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

Lifespan Respite Care Program Grant Awarded To Florida

The Florida Lifespan Respite Alliance (FLRA) is a new organization whose mission is to promote access to affordable, high-quality lifespan respite care services in Florida for all disabilities. In partnership with FLRA, the Department of Elder Affairs (DOEA) has recently been awarded a Lifespan Respite Care Program Grant by The Administration for Community Living under the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. FLRA and DOEA will use the grant funds to build a statewide coalition of respite stakeholders; improve the accessibility of respite services by more efficiently connecting family caregivers with available respite services; raise public awareness and stakeholder knowledge of the critical role that respite services play in the lives of family caregivers; expand the availability of high quality lifespan respite services across all disabilities; and develop a long-term plan for sustainability that will support the project goals.

This is great news for Florida which currently does not have a comprehensive, cross-disability, lifespan respite services program. Some family caregivers across disabilities and age groups receive respite services from a variety of community-based providers. Although these services are usually available at no charge, they are often narrowly focused and minimally marketed, if at all. FLRA and DOEA plan to address this issue by coordinating resources statewide and expanding respite services to serve all disabilities and age groups. To learn more about the project please contact: Christine Kucera, DOEA Caregiver Support at 850-414-2000.

What Is Respite?

Respite is time taken by a caregiver for rest and rejuvenation. It is temporary, short-term relief that provides a break from the extraordinary demands of ongoing care for an individual with disabilities, special needs or chronic illness.
2015 Council Members

Sylvia James-Miller - Council Chair & Parent Advocate - Ocala, FL
Tricia Riccardi - Council Co-Chair & Self Advocate - Kissimmee, FL
Shirley Kervin - Dept. of Elder Affairs - Community & Support Services - Treasurer - Tallahassee, FL

Rixys Alfonso - Parent Advocate - Pembroke Pines, FL
Pat Archer - Self Advocate - Boca Raton, FL
Ronni Bianco - Parent Advocate - Aventura, FL
Richard “Dick” Bradley - Elected-At-Large, Non-Profit Member - Gainesville, 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
Cynthia “Marcy” Jackson - Appointed-At-Large, Parent Advocate - Tallahassee, FL
Kevin Johnson - Bishop Grady Villas - Celebration, FL

Susan Kabot, Ed.D., CCC-SLP, Appointed-At-Large, Parent Advocate - Plantation, FL
John “Jack” Kosik - Parent Advocate - Lakeland, FL
Kathy Leigh - Elected-At-Large, Self Advocate - Starke, FL
Kathy McAllister - Self Advocate - Sarasota, 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
Frank Shalett - Self Advocate - Ft. Lauderdale, FL
Jean Sherman, Ed.D., R.N. - Mailman Center UCEDD University of Miami - Pembroke Pines, FL
Louis Towson, Self Advocate - Marianna, FL

Monica Verra-Tirado, Ed.D., Florida Department of Education - Tallahassee, FL
Victoria Vangalis Zepp - Parent Advocate - Tallahassee, FL
As many of you know, the charge of the Florida Developmental Disabilities Council is to change the system so that individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities can make informed choices and decisions, pursue meaningful and productive lives, and be fully included and integrated in all aspects of our communities. But what is Changing the System and why is Changing the System important? The Council has found itself giving this concept a great deal of thought and discussion over the last several months as we have begun our work to develop our next five-year State Plan for 2017-2021. Our federal funding agency, the Administration on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AIDD), is requiring that, unless Individual and Family Advocacy activities, all goals and activities of the Council must focus on Systems Change.

As a starting point, AIDD has defined Systems Change as—A process that shifts the way an organization or community makes decisions about policies, programs, and allocation of resources, and ultimately in the way it delivers services and supports to its citizens and constituents. However, as the Council has looked at the big picture of what needs to be done in Florida and the role the Council can play, we are recognizing the magnitude and potential of true system change and learning that—

- Systems Change begins with the realization that no one agency or organization can be all and do all, which leads to a greater collaboration among partners agencies, organizations and individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families.
- Systems Change requires all partners to focus their work on a common vision and engage in collective action and sharing of resources.
- Systems Change requires revisiting what has worked and what hasn’t worked, and demands a willingness to toss out policies, procedures, practices or strategies that aren’t leading to sustainable, long term outcomes.

