Florida Developmental Disabilities Council Welcomes New Executive Director

TALLAHASSEE, FL. - The Florida Developmental Disabilities Council (FDDC) has announced the appointment of Valerie Breen as its new Executive Director. She assumed responsibilities on March 20 succeeding Debra Dowds who recently retired.

Breen served as Chief Executive Officer of Brain Injury Association of Florida (BIAF) from 2005 to 2017. Her expertise in the field of health care and disabilities spans a 30-year career working in the health-related industry as an innovative leader of sustainable human service delivery programs and services. A graduate of Case Western Reserve University School of Applied Social Sciences with a Master of Science degree in Social Administration, she has dedicated most of her career to ensuring that families impacted by chronic and disabling conditions have access to the critical health and community-based resources necessary to thrive.

Born and raised in Grand Rapids, Michigan, she moved to Florida in 1994 and currently lives in Tallahassee. She also serves as the overseer/care coordinator for her mother, who sustained a traumatic brain injury in 2010. She is a recognized health care consultant, an innovative leader in the field of health care and disabilities, and a nationally recognized speaker on the subject.

“I am extremely honored to have been chosen as the next Executive Director for the FDDC and to work with such a committed Council, staff and community. My hope is that through my leadership we can continue to positively impact the systems that serve persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families. I look forward to bringing my passion and expertise developed through my 30-year career serving persons with disabilities to the Florida Developmental Disabilities Council. My desire is to continue the Council’s mission to support Floridian’s with intellectual and developmental disabilities to have meaningful participation at home and in their communities,” said Breen.
Making Your Voice Heard in Support of People with Disabilities

by Susan Kabot and Richard “Dick” Bradley

March is the gateway to spring, a time of renewal and hope as it roars in like a lion and exits like a lamb. It marks the changing of our clocks as we “spring forward.” It signals the “madness” of the NCAA basketball tournament. It marks the beginning of another “big dance” – in Florida politics – as it brings the start of the 2017 legislative session. And, it heralds national Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month – a critically important time to focus on the needs of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

That focus was crystal clear on March 21, when hundreds of people with disabilities, their families, caregivers, service providers and other advocates converged in Tallahassee at the State Capitol for Developmental Disabilities Awareness Day. They made their voices heard at a rally in the Capitol Courtyard, in the halls of the Capitol building and in the offices of their legislators to ensure lawmakers are able to make positive and informed decisions on the issues that affect their daily lives – from the diminishing availability of care providers and provider agencies closing, a long waiting list to receive services and a lack of transportation for employment-related tasks. Here’s a glimpse of some of the key issues to which we’re hoping to draw attention:

The Individual Budgeting/Home- and Community-Based Services Waiver (iBudget/HCBS)
The iBudget Waiver makes it possible for nearly 30,000 individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities to choose the supports and services they need in order to live safely and as independently as possible in their own homes and communities. It has been under funded for many years, and providers receive highly inadequate compensation for their diligent and caring work. Today’s Agency for Persons with Disabilities (APD) iBudget Waiver reimbursement rates are, on average, 11 percent lower than they were in 2003. Providers need greater compensation. We urge the Florida Legislature to ensure that individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families who receive the Individual Budgeting/Home- and Community-Based Services Waiver have stable and qualified service providers for delivering waiver services. This can only be done by increasing the compensation providers receive. This year, we are advocating for $30 million dollars to increase provider rates so they are closer to 2003 levels. In addition, the Individual Budgeting/Home- and Community-Based Services Waiver waitlist continues to be long and excessive due to inadequate funding. It is critical that the Legislature make a meaningful long-term commitment to eliminate the waitlist. Currently, there are approximately 20,000 Floridians on the waitlist – and many of them have been waiting for more than five years. This year we are advocating that 1,500 individuals come off the waitlist.

Department of Labor Wage Requirements
Last year the Florida Legislature approved funding for rates for Florida’s iBudget services to meet the new Department of Labor (DOL) minimum wage requirement that became effective on October 13, 2015. The reimbursement rates affected by the DOL changes include the following services: Live-In Residential Habilitation daily rate, Personal Supports daily rate, and Companion services. This funding was provided to adjust these rates so that individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities would continue to have choices and options for residential living services. Unfortunately this allocation was only provided for one year as nonrecurring funding. We believe it is critical for this funding to be included in the regular base budget of the Agency for Persons with Disabilities on a recurring basis.

