



FID

OFFICE FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES

All Abilities Newsletter

1st Quarter Edition (January- March 2025)

March 2025- Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month



#WeReHereAllYear #DDAwareness #InvolveUs

The National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities' (NACDD) 2025 theme, is "We're Here All Year", which emphasizes that community, accessibility, and opportunities for people with developmental disabilities should be recognized and championed every day, not just in March. (For more info- [2025 DD Awareness Month: We're Here All Year! – NACDD](#))

What is the history of Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month?

Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month began with in 1987, with a proclamation made by President Ronald Reagan, which sought to bring attention to the contributions of individuals with developmental disabilities and the challenges they face.

What are some Developmental Disabilities?

- Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)
- Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)
- Intellectual Disabilities and learning disabilities
- Cerebral Palsy
- Down Syndrome
- Epilepsy
- Language Disorders
- Sensory Disabilities (such as hearing loss and vision impairment)

How can I learn more or help others learn more?

- Facilitate conversations about respect, acceptance, and the ways we can make our communities more inclusive.
- Ask questions, "meet us, know us, involve us"

Local community acknowledgement and events for March 2025:

- Putnam County proclaims March **Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month** at the legislative meeting on March 4, 2025.

This March, Carmel Central School District will celebrate Disability Awareness Month with a series of seminars and workshops. Stay tuned for more information! The calendar will be posted on www.carmelschools.org.

March 21, 2025 World Down Syndrome Day



World Down Syndrome Day (WSD), celebrated on **March 21st** annually, is a global awareness day, officially observed by the United Nations since 2012. The date for World Down Syndrome Day, being the 21st day of the 3rd month, was selected to signify the uniqueness of the triplication (trisomy) of the 21st chromosome which causes Down syndrome.

Join us on World Down Syndrome Day to raise awareness and end the stereotypes....



With #LotsOfSocks

Believe it or not, socks get people talking! On March 21, choose some socks that are going to get noticed! They can be mismatched, colorful or share a message. The idea is to start a conversation, so when people ask you about your socks, you can tell them, "I'm wearing them to raise awareness of Down syndrome".



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Here are some ways to learn more about Down Syndrome and World Down Syndrome Day:

World Down Syndrome Day Resource Hub- <https://www.worlddownsyndromeday.org/wdsd-2025-resource-hub>

The National Down Syndrome Society- <https://ndss.org/>
Down Syndrome Association of the Hudson Valley- <http://www.dsahv.org/>

From the desk of:



Office of the Chief Disability Officer

Disability Rights & Employment Awareness Symposium (DREAM)

The 2025 DREAM Symposium

Save the Date: The fourth annual DREAM (Disability Rights & Employment Awareness Month) Symposium will be held on October 28, 2025. To watch previous symposiums click [HERE](#).



Office for People With Developmental Disabilities

Executive Budget Hearings

Acting Commissioner Baer Testifies on Governor Hochul's Proposed Fiscal Year 2026 Executive Budget

Acting Commissioner Baer testified before members of the Legislature at the 2025 Mental Hygiene Budget Hearing on February 5. [Watch or read her testimony.](#)

Acting Commissioner Baer Visits the Center for Discovery Specialty Hospital



Acting Commissioner Willow Baer visited the new [The Center for Discovery](#) Specialty Hospital in Rock Hill where she toured the hospital and other facilities. The Acting Commissioner's visit came in advance of the announcement by Governor Hochul and Senator Schumer that this first-of-its kind children's specialty hospital in New York State had opened. Funding for the hospital was made possible through a federal low-interest loan as well as state investment. "Achieving health equity for people with developmental disabilities is a priority for the Office for People With Developmental Disabilities and ensuring access to complete medical care for children, in an appropriate setting, is a part of that goal. We're so excited for The Center for Discovery's new Children's Specialty Hospital to begin to help New York families and are grateful to our state and federal partners for making this vital resource possible for children and teenagers with complex medical conditions." said Acting Commissioner Willow Baer.

[Read the full announcement.](#)

OMBUDS Program Up and Running!



NEW OMBUDS PROGRAM
HERE TO HELP!

The Ombuds Program, headed by the Community Service Society of New York, is up and running. This independent program is here to:

- Help people with developmental disabilities and their families advocate for themselves.
- Assist in resolving concerns about service access and quality.
- Educate people about their rights and how to navigate the OPWDD system effectively.