Systems Change culminates in improved outcomes, supports and services for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, allowing each and every individual to live his or her life fully included in the community with quality supports and services based upon each individual’s interests, preferences and needs.

The bottom line for the Council is that Systems Change is investing our efforts more on the challenging issues that need to be addressed with long term impact, instead of the things that are easily fixed with short term impacts. Please stay tuned as we continue this process. I think you will like where we are heading.
WELCOME
Christina Catledge

New Help Me Grow Program Manager

Christina is a versatile and talented professional with over 15 years of experience in social work, publications, web development, professional writing and holds a degree in Sociology from Florida State University. Christina has worked with FSU, the Florida Department of Children and Families, Florida Medical Association, and the Florida Department of Education.

Moving Forward And Into Its Second Year

Help Me Grow Florida had an incredibly productive first year. The state coordinating office was established to provide the infrastructure for a State Help Me Grow program and to support the launch of Help Me Grow sites across Florida. Five sites operating through 2-1-1 in collaboration with community partner agencies were established. These sites included: 2-1-1 Big Bend; 2-1-1 Broward; 2-1-1 Palm Beach/ Treasure Coast; United Way of Lee, Hendry, Glades; and United Way of Volusia and Flagler Counties. The sites brought Help Me Grow services to 19 counties across Florida. An additional six sites began their planning process to become Help Me Grow Florida affiliate sites. They developed their strategic plans, built community partnerships and added community-based resources, which support children ages birth through age eight, to their database system.

Additional state projects were accomplished through the collaboration of our steering committee. A public awareness campaign was developed and included TV and radio announcements, bus stop posters, brochures, flyers and postcards. Trainings for healthcare professionals and early care and education providers were developed with the assistance of the Help Me Grow National Center. A statewide common database referral system was adopted and is being customized to capture Florida’s Help Me Grow common indicators. A third party project evaluation was conducted to provide feedback and guide future planning. Lastly, the Help Me Grow Florida website was created which provides information for families, healthcare professionals, early care & education and community providers. Please visit the site at www.helpmegrowfl.org.
Our Help Me Grow affiliate sites participated in numerous community outreach events which reached approximately 11,000 individuals. Our care coordinators provided information, developmental and behavioral screenings and care coordination which effectively connected families to community-based services. Physician Champions and community partners joined each team to build a better coordinated systems of early detection in each community.

Our preliminary data demonstrated that most of our callers were mothers; their child’s learning environment was reported as home; 42 percent reported being concerned about their child for six months or longer and 89 percent had not received previous support for a delay or diagnosis. Their main concerns included: development, behavior, communication, education, diagnosis and basic needs. Screening data indicated the 58 percent of screenings demonstrated a concern and need for a referral to community-based services. Help Me Grow will continue to learn more about gaps and barriers that families face in accessing services for their children and we are hopeful that increasing availability of Help Me Grow will help parents address their concerns and improve timely access to early intervention services.

The upcoming year will provide us the opportunity to continue our work and to expand Help Me Grow in Florida. We anticipate adding five new sites to our network. With the addition of these new sites, Help Me Grow services will reach approximately 50 percent of the counties in our state. This means that more Florida families will be able to benefit from Help Me Grow services. We will be continuing to work together because we know that all of our children should be afforded the opportunity for early detection of developmental and behavioral delays and we understand the difference that early intervention makes in improving children’s lives.

In Orlando earlier this year, Help Me Grow Florida welcomed 2-1-1 representatives and community partners from 66 counties. With the support of the Florida Developmental Disabilities Council, the Office of Early Learning, the Children’s Movement of Florida, and the Help Me Grow National Center, attendees from across the state were brought together to further the work of the HMG system on behalf of all children and families in Florida.
Innovative Summer Technology Camp in Gilchrist County School District

The Exceptional Student Education (ESE) faculty in the Gilchrist County School District (GCSD) sponsored a unique opportunity for students with disabilities in grades 6 through 12. In July, students and teachers came together for a three-day Summer Technology Camp to prepare everyone for inclusive educational opportunities this fall. There were seventeen students who attended the camp along with eleven GCSD staff, one Florida Diagnostic and Learning Resource System (FDLRS) staff member, and a Regional Technology Specialist. GCSD is in its second year of funding for a Universal Design for Learning (UDL) initiative. UDL is a system that assists teachers to provide all students with an equal opportunity to learn.