Transportation for Individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities
We urge the Florida Legislature to provide resources for employment-related transportation for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Transportation remains a critical issue and a key factor in the successful independence and productivity of those with intellectual and developmental disabilities across our state. With the spotlight shining brighter than ever these days on state and national politics, it’s become more important than ever for individuals affected by the decisions of government leaders to make their voices heard on issues that will have a direct impact on their lives. That is particularly true for the decisions that will be made during the current legislative session that will impact some of our most vulnerable citizens – those with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Developmental Disabilities Day offered a great opportunity to encourage awareness and involvement in support of systemic changes that will enable those with disabilities to lead meaningful, comfortable and productive lives.
Valerie Breen, Executive Director
Florida Developmental Disabilities Council

March 20th was the first day of spring and my first day on the job as Executive Director for the Florida Developmental Disability Council (FDDC). It was also the first of three days filled with Developmental Disabilities Awareness Day activities during which I had the pleasure of interacting with Council members, staff, self-advocates, agency leaders, providers, and legislators. In many ways, I felt completely at home, seeing many familiar faces and receiving many warm wishes from those I had met in my career working with people with disabilities. In addition, I was introduced to many “new people” which hopefully, given enough time and exposure, I will eventually remember!

My first evening on the job was both humbling and inspiring. I attended the FDDC’s information and preparation dinner on Monday evening. The FDDC staff and key speakers at the dinner educated nearly 100 self-advocates and prepared everyone for a full day at the Capitol starting early the next morning to launch DD Awareness Day.

Tuesday March 21st was a full day at the Capitol spent with hundreds of self-advocates from across Florida who were on hand for DD Awareness Day to address legislative issues. Provider booths filled the second floor of the Capitol rotunda sharing important pieces of information and educational materials. The morning press conference and award ceremony was outstanding. Co-hosted with The Arc of Florida, FDDC’s Chair, Sue Kabot, Ed.D, and The Arc of Florida’s Chair, Dick Bradley, facilitated the program, which included: Representative Ray Rodriguiz, House Majority Leader who praised the efforts of the self-advocates; Representative Gayle Harrell recognizing The Arc of Florida for their initiative to prevent deaths by choking; Senator Anitere Flores’s presentation of the FDDC’s Idolio Leadership and Advocacy Award to self-advocate Sarah Goldman; and Representative Kathleen Peters who applauded Sarah Goldman and all of the advocates. Both the morning and afternoon were spent meeting with legislators on key issues which included provider rates, waiting list and transportation.

On day three I had the privilege of meeting one on one with many of our State agency partners and leaders committed to ensure that persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families have access to the services and supports they need. With the FDDC’s new five-year state plan, created by our stakeholders to address the needs in Florida and meet the federal obligations under our guidepost, the DD Act of 2000, we will focus on creating systems change in the areas of housing, transportation, employment, elementary through postsecondary transition and the workforce. Our partners within the legislature and our State agencies will be key to sustainable systems change. Well trained and knowledgeable self-advocates will be crucial to the grassroots momentum needed to facilitate change. A huge undertaking, but doable because of who we are as a collective community and the knowledge we bring.

Over the course of my career I have studied the developmental disability movement as a growing and influential “change agent” movement among self-advocates at both the federal and state level. The extraordinary dedication of families working together for common goals, fueled with impactful personal stories that become top of mind within State agencies and policy makers made my first DD Awareness Day an awe-inspiring event, and one I am grateful to be part of.

