

- 14th Annual Legislative Event
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Community Update

VOLUME 1 ISSUE 1

MARCH 2013

Developmental Disability Self-Advocates Meet with Lawmakers at Annual Event

On Feb. 13, more than 130 statewide advocates met with their state legislators during the Developmental Disabilities Council's 14th Annual Legislative Event at the Radisson Hotel in downtown Lansing.

During the event members from Regional Inclusive Community Coalitions (RICCs) across the state met with their state lawmakers to discuss policy issues affecting the developmental disability community. RICCs are local self-advocacy groups made of members with developmental disabilities and other disabilities, their friends or family members, community leaders, and service providers.

"Michigan's Developmental Disabilities Council's Annual Legislative Event provides an ideal opportunity for self-advocates to connect with their lawmakers about the important issues they face," said James K. Haveman, Director of the MDCH. "Issues ranging from healthcare, jobs, housing, transportation, employment and other community supports create unique challenges for those with disabilities so this event is critical in allowing them to have their voices heard."



Photo Caption: Representative Tom Leonard (left top row) meets with the Central Michigan Regional Inclusive Community Coalition to discuss issues affecting the developmental disabilities community. (Left to right back row: Jennah Wolfe; Rep. Tom Leonard, Myron Denman, Andrea Cotter; Left to right bottom row: Joyce LeBoeuf and Clayton Brown)



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Michigan Developmental Disabilities Council

Dear Readers:

It is a pleasure and honor to be here working with the DD Council. As many of you have already witnessed, I have overloaded your inboxes with messages. I have big plans for communications for the Council. However, I can't make these changes alone. I need your help to get the word out about the Council's website and initiatives to your local media. I know the Michigan DD Council will be well-known across the nation with your help and support. So far, the Council's activities have reached Atlanta, Georgia and press releases have been picked up by the Associated Press. This outreach doesn't stop here. Some RICCs have had articles published in their local newspapers. Please continue to send any articles to your media let them know what your RICC is doing. Look out for our Community Updates every quarter. Feel free to contact me with your questions and concerns about communications. I look forward to working with you all.

Sincerely,

Meredith Smith
Communications Representative
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March is Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month

Statewide, approximately 178,000 adults and children have a developmental disability. To encourage Michigan residents to understand developmental disabilities, Governor Rick Snyder has proclaimed March as Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month in Michigan.

The Developmental Disabilities Council within the Michigan Department of Community Health (MDCH) is encouraging Michigan residents to take the time to get to know someone with a developmental disability. Local self-advocacy groups, such as Michigan's Regional Inclusive Community Coalitions, are hosting events to raise awareness of the many possibilities people with developmental disabilities have as well as public policies affecting people with disabilities.

"Michigan is making great strides in assisting those with developmental disabilities but citizens can get involved locally to do even more," said James K. Haveman, Director of the MDCH. "We encourage Michigan residents to contact their local RICC to find more information about what they can do in their community to join, assist, or get to know someone with a developmental disability."

"Every day the Michigan Developmental Disabilities Council advocates and educates about critical issues affecting people with developmental disabilities. This month marks a time when we look to a brighter future for people with developmental disabilities," said Vendella M. Collins, Executive Director of the Michigan Developmental Disabilities Council.

The Council Prepares for DD Month

The DD Council began DD Month with a proclamation signed by Governor Snyder declaring March as Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month. The Council also began working with the RICCs to prepare for the month by sending out suggestions and information for activities. Facebook and Twitter played a huge role in engaging Michigan Residents about DD month as the Council participated in 31 days of DD Awareness(a social media campaign). The Council sent out a press release to the media about the month and as a result, the Associated Press (AP) picked up the release and the Council's message reached Atlanta, Georgia. The Council continued to promote the month and worked with the RICCS on DD Awareness activities.



Michigan Proclamation for DD Awareness Month.

RICCs Activities for DD Month

RICC	Activities
Shiawassee	Home and Garden Show
Allegan	Passing DD information sheets
Eastern UP	Viewing party of possibilities DVD/letter thanking residents for support
Central RICC	31 days of DD Awareness a social media campaign/letter to residents
Kent	Cable access TV spots in G.R. only. radio spot and hosting a movie at a Celebration Cinema. The movie is titled "Smiles As Big As The Moon".
Marquette-Alger	31 days of DD Awareness a social media campaign
Berrien	Possibilities DVD screening
St. Clair	Self-advocacy workshops: disability pride and power
Cheboygan	Possibilities DVD presentation

Shiawassee Home & Garden Show

The Shiawassee RICC began DD Awareness month off with a display at their Home and Garden Show. About eight RICC members passed out information on what a RICC is, fact sheets on DD Awareness and other information from state and local organizations. Members also had a Shred the Hate table where they got locals to sign a pledge not use hate speech. They then asked them to write down a word or phrase they did not like and proceeded to shred it. The event garnered a lot of support from the community.