The students were taught the basics of how to electronically receive, send, and save assignments from their teachers. Both teachers and students were trained on the software programs Snap and Read, and WorkQ/SpeakQ. This software allows students to read a variety of text sources including textbooks and websites.

Teachers that participated shared the camp experience and information about UDL with grade level teachers. Teachers that wish to expand the UDL strategies with all students served in ESE to support inclusion have signed up to participate in after school professional learning communities (PLCs). The software used in camp is being installed in several teachers’ rooms to benefit additional students served in ESE. GSCD’s technology department is working very hard to accommodate all of the technology needs.

Reports from the classroom about the impact of the technology camp are positive. One ESE teacher reported, "A student who rarely participated or completed his work in the past is already very successful! He not only did his work using the technology on his laptop, but he went above and beyond to make charts for his work. He loves having the technology that is helping him succeed!" Lisa Rowland, the Director of Special Programs and camp director, reported, “This is what makes it all worthwhile.”
FDDC Impacts Nurse Practitioner Education in Florida

Last year, the FDDC completed its Physician Education in Developmental Disabilities program. This program created 12 hours of online curriculum for physicians and led to two Florida medical residency programs and one medical school and nursing school changing their curricula to include a specific focus on the care of adults with developmental disabilities. To create this program, the FDDC partnered with the American Academy of Developmental Medicine and Dentistry (AADMD).

This year, the FDDC and the AADMD teamed up again to create the Nurse Practitioner Education in Developmental Disabilities (NPEDD) program. The NPEDD program built off of the original PEDD platform, but created an 8-hour, online training course for nurse practitioners and nurse practitioner students. The webinar series was accredited by the American Association of Nurse Practitioners and is free to any Nurse Practitioner who wishes to take it. The webinar series can be accessed at: http://aadmd.org/npedd-webinar-series.

The program became available to the public on July 15, 2015. Within the first month, 35 nurse practitioners in Florida had enrolled in the course. An additional 100 healthcare professionals (nurse practitioners, nurses, physicians and other healthcare providers) from around the US and Canada also enrolled in the course. The course will be available until July 15, 2017.

As part of the next phase of the project, the FDDC and AADMD will be working with up to four nurse practitioner schools in the state of Florida to permanently integrate the care of adult patients with developmental disabilities into the schools’ curricula. When fully implemented, this could impact hundreds of nurse practitioners graduating from Florida programs each year.

Online Graduate Certificate: Positive Behavior Support

The University of South Florida’s (USF) College of Behavioral and Community Sciences offers a fully online Graduate Certificate in Positive Behavior Support. This certificate program offers an evidence-based approach to resolving challenging, and supporting prosocial, behavior in children and youth within schools and early education settings. The certificate will benefit students by equipping them with necessary skills to provide systemic applications of PBS. The applications vary from understanding consultation at the individual level in the home and community, with young children in preschool settings, and/or school-age children within classrooms and schools.

For more information please visit: http://pbs.cbc.usf.edu/ or contact Michelle Kobus at 813-974-3126; email: mkobus@usf.edu.
Florida State College at Jacksonville 2015 Project Achieve Student Graduation

Project Achieve is a collaboration of FSCJ, Duval County Public Schools and the Florida Developmental Disabilities Council. The program provides a comprehensive, inclusion model career and technical training program at a postsecondary institution for students from Duval, Nassau, Clay and St. Johns counties with intellectual or developmental disabilities.

This year, 11 students from Project Achieve graduated from seven of FSCJ’s Workforce Certificate programs including Automotive Collision Repair and Refinishing, Automotive Service Technology, Facials Specialty, Applied Welding Technologies, Family Child Care Training, Building Trades and Construction Design Technology, and Air Conditioning, Refrigeration and Heating Technology. The ceremony’s guest speaker was Professor Joel Williams from Edward Waters College. An additional highlight of the program was a video tribute to the seniors by fellow graduate, Jaquan Fulton.

In addition to Workforce Certificate program participation, Project Achieve students also receive additional instruction in academics, career preparation and self-determination. Prior to this year’s graduation, many Project Achieve students have completed internships and work experiences that add tremendous value to their employability. The goal of Project Achieve at FSCJ is to ensure that students with unique abilities are able to hone their skills in a specific trade, then apply those skills to fulfilling careers that foster increased independence.

