CREATING A
DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES
AWARENESS DAY IN YOUR COMMUNITY
2016

“To advocate and promote meaningful participation in all aspects of life for Floridians with developmental disabilities”

The Florida Developmental Disabilities Council (FDDC), will launch its statewide grassroots advocacy campaign for Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month at the Capitol, on Thursday, February 18, 2016. This year it will be earlier than in the past because the legislature will convene in February and March however, this will be the kick-off for other activities scheduled for March around the state.

The campaign’s mission is to support local advocates in working with media outlets and community members to: successfully advocate with Florida legislators to maintain funding for critical services and programs, support additional funding for the APD waitlist, and educate legislators and the public about the challenges and opportunities facing Floridians with disabilities.

Media and Advocacy Kit Overview
Effective communication is critical in advocating with lawmakers to maintain funding for services and supports for individuals with developmental disabilities. A successful media campaign will engage the media and educate the public on issues affecting individuals with developmental disabilities and their families, caregivers and friends. The Media and Advocacy Kit provides the information and tools needed to implement a grassroots advocacy campaign in communities throughout Florida.

Included in this kit are:

- Public Awareness and Media Strategies to create events that generate media coverage and public attention.
- Advocacy Strategies to educate legislators.
- An Appendix with samples for most of the strategies.
This Media and Advocacy Kit is designed to provide the information and tools needed to implement this campaign in communities throughout Florida, thereby increasing the overall impact and helping ensure adequate services and a reasonable quality of life for Floridians with developmental disabilities.

With your help – with all of our voices raised together – we will ensure that the needs of people with developmental disabilities and their families, caregivers and friends, will not be ignored.

Public Awareness and Media Strategies

The following strategies can be used to generate media coverage, and increase public attention to a Developmental Disabilities Day in local communities.

Press Conference and Rally

Press conferences and rallies are used to announce major news events or bring attention to an important issue. A sample Press Release and Suggestions for Organizing a Local Developmental Disabilities Awareness Day are available in Appendix A. To increase the likelihood of a successful press conference and/or rally, organizers should:

- Choose a location that relates to the reason for the press conference, and is accessible to the media and the public.
- Schedule the press conference before noon.
- Two to three days before the event, announce the press conference using a press release and phone calls to the media.
- Select two or three people knowledgeable on the issues to make brief statements.
- Prepare handouts with copies of the statements, along with information and statistics to reinforce your position.
- Allow time for questions from the media.
Suggestions for Organizing a Press Conference/Rally

- Determine the issue(s) to be addressed at the press conference/rally.

- Determine the location and get permission to hold your event there.

- Determine who will attend and send invitations at least two weeks in advance of the event.

- Assemble a media packet to distribute at the event that includes a press release, background information on the speaker(s), and a summary of the issue(s).
Adoption of Resolution/Proclamation

- Request issuance of a resolution, proclamation or designation of (local date) as Developmental Disabilities Awareness Day 2016 from your local city and/or county commission several ways.

- If you personally know a city or county commissioner, or the mayor, ask them to issue a proclamation or resolution. While it is best for a chairman or mayor to request a resolution, any commissioner can put in a request.

- If you don't have a personal contact, call the main phone number for the commission or council office and find out the process for issuing a resolution or proclamation. Tell them your request and briefly explain the key issues. Ask for an email address to send more information and let them know you have sample language for the proclamation/resolution already prepared.

- Once you have agreement, confirm when it will be scheduled on a meeting agenda. You and as many other advocates as you can find should attend the meeting to show your support. Frequently, they will not just designate the day, but they may also wish to present the official proclamation to you on behalf of your organization. Be sure to have someone take a picture of you receiving the proclamation. Email the picture to RichardB@fddc.org and make sure to send a personal message (letter or email) to the commissioner or whoever assisted you, expressing your sincere gratitude.

- A sample Proclamation/Resolution can be found at Appendix B.

Editorial Board Visits

The intended outcome of an editorial board meeting with the editor of your local newspaper is to have the editor write an opinion piece about your organization, event or idea. When establishing and holding an editorial board meeting, advocates should:

- Call the newsroom or television station two to three weeks in advance and ask to speak to the person in charge of scheduling an editorial board meeting.

- Review your key message before the meeting

- Have handouts of the press release, issue summary and key facts

- Have a copy of the proclamation or resolution for Developmental Disabilities Awareness DAY that has been issued at the city or county level.

- Have clear notes about why it is a good idea for the newspaper to support your position, issue or topic.

- Maintain good eye contact to engage your audience.

