

# Dateline

May 2023

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

## Advocates share policy priorities with central Ohio legislators

More than 150 people attended the recent Franklin County Legislative Advocacy Day at the ARC Bixby Center, gathering to share suggestions and listen to policy concerns affecting the local developmental disabilities community.

Members of the Self-Advocate Advisory Council of the Franklin County Board of Developmental Disabilities and others with disabilities were joined by four state senators, four state representatives, the director of the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities, FCBDD board members and the heads of several state associations.

"We are proud of how far we have come," FCBDD board member Marci Straughter told the crowd.

Straughter, the first person with developmental disabilities to serve on the Franklin County board, shared remarks prepared by Advocacy Day organizer Christine Brown, who wasn't able to attend in person. Both are actively involved in the Ohio Self Determination Association.



Travis Dresbach, advocate and Pickaway County Board of DD staff member



Reps. Allison Russo, Mary Lightbody, and Sen. Hearcel Craig



DODD Director Kim Hauck and self-advocate/FCBDD Board Member Marci Straughter



Senator Michele Reynolds



Changing Spaces Ohio and Jennifer Corcoran, with her son, advocate for universal changing tables



Kyle Pigman



Erica & Lynne Fogel

### Advocates told legislators about many of their top concerns, including:

- ◆ The need for higher wages for Ohio's direct-support professional workforce, which struggles to recruit and keep essential workers. The average hourly wage for DSPs employed by Ohio provider agencies sits at just \$13.75 per hour. "I do believe that our DSPs are the first and last lines to our community," said Michael Denlinger, chair of the Ohio Developmental Disabilities Council.
- ◆ Increased availability of universal changing tables in public places so that people with mobility disabilities can tend to personal hygiene needs. "I know of people who will eat and drink less just so they can participate in their communities," said Jennifer Corcoran of the Changing Spaces Campaign. "And that's appalling."
- ◆ Elimination of the so-called "marriage penalty" so that people with disabilities can marry without losing Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits. "People with intellectual and developmental disabilities should not have to choose between marriage and their disability benefits," Brown wrote.
- ◆ Removing the age limit on Medicaid buy-in for workers with disabilities. Under current regulations, workers with disabilities are no longer eligible for the program when they reach age 65. That can mean they are not able to continue working and keep Medicaid health coverage.
- ◆ Improving transportation options so that people with disabilities have more access to community activities, appointments and jobs. "When I can't get out past 2 o'clock in the afternoon, that's an issue," said Travis Dresbach, receptionist and self-advocacy representative at the Pickaway County Board of Developmental Disabilities.

## Susan Gibson to retire after dream career in social work

After a little more than 42 years and service to thousands of families, Susan Gibson is retiring as the sole social worker assigned to the Early Childhood Education program at the Franklin County Board of Developmental Disabilities. Colleagues say she tended her “department of one” with all her heart.

“She designed the position, developed the position, and I’d say she cultivated the position to be relevant to our families,” said Early Childhood Education Director Becky Love. “Susan has stretched her arms in so many ways. She has been an inspiration to the staff.”

Gibson began working at FCBDD in 1981 and quickly decided she’d landed in the right place. “It’s just so hopeful to be around kids,” she said. “I noted on my resignation form that I’ve loved working for an organization and a department that I have been privileged and proud to serve. It’s a social worker’s dream.”

During the early part of her career, Gibson mainly focused on connecting families to resources that could help with basic needs such as housing, food and furniture, Love said. Today, the needs are often complex, as many families have been affected by the opioid crisis, mental health challenges and other trauma.

“The types of resources have really changed,” Gibson said. “Also, it can be tender time for parents, the first that they’re grappling with having a child with special needs.”

Gibson also has worked with growing numbers of refugee and immigrant families, as the Columbus area has become increasingly diverse. She recalled a mother from Ethiopia who settled in Columbus only to face a sudden, forced relocation from her crime-ridden apartment complex in Columbus.

“We were sitting in the car, and I asked if with all she was going through, if it still felt worth it to come to this country,” Gibson said, smiling at the memory. “She said, ‘Oh, yes.’”

Gibson will wrap up her career at the end of the school year. She plans to take time to think about what comes next, whether volunteering for Columbus Dog Connection or pitching in as an occasional helper at FCBDD. “Most people go into social work or a helping profession because they want to help people,” she said. “The thing to figure out is what population you want to help.”



Susan Gibson

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## Proponents want supported decision-making guidelines for Ohio

A group of advocates is hoping Ohio becomes the next state to officially recognize supported decision-making as an option for people and families seeking alternatives to guardianship.