I will never forget my first three days on the job. It was the perfect initiation to the issues and the people who make up the fabric of our mission at the Florida Developmental Disabilities Council, “to advocate and promote meaningful participation in all aspects of life for Floridians with developmental disabilities.” I look forward to working with you all!
Developmental Disabilities Day 2017

Annual DD Day at the Capitol

Hundreds of Floridians concerned about funding and services for persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities, gathered once again at the state Capitol on Tuesday, March 21, 2017 for the annual Developmental Disabilities Awareness Day. Hosted by the Florida Developmental Disabilities Council and The Arc of Florida, members presented their concerns during the event’s press conference, which included numerous speakers and was attended by hundreds of people with developmental disabilities, advocates, self-advocates, legislators, policy makers and many others.

The number one message focused on the current iBudget Provider Rate Crisis, a trend that is severely impacting individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, their families and care providers throughout the state. The FDDC and The Arc of Florida both urged legislators to correct the iBudget Provider Rate Crisis by increasing the rates paid to care providers so they are closer to the 2003 levels as well as to make a long-term commitment to eliminate the iBudget waiver waitlist on which approximately 20,000 Floridians are waiting for services.
Tampa Advocate Receives Top Award During DD Day at the Capitol

The Florida Developmental Disabilities Council honored Sarah Goldman of Tampa, Florida during the annual Developmental Disabilities Awareness Day at the Capitol where she received the Eighth Annual Idelio Valdes Leadership and Advocacy Award. The award recognizes an individual with a developmental disability who has demonstrated outstanding advocacy efforts and has helped develop partnerships for the facilitation of community integration, employment and inclusion for individuals with developmental disabilities.

Goldman was selected to receive the prestigious award because of her exemplary personal and professional achievements. Through her efforts she has helped legislators better understand the needs of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. During the 2015 and 2016 legislative sessions, Goldman interned with state representatives and the FDDC. During these internships, she created a House Resolution to help make March Cerebral Palsy Awareness month in Florida and was recognized on the House floor. She testified in House and Senate committees on bills impacting people with disabilities and presented at national conferences during the 25th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act. The award was presented by Senator Anitere Flores who noted that the recognition is given each year to an individual with developmental disabilities who demonstrates advocacy activities in keeping with the spirit of Valdes, enthusiasm for partnerships within their community and dedication to facilitating community integration, employment and inclusion.

Goldman currently works as a district aide for Representative Kathleen Peters and serves as the secretary for The Able Trust Youth Program’s Alumni Association. She believes that all individuals should be included, and plans on running for a House seat in the next five years to continue her work for people with disabilities.

“Sarah is a phenomenal advocate for all individuals, and has the most passionate heart for individuals with developmental disabilities. She has truly devoted her entire life to self-advocacy, but most importantly, the rights of others. As an individual with cerebral palsy, Sarah faces her own daily challenges overcoming adversity, but despite her own barriers, she fights on the frontline as a leader, paving the way for more rights and better opportunities for other individuals with similar struggles,” said Rose Withers, clinical supervisor at Spectrum House, Inc., who nominated Goldman for the award.
Increase provider rates for the Individual Budgeting/Home and Community Based Services Waiver

The Council urges the Florida Legislature to increase provider rates so that individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families who receive the Individual Budgeting/Home and Community Based Services Waiver have stable and qualified service provider staffing for delivering waiver services.

- Provider rates are so low that providers are offering fewer services or going out of business. As a result, families are often unable to obtain the services their loved ones need.
- Providers need greater compensation. A 3% increase in provider rates for this fiscal year was a good start that must be increased for next year.

Continue funding for Florida’s iBudget services to meet the new Department of Labor wage requirements

The Council believes it is critical to include funding to meet the federal Department of Labor minimum wage requirement in the regular base budget of the Agency for Persons with Disabilities on a recurring basis.

Continue to transition individuals off the iBudget waiver waitlist

The Council urges the Florida Legislature to continue their support of a meaningful long-term commitment to transition individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities off the waiver waitlist for Individual Budgeting/Home and Community Based Services.

Transportation for Individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities

The Council urges the Florida Legislature to provide resources for employment related transportation for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Reinstate the statewide and local Advocacy Councils for the protection of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities

The Council urges the legislature to reinstate the Statewide and Local Advocacy Councils to offer protection to individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities from abuse and neglect.
Workforce Subcommittee

Maggie Reilly, Chair

Holly Hohmeister, Program Manager

New State Plan Initiative

By the end of the five-year state plan, one or more improvements will be made to practices, services and compensation for community-based service providers to ensure that individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities have access to, and receive services and supports from, a sustainable, qualified provider base.