- Send a thank-you note following the meeting.
Submit an Op-Ed Piece

- Written opinion-editorials, also known as op-ed pieces, are located on or near the editorial page in a newspaper. Op-eds give companies, organizations, and people of the community a chance to present their views to the readership of a newspaper. Op-eds should clearly advocate a point, provide adequate research to support the point and suggest a call to action. Op-eds should not only be informative, but also persuasive and compelling. Different news outlets have specific guidelines on how to submit op-eds; the best place to find instructions is on the newspaper’s website. Submit your Op-Ed to “Guest” or “My View” columns in your local paper.

- Always follow up with the editor after submitting an op-ed piece. If an editor publishes your piece, it is customary to thank them for the inclusion. If they are not interested in publishing the piece, thank them for their time and consideration. If there is no response to the initial submission, send a timely follow-up email. To submit an op-ed, call your local daily print news outlet and ask for contact information for the editorial page editor.

- A sample Op-Ed piece can be found at Appendix C.

Submit a Letter to the Editor

- Letters to the editor are a good way to present ideas, promote a campaign or respond to a previously published article. Letters to the editor are brief opinion pieces reflecting the viewpoint of the author. When writing a letter to the editor, it is best to keep the length to 150 words or less (certainly no more than 200). Letters to the editor can be sent via email or submitted through the newspaper’s website. Include your name, address, phone number and email address at the bottom of the letter as a signature of authenticity.

- To submit a letter, call your local daily or weekly newspaper or check online for letter submission information. Be sure to read through the submission guidelines before sending.

- A sample Letter to the Editor can be found at Appendix D.

Broadcast Interviews

- A great way to share awareness messages and educate the local community about Developmental Disabilities Awareness Day is to participate in radio or TV interviews. Advocates, individuals or family members affected by developmental disabilities and/or other advocates can be scheduled to appear on television and radio public affairs programs, news/feature segments, guest/interview shows and “talk” shows. Advocate efforts will most likely be best spent by focusing specifically on television and radio public affairs programs, news/feature and guest-interview shows and local news and talk radio programming as interviews of this nature are typical for this type of programming.
To find out about local TV and radio programs, including air time, host, format, etc., visit the websites of your local stations. If you are unable to locate the information, simply call the station and ask to speak to the news director or program director. During your call, explain the nature of your inquiry and briefly describe Developmental Disabilities Awareness Day and why the listeners or viewers of his/her particular station might be interested in learning more about it.

**Social Media Engagement**

Social media is influential because it gives real-time news and industry information, as well as provides opportunities to meet and interact with people that can be advantageous to a company, group or organization. Social media is about building relationships with others that have common interests, similar occupations or skills. Social media can be used to reach out to third-party organizations, fellow advocates, and members of the community to share and receive important information. For the purpose of the Developmental Disabilities Awareness Day campaign, social media sites are being utilized to share campaign messages and raise public awareness and recognition.

- There are many different social media sites that can be used to promote Developmental Disabilities Awareness Day including Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn.

- Sample Social Media Messages can be found Appendix E.

**Meet With Your Legislator**

To locate contact information for your local legislators go to [www.flsenate.gov](http://www.flsenate.gov) for a list of senators and to [www.myfloridahouse.gov](http://www.myfloridahouse.gov) to find your representative. It’s best to make an appointment to speak with your legislator. If you are unable to make an appointment, you could stop by your legislator’s office, explain to an available staffer that you live in the legislator’s district and ask if the legislator has a few minutes to talk. It is realistic to expect to spend only 5 to 10 minutes with your legislator so have all your information ready. During the meeting, you should:

- **State the purpose of your visit.**
- **Identify your affiliated organization and briefly explain its mission.**
- **Be clear about the legislation you are supporting/opposing.**
- **Convey your position concisely (use personal examples if possible).**
- **Give the legislator a chance to explain their perspective on the issue.**
Let the legislator know you will stay in touch.

Leave concise, useful information that will remind the legislator of your visit and act as a resource for him/her.

Following the meeting, write a note or letter to your legislator, thanking them for their time and stating your position succinctly and politely.

**Write a Letter to Your Legislator**

- If you can’t make a personal visit with your legislator, write a letter stating your position on a particular piece of legislation and asking for their support.

- A sample Letter to Your Legislator can be found at Appendix F.

**APPENDICES**

- **Appendix A**
  Press Release/ Suggestions for Organizing a Press Conference/Rally

- **Appendix B**
  Sample Proclamation/Resolution

- **Appendix C**
  Op-Ed

- **Appendix D**
  Letter to the Editor

- **Appendix E**
  Social Media Messages

- **Appendix F**
  Letter to Your Legislator
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

[Month XX, XXXX]

Contact: [Name]
[Phone Number]
[E-mail]

Advocates in [Location] To Hold Developmental Disability Awareness Day

[YOUR CITY], Fla. – Community advocates in [location] are making their voices heard to support the services and supports that help people with developmental disabilities in Florida, and they are calling for recognition of Developmental Disabilities Awareness Day on (Local Date). Sponsored by (Name of Local Sponsor), this event serves as a forum to generate awareness and provide information about the value and importance of adequately funding services for individuals with developmental disabilities and their families.