Project Achieve will continue providing opportunities to 14 new students this Fall. The program currently serves students with intellectual or developmental disabilities of at least 18 years of age from Duval, Nassau, Clay and St. Johns counties.
The 2015 Partners in Policymaking class is off to a fabulous beginning! With more than 30 participants, a third of whom are self-advocates, excitement is mounting as discussions unfold about how systems change can come about as a result of project development. The challenges faced by so many within the Florida disability community make for a fertile ground in the expansion of resources, supports and inclusionary opportunities as their projects begin to roll out.

One of the goals of this year’s PIP program is to bring the project into the age of networking through social media. Plans are being developed for an open Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Google Page and YouTube Channel. Engagement opportunities are evolving for those who have previously moved through the program in an effort to extend PIP and FDDC initiatives well beyond the scope of the current class. Inspiring the graduates to collaborate with one another, as well as with other developmental disability organizations, is part of the plan for a cohesive formula of progression.

In an effort to expand PIPs influence throughout the state, the soon to be developed YouTube channel will air video interviews with current and past graduates showcasing the impact PIP has had on their ability to influence public officials and policy specialists. This will help to open up the enormous benefits of the PIP program to virtually anyone who has access to an internet connection.

This year PIP is excited to see some new faces come into the fold of trainers. Specialists such as Guy Caruso, Herm Fishbein, Al Condeluci and Darcy Elks will be bringing their wealth of knowledge to the project. Among them, they have the combined experience of nearly a century of developmental disability expertise. Between this group and the wonderful team of trainers that Florida PIP has been fortunate to sustain over time, they are sure to prepare the next class participants with the skills they need to become tomorrow’s leaders and catalysts for change.

The Partners in Policymaking would like for everyone to follow along with the growth and development of the PIP program by keeping an eye out across social media channels. By “liking” and “sharing” the highlights and topics of interest the program is sure to extend to families, individuals and policy changers across the state. Forging positive partnerships with elected officials and others in key leadership positions via the use of today’s technology will complement the Partners in Policymaking program to continue to be an impetus for change.
Project SEARCH...real opportunity, real outcomes.

The Project SEARCH high school transition program is a unique, business led, one-year school-to-work program that takes place entirely at the workplace. Total workplace immersion facilitates a seamless combination of classroom instruction, career exploration, and hands-on training through worksite rotations. The ultimate goal upon completion of the program is for all interns to have attained integrated, competitive employment at or above minimum wage. There are currently 20 Project SEARCH sites in Florida with average employment outcomes of 74%. In July, Project SEARCH held its International Conference in Phoenix, Arizona where 16 of the Florida sites were honored for having employment outcomes of 60% or greater.

Six of our sites received the top honor with 100% employment outcomes. These sites were Holmes Regional Medical Center; Cape Canaveral Hospital; Rosen Shingle Creek Resort; Florida Hospital Winter Park; Florida Hospital Orlando; City of Hialeah.

Holmes Regional Medical Center and Cape Canaveral Hospital are both part of the Health First, Inc., family and are located in Brevard County. Interns train in many areas which cannot only be generalized to any healthcare setting but also many other areas of employment in the community. These areas include but are not limited to patient transport, environmental services, nutritional services, and materials management. The interns from these sites were employed in various positions at the host businesses and throughout the community.

Rosen Shingle Creek Resort and Spa is a luxury hotel and convention center located in the heart of the Orlando tourist district. With such a large hotel, interns are afforded the opportunity to train in many areas. These areas include but are not limited to banquet services, housekeeping, food preparation, and the spa. Of the interns that were hired all landed jobs in the hospitality industry. Some examples include banquet stewarding and house runner.

Florida Hospital Winter Park (Winter Park memorial) is a community hospital located in the heart of Orlando. Interns train in many areas that include but are not limited to patient transport, environmental services, nutritional services, and materials management all of which are skills that can generalized to any healthcare setting. Of the interns that were hired most landed jobs at Winter Park Memorial Hospital.

Florida Hospital Orlando is the largest in the Florida Hospital family. Project SEARCH opened its site here in 2013-2014 affording opportunities for interns to train in the areas of materials management, nutritional services, environmental services, and emergency services, patient transport, the warehouse and cafeterias. All but one of the interns hired that first year landed jobs at Florida Hospital Orlando.

