

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

Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month

Legislative Advocacy Day forum returns to Franklin County

People with developmental disabilities will have the opportunity to speak directly to central Ohio lawmakers during an advocacy forum on March 31.

The event, which first began in 2013 but was postponed in recent years due to the COVID-19 pandemic, allows people to share views, raise concerns and make suggestions about issues important to the local disability community.

"Legislators hear from the professional side a lot," said Christine Brown, a member of the Self-Advocate Advisory Council of the Franklin County Board of Developmental Disabilities. "But if we individuals didn't exist, the county boards and the human services field wouldn't exist. Our voice matters. We're the assets in this job."

The council is a co-sponsor of the event, along with the Ohio Self Determination Association, FCBDD and ARC Industries, Inc. It will be held at 10 a.m. March 31 at Bixby Center, 4200 Bixby Rd. in Groveport.

"I'm really impressed with the initiative of our Self-Advocate Advisory Council," said FCBDD Superintendent/CEO Jed Morison. "We appreciate their work, and also the willingness of our local legislators to attend."

Central Ohio has four state senators and 12 state representatives whose districts include all or parts of Franklin County. All are invited.

RSVPs are requested to Christine.brown@osumc.edu or at 614-329-4560.

Anne Thomas wraps up nearly four decades of service

After 37 years of learning, listening and working to help people with developmental disabilities manage challenges big and small, psychology assistant Anne Thomas retired last month.

"One of my clients said, 'Now that you're retiring, are you going to adopt me and take me to your house?'" Thomas said with a smile. "I told her I can't do that. But I said I'll always want to hear good things about you, and know that you're doing okay."

Thomas said she loves people, and has always wanted to understand how their conditions and experiences affect behavior. "Sometimes, if you can't solve the problem, you've got to change the way you view the problem," she said.

A native of Thomasville, Georgia, Thomas became interested in disabilities as a college student after visiting an institution in South Carolina. "I had never seen anyone with hydrocephaly," she said. "I was curious. I wanted to know why and what caused it."

Thomas went on to graduate school at Ohio State University. She worked at the now-closed state developmental center at Orient, then came to the Franklin County Board of Developmental Disabilities. Thomas spent almost all of her career alongside participants at the ARC workshops, moving to offices in the Psychology Department after ARC became a private organization and stopped on-site production.

FCBDD Superintendent/CEO Jed Morison said Thomas is "one of the kindest people you could ever meet. Anne has been wonderful and supported so many over the years."

Like anyone else, she said, people with disabilities need to be able to develop good coping skills. "And sometimes that takes a long time," she said. "You know what we tell them? We all make mistakes. That's why pencils have erasers."

Thomas isn't sure of her long-term plans, but she's thinking of mentoring or volunteering. She also might do some traveling across "small-town America." Though she still has concerns about the loss of workshop jobs for people with disabilities who thrived in that setting, she's hopeful.

"Just to see the way the field has grown overall, society is doing better about being welcoming and inclusive," Thomas said. "I can't wait to see where it goes next."



Michael Underwood begins second year as FCBDD board president

The Franklin County Board of Developmental Disabilities held its annual organizational meeting in January and re-elected the same slate of officers to serve another year.

“Historically, the board officer positions have usually run two consecutive terms,” said Michael Underwood, board president. “A lot of organizations do try to retain incumbents so they can get used to the job and, hopefully, become even more effective.”

Underwood, an attorney who recently retired from Porter Wright Morris & Arthur, is serving his second four-year term on the board.

Marie Crawford, a parent advocate with two adult children receiving FCBDD services, is vice president; Bill Wilkins, a former state budget director and OhioHealth executive who has an adult son served by the board, will continue to serve as secretary and chair of the finance committee.

Board member John Bickley chairs the human resources committee for 2023 and board member Samuel Davis chairs the ethics committee. Past president is Beth Savage, an accountant for PricewaterhouseCoopers who also has a child eligible for board services.

Underwood noted the history-making service during the past year of Marci Straughter, a longtime advocate who became the first person with developmental disabilities on the FCBDD board. Straughter was appointed by the Franklin County Commissioners and took her seat in 2022.

“Having Marci on the board has been fantastic,” Underwood said. “It was not just the right thing to do, but also a smart thing to do, given that Marci is a person who’s used to speaking up and contributing. We’re absolutely a better board now.”

In his current budget proposal, Gov. Mike DeWine has called for a requirement that all county boards of developmental disabilities in Ohio have at least one board member who is eligible for services.



**FCBDD Board President
Michael Underwood**

Public asked to share stories about disability workforce shortage



A group of disability service providers and advocacy organizations has launched a campaign urging Ohio legislators to approve a big increase in the Medicaid reimbursement rates that fund wages for direct-support professionals.