There is a growing need for essential services that help people with developmental disabilities have the same life experiences as those without disabilities. Inclusion of people with disabilities in all aspects of life – in our communities, housing, recreational opportunities, the workplace and education – is central to the mission of (Name of Local Group).

“In today’s uncertain times, many Floridians with disabilities and their families are very concerned about their futures,” said (Name and Title of Local Spokesperson). “Decisions made during this year’s Legislative Session could determine whether or not Floridians with developmental disabilities receive essential services needed to sustain their quality of life and continue to live independently as contributing members of our society.”

All over Florida, during the month of March, people are gathering to engage and educate Floridians and policymakers about the importance and essential need for programs and services that enable persons with developmental disabilities to reach their full potential and live independent, self-sufficient and productive lives.

“It’s time,” said (Name of Local Spokesperson), “to recognize the benefits that inclusion in our schools, businesses and communities can bring to all people – with and without disabilities.

(Insert information about your organization.)

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Appendix B – Sample Proclamation/Resolution

PROPOSED LANGUAGE FOR
A LOCAL RESOLUTION OR PROCLAMATION
DESIGNATING (Local Date) 2016, AS
“DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES AWARENESS DAY”

WHEREAS, the (Name of your local organization) is involved in advocating for programs that promote positive system changes and that allow persons with developmental disabilities to achieve optimum independence and to promote innovative programs and practices that improve the quality of life for these individuals; and

WHEREAS, (Name of your local organization), encourages all Florida citizens to actively participate in events that appropriately recognize and celebrate Florida's diverse population, including persons with developmental disabilities; and

WHEREAS, “Developmental Disabilities Awareness Day in (Local city or county)” has been established to promote awareness and understanding of the opportunities, challenges and needs of persons with developmental disabilities; and

WHEREAS, “Developmental Disabilities Awareness Day” also recognizes Florida's public policy accomplishments concerning persons with disabilities, as well as identifying the improvements to public policy that are needed to ensure that all of Florida's citizens with developmental disabilities have the capacity to lead full, productive and engaged lives; and

WHEREAS, it is necessary and appropriate that local communities in Florida such as (Name of city or county) support the mission and purpose of “Developmental Disabilities Awareness Day” and encourage their citizens to recognize and respect this important commemoration;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED [or PROCLAIMED] BY THE [insert name of local government entity] THAT MARCH (Date of local event), 2016, BE RECOGNIZED IN [insert city or county name] AS:

“DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES AWARENESS DAY”
Appendix C – Op-Ed
State Leaders Must Act to Ensure Equal Opportunities for People with Developmental Disabilities

by (Name of local contact)

As Florida looks for ways to balance the state budget while meeting the basic needs of its citizens, we must make choices that protect the quality of life for our most vulnerable populations, including those with developmental disabilities.

When given access to adequate services and support, Floridians with developmental disabilities can – and do – become self-sufficient citizens that are willing and able to attend school, work and play in the community, pay taxes and vote.

Undoubtedly, there are tough budget decisions ahead. However, the best decisions will be those that encourage sustainability and lead to future cost savings for all citizens. The (Name of local group) believes that supporting the continuum of life for persons with disabilities, including those on the waiting list for services, is an integral part of this solution.

These issues will take center stage on (local date) which is Developmental Disabilities Awareness Day in (city or county). Advocates around the area have been raising their voices to show their support for the funding of services and programs that ensure an acceptable quality of life for our underserved citizens. It is vitally important that our lawmakers hear their voices and understand the need to provide funding for fundamental services for people with developmental disabilities.

Some of those choices are more difficult than others. Some may determine whether our most vulnerable citizens receive essential services needed to sustain the quality of their lives and determine whether they can continue to live independently as contributing members of our society, rather than be isolated or discarded.

It’s vitally important that all our citizens join in urging our legislators to be bold, courageous and do the right thing by finding the funds to provide essential services to people with developmental disabilities and their families. We support budget recommendations that provide additional funding for people on the Agency for Persons with Disabilities waiver waiting list. This recommendation allows individuals with the most critical needs, some of whom have been waiting for years, to begin receiving critically needed services.

Here are the most critical needs in (name of city or county):
(List critical needs in your area)

One voice can be heard when combined with many others. One face commands attention when joined by many others. And one bold, brave, creative effort by those we’ve elected to represent us can give strength to those among us who are most in need and most vulnerable.