Project SEARCH City of Hialeah has internships woven throughout the departments of their city hall. Launched in 2010, in partnership with Miami-Dade Public Schools and Best Buddies Jobs and Vocational Rehabilitation, the City of Hialeah has proven itself a model host business others should aspire to emulate. City of Hialeah, Mayor Carlos Hernandez shared, “I am truly excited and proud to hear that the Project Search program at the City of Hialeah had 100 percent job placement. The students have truly been an inspiration to me and I encourage businesses to become more aware of the benefits received when hiring someone with intellectual or developmental disabilities. I always say that we learn as much from them as they do from us.”
"We are fortunate to have several Project Search graduates currently working at various departments at City Hall. I thank Vocational Rehabilitation, Best Buddies and Miami-Dade Public Schools for the support to the City of Hialeah in allowing us to make a difference in their lives," he said.

The City of Hialeah hired three new staff from the 2013-14 class. Two of these new hires were a direct result of hard work during the internships – essentially, the departments did not want to lose them, so they hired them. The remaining interns were hired in the community: clerical roles at the City of Doral and North Bay Village; a linen runner at the Ritz Carlton – Key Biscayne; a human services assistant at BrightStar and a marketing assistant at The Ultimate Umbrella Company, Inc. (TUCCI). Carlos at TUCCI is really a success as he was hired on full time to this rapidly growing company. He came in on the ground floor and is now assisting in the human resources department as well and proving himself part of the team that will grow right along with the company.

Since 2007, the Florida Developmental Disabilities Council, Inc. has helped Project Search in Florida to make significant progress in not only adding more sites but in gaining statewide funding and programmatic support from Vocational Rehabilitation and the Agency for Persons with Disabilities. For more information on Project SEARCH or how to become involved, please contact:

Beth Romans-Corsi, Ed.S, Program Manager Employment and Transportation Task Force
Ph.: (850) 488-4180 | (800) 580-7801, Bethrc@fddc.org

For more information on Florida’s Employment First efforts, please visit www.employmentfirstfl.org
Hollie Lynch of Sun City, Florida has intellectual and developmental disabilities and she is blind. Does this prevent her from pursuing her dream to be an artist? Far from it! Earlier this year she requested information and assistance from Employment Program Manager, Beth Romans-Corsi, who was quite impressed with her talents. A mutual friendship was formed and recently Hollie presented Beth with one of her original paintings with the note that read: “I am very happy you like my paintings. This one is with the American flag and all types of people saying the pledge of allegiance because I point out participation, inclusion and mutual relationships for all.”

Programs and Activities

The University of Miami Mailman Center for Child Development and the Florida Developmental Disabilities Council recently offered an Oral Healthcare for Caregivers Training session. It was held at the APD Suncoast Region Field Office in Fort Myers with 27 attendees.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was signed into law 25 years ago, and the FDDC staff helped to celebrate this landmark during the Walk To City Hall and other events held in downtown Tallahassee on July 24.
Pyramid Inc. is a private, non-profit arts-based program serving adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. According to the Visual Arts Coordinator Megan Holmes, “Opportunities to be recognized as professional artists and to teach others, such as workshops like this for the Florida Developmental Disabilities Council, offers the artists a chance to succeed not only as painters and sculptors, but as vital contributing members of our community as well.”

To prepare Council staff for the activities, each of the artists discussed their memories of what it felt like to create or try something new for the first time. Participants at the retreat were asked to create four sections of a mandala and given the prompt to choose a color to represent themselves as they were in that moment. Each participant then chose one piece of their art to combine with their group to create a collaborative whole. The results were inspiring; each piece was colorful and unique.

The artists of Pyramid thanked the FDDC for valuing the role that art can have for the community and for providing them the opportunity to continue to spread the power of creativity, but in reality, it was the FDDC staff who were thankful for the artists. One artist, who is a long time veteran of both the visual and performing arts of Pyramid Studios stated in his reflection of the workshop, “First you have to believe inside, then it shows up on the outside to others.”

When the FDDC invited the artists of Pyramid to conduct a professional art training for their summer staff retreat, it validated the artists of Pyramid in many ways. Several stated “What... you mean we will get to do the teaching?”

The artists of Pyramid and amateur FDDC staff artists took time out from the busy agenda to pose with their artwork of the day.