Workforce Is Moving Forward

The Workforce Goal Subcommittee held its first face to face meeting on February 28, 2017 in Tampa, Florida. This subcommittee is tasked with implementing the Workforce Goal of the FDDC State Plan. The subcommittee will accomplish this goal by recommending and advocating for competitive compensation for at least two categories of community-based service providers. This will be done in conjunction with Florida’s self-advocates, family members and other key stakeholders.

The subcommittee also recognizes the need for adequately trained providers to serve individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities in the community. As evidenced in FDDC’s Comprehensive Review and Analysis, Quality Assurance as Self-Determination 2015 (“the Report”) and amplified in FDDC Public Input 2015, significant workforce training is needed to successfully implement recent policy and regulatory initiatives, and to address gaps in services available to individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities across Florida. Major forces driving this need for training include a renewed commitment toward ensuring Florida’s citizens with intellectual and developmental disabilities are empowered to live self-determined lives, and new Children’s Medical Services (CMS), Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) standards driving the advancement of person-centered planning and commensurate person-centered services. To address this need, the Subcommittee will identify, develop, and implement evidence-based training for community-based service providers and supervisors that represent agencies and organizations of diverse sizes.

The Workforce Goal subcommittee looks forward to sharing their successes in future newsletters!

The 2017 Disability Policy Seminar

The Seminar was the premier opportunity to cultivate champions on Capitol Hill and advance the grassroots movement for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Armed with valuable information, the event assisted attendees to converge on Capitol Hill to speak directly to their representatives about their high-priority issues.

Kevin Johnson, Laurie Harlow, Holly Hohmeister, Eddie Hall and Katty Hall represented the FDDC at the 2017 Disability Policy Seminar held in Washington, DC March 20-22, 2017. The team met with Representative Louis Frankel, of Florida’s 21st District, just one of several stops while on Capitol Hill.
New State Plan Initiative (Housing)

By the end of the five-year state plan, Florida will have made at least one systemic change to statutes, rules, policies or procedures designed to improve choice and provide for financial support for safe, affordable and inclusive housing with access to support services for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

A Change in SHIP Funding Can Create Housing Opportunities for People with Disabilities

Residential Options of Florida (ROOF) is committed to empowering individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities to successfully obtain and maintain affordable and inclusionary housing of their choice. The Council supports ROOF’s mission to provide information, training and advocacy to promote housing choice.

Many individuals with developmental disabilities look to rental housing to achieve independent living in their community. For the majority of individuals, income limits make realizing their rental housing goals difficult to achieve. Through the State Housing Initiatives Partnership (SHIP) program, the State of Florida allocates funding to local governments to provide financial assistance to provide affordable housing options for low-income families and individuals.

Although SHIP funds are distributed to local governments, the state government dictates how the funds are distributed and to whom. Florida’s current legislation on SHIP funding distribution allows local governments to allocate up to 25% of SHIP funds to go towards assistance that makes rental housing affordable, including money for rental assistance (F.S. 420.9072). However, a new bill introduced by State Representative John Cortes (D-Kissimmee), would increase the amount of SHIP funds that local governments can use towards rental housing. The bill, HB 133, would amend the current legislation on SHIP funds, allowing local governments to increase the amount of SHIP funding allocated for rental housing strategies. The bill would provide local government the opportunity to allocate up to 50% of SHIP funds to rental housing strategies which can include rental assistance, rent subsidies and assistance with security deposits and utility deposits.

