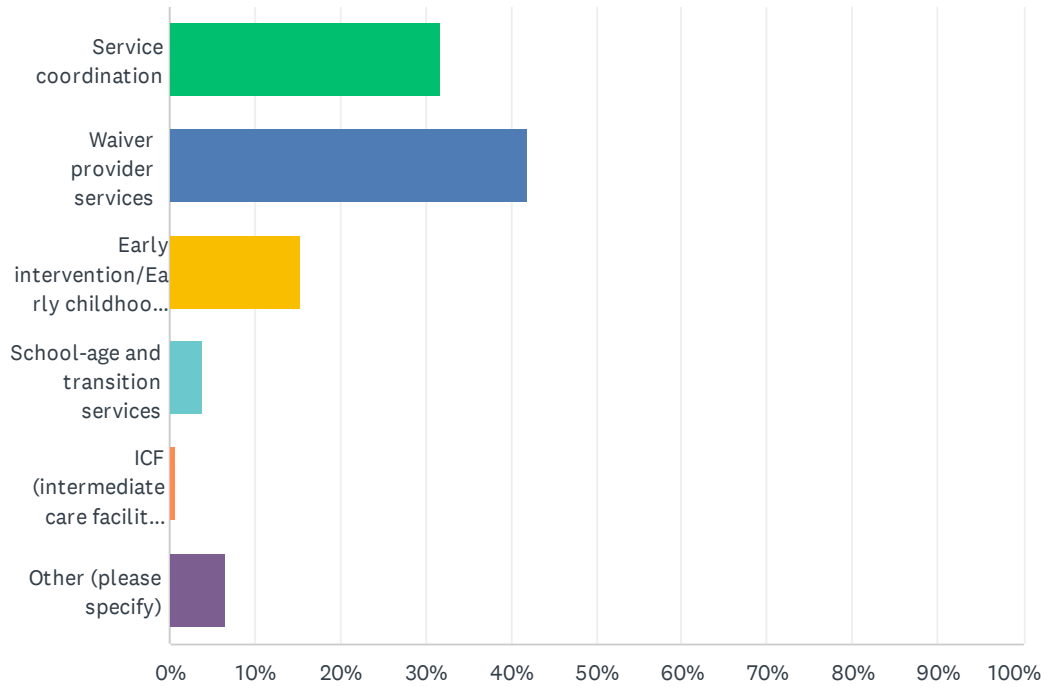
Answered: 490 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Person receiving services	13.47%	66
Parent or guardian of the person receiving services	63.27%	310
Direct service provider	9.59%	47
Partner agency staff member	6.33%	31
Other (please specify)	7.35%	36
TOTAL		490

Q2 What program area affects you the most?

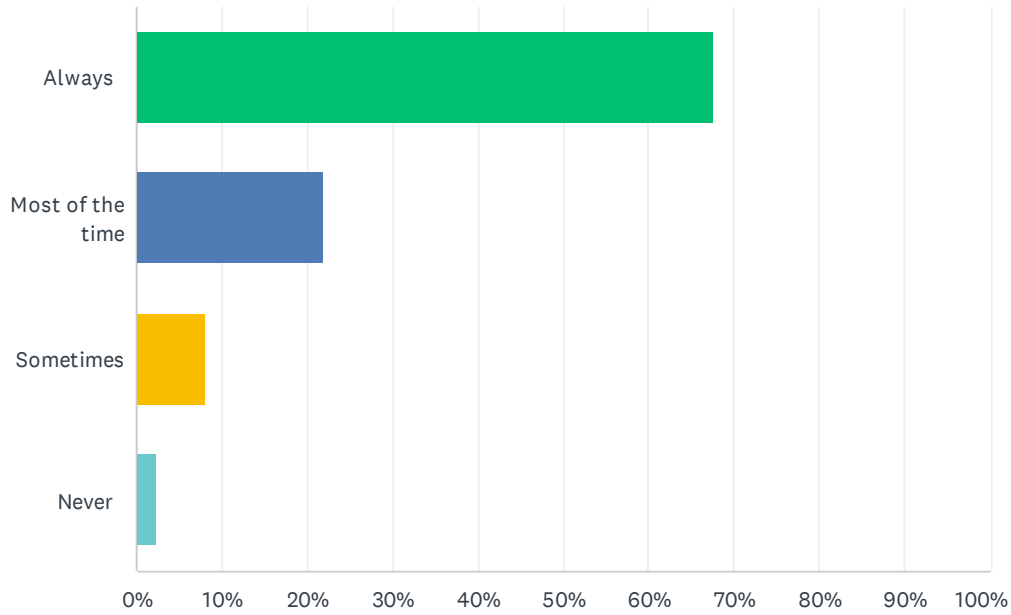
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ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Service coordination	31.74%	153
Waiver provider services	41.91%	202
Early intervention/Early childhood education	15.35%	74
School-age and transition services	3.73%	18
ICF (intermediate care facility) services	0.62%	3
Other (please specify)	6.64%	32
TOTAL		482

Q3 Do you feel that Franklin County DD staff treats you with courtesy and respect?