Shiawassee RICC member Tom Holley by Shred the Hate table.

Grand Rapids Proclaims March Disabilities Awareness Month

March is Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month. The Kent RICC and the Arc of Kent County have spearheaded a media campaign in their area to empower those with developmental and other disabilities to celebrate this month as well as bring knowledge to issues affecting persons with disabilities. Chair of the Kent County RICC, Duane DeRochey along with Executive Director Tammy Finn of The Arc of Kent County appeared in the PSAs for local access TV in Grand Rapids. As well as a radio spot and will be hosting a movie ("Smiles As Big As the Moon") at the Celebration Cinema. They have also successfully gotten the Mayor of Grand Rapids to declare March, Disabilities Awareness Month.

Make sure to check out the PSA. <http://vimeo.com/60873986>



Brooke Fuller, Board Member of The Arc Kent County and Tammy Finn, Executive Director accept the Proclamation from James White, President of Grand Rapids City Commission.





City of Grand Rapids, Michigan
OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

GEORGE K. HEARTWELL
MAYOR

PROCLAMATION

WHEREAS, disability is a natural part of the human experience and in no way diminishes the right of individuals to live independently, enjoy self-determination, make choices, contribute to society, and experience fully in society; and

WHEREAS, when provided with necessary support services, family members, friends and members of the community can play a central role in enhancing the lives of people with disabilities; and

WHEREAS, all people with intellectual, developmental, and physical disabilities must be valued in order that they realize their full potential and participate fully in and contribute to their community; and

WHEREAS, the goals of all citizens must include providing individuals with disabilities the opportunities and support to live where they can exercise their full rights and responsibilities as citizens, pursue meaningful and productive lives, and contribute to their family and community;

NOW, THEREFORE, I George K. Heartwell, Mayor of the City of Grand Rapids, do hereby proclaim the month of March, 2013 as

DISABILITY AWARENESS MONTH

in Grand Rapids, and call upon all citizens to observe the month by seeking council and input from any person or group with knowledge and expertise in matters concerning disabilities.



George K. Heartwell

Grand Rapids proclamation for DD Awareness Month.

Member Spotlight

Starting this month, we have a new section in our update called “Member Spotlight.” This section will highlight a RICC or a Council member who is doing something wonderful in their community. This month Scott A. Marvin of Lenawee is featured. Scott has been very active in the Shred the Hate Campaign. He has obtained over 800 signatures from various people pledging to stop using the R-word and other hate speech. Scott also wrote numerous articles to his local papers about the campaign. “We need to educate citizens about disabilities. We are all different and deserve respect no matter who you are,” said Marvin.

Shred the Hate as well as anti-bullying campaigns keep Marvin motivated to educate his community. He continues to make presentations to local groups about his efforts. “I have done a few public presentations on the ‘Shred the Hate’ materials. Each time it gets a little bit easier. I am more comfortable,” said Marvin.

If you would like to nominate someone for “Member Spotlight” please send in nominations to Meredith Smith at smithm10@michigan.gov with a brief summary on why they deserve to be featured.



Scott A. Marvin

Iosco Teaches Kids about the R-word

Over the past year, the Iosco RICC has been very effective in getting the word out about 'Shred the Hate.' They have actively gone out to schools across their counties educating students about the R-word. These information sessions provide a context of what bullying is, and how it hurts people.

One student writes:

"Thank you for coming to my class for the presentation! It really meant a lot to me. To all of us! I love the way you did things! It wasn't like our usual presentations about bullying, which is like "don't be a bully," your presentation was very different. And it I think, helped get the point through better. Thank you so much for coming to do a presentation in my class! "

A. Cooper

Delta RICC Meets with Students

The 'Shred the Hate' Campaign is abuzz in Delta County. Members of the Delta RICC have gone into local schools to teach students about hateful speech. They have also gone around their community making presentations. Through their campaign, they have collected approximately 1,854 pledges from community members to stop using the 'R-word' and other hateful speech. The Delta RICC continues to reach out to local community members, schools and officials to spread their message.



Delta RICC STH.

Legislators Pledge Support

Joining with the Michigan Developmental Disabilities Council, members of the Legislature pledge their support to eliminate the *R-Word*. *The R-word* is a synonym for *retard* and *retarded*, words that are considered offensive and disrespectful when used to describe or insult individuals with intellectual disabilities.

On Wednesday, February 13, while attending the 14th Annual Legislative Event, several key representatives and senators stopped by the Shred the Hate (STH) station, signing pledges to help eliminate hurtful words and speech.