The increased distribution of SHIP funds for rental housing assistance could provide greater opportunity for people with developmental disabilities to receive financial assistance with renting a home in the community. To ensure that local governments choose to use SHIP funds towards rental assistance, this strategy should be included in the Local Housing Assistance Plan (LHAP). Local governments create their LHAP’s with input from the public. To learn how you can participate in this process in your area, contact your local SHIP administrator or ROOF for more information at: www.flroof.org.
New State Plan Initiative (Transportation)

By the end of the five-year state plan, the Council will work in collaboration with agencies and organizations to develop and implement a minimum of three sustainable transportation solutions to develop and implement at least one infrastructure change and advocate for increased funding to increase access to safe and affordable methods of transportation for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Transportation Voucher Pilots

The Council, in conjunction with the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) implemented two transportation voucher pilot projects in 2016. The urban model was within the Hillsborough Area Regional Transit Authority ADA Service (HARTPlus), and the rural model, Citizens for Improved Transit (CIT), served multiple counties in southeast Florida.

Prior to the voucher pilot, HARTPlus required a three-day notice to provide rides to its 3,000 clients, only serving individuals within three quarters of a mile of the standard bus schedule. Each trip cost HARTPlus $36. The voucher pilot allowed HARTPlus to secure trips for $16 per person for up to a 7.6 mile ride. As a result, HARTPlus was able to offer 27,813 trips at a cost of $445,008 rather than the typical trip cost of $1,001,268, providing a savings of $556,260. Riders booked trips for a variety of purposes and received 24-hour service, which positively impacted safety and satisfaction and opened the door to a wider variety of community access, including employment and evening recreational events. HARTPlus credits the voucher pilot with its 8% growth, improved on-time performance and its ability to exceed expectations in accessibility to wheelchair users. The urban model is self-sustaining after one year of funding.

The rural model is working toward independent sustainability during a second year of Council funding. Preliminary outcome reports from the rural model include: (1) An individual who lives in Belle Glade being able to move from working at McDonalds for $8.05 per hour to working as a welder earning $16.00 per hour; (2) An individual who lives in South Bay who initially had to turn down a job offer but was able to become employed at Walmart in Royal Palm upon securing transportation; and (3) Three individuals in Pahokee who are now employed in Lake Worth, earning $10.00 per hour. It is anticipated that the rural model will also be self-sustaining by the end of 2017.

For More Information visit: http://www.gohart.org
Employment First Florida Update

Employment First strategies consist of a clear set of guiding principles and practices promulgated through statute, regulation, and operational procedures. These practices target employment in typical work settings as the priority for funding. Employment First activities are occurring across the nation and here in Florida.

In Florida the 2016 Florida Employment first legislation defined employment as: *Integrated employment, including supported employment, customized employment, and self-employment, where an individual is paid by an employer at minimum wage or greater or receives earnings through one’s self-employment business, fully integrated in the community workforce, with a goal of maximum self-sufficiency.*

Research from the Institute for Community Inclusion ([www.thinkwork.org](http://www.thinkwork.org)) has found that a key component of successful implementation of Employment First is sharing information with individuals with disabilities and their families as well as community service providers to raise expectations for employment. To support this goal, the Employ Me 1st Project has developed a long term strategy to educate the public about employment and increase the number of Floridians with disabilities working in the community. Efforts include the Employment First Florida website, quarterly Grassroots Group webinars, topical Communities of Practice as requested, employment success stories, and the Self-Advocate Advisory Committee.

The purpose of the Employment First Florida website ([http://www.employmentfirstfl.org/](http://www.employmentfirstfl.org/)) is to provide information about the Employ Me 1st Project and the impact of Employment First in Florida. It is also where information about the Grassroots Group, topical Communities of Practice, and employment success stories can be found. The Grassroots Group meets online four times each year. All webinars are held from 3-4pm ET. Future meeting dates and topics will be:

- Tuesday, April 18, 2017 – Nassau County Public Schools: How schools can become vendors for DVR
- Tuesday, July 18, 2016 – Peer Curriculum/Self Advocacy
- Tuesday, October 17, 2017 – Employment Success Stories

Please contact Sheila Johnson, Sheila.Johnson@umb.edu for more information on upcoming events.