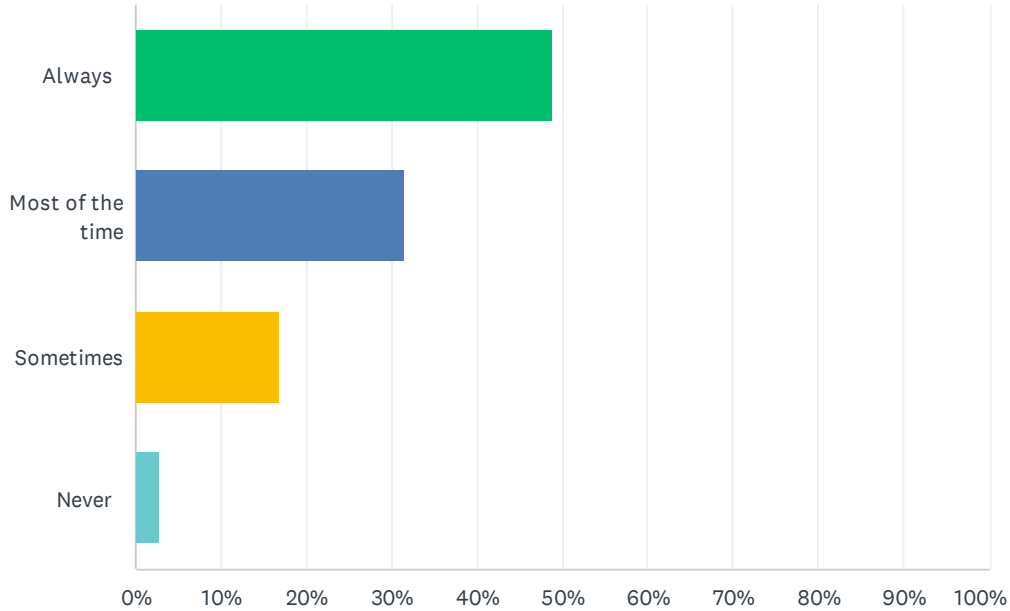
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ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Always	67.70%	329
Most of the time	22.02%	107
Sometimes	8.02%	39
Never	2.26%	11
TOTAL		486

Q4 Does Franklin County DD answer your questions and provide helpful information?

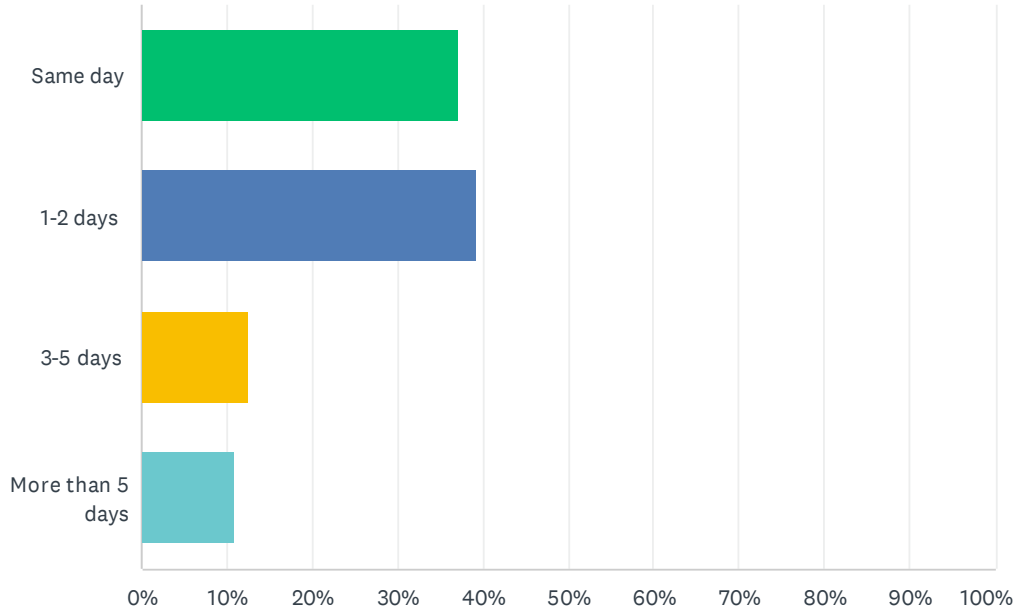
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ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Always	48.77%	238
Most of the time	31.56%	154
Sometimes	16.80%	82
Never	2.87%	14
TOTAL		488

Q5 The last time you contacted a Franklin County DD staff member, how quickly did you hear back?