The Ombuds program complements the existing service system by providing an additional avenue for addressing unresolved issues. Care managers and Care Coordination Organizations remain your primary resources for service access and coordination.

Need support? Contact the Ombuds Program today:
Call: 1-800-762-9290

Learn More: cssny.org/programs/entry/iddo



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2024 OPWDD Annual Report Annual Report Available in Multiple Languages

OPWDD's 2024 Annual Report is now available in multiple languages on the OPWDD website.

[Find the 2024 Annual Report in 13 Languages Here](#)

The Plain Language version of the Annual Report is also available in multiple languages.

[Find the 2024 Plain Language Annual Report in 13 Languages Here](#)

The Annual Report includes important updates on work to achieve the goals outlined in the [2023 – 2027 Strategic Plan](#).

Public Meetings:

All information regarding meetings can be found on the [OPWDD Events page](#).

- ✚ **March 5, 2025:** Family Support Services Quarterly Meeting (11am-3pm)
- ✚ **April 8, 2025:** Autism Spectrum Disorders Advisory Board Meeting(12pm-2pm)
- ✚ **April 9, 2025:** Developmental Disabilities Advisory Council Meeting (11am-2pm)

Learning/Training Opportunities/Information Sessions:



Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) Litigation Update

Event Date/Time: March 19th, 2025, 2:00pm-3:30pm

Location: Zoom Webinar Platform

Description: How the courts interpret the ADA can greatly impact all ADA stakeholders. This session will provide an in-depth review of some of the most significant ADA cases from the past year. In addition to reviewing the specific facts and ruling of each case, there will be discussion of how these cases may affect future ADA litigation. The webinar will cover a wide variety of issues under Titles I, II and III. Join to have a better understanding of what courts across the country are saying about the ADA.

Registration Link:

[https://www.accessibilityonline.org/ada-legal/session/?id=111155\(link is external\)](https://www.accessibilityonline.org/ada-legal/session/?id=111155(link is external))

PLEASE JOIN MICHAEL RINGEL, RICP®, CDFA®, CEXP™, CHSNC, CHARTERED SPECIAL NEEDS CONSULTANT, FOR AN EXCLUSIVE WEBINAR

PLANNING FOR A LOVED ONE WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

[REGISTER HERE FOR THURSDAY, MARCH 6 | 12 - 1PM](#)

[REGISTER HERE FOR WEDNESDAY, MARCH 12 | 7 - 8PM](#)

As a parent of a child with special needs, you are so focused on managing your child's day-day needs and agenda that you know that estate and financial planning is important—you just don't have the time or capacity to make it urgent.

During this presentation, you will learn:

- What is a special needs trust, why you "must have" one and how to fund it effectively
- How to save and plan for your retirement while funding your special needs plan
- What is an ABLE account and why you may want to open one

Registered Representative and Financial Advisor of Park Avenue Securities LLC (PAS). OSJ: 437 Madison Avenue, 29th Floor, New York, NY, 10022, 212-701-7900. Securities products and advisory services offered through PAS, member FINRA, SIPC. Financial Representative of The Guardian Life Insurance Company of America® (Guardian), New York, NY. PAS is a wholly owned subsidiary of Guardian. Strategies for Wealth is not an affiliate or subsidiary of PAS or Guardian. FLO and LivingFlo, LLC are not affiliates or subsidiaries of PAS or Guardian. CA Insurance License #4204165. 7623699.1 Exp 3/13/25

Planning for a Loved One with Special Needs

Topics to be discussed include:

- ✚ What is a special needs trust, why you "must have" one and how to fund it effectively
- ✚ How to save and plan for your retirement while funding your special needs plan
- ✚ What is an ABLE account and why you may want to open one

Registration (Webinar to be held via ZOOM):

- March 6, 2025- 12 pm-1pm [REGISTER HERE](#).
- March 12, 2025- 7pm-8pm [REGISTER HERE](#).



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NORTHEASTERN
NEW YORK

ADAPT [we change] COMMUNITY NETWORK WEBINAR

INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY

Thursday, March 6, 2025, 10:00 am – 11:30 am

DESCRIPTION: The webinar will address what an Intellectual Disability is, how it is diagnosed, and how it differs from a learning disability.