Shred The Hate is the Council's campaign to encourage Michigan citizens to eliminate hate speech from their vocabulary. Hate speech is a term for speech intended to degrade a person or group of people based on their race, gender, age, ethnicity, nationality, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, or disability. Hate speech makes threats, intimidates, harasses or is used to bully. In 3 years the STH campaign has collected approximately 10,000 pledges from citizens throughout Michigan.



Rep. Peter Pettalia signed the STH pledge, pictured here with the Iosco RICC at the 14th Annual Legislative Event.

Able Act Is Back

Congressman Ander Crenshaw (R-FL) and Senator Robert Casey (D-PA) re-introduced the Achieving a Better Life Experience Act (ABLE Act) on February 13, 2013. This bipartisan legislation will create an improved quality of life for individuals with disabilities through tax-free savings accounts.

The ABLE Act will give individuals with disabilities and their families the ability to save for the future just like every other American family, and help people with disabilities live full, productive lives in their communities while protecting eligibility for Medicaid, SSI, and other important federal benefits. The account can be used for qualified disability related expenses, such as employment training and education, housing, transportation, health and wellness. Saving for the future has traditionally been an important part of American culture. This will allow people with disabilities to participate in that tradition.

Upon introduction, the legislation has earned 59 original House co-sponsors and 16 original Senate co-sponsors and is backed by at least 50 local, state and national disability advocacy groups, including the National Down Syndrome Society, The Arc and Autism Speaks.

Action Needed: Please contact your representatives and encourage them to co-sponsor this legislation.



Michigan State Capitol Building, Lansing, MI

Medicaid Freedom to Work Amended

Medicaid Freedom to Work legislation has been amended, which allows more people with disabilities to work without losing Medicaid benefits. The original Act was established in 2003 and helps employers find the best person for the job, by allowing them to choose among a broader pool of qualified applicants. It improves health and lowers Medicaid costs. Studies have shown that people with disabilities who participate in Michigan's Freedom to Work program incur fewer medical expenses when they are working. It is also a path to private insurance for some individuals, providing an opportunity to qualify for employer-sponsored health insurance, which pays a portion of Medicaid's cost. Now, the Amendment widens the path to employment for people with disabilities who want to work and pay taxes. It raises the Freedom to Work eligibility level to 250% of the federal Poverty level.



Governor Snyder held a ceremonial bill signing for the Freedom to Work legislation. In attendance (left to right) Joe Longcor (DCH), Laura Hall (MDRC), Yasmina Bouraoui (DDC staff), Gov. Snyder, Sen. Schuitmaker, Paul Palmer (DDC Public Policy Co-Chair), Karla Garcia (DCH Legislative Liaison) and Mike Zelle (Disability Network- Flint)

Disability Community Loses a Champion

Story provided by: Glenn Ashley

Cheryl Berger Trommater (May 24, 1946 - February 23, 2013) died on February 23rd, following a brief illness.

Mother, grandmother, and dedicated public servant. She was Grants Manager for the Michigan Developmental Disabilities Council for 23 years. She was a tireless advocate for people with developmental and other disabilities. In 2012 she was presented with the Corrie Bair Building Inclusive Communities Award by the Michigan Disability Rights Coalition, recognizing her dedication to making communities and housing accessible to all.

Predeceased by her husband Alan in 2004. Survived by her two sons, Chris Trommater and Eric Trommater, her sister and 3 brothers, her two grandchildren, Cooper and Piper Trommater, their mother Jacqueline Studer (formerly Trommater), and her dog Kailie. Cheryl was truly a beautiful person and will be sorely missed. Memorial services were held Monday, March 11, 2013.



Housing

The Housing Workgroup is addressing various issues in the community. Some of them are Michigan State Housing Development Authority's (MSHDA's) Qualifies Allocation Plan (QAP) and availability of housing vouchers for low-income individuals and families. The group is concerned about the effect of budget sequestration on funding for housing vouchers. Members are gathering information about the effect the Sequestration will have. They are also concerned with a variety of group home issues, including the difficulty of transitioning out of a group home, rights violations in the homes, and group home residents' lack of knowledge of alternative residential options. Its subcommittee on Group Home Reform has been working on a draft policy that was reviewed in January. In order to address these issues the workgroup has a subcommittee that tracks developments with MSHDA's QAP. It monitors federal work on housing vouchers. The Group is also developing both a booth and a workshop presentation for the 2013 Building Michigan Communities Conference.

Transportation

The Transportation Workgroup (TWG) is focusing on local transit issues as well as the ability for persons with disabilities to get to medical appointments using Medicaid funded transportation. Along with the Transportation Workgroup, the Public Policy Committee and Health Issues Work Group are also working to help on this issue. TWG is also looking at the use and abuse of handicapped parking spaces, hang-tags, etc. They are looking at possible legislation to enhance penalties to punish abusers. Last year, after four decades of advocacy, legislation was passed to create a Regional Transit Authority in Southeast Michigan. This legislation enables an RTA system in Wayne, Oakland, Macomb and Washtenaw counties. The TWG and other advocates are still working to assist with implementation of an RTA system.