Because DSP pay has been so low for so long, Ohio’s developmental disability workforce crisis has worsened throughout the state, the coalition said. In many cases:

- * ***Providers can’t retain sufficient workers.***
- * ***People with disabilities can’t get the support they need.***
- * ***Family members are quitting jobs to provide care.***
- * ***Businesses that provide care and support are closing.***

Organizers have posted details and videos at www.ohioddcrisis.com, including links for people to sign an online petition and to share their own stories about how the problems have affected them.

Gov. Mike DeWine recently introduced a budget proposal that would invest an historic \$701 million in support for Ohioans with developmental disabilities and result in a \$16-per-hour average reimbursement for the rates that pay DSP wages. But the Ohio Association of County Boards, the Ohio Provider Resource Association and others say it isn’t enough.

“We certainly support the effort, and we also are very appreciative of the governor’s initial proposal,” said Jed Morison, Superintendent/CEO of the Franklin County Board of Developmental Disabilities. “It’s too bad that for so many years, there was little to no increase in these rates. We fell behind.”

Kim Kelly, a Franklin County parent who serves on the Ohio DD Workforce Crisis Taskforce, said advocates should strive to ensure that the funding goes into the pockets of front-line workers and leads to improved services. “It will be important to know how the money is being spent, to look at training and also who’s coming into the field,” Kelly said. “We need to attract the right people.”

DD Awareness Month Spotlight

Retiree creates her dream family adopting special-needs children

Quinn Davis Vogel had always wanted a big family. And the more she eyed the recruiting sign – *Do you have it in you to foster?* – the more she felt it was speaking directly to her. Never mind that she already had three grown daughters and was about to retire from her nursing career.

Davis Vogel decided to become a foster parent. She also was willing to open her home to children with intensive needs and developmental disabilities. “When the lord’s been good to you, and your children are healthy, you pay it forward,” she said.

After child-welfare officials determined that three of the children would not return to their biological families, Davis Vogel took the next step: She adopted Brady, now 8; Daryn, 13; and Mariah, 17.

“Typical kids who wind up in foster care are more likely to return to their parents and relatives,” she said. “Sadly, a lot of times, people feel that once their special-needs kids are gone, it’s easier not to take them back.”

For Davis Vogel and her adult children, who are supportive and involved in the lives of their younger siblings, the journey has been rewarding and challenging, joyous and heart-wrenching. But always, Davis Vogel believes that she made the right choice:



Quinn Davis Vogel and her family had a great time at Lake Cumberland in Kentucky. From left, granddaughter Amia, son Brady, daughters Daryn and Mariah with Davis Vogel.

It doesn't sound like there's a lot of relaxation in your retirement!

To see the world through the eyes of a child, it keeps you humble, keeps you young. We went out and built a snowman last week. I took lessons and finally learned how to swim. These children aren't shut away in the house; we travel, eat at restaurants, garden, enjoy music and the outdoors. We want them up and out.

Have you seen a lot of change and growth?

All the kids are non-verbal, but they've made so much progress. Mariah is blind; when she came to us, she didn't walk. She does now. Brady, too. He was a self-harmer. I rocked and rocked and rocked him. Daryn had a rough start in life but she's doing really well.

Mariah attends FCBDD's West Central School and Transition Services. How's it going?

We love West Central. This is her second year, and when I first talked to staff, they said, 'What do you want for her?' I said, 'I want her to be pushed as far as she's comfortable going.' For Family Night events, Rebecca (Holthaus, the principal) told me to bring the other kids, too. Which I really appreciate.

Traveling and going out with the children, you've probably seen the best and the worst of other people, right?

Oh, yes. I've had someone say, 'Why would you put them in school? They can't learn.' Or, 'Why would you take these kids places? It's not worth it.' Well, how would they know what these children know? Other times people are wonderful. There are those who come up to me and say, 'It's great that you're here. These children have every right to be out in the world.'

You seem to find ways to connect with each child, no matter their disabilities.

God gives everyone gifts. I finally got my big family, and these children deserve a good life. Mariah can't see the ocean, but when we took her, she loved listening. She can't watch television, so one night a week it goes off, and we have a dance night. Mariah knows – she just knows – that it's for her.

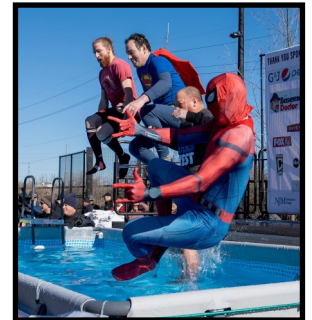
2023 Polar Plunge a big success for Special Olympics

There was plenty of sunshine, support and enthusiasm at the Special Olympics Ohio 2023 Polar Plunge, held Feb. 11 at Columbus Crew Lower.com field.