Derrik instructs Sheila on the perfect way to create color in her artwork during the Summer Staff Retreat held August 20, at Goodwood Plantation and Museum in Tallahassee.

And then there was balloon building during which, teamwork and patience were put to the test by each of the FDDC staff!
The FDDC Recently Presented three 2015 Outstanding Legislator Awards and Senate President Andy Gardiner was awarded the 2015 Outstanding Service Award

The Florida Developmental Disabilities Council (FDDC) recently voted to present the 2015 Outstanding Service Award to Senate President Andy Gardiner of Orlando. Senate President Gardiner joins Senator Nan Rich and Governor Jeb Bush as the only recipients of this distinguished recognition. The Council’s Outstanding Service Award is an award that the Council presents to those who have consistently supported individuals with developmental disabilities for a long period of time. It represents our appreciation for years of hard work in support of individuals with developmental disabilities.

Senate President Gardiner is honored for his support and oversight of additional funding for the Part C/Early Steps program and the needed funding for those on the Developmental Disabilities Home and Community-Based Services Waiver Waitlist. The Council was also grateful for the Senate Presidents support of employment, education and asset development initiatives for individuals with unique abilities in SB 7022 and SB 7030 and the passage of the Florida ABLE bills.

President Pro Tempore Garrett Richter, Senator Rene’ Garcia and Representative Patrick Rooney, Jr are recipients of the 2015 Outstanding Legislator Award. This award recognizes legislators who have made extraordinary contributions to the State of Florida and its citizens with developmental disabilities during the 2015 legislative session.

President Pro Tempore Richter of Naples, Florida is honored for his sponsorship of SB 848, The Employment First Act that included the Councils language to continue the Governor’s Executive Order for the Employment First Initiative legislation that guarantees the prioritization of competitive employment for individuals with developmental disabilities. Representative Rooney of Palm Beach Gardens, Florida was recognized and honored in his Palm Beach Gardens office for his sponsorship of HB 1083, the House companion of The Employment First Act.

Senator Garcia of Hialeah, Florida is honored for his leadership in securing the additional funding for the Developmental Disabilities iBudget Waiver Waitlist and for providing Early Steps with extra funding.

“The Florida Developmental Disabilities Council, Inc. would like to applaud these legislators for their commitment to public service and their continued support of the issues and challenges that are unique to individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, and more often than not, go unnoticed. Through their help we will be able to improve the lives of more individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities and we appreciate their willingness to work with our Council on these issues,” said Sylvia James-Miller, FDDC Chair.

Margaret Hooper, FDDC Public Policy Coordinator, presented Representative Patrick Rooney the 2015 Outstanding Legislator Award in August, 2015.
Congratulations to FDDC Council Member Rixys Alfonso who recently received the “Heart of the South” Award for her advocacy efforts in South Florida. Congratulations also goes out to her son, Devin, who was one of the 2015 recipients of the Portraits of Courage Award for Advocacy by the National Organization of Rare Disorders (NORD). The award was presented during the Patients of Courage Gala recently held in Washington, DC. Because of this award, Miami-Dade County issued a Proclamation for a Special “Devin Alvarez Day.”

Miami Duplicates Devin Alvarez Day

The Florida Developmental Disabilities Council honored Ms. Amanda Baker during Developmental Disabilities Day at the Capitol where she received the Sixth Annual Idelio Valdes Leadership and Advocacy Award. Ms. Baker was selected to receive the prestigious award because of her numerous community activities and personal achievements which have resulted in a better understanding of increased inclusion of people with developmental disabilities, specifically, exemplary self-advocacy work as President of Elephant Herds Self-Advocacy Group of Panama City, Parliamentarian and past Co-Chair of Florida SAND’s as well as creator of the Dalton Belles Award.

“We are thrilled that Amanda is the 2015 Idelio Valdes award recipient,” said Sylvia James-Miller. “She is an individual who works hard all year long, leads by example, motivates and encourages everyone around her and does it all with a brilliant smile. We are all very proud of her and for her many accomplishments all year long.”

The 2015 Idelio Award Winner

Camera Shy?

The FDDC recently recognized and celebrated Staff Assistant’s Day with a warm thank you and some very special treats. We appreciate all that you do, Jarl, Vanda, Deena, Carolyn & Misty!