“Supported decision-making is really how we all live our lives,” said Kristen Henry, executive director of APSI (Advocacy and Protective Services, Inc.). “To me it really is about recognition – recognition of an option.”

A supported decision-making plan is between an adult with a developmental disability and the supporter – or multiple supporters – chosen by the person with a disability. Supporters can help with informed decisions about finances, medical care, housing or other matters as determined by the person with a disability.

The plans, which do not require people to surrender rights, can be communicated verbally or put in writing. The supporters could be relatives, friends, colleagues or others.

“Some families think, ‘I either have to get guardianship, or nothing,’” Henry said. “To have this middle option could really help meet people where they are.”

Dana Charlton, executive director of the Ohio Self Determination Association, said supported decision-making is important because it can be both an alternative to – and a component of – guardianship. As of this writing, supported decision-making guidelines were being considered by lawmakers as part of the state budget legislation. Charlton said a website also is being developed to provide resources and information about supported decision-making.

“If the words are in statute, when people are quick to assume guardianship is the only alternative, we can point to this and say, there is another option,” she said. “I think it’s a step in getting courts and others who sign off on expert evaluations to think a little before signing on the dotted line.”

According to the National Resource Center for Supported Decision Making, at least a dozen states have enacted supported decision-making legislation.

For many people with disabilities, guardianship seems too restrictive, or at least potentially so, Charlton said. “There are a lot of people who will tell you how negative it made them feel to be labeled a ward.”

## National organization honors Boundless employee as Ohio DSP of the year

Ask Hope Johnson to describe what she does, and her answer – *Just about everything!* -- says a lot about the way she embraces her job as a direct-support professional.

“We go out and integrate ourselves into the community,” Johnson said, smiling. “I tell people, if it’s somewhere I’d take my kids, family or friends, then we go there, too.”

Johnson recently was named the Ohio DSP of the Year by ANCOR, the American Network of Community Options and Resources, for excellence in the field of direct support to people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. She was chosen from more than 350 nominees.

“This is not easy work, and it really is hard to find good staff,” said Lynsey Cooner, Johnson’s supervisor at Boundless, a statewide nonprofit disability services provider based in Franklin County. “Hope is a true people person. She loves to help.”

Officially, Johnson’s title is community integration specialist for the WOW (Without Walls) program at Boundless. But that hardly describes the extent of the role she plays in the lives of people with developmental disabilities.

“We had a client who was completely nonverbal when he started the program,” Cooner said. “He used a tablet and was only able to text short messages. Hope spoke to him daily, just like everyone else, and he became interested and immersed in their conversations. He started to respond to her verbally, and his dad says that now, he won’t stop.”

Johnson also has helped people with developmental disabilities form close friendships, learn to manage difficult behaviors, and swim for the first time. She even made sure one man fulfilled a personal goal of becoming a much-liked regular at a local restaurant.

She says it’s important for people to be able to develop special relationships with each other as well as their communities. “Most of my clients don’t live together, and they come from different backgrounds, but we come together as a family.”

Johnson hopes that current advocacy efforts lead to better wages for direct-support professionals, and she appreciates when others recognize the demands and the value of the job. She faced an especially difficult situation one day at a library as one of her clients became upset and confrontational.

“A woman came up to me and said, ‘You’re being very compassionate,’” Johnson recalled. “When I have a bad day, I look back to that. It means a lot that somebody noticed.”



Hope Johnson

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## Service coordinators work to improve dementia care, support

Amanda Dingess knows that because her brother has Down syndrome, he’s at increased risk for developing dementia and Alzheimer’s disease.

She of course hopes her family never faces that challenge. “But you can’t know,” said Dingess, a service coordinator at the Franklin County Board of Developmental Disabilities. “I’d rather be somewhat prepared than not.”

Dingess is joining Nick Smith, a service coordination supervisor, in Cincinnati this May for a three-day workshop by the National Task Group on Intellectual Disabilities and Dementia Practices (NTG). She and Smith will be trained on best practices so that they can help families, advocates, service coordinators, providers and others learn the best ways to support and care for people with intellectual disabilities who have dementia.

“Knowing that our individuals are living longer than ever, I think we should try to educate our staff more broadly,” Smith said. “And we have to think of caregivers, too. Upon completing this, I’ll be able to teach staff here. I just think this is something that will benefit everyone.”

Smith recalled the struggle of a man he worked with before becoming a supervisor. The man had Down syndrome and developed dementia, which led to difficult, erratic behavior. “It was something where I wish I could have been a better support to the family,” he said.

Dingess is hopeful that knowledge gained from the NTG training will empower both service coordinators and families. “This touches my heart a little more, because of my brother,” she said. “It’s nice, because I feel like I’ll be able to help others.”