IFSEA

The Individual and Family Support Education and Advocacy Workgroup (IFSEA) have developed an advocacy strategy to create awareness and education around universal education. A position paper has been drafted and a distribution list is being created. IFSEA has also created a fact sheet on self-determination and disability pride to distribute to families. The Transition subcommittee is preparing to draft a paper on what services and supports should look like for young adults 22-26. IFSEA is supporting a young adult to attend the MI Transition Conference in March. IFSEA continues to monitor legislation. The ABLE Act was re-introduced on February 13, 2013. Letters have been sent to representatives asking for their support on this legislation. IFSEA also drafted a letter to the Oxford Foundation and Governor Snyder on behalf of the Council. There is concern on how this bill will affect kids in Special Ed.

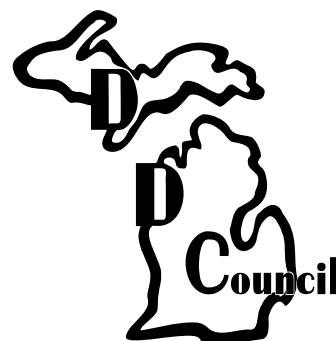
Health Issues

Health Issues Workgroup (HIWG) is currently working on Medicaid funded oral health, transportation to health services and dual eligibility for Medicaid and Medicare. HIWG has worked with Alliance for Michigan Medicaid Access (AMMA) to figure out the greatest barriers to quality Medicaid care. They discovered transportation and protection of Medicaid benefits are the greatest obstacles to Medicaid care. Groups like Michigan Consumers for Healthcare (MCH), HIWG and others remain current on issues, and explore ways to improve access to health services. HIWG has teamed up with the Public Policy Committee to address Medicaid transportation to health services. They are meeting with Department of Human Services to discuss barriers people experience in getting Medicaid to pay for rides to medical appointments. HIWG is also encouraging people to include transportation on their Person Centered Plan (PCP).

Economic Justice

The Economic Justice (EJ) Workgroup has been advocating for implementation of the Medicaid FTW legislation with Medicaid and Department of Community Health (DCH) administration. Medicaid has indicated, due to some policy barriers, this may not happen until 2014.

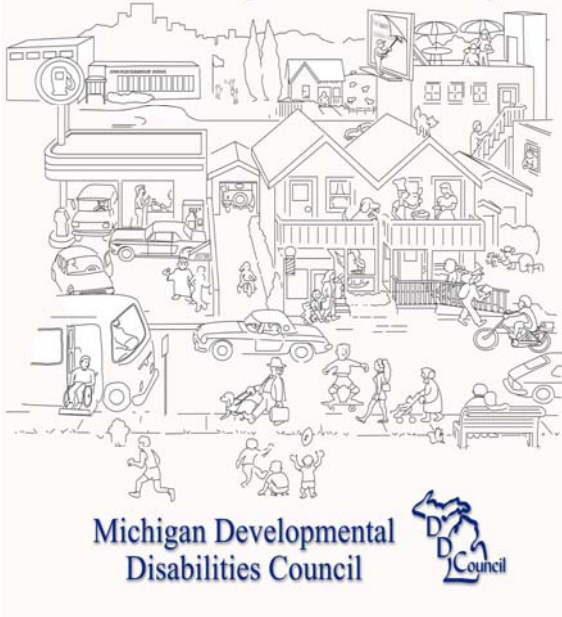
The workgroup is determining steps to advocate for an Employment First! policy at the state level. Staff is working on a white paper around the status of employment of persons with disabilities in Michigan to jumpstart the issue. It is also advocating for the federal H.R. 3086, the Fair Wages for Workers with Disabilities Act of 2011. EJ along with the Public Policy Committee will be requesting that the Council write a letter to Tim Walberg, who sits on the Education & Workforce Committee, where it has been referred, requesting that he consider supporting the legislation. EJ intends to work with the RICCS represented by Mr. Walberg so that they can contact him directly as well.



2013 Legislative Event



Our Community Includes Everyone



The Michigan Developmental Disabilities Council works to support people with developmental disabilities across the state. The Governor appointed 21-member council consists of people with disabilities; family members, mentors, guardians, and advocates of people with disabilities; and professionals from state and local agencies who assist people with developmental disabilities.

Our Community Includes Everyone

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Ontonagon RICC with their Rep. Scott Dianda (front row left) at 14th Annual Legislative Event. (Back top row from left to right) Sheri Shafer, Marja Salani, Gena Pengor and Kristy Dobbins. (Front row left to right) Rep. Scott Dianda, Tony Smydra and Steve Shafer.