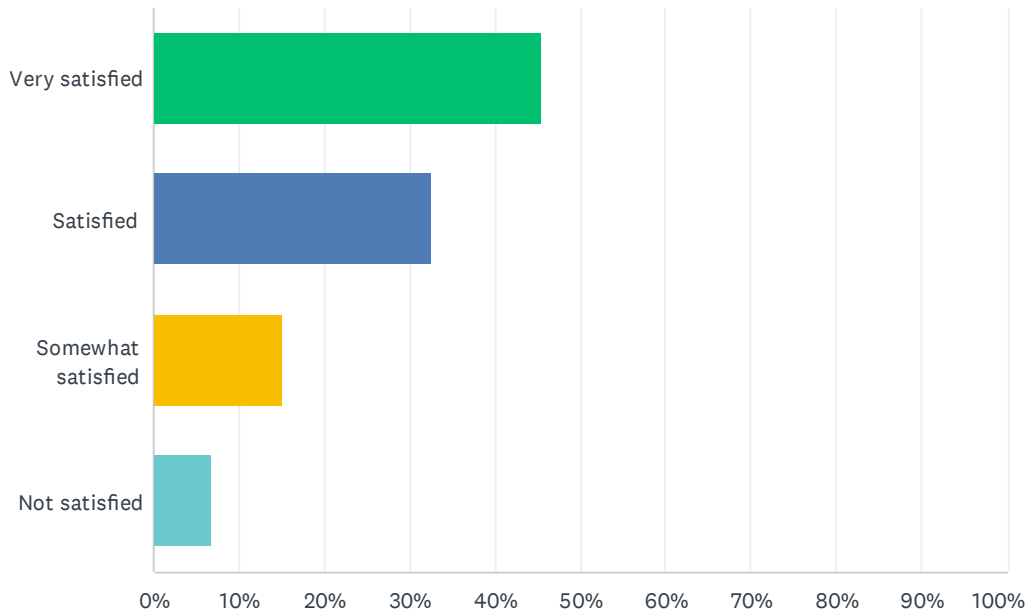
Answered: 483 Skipped: 7



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Same day	37.06%	179
1-2 days	39.34%	190
3-5 days	12.63%	61
More than 5 days	10.97%	53
TOTAL		483

Q6 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.)

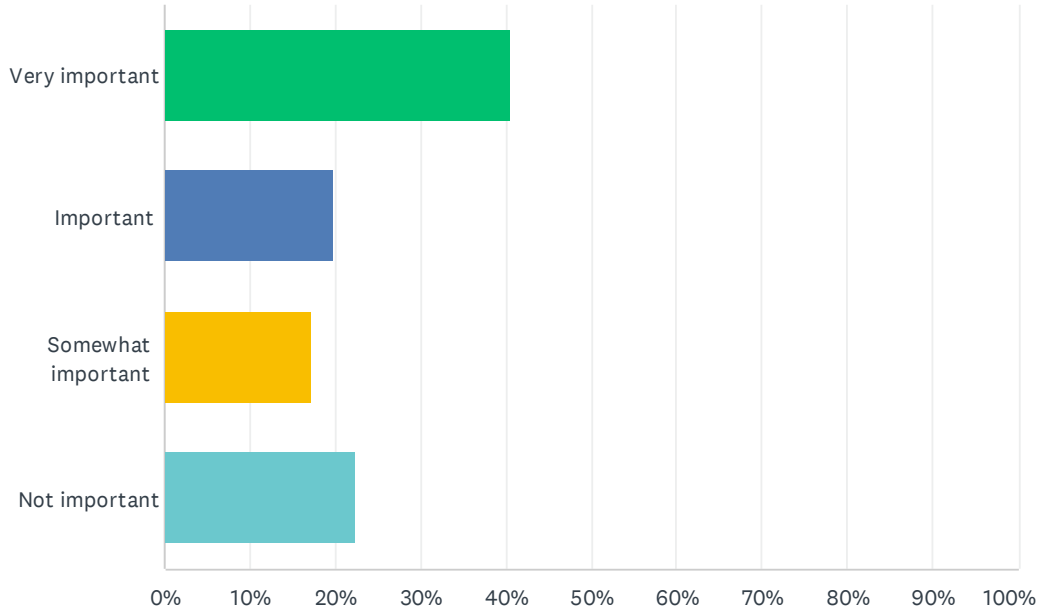
Answered: 478 Skipped: 12



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Very satisfied	45.40%	217
Satisfied	32.64%	156
Somewhat satisfied	15.06%	72
Not satisfied	6.90%	33
TOTAL		478

Q7 How important is it for you to be informed about employment opportunities for people with disabilities?