WHO SHOULD ATTEND:

Parents, family members, caregivers and professionals who want to enhance the lives of children, teenagers & young adults. We welcome anyone who strives to achieve the same goals.

LANGUAGE:

English (With Spanish & Mandarin Interpretation)

REGISTRATION IS REQUIRED

By web: [Click Here](#)

By Email familyconnect@adaptcommunitynetwork.org

By Phone: (718) 436-7979 Ext.5139

LIVE WEBINAR



ABOUT THE SPEAKER



Dr. Mayra Alvarez is a licensed clinical psychologist with 36 years of experience in evaluating and following children, adolescents and young adults with developmental disabilities. In addition, she is the associate director of the Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental and Related Disabilities (LEND) program which trains graduate students, self-advocates and family members in interdisciplinary academic topics, leadership and advocacy.

DON'T MISS OUT, LET'S STAY CONNECTED!

adaptcommunitynetwork.org

@adaptwechange

ADAPT Community Network

A webinar addressing what an intellectual disability is, how it is diagnosed and how it differs from a learning disability.

When: Thursday March 6, 2025 10am-11:30 am

To register:

https://us06web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_Oe0UdT6TMeDOctEq6XSMQ#/registration

WEBINAR WEDNESDAY

SEIZURE RECOGNITION & FIRST AID CERTIFICATION

The first Wednesday of every month is Webinar Wednesday!

FIRST WEDNESDAY OF EVERY MONTH **TIME 3:00 - 4:30**

Join Health Educator, Rachel Yattaw for a 1.5 hour virtual educational course via ZOOM that aims to increase your knowledge, skills, and confidence in applying seizure first aid.

REGISTER HERE!



(518) 456-7501

@EFNENY

FOR QUESTIONS PLEASE EMAIL RACHEL YATTAW, RYATTAW@EPILEPSYNYENY.ORG

Seizure Recognition and First Aid Certification

Training is available on the first Wednesday of every month from 3:00 pm-4:30pm

Register here:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZMkcuyhrTMvGdBIDUg4QtYI9Iab60eS4rvR#/registration>



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(Parent to Parent of NYS) Let's Take a Crash Course on Understanding how to Read an IEP

Date: March 24, 2025

Time: 10 am-12pm

Please join us for this training "Let's Take a Crash Course on Understanding how to Read your child's IEP." Does your child have an IEP (Individualized Education Program)? We'll walk through the different sections of the IEP and discuss how to advocate for supports to make sure the IEP reflects your child's abilities and needs. Because states and local school systems may include additional information, forms differ from state to state and may vary between school systems within a state. The IEP, Individualized Education Program, is a written document that's developed for each public-school child who is eligible for special education. The IEP is created through a team effort and reviewed at least once a year. This training will teach you how to read the IEP so you can understand what should and can be in the IEP.

Link to register: [Click here](#)

(Parent to Parent of NYS) A Guide for Families to Understanding Supports & Services Administered by OPWDD

Date: April 2, 2025

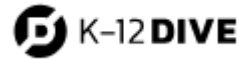
Time: 11:00 am - 12:30 pm

Please join Parent to Parent of NYS, for this great presentation on A Guide for Families to Understanding Supports & Services Administered by OPWDD. The purpose of this training is to introduce families to the language of service delivery systems and to define and clarify information about services and supports. Participants will gain an increased awareness and understanding of eligibility criteria and the eligibility determination process. The training includes an overview of Home and Community Based Services Waiver, and Family Support Services.

Link to register:

[Click here.](#)

In the news:



Published Feb. 25, 2025

Special education enrollment climbs to nearly 8M

"Data suggests the number of students with disabilities between ages 3-21 could jump by about 1 million between 2021 and 2025 if current trends hold."

Why student counts are increasing- Several factors may explain the rise in special education students. For one thing, pandemic-related learning loss and social isolation due to extended school closures set students back academically and emotionally. Some special education professionals had predicted at the start of the pandemic that COVID-related learning loss could lead to a greater demand for special education services.

Another possible explanation for demand for special education services is developmental setbacks from increased screen time of young children and the negative mental health impacts of social media use on students, researchers and educators said.

"The No. 1 issue that we hear from teachers is dealing with more aggressive behaviors and even more out-of-control behaviors," Wolfram said."