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(Include a brief bio and contact information for the author of the Op-Ed)
Dear Editor,

There is a growing need in Florida for essential services that ensure an acceptable quality of life for people with developmental disabilities and allow them to have the same life experiences as those without disabilities.

But, as our state continues to wrestle with an uncertain economy, many of those essential services are at risk.

During the month of March, (Name of local group) will hold a (press conference/rally) on (date of event) and call on all Floridians – those with abilities and those with disabilities – to make their voices heard by urging our lawmakers to support the programs and services that enable persons with developmental disabilities to reach their full potential and live independent, self-sufficient and productive lives.

We support budget recommendations that provide additional funding for people on the Agency for Persons with Disabilities waiver waiting list. This recommendation allows individuals with the most critical needs, some of whom have been waiting for years, to begin receiving critically needed services.

[Name]
[Physical Address]
[Phone]
[E-mail Address]
Appendix E – Social Media Messages

Facebook

Facebook is the most-used social networking site in the world. Organizations can create Facebook pages to interact with their constituents and followers.

Sample Facebook Posts:

• Mark your calendars: Thursday, February 18, is Developmental Disabilities Awareness Day 2016 in Florida. Show your support by spreading the word and help advocate for those living with disabilities. (*link to Facebook Event)

• I believe all individuals have a right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness; the right to be treated with respect and dignity; and the right to direct one’s own life, to control one’s own destiny. If you do too, join me in advocating these same rights for individuals living with disabilities and spread the word about Developmental Disabilities Awareness Day 2016 in Florida. (*link to Facebook Event)

• With more than 240,000 individuals with developmental disabilities currently residing in Florida, there is a growing need for services that support the desire of people with developmental disabilities to have the same life experiences as those without disabilities. Write to your legislators about (insert local issues).

• Inclusion of people with disabilities in all aspects of life – in our communities, housing, recreational opportunities, the workplace and education – is central to the mission of (insert name of local group). Join me as an advocate, and help spread the word about Developmental Disabilities Awareness Day 2016 on Thursday, February 18. (*link to Facebook Event)

Twitter

Twitter is a social networking and micro-blogging service that enables its users to send and read messages known as “tweets.” Tweets are text-based, SMS (short-messaging service) posts of up to 140 characters. Tweets are displayed on the author’s profile page and delivered to the author’s subscribers who are known as “followers.” Twitter can be used to build relationships with potential advocates, increase support for the campaign, participate in conversations with target audiences, share information about developmental disabilities, or alert followers of news or events.

Sample Twitter Posts

• Do your part to protect funding for individuals with developmental disabilities, provide funding for individuals on the waitlist, and promote inclusion of Floridians living with developmental disabilities; write to your legislators today.

• The 2016 Developmental Disabilities Awareness Day in Florida is Thursday, February 18.

• All individuals, including those with disabilities, should have equal rights.
LinkedIn

LinkedIn allows professionals to reconnect with past and current friends, colleagues and coworkers, make connections when looking for a job in a specific field or ask questions of knowledgeable professionals. Unlike Facebook, LinkedIn is more about getting answers and helping the user. Instead of staying in contact with people, it is a site about making new connections that can help. Organizations can make pages that members can join, establishing connections within the company. Organizations can also reach out to certain individuals or people. Having a page on LinkedIn shows target audiences that you are available for questions, connections or support. LinkedIn is particularly effective for creating groups with special interests and facilitating discussions and chats on specific topics. If you are already a member or would like to join relevant groups, you may start a discussion about Developmental Disabilities Awareness Day 2016, urge others to help spread the word, and share the FDDC’s 2016 legislative priorities.

If there are other social media platforms you are engaged in, feel free to use those too!
Appendix F – Letter to Your Legislator

Senator/Representative [Member’s First and Last Name]
The Capitol
[INSERT ADDRESS]
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1100

Dear Senator/Representative [MEMBER’S LAST NAME]:

As a concerned constituent, I urge you to protect the funding for the Developmental Disabilities Waiver and support allocating additional dollars to fund the waiting list of persons with developmental disabilities who need services and have been waiting for years for these services.

[WRITE A PARAGRAPH EXPLAINING WHY THE ISSUE IS IMPORTANT TO YOU PERSONALLY. IF POSSIBLE, IDENTIFY HUMAN FACES TO SERVE AS EXAMPLES OF THE ISSUE.]

Please make our priorities YOUR priority this spring. Floridians are counting on you – thank you in advance.

Sincerely,

[YOU’RE SIGNATURE]

[YOU’RE NAME]
[YOUR TITLE] - if applicable
[YOUR AGENCY] – if applicable
[YOUR CITY], FL