The Employ Me 1st Project’s Self-Advocate Advisory Committee is comprised of Aaron Coleman and Arizona Jenkins. In addition Sandy Coleman, Aaron’s mom, participates in the meetings. Both Mr. Coleman and Mr. Jenkins serve as liaisons to their respective local level self-advocacy communities and provide feedback on the Employ Me 1st Project’s activities. Through these efforts they have shared information to help individuals plan for employment and changes to the Employ Me 1st Florida website including the development of plain language policy documents and adding short instructional videos to the website to model how to solve common issues that individuals face when pursuing a job in the community. To find out more about the group please contact Allison Hall, Allison.hall@umb.edu
New State Plan Initiative

By the end of the five-year state plan, the Council will have contributed to the implementation of at least four new improvements to transition services and two or more policies or practices that assist students with intellectual and developmental disabilities from elementary through post-school transition into meaningful post-school outcomes with adequate services and supports.

Transition Update

In 2016, the Florida Legislature passed the Florida Postsecondary Comprehensive Transition Program Act to support the development of Florida Postsecondary Comprehensive Transition Programs (FPCTPs) that meet the needs of students with intellectual disabilities. The legislation created the Florida Center for Students with Unique Abilities at the University of Central Florida (UCF) and charged the Center with approving FPCTPs, administering a scholarship program for students in approved programs, and awarding startup and enhancement grants for these programs. The legislature appropriated $3.5 million for student scholarships and $3 million for the grants the Center awards, a tremendous commitment of resources to support this initiative.

The FDDC is well poised to support this initiative. We are focused on helping create, improve, and sustain inclusive models of postsecondary education for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities. In 2016, the FDDC published *Florida Postsecondary Education Guide*, a free guide providing in-depth descriptions of postsecondary programs throughout the state of Florida for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities. This was the first guide in the state to help families of youth with intellectual and developmental disabilities identify postsecondary education options for their children.

The Council is a national leader in supporting postsecondary career and technical education (CTE) for students who have these disabilities. The FDDC was instrumental in the development of Project Achieve at Florida State College at Jacksonville, a postsecondary career and technical education (CTE) program for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities. For the five years that FDDC funded Project Achieve at Florida State College at Jacksonville, over 70% of students in this program earned CTE certificates, an impressive record of achievement. The success of Project Achieve has encouraged other state colleges to develop similar programs, supported by a replication manual and webinars developed by the FDDC. In recent years, there has been a significant rise in postsecondary options for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

One such program is Project TOPS at Robert Morgan Educational Center and Technical College in Miami, where students are dual enrolled at Robert Morgan and the school district. Project TOPS is a school district CTE initiative based on Project Achieve. Consistent with the Council’s aim to develop a school district postsecondary CTE model, FDDC has funded this program from its inception in 2015. One Project TOPS student was asked what Disney character he identified with. His response was “Jim Hawkins, because he was always underestimated.” The student explained that people assumed he could not do much and never gave him a chance to show what he could do, but this was not the case with Project TOPS. Here are just a few examples of the graphics developed by Project TOPS students that demonstrate student achievement in their CTE program.
New State Plan Initiative
By the end of the five-year state plan, a minimum of 250 Floridians with intellectual and developmental disabilities and a minimum of 100 family members or allies who are not currently participating in leadership and advocacy will participate in leadership, advocacy and systems change activities in culturally diverse or cross-disability coalitions.

Self-Advocacy Systems Change Goal
By the end of the five-year state plan, there will have been at least one systemic change to federal and/or state statutes, rules, policies or procedures designed to mitigate the income limits imposed on people with intellectual and developmental disabilities in federal and state programs and restore their ability to independently control their income.

Partners In Policymaking
The Class of 2016 Partners in Policymaking celebrated another successful year. The class graduated on February 11, 2017 with a record number of 25 graduates from all levels of disability experience. This year’s Allen C. Wesley award was presented to Yessenia Leyva. Yessenia is a self-advocate from Ft. Lauderdale. Applications for the next Partners in Policymaking Class of 2017 are now online on the FDDC website: www.fddc.org/about/partners-in-policymaking. The deadline for applications is July 1, 2017. Topics will include: History of the Disability Movement, Inclusive Education & Transition, Assistive Technology, Supported/Competitive Employment, Supported/Independent Living, Person Centered Planning, Community Support, State and Federal Legislative Process, Leadership Development, and Organizing for Systems Change. For additional information, please contact: Stacey Hoaglund, Project Coordinator at (954) 252-8764.