# Self-advocate eager to share her voice, accomplishments

Until she attended the Franklin County gathering this spring, Marrion Smith had never taken part in a legislative advocacy day for people with developmental disabilities. She liked what she heard.

“I enjoyed it,” said Smith, who joined friends and colleagues at the ARC Bixby Center for the event on March 31. “I think there were very strong points made. I’m not afraid to speak my mind, either. I just haven’t been asked enough.”

Alan Rafiq, a West Central School instructor assistant who has worked with Smith as part of her support staff for more than 20 years, said Smith is “a very studious person” who’s always thinking of new and creative projects. “I look forward to being with her. It’s fun.”

Smith says she’s gone through a lot on the way to finding her voice and building a life as a worker, wife, mother, artist, church deaconess and person living with disability.



*Marrion Smith enjoyed advocacy day with, from left, husband Calvin, FCBDD Superintendent/CEO Jed Morison and ARC program manager Tyler Betts.*

### **You're 50 years old, so you probably have some perspective on progress for the disability community.**

When I was in high school, students were mean to me. I didn't know how to control my anger, and teachers didn't understand. But I made it through. I graduated and I have a home and a family. I'm very proud of that. There definitely has been progress.

### **Can you talk a little about your job?**

I've been with ARC ever since I got out of high school; I'm on a crew at Honeywell. I'm a very hard worker. We assemble stuff, box it up, and send it on its way. I don't know where I'd be without ARC.

### **What are some areas you think need to be improved for people with disabilities?**

Transportation is so important. We want to work, we want to be out in the community. When I have to wait for transportation, it makes me very nervous. We also need more staff – people who are reliable.

### **How did you and your husband meet?**

We met at Goodwill. He spoke to me first. I was in typing class; he was in janitorial. We just clicked!

### **Has Columbus always been home?**

I'm from Shreveport, Louisiana. I moved here with my family when I was younger. Let's just say I was born with a jalapeno in my mouth. Gumbo's part of the deal, too.

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## Families asked to comment on disability worker shortage

The Ohio DD Crisis coalition still needs families and people with disabilities to share their stories about difficulties they face finding and keeping direct-support professionals.

Disability service providers, advocacy organizations and others launched a campaign earlier this year urging Ohio legislators to approve a big increase in the Medicaid reimbursement rates that fund wages for direct-support professionals. Hundreds of people have submitted testimony and signed petitions supporting the increase, and more are needed as the legislative budget process continues.



### **According to the coalition:**

- ◆ The average hourly wage for DSPs working for Ohio DD provider businesses is just \$13.75. The coalition is pushing for \$20 an hour.
- ◆ About 77 percent of DD provider businesses are turning away new referrals and 68 percent turn away or end services to people who needed the highest level of support because staffing levels can't be maintained under the current state reimbursement rate.
- ◆ A little more than 60 percent of DD provider businesses have said they may close in the next five years if reimbursement rates don't rise enough to offer competitive wages.

At [www.ohioddcrisis.com](http://www.ohioddcrisis.com), the coalition has more information, videos from families and DSPs, and links for people to sign a petition and submit written testimony.

# Good For You

*Notable achievements in the FCBDD community*

Thanks to Jaime Graham, adult day service coordinator at ARC Industries, and all the program participants who worked hard to prepare the Bixby Center for Legislative Advocacy Day. It was great to see the return of this important event after a pandemic hiatus.

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Thanks to Ohio SIBS for the National Siblings Day video feature on Franklin County brothers Ryan and Colin Trubee in celebration of the bond between siblings with and without disabilities. Watch the video at <https://tinyurl.com/y9xrsbve>

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Congrats to all the FCBDD service coordination staff recently featured in *The Columbus Dispatch*: Tim Voigt was named the Boys Bowling All-Metro Coach of the Year after leading Hilliard Davidson on a 'magical' season; Angela Jones helped showcase daughter Raya's amazing singing abilities during Autism Acceptance Month; and Torrey Seaton's wife and son discussed a much-anticipated drop in the cost of insulin. Great job supporting and informing the community!

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It was great to see Early Childhood Education staff supporting the Spread the Word campaign in celebration of inclusion for all students. Love the shirts!



## New adoption grant program provides payments to families

Parents in Ohio who adopt a child with special needs could receive one-time payments of up to \$20,000 through a new adoption grant program launched in April.

Signed into law by Gov. Mike DeWine last month, the program replaces the adoption tax credit and offers three levels of payments, according to state officials. It provides:

- ◆ \$10,000 to anyone, except a stepparent, adopting a youth.
- ◆ \$15,000 if the parent was a foster caregiver (including kinship caregivers) who cared for the child prior to adoption.
- ◆ \$20,000 to families that adopt a child with special needs, as determined by a qualified professional.