To read the full article: [Click HERE](#)

In pop culture:



February 24, 2025:

Kelly Clarkson Loves Viral Company Helping Adults On The Spectrum Gain Independence

"Those with disabilities are different, not less." Spectrum Designs is a New York screen printing company that is thriving thanks to its employees, over half of which have autism or are neurodivergent. Kelly meets co-founder Matt, who explains why other entrepreneurs should hire people with disabilities. Kelly also meets their social media specialist, Kelli, who is helping the company go viral thanks to her videos highlighting the colorful personalities of their employees.

Watch the video here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vqVdxUvIOnE>

To learn more about Spectrum Designs:

<https://www.spectrumdesigns.org/>



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Recreational events/activities:



Visit Putnam County Tourism for Putnam County happenings: <https://www.putnamcountyny.gov/tourism>

AUTISM AWARENESS WALK
PUTNAM COUNTY NEW YORK

Sensory-friendly activities for all ages. Information & community resources. Food vendors & refreshments available.

SATURDAY APRIL 26, 2025
11:00 AM - 2:00 PM
AT TILLY FOSTER FARM
100 NY 312, BREWSTER, NY 10509

SCAN HERE TO LEARN MORE!
OR CALL US AT 845.600.4379

WWW.PUTNAMCOUNTYNY.GOV/AAW

2025 Autism Awareness Walk

When: Saturday, April 26, 2025
Rain date April 27, 2025

Time: 11:00 am-2:00 pm

Where: Tilly Foster Farm- 100 NY 312, Brewster, NY

How to register: <https://putnamcountyny.gov/aaw>

The Arc
Mid-Hudson
New York

Hosted by:
Town of Southeast
CULTURAL ARTS COALITION

THE ABILITY OF ART
Showing the Month of March
Studio Hours Tuesdays and Thursdays 10am -2PM

OPENING 3/6/2025
10AM-2PM

STUDIO AROUND THE CORNER
67 MAIN STREET, SUITE 101, BREWSTER, NY

The Ability of Art

When: Grand Opening March 6, 2025- 10 am-2pm
Tuesdays and Thursdays during the month of March from 10am-2pm

Where: Studio Around the Corner
67 Main Street Suite 101 Brewster, NY 10509



John Bramblitt- Blind artist



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Sun, Moon & Stars
Autism-Friendly Easter Bunny Express



[Autism Friendly Easter Bunny Express](#)

Saturday April 12
4:00 pm - 5:30 pm

Railroad Museum of New England

There is no better way to celebrate the coming of spring than on the Naugatuck Railroad's Easter Bunny Express!

The Autism Friendly Train Rides with the Railroad Museum of New England are considered sensory friendly (lowered music) and judgement-free. Climb aboard for a 1 hour and 20-minute train ride through the beautiful Litchfield Hills as they reawaken after a cold, long winter's nap. Passengers on these trains enjoy a stop at the Bunny Patch where children will have the chance to help rescue the Easter Bunny's rubber duck friends!

All children will have the opportunity to meet the Easter Bunny himself, as well as receive a chocolate-filled egg from his very own collection.

[Booking Easter Bunny Express for 4/12/25 - Railroad Museum of New England - for tickets](#)

PROMO CODE: MOON for \$5.00 discount

[Classes of Service — Railroad Museum of New England -](#)

For more info

Venue: Railroad Museum of New England

860-283-7245

info@rmne.org

<https://www.rmne.org>



The 17th annual ReelAbilities Film Festival: New York (RFFNY), the world's leading exhibitor showcasing and redefining how disability is perceived and presented in entertainment media, returns April 3-9, 2025, with another dynamic lineup celebrating the lives, stories, and artistic expressions of people with disabilities worldwide.

ReelAbilities continues to set industry standards, providing a wide range of accessibility accommodations throughout all festival screenings, conversations and special events, ensures accessibility for all by including:

- ✚ Open captions for all films
- ✚ Closed Audio description for all films
- ✚ ASL interpretation and Live captioning (CART) for all Q&As, and panel discussions and events
- ✚ Festival materials in Braille and large font formats
- ✚ Sensory friendly break rooms and fidgets
- ✚ All venues accessible for wheelchairs and other mobility devices, service animals, and more.
- ✚ Accessible Virtual options for many of the films via their streaming site:

www.reelabilities.org/stream

Full details about the festival, including passes, and ticket sales, are available at:

<https://reelabilities.org/newyork/>