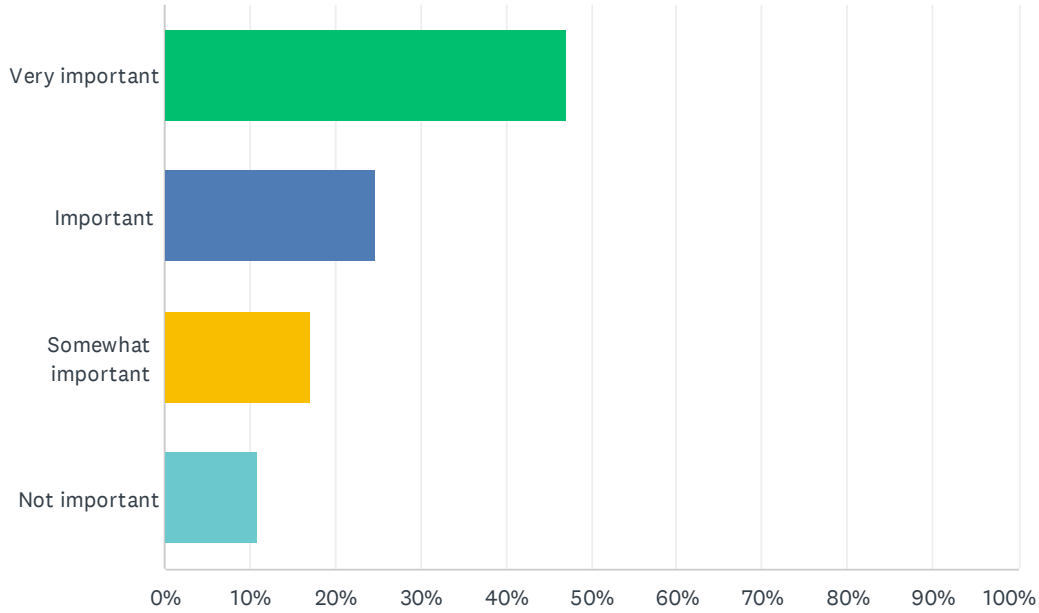
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ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Very important	40.57%	198
Important	19.88%	97
Somewhat important	17.21%	84
Not important	22.34%	109
TOTAL		488

Q8 How important is it for you to learn how technology, such as assistive devices and remote support services, can help people with disabilities?

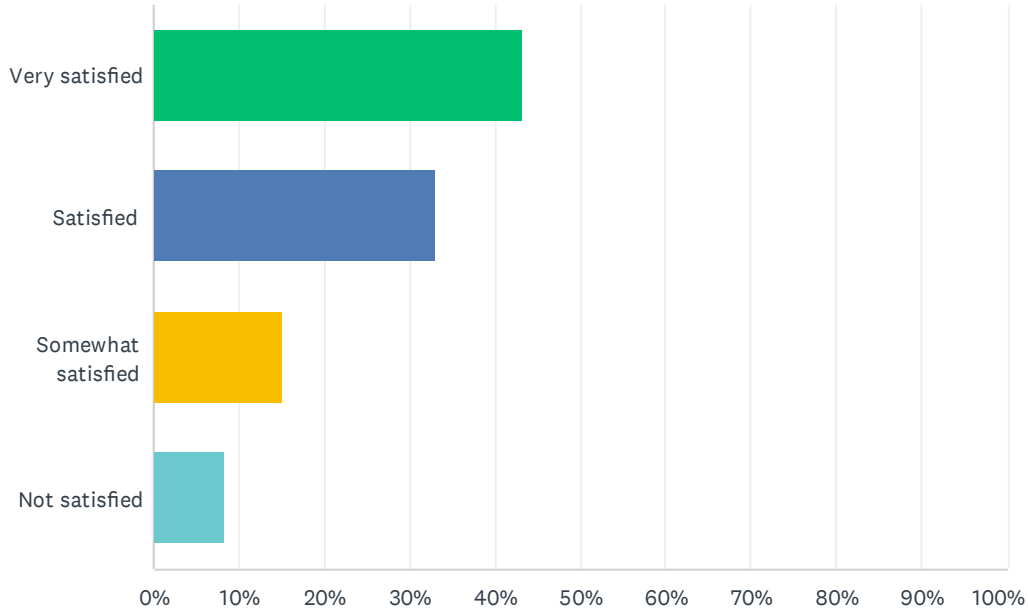
Answered: 485 Skipped: 5



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Very important	47.22%	229
Important	24.74%	120
Somewhat important	17.11%	83
Not important	10.93%	53
TOTAL		485

Q9 Overall, how satisfied are you with the programs and supports provided by Franklin County DD?

Answered: 487 Skipped: 3



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Very satisfied	43.33%	211
Satisfied	33.06%	161
Somewhat satisfied	15.20%	74
Not satisfied	8.42%	41
TOTAL		487