A reunion of Partners in Policymaking graduates will be held in Orlando during this year’s Family Café (June 16-18, 2017). The date and time is to be determined.
Florida SAND

Florida’s statewide self-advocacy organization, Florida SAND, held its 5th Annual Conference, January 6-8, 2017, at the Florida Hotel in Orlando, Florida. Over 100 self-advocates from all parts of Florida attended this very important conference. The Florida SAND board kicked the conference off with a strategic planning meeting Friday afternoon, followed by a general session and welcome from Frank Shalett, president of Florida SAND. On Saturday, Florida SAND self-advocates presented and/or helped with presentations to the enthusiastic audience. The Florida SAND conference theme was “Speaking Up and Moving Out” with an emphasis on leadership and attaining leadership skills for self-advocates.

The Florida SAND membership made a unanimous decision to support two (2) platforms for the upcoming legislative session: Transportation and Provider rates. There was interesting discussion on a number of issues. Transportation and provider rates received support and endorsement from each local self-advocacy group represented.

Florida SAND has updated their website. The new site will also host the disability news hub, Florida Self-Advocacy Alliance, now known as Florida Self-Advocates Central. You can find the disability articles written by self-advocates for self-advocates and disability resources to help keep self-advocates up to date with current events in Florida and nationally. The new website may be found at: https://www.flsand.org/
Are you eligible for @ABLE United?

This quick 30-second video can tell you. Find out more about this opportunity to save while maintaining your benefits at www.ableunited.com.

Financial security is the gift that keeps on giving. Many individuals with disabilities and their loved ones have been afraid to give and receive monetary gifts for fear of jeopardizing government benefits. With ABLE United, Florida’s qualified ABLE program individuals with disabilities will be allowed to save up to $14,000 a year without negatively impacting benefits.

While maintaining federal benefits is a key advantage, ABLE United offers even more, including the ability to:

- Save tax free: Save tax-free as gains on account will not be subject to tax when spent on qualified expenses.
- Save affordably: There is no cost to open, no application fee and no minimum contribution. The monthly fee of $2.50 waived until July 2017.
- Save with the help of family friends, anyone can contribute!

Family members, friends and caregivers alike have the potential to support the health, independence and quality of life of those in the disability community. Contributing to an ABLE United account has lasting benefits. It allows individuals to save and be empowered to invest in a better life experience.

The FDDC is now a proud partner of the Florida Department of Economic Opportunities “Florida Unique Abilities” Program

This program recognizes businesses in our state that are committed to providing career and financial opportunities to individuals with unique abilities and to the organizations that support them. Thanks to dedicated business partners and advocacy organizations, the Florida Unique Abilities Partner Program will strengthen our state’s economy and workforce by giving a talented but untapped group of Floridians who want to work more opportunities to do so.

The program is designed to raise awareness about the economic and social benefits of employing individuals with unique abilities. Participating businesses demonstrate their dedication to strengthening communities and the economy by helping Floridians with untapped talents to become more independent. The program also provides opportunities to partner with other businesses, organizations and state resources in this endeavor.
Three Great Publications Are Available Free of Charge

The FDDC maintains Disability Guides developed as tools for educators and families to promote successful inclusion of students with disabilities in the classroom and facilitate the development of English and language art skills through activities about disability awareness. These guides contain lesson plans in language arts and literacy based on Florida education standards. The three publications: Disability Awareness through Language Arts and Literacy: Resources for Prekindergarten and Elementary School (2012), Disability Awareness through Language Arts and Literacy Resources for Prekindergarten and Elementary School (2016), and Disability Awareness through Language Arts and Literacy: Resources for Middle and High School (2015), have been created for educators and families to promote positive attitudes toward successful inclusion of students with disabilities. The booklets also help to increase respect and acceptance of individual differences and to increase understanding of disabilities related to social issues. But how are the guides for younger children different? The 2016 prekindergarten and elementary school guide updates the 2012 guide to meet elementary school standards. For prekindergarten educators and others who need prekindergarten lesson plans that meet current standards, the 2012 guide can still be used as a current resource.