“Just about the best Plunge ever,” said Ryan Phillips, director of Special Olympics, recreation and aquatics at the Franklin County Board of Developmental Disabilities. “The weather was perfect.”

The Franklin County Flyers and Encova Insurance joined forces as Super Friends to plunge for our athletes, raising more than \$35,000 to help fund programs throughout the year.

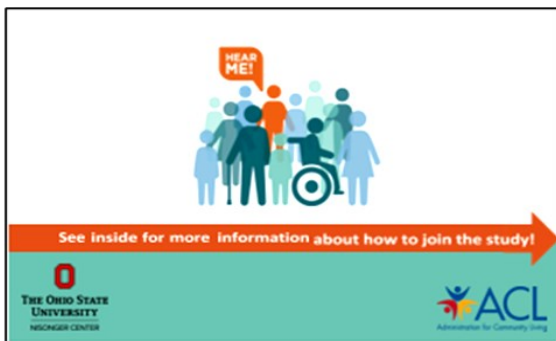
Even with abundant sun and minimal wind, the water was still darn cold. But Spider Man, Bat Man, Captain Underpants, Groot and the rest of the Super crew didn't mind. Not too much, anyway.



Look for Ohio State study flyer in email

People served by the Franklin County Board of Developmental Disabilities might be asked to take part in an important study. OSU is conducting the study to learn more about the health of people with developmental disabilities.

If you are selected, you will get a flyer in the mail that looks like the image below:



You are not required to participate. If you can take part in the study, you and your caregiver each will receive \$100 for doing the interviews.

Keep an eye on your mail. Flyers were sent out starting in February and will continue in March.

Summer Center program returns at West Central School

For the first time since 2019, West Central School and Transition Services is again hosting its Out and About Summer Center program for students age 14 to 22.

Families who want to secure a spot for their children should return the application and \$200 program fee no later than March 11. Summer Center starts June 5 and ends June 30, and is open to students who attend West Central or one of the Franklin County Board of Developmental Disabilities collaborative classrooms.

“It’s really a very nice program – they do a lot of fun things,” said Jack Brownley, FCBDD director of schools and special services. “It’s not a school day. The aim is recreation and fun.”

Summer Center is separate from Transition to Work (TTW), an employment exploration program operated during the summer months by the Hattie Larlham agency. TTW participants meet at West Central and head out to various community sites each day.

Transportation is provided during Summer Center, but nursing and therapy services are not.

For more information, call West Central at 614-276-8231



Good For You

Notable achievements in the FCBDD community

We appreciated the visit to our Early Childhood Education and Family Center from Mario Basora, new CEO of Future Ready Columbus. The public-private partnership works to ensure that all Franklin County children are kindergarten-ready when they start school. Basora, a former school superintendent in the Dayton area, says his mission is to help children overcome barriers and achieve their dreams. Welcome, Mario!





Thanks to the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities and to OCALI for spotlighting some of the many ways our West Central School staff, residents, families and local service providers use technology at school and at home. We can't wait to see the videos!

Congratulations to Carolyn Earnhardt on her recent retirement. Carolyn spent more than 22 years delivering mail and more in support of our agency. You still might spot her zooming down a hallway now and then; she's lending a hand as a volunteer during busy times. Thanks, Carolyn!

Career Milestones

35 Years

Barbara Hennis

30 Years

Scott Erenpreiss
Valerie Mclean

25 Years

Cynthia Massenelli

20 Years

Jane Massaquoi
Karen Toohey

15 Years

Denise Blackburn-Smith
Melanie Erbe
Anne Murra

10 Years

Robinson Dunham

5 Years

Kamran Arif
April Barth

Behind the Scenes of DSACO's Dancing with Our Stars Gala by Jennifer Fox-Cunningham

Dancing with our Stars was held at the Hilton Columbus at Easton on Saturday, Feb. 4, 2023. The gala for the Down Syndrome Association of Central Ohio (DSACO) was a success and everybody enjoyed this event.

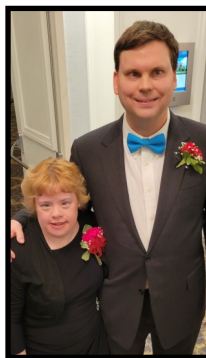
My partner Bryan Fox and I have been going to the gala for years. Our dance lessons started there, and we decided we wanted to do more than that. So we also take private lessons at Arthur Murray Dance Studio.