"While the \$10,000 grant is available for most adoptions, additional dollars are available for foster caregivers who adopt a child they are caring for, as well as for instances where the child has a special need," Matt Damschroder, director of the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services, said in a news release.

Parents who have finalized an adoption since Jan. 1, 2023, can begin applying for the grant online at [Adoption.Grant.Ohio.gov](http://Adoption.Grant.Ohio.gov). Applicants should be prepared to provide two forms of identification and documentation related to the finalized adoption, as well as proof of foster and special needs if applicable.

# Career Milestones

**30 Years**

**George Barnette**

**20 Years**

**Stacey Coriell  
Theresa Hazlett**

**15 Years**

**Phillip Johnson**

**10 Years**

**Sarah Thompson**

**5 Years**

**Amy Peal**



We appreciate the visit from state Sen. Michele Reynolds, who joined FCBDD Superintendent/CEO Jed Morison and Early Childhood Education Director Becky Love for a tour. We're always glad to show off our wonderful programs!



## Summer camp, resource guides available

The Ohio Department of Education's State Support Team for Franklin County's region has put together a Summer Resource Directory for 2023.

The directory lists dozens of camps and programs to help parents and guardians choose summer activity programs that are appropriate for the needs of children with disabilities. To download the directory, go to [www.sst11.org](http://www.sst11.org) and click on the "Family and Community Engagement" tab, then choose the Family Resources option.

Families must contact the camps directly for additional information.

Columbus City Schools also offers a Summer Experience Program for district students.

**For details and to register, go to [www.ccsummer.org](http://www.ccsummer.org)**



Families also can check with their service coordinators or early-childhood instructors at the Franklin County Board of Developmental Disabilities.

# Calendar

May 2023

- 11,12 Ohio Association of County Boards of Developmental Disabilities (OACBDD) Spring Conference at the Easton Hilton.
- 17 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: <https://bit.ly/3JvZSUJ>
- 17 West Central School Graduation, 1481 West Town Street, Columbus. 6 p.m.
- 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.
- 18 Franklin County Board of Developmental Disabilities Board meeting at West Central School, 1481 West Town Street, Columbus. Please contact Amy Magginis at 614-342-5950 for details. 12:00 p.m. (Noon)
- 29 Memorial Day observed - Early Childhood Centers, West Central School and Administrative offices will be closed.



## Dateline

The Franklin County Board of Developmental Disabilities

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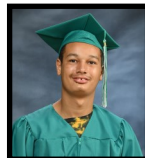
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[www.fcbdd.org](http://www.fcbdd.org)

## West Central to hold multi-class graduation May 17

Marci Straughter, history-making member of the Franklin County Board of Developmental Disabilities, will be a featured speaker during the graduation ceremony and celebration for West Central School and Transition Services.



In addition to the current class of 2023, graduates from the past three years who missed having an in-person commencement due to the COVID-19 pandemic also were invited to attend. The event is set for 6 p.m. May 17 at West Central, 1481 W. Town St.

Straughter has long been active in Ohio's self-advocate community. She took her seat on the board in January 2022, becoming the first person with developmental disabilities to help lead the agency.

## Nursery that trains, employs people with autism now open

Lettuce Work, a nonprofit nursery that nurtures job opportunities for young adults with autism, is open for the growing season.

The New Albany-area farm and greenhouse at 14985 Fancher Rd. has thousands of plants and flowers, and this year also is selling edible berries, native perennials and many new annual varieties.



All proceeds are used to support training and work experience for young adults with autism so that they can successfully transition from high school to employment and live as independently as possible.

Lettuce Work says that about 65 percent of its associates who graduate from high school have moved on to jobs or secondary education.

For information and hours of operation, go to [www.lettucework.org](http://www.lettucework.org) or call the nursery at 740-913-0495.

## Youth ages 12-21 needed for Ohio State research study

Researchers are seeking adolescents and young adults between the ages of 12 and 21 who have intellectual disabilities – and can communicate verbally in sentences – to help with a behavioral-health study.

Participants would complete a 25-item rating form and provide feedback to the researcher in a one-to-one meeting. The newly developed, self-report form aims to help measure behavioral health so that clinicians can increase their ability to gain self-reported information from young people with intellectual disabilities.

The virtual interview takes about an hour to an hour and a half. Participants will be compensated \$25 for their time.

For more information, contact Minje Kim at [minje.kim@osumc.edu](mailto:minje.kim@osumc.edu) or 614-767-8915.