For more information, contact Rick Lockenbach at rickl@fddc.org. Publications and other resources can be ordered and/or downloaded free of charge from the FDDC Education Resources site at http://www.fddc.org/sites/default/files/New%20Web-Education4_0.pdf.

2017 Family Caregiver Lifespan Respite Summit Registration Is Now Open

The Florida Lifespan Respite Alliance is pleased to announce the 2017 Family Caregiver Lifespan Respite Summit taking place on Thursday, June 15, 2017. This free Summit will be held at St. Paul United Methodist Church in Largo, Florida, located at 1498 Rosery Road East. The Summit is an opportunity to bring family caregivers of all ages and disabilities, service professionals and other stakeholders together. Its purpose is to share creative strategies, create a better understand of the availability of respite resources within the State of Florida and develop concrete plans for improving access to and understanding of respite care.

The Florida Lifespan Respite Alliance invites you join in this interactive day of connection and collaboration. Opportunities still exist for panelists and exhibitors as well. As the number of attendees will be limited, you are encouraged to register in a timely manner to guarantee your seat.

Visit the Florida Lifespan Respite Alliance website to register! www.FLlifespanrespite.com. The registration link can be found under the “Get Involved” tab.

The Florida Lifespan Respite Alliance is an enthusiastic and growing coalition of individuals and organizations interested in improving respite care in Florida. We hope you will spread the news of this Summit and plan to be there on June 15, 2017.
The Council is composed of 30 members appointed by the Governor. Members represent individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, their family members, agency staff and interested individuals.

Rixys Alfonso - Parent Advocate - Miami Lakes, FL
Pat Archer - Self Advocate - Boca Raton, FL
Catherine Anne Avery, PN LNC - Department of Elder Affairs, Tallahassee, FL
Amanda Baker - CO-CHAIR and Self Advocate - Panama City, FL
Ronni Bianco - Parent Advocate - Aventura, FL
Richard “Dick” Bradley - Elected-At-Large, Non-Profit Member - Yankeetown, FL
Conney Dahn - Appointed-At-Large, Parent-Advocate - Stuart, FL
Lise Fox, Ph.D, Florida Center for Inclusive Communities, University of South Florida -Tampa, FL
Eddie Hall - Self Advocate - Lakeland, FL
Laurie J. Harlow - Parent Advocate -Tampa, FL
Shevaun Harris - Agency for Health Care Administration - Tallahassee, FL
Kevin Johnson - Local Agency Member –Celebration, FL
Susan Kabot, Ed.D., CHAIR and Appointed-At-Large, Parent Advocate - Plantation, FL
John “Jack” Kosik - Parent Advocate - Lakeland, FL
Kathy Leigh - Elected-At-Large, Self Advocate - Starke, FL
Mary Ellen McDonald - Disability Rights Florida - Tallahassee, FL
Aleisa McKinlay - Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DOE) -Tallahassee, FL
Thomas (TJ) Moon - Self Advocate - Ocala, FL
Bernadette Moran - Parent Advocate - Jacksonville, FL
Barbara Palmer - Agency for Persons with Disabilities - Tallahassee, FL
Cassandra G. Pasley - Division of Children’s Medical Services-Tallahassee, FL
Margaret Reilly - All Children’s Hospital - Bradenton, FL
Tricia Riccardi - Self Advocate - Kissimmee, FL
Frank Shalett - Self Advocate - Ft. Lauderdale, FL
Jean Sherman, Ed.D., R.N. - Mailman Center UCEDD University of Miami - Pembroke Pines, FL
Phil Stevens - Parent Advocate - Tampa, FL
Louis Towson, Self Advocate - Marianna, FL
Monica Verra-Tirado, Ed.D., Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services (DOE) - Tallahassee, FL
Victoria Vangalis Zepp - Parent Advocate - Tallahassee, FL

Please Note: Two Parent Advocate member positions are currently vacant. If you are interested in applying for one of these positions you can access the Gubernatorial Application/Questionnaire for Appointments form on our website at: http://www.fddc.org/about/council