We have 10 different dances in our routine, and we do two showcases each year. You have to dress up for them. Bryan took lessons on how to tie his tie. Bow ties are a pain in the you-know-what!

Our instructor, Mia, knows us and what works best for us, whether it's a merengue or a waltz. Bryan and I are into country music and our song is by Tim McGraw and Faith Hill. It's called *It's Your Love*.

We all had a great time dancing at the gala, being with friends and also raising money to donate to DSACO's other events.

Jennifer Fox-Cunningham works in the Human Resources Department at the Franklin County Board of Developmental Disabilities.



Jenny and Bryan, all dressed up for the gala.

Early Childhood families invited to online engagement gatherings

Early Childhood Education professionals at the Franklin County Board of Developmental Disabilities know a lot about the joys, quirks and challenges of caring for young children. And they're happily sharing great information and pro tips in a new series of virtual chats with families.

The sessions also aim to answer questions, foster discussions and connect families and guardians with each other. "It's open to anybody and everybody who can use the information," said Jessica Bennett, a teacher at FCBDD's Early Childhood Education and Family Center. "It's an opportunity to get families together, to let them meet each other. It's important to know you're not alone."

Bennett sent out surveys prior to the launch to find out some of the topics that most interest families.

The next gathering is from 5:30 to 6:30 p.m. March 15 and the topic is *Transitions: What happens after my child leaves this program?*



Scan the QR code or go to <https://bit.ly/3YRfQyU> for the Zoom link.

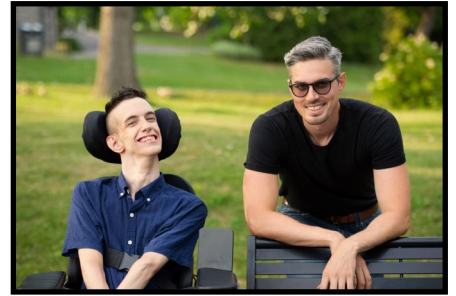
FCBDD co-hosting webinar on assistive tech, adaptive gaming

Interested in adaptive products, assistive tech and how they fit into the fast-changing world of gaming?

The Franklin County Board of Developmental Disabilities is co-hosting a webinar at 1 p.m. on March 29 with presentations and demonstrations by Bradley Heaven and Daniel O'Connor of All Access Life, a nonprofit that showcases all the latest trends and movements in adaptive products and assistive technologies.

Heaven was born with nonverbal spastic quadriplegic cerebral palsy and O'Connor started working as his full-time aide more than a decade ago. They now do virtual presentations, attend tech shows and review products, including adaptive controllers and eye-tracking devices for gaming.

Webinar attendees will see cool demonstrations and get to ask questions. The Zoom link wasn't available at Dateline's print deadline but will be posted to our social media pages and emailed via NewsBits.



Bradley Heaven and Daniel O'Connor of All Access Life.

2023 Franklin County Provider Fair
Come for a Balloon Leave With a Provider

SAVE THE DATE!
Thursday, April 27, 2023
11:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.
The Lausche Building
17th Avenue at I-71
Ohio State Fairgrounds

Dateline

The Franklin County Board of Developmental Disabilities

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Marie Crawford, Vice President
William W. Wilkins, Secretary
John Bickley
Samuel Davis
Beth Savage
Marci Straughter

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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

Editor's Note: The following calendar is tentative due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Call 614-342-5950 before attending any meeting to see if it is still scheduled.

March, 2023

- 1 Developmental Disability Awareness and Advocacy Day at the Statehouse, 10:00 a.m.
- 15 Family Support meeting, 10 a.m. via Zoom. Please contact Amy Magginis at 614-342-5950 for details or click the following link to connect:
[Family Support Meeting Zoom Link](#)
- 16 Self-Advocate Advisory Council meeting via Zoom 10 a.m.
- 16 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.
- 17 Staff Development Day - classes closed.
- 19 World Down Syndrome Day Celebration at Easton Town Center. For more information, go to www.dsaco.net or call (614) 263-6020.
- 23 Franklin County Board of Developmental Disabilities Board meeting at Noon at 2879 Johnstown Road, Columbus, Ohio, via Zoom for the public. Please contact Amy Magginis at 614-342-5950 for details. Click on the following link to connect:
[FCBDD Board Meeting Link \(Zoom\)](#)
- 29 Co-hosted Assistive Tech Webinar at 1pm on Zoom (see social media or NewsBits for link)
- 31 Legislative Advocacy Day at the Bixby Center, 4200 Bixby Road, Groveport. For details, please contact Christine Brown by phone at 614-329-4560 or christine.brown@osumc.edu