

# The Ability Connection

Summer 2026

*A Newsletter by the Trumbull County Board of Developmental Disabilities*

## Athletes Shine in Local Competition

The 15<sup>th</sup> annual Trumbull County Special Olympic Invitational track meet was held on Saturday, May 9th at Arrowhead Stadium in Girard, OH. Over 170 athletes participated from Ashtabula, Columbiana, Geauga, and Portage-Kent, and Trumbull counties. Festivities began with the parade of athletes, led by the Girard R.O.T.C and marching band. Resident vocal soloist, Niko Cappitti, performed the national anthem and Kaylen Ralston guided the athletes in reciting the Special Olympics oath. The invitational included a variety of track and field events.



## In This Issue

|                               |     |
|-------------------------------|-----|
| Special Olympics Invitational | 1   |
| Superintendent's Message      | 2-3 |
| Fairhaven School Activities   | 4   |
| Fairhaven School Graduation   | 5   |
| Ability Walk & Roll           | 6   |
| Transportation                | 7   |
| DSP Recognition               | 8   |

# Funding the Future: Update on Local Growing Financial Pressures



Dear Friends and Partners,

Across our region and throughout Ohio, county boards of developmental disabilities are facing growing financial pressures. Because the work we do is closely connected to the lives of individuals, families, and our broader community, I want to share a clear and honest picture of where the Trumbull County Board of Developmental Disabilities (TCBDD) stands financially—and how we are moving forward.

Budget decisions are never just about numbers. They directly affect the services and supports people rely on every day. That is why it is so important that you remain informed, engaged, and part of the conversation. Our financial situation is serious and requires thoughtful action, but we are not in crisis. We anticipated these pressures and have taken deliberate steps to prepare. Our goal is to protect services, make responsible decisions, and preserve long-term stability for those we serve. Meeting this challenge will require all of us—individuals, families, staff, providers, and community partners—working together.

## Where We Stand Today

For more than 15 years, TCBDD has managed its resources carefully. We have stretched every dollar, reduced waste, strengthened internal processes, secured additional funding where possible, and built reserves for moments like this.

Those reserves are now doing exactly what they were intended to do: giving us time to make strategic, measured decisions rather than reactive ones. They allow us to continue protecting services while we implement long-term solutions.

However, the cost of Medicaid waivers—which fund community-based supports—has increased at an unprecedented rate over the past three years, while our funding has not kept pace. In 2025, we began drawing on our reserves faster than planned. To ensure the long-term sustainability of our services, we must address these financial realities now.

## What's Driving the Pressure?

Several major factors have converged to create this challenge:

- Federal pandemic funding that temporarily supplemented our budget has ended.
- The state increased pay rates for direct support professionals from approximately \$11 per hour in 2019 to about \$19 per hour today. This was a necessary and positive step for the dedicated professionals providing hands-on care, but it also added substantial costs to county board budgets.
- More people in our community have become eligible for services, and the needs of individuals already receiving support have grown more rapidly than projected.

Yet the most significant issue has been building quietly for over a decade.

Approximately 70% of TCBDD's funding comes from local property tax levies. Unlike many other funding sources, these levies are fixed-sum levies—meaning they generate the same dollar amount year after year, regardless of rising property values or inflation.

Simply put, our primary revenue source has remained essentially flat since 2010.

While the cost of groceries, utilities, fuel, and healthcare has steadily increased, the dollars supporting essential DD services have not. We are being asked to meet today's demands with yesterday's funding levels. That is the core challenge we face.

### What's Next?

We are not standing still. We are taking proactive steps now to strengthen our financial position while protecting direct services.

Our current focus includes:

- Reviewing business practices and contracts to identify savings that do not impact direct supports.
- Reducing authorized staffing levels by eliminating positions that are currently vacant.
- Maximizing every dollar of state and federal funding for which we are eligible.
- Evaluating programs and services to ensure resources are used as effectively as possible.
- Participating in statewide efforts to modernize Ohio's funding structure for developmental disability services.

Throughout 2026, TCBDD leadership will continue developing additional cost-saving strategies and working with community partners to ensure local revenue aligns with the true cost of services.

Since 1967, TCBDD has successfully navigated difficult circumstances by remaining focused on our mission. We are approaching this challenge with the same commitment, discipline, and resolve.

While we are confident in our ability to preserve quality services for the long term, we also recognize that doing so will require difficult decisions and sustained effort.

### How You Can Help

Ensuring TCBDD's long-term financial stability is not something we can accomplish alone.

It will require the voices of individuals receiving services, families, provider partners, community members, and local and state leaders—all working toward the same goal.

I will continue providing updates through this newsletter, our website, and our social media channels. I will also share opportunities for advocacy as we work with elected officials at both the local and state levels.

Your voice matters—in our community and in Columbus.

Your continued support is needed now more than ever, and I look forward to working together to secure the future of the services and supports our community depends on.

*Edward J. Stark*

Superintendent,

Trumbull County Board of Developmental Disabilities

## Creating Memories With Friends



Fairhaven School celebrated a fabulous prom on May 8th at Sorrento's Restaurant & Banquet Center. Students enjoyed an afternoon filled with dancing, delicious chicken parmesan, and cake while making wonderful memories with friends and staff. Prior to the dance, students participated in a special promenade held in the Fairhaven School gymnasium, where family and friends gathered to cheer them on and take part in the festivities.

A special thank you goes to the Hubbard High School National Honor Society, whose 25 student members joined in the celebration to dance and socialize with Fairhaven students, helping to make the event even more memorable.

The event also included the crowing of Prom King, Carrington Smith. The celebration was a tremendous success, and a wonderful time was had by all!



## Students Welcome In Spring

Students and staff at Fairhaven School enjoyed all the festivities of the annual Spring Fling. The event was filled with an afternoon full of fun, laughter, and school spirit. Students wore matching class t-shirts to help promote unity among classmates. Activities included a dunk tank, foam party, bounce house, face painting, and music provided by Purple Cat. Students also enjoyed a variety of festive treats including nachos, popcorn, snow cones, and cotton candy. The Spring Fling is always a highlight of the school year and provides students and staff with an opportunity to celebrate friendship, school community, and the excitement of the season together.



# A Time of Celebration and New Beginnings

Family, friends, and community members gathered to celebrate the accomplishments of the 2026 graduating class of Fairhaven School on June 2nd. The morning also included a special breakfast, presentation of gifts, and award ceremony.



Abilities Unite Foundation attended and presented each senior with customized Fairhaven School letterman jackets.



Fairhaven School's Preschool Graduation Ceremony was held on June 1st. Family and friends celebrated this special milestone as students were recognized for their growth and accomplishments throughout the school year.

The Preschool Graduation is always a joyful event and a wonderful way to celebrate each students' successes!

## Summer Meal Program Expands

The Summer Meals Program will run from May 27th - July 1<sup>st</sup>. For more information on program guidelines contact Lindsey Ison: [LindseyIson@tcbdd.org](mailto:LindseyIson@tcbdd.org). In addition, eligible students will receive \$120 in Summer EBT benefits beginning in June to help support access to nutritious meals during the summer months.

We're pleased to share we have expanded our Summer Meals Program invitation to include students and families from Mahoning and Columbiana County Boards of Developmental Disabilities.

# Join A Mission To Unite Us All



Get ready for the 5th Annual Ability Walk & Roll, on Saturday, August 8th at 717 Credit Union Field at Eastwood! This special day is a powerful reminder that our communities thrive when everyone—including those with developmental disabilities—is included, supported, and celebrated. It's more than just an event; it's a mission to unite us all in promoting respect and inclusion.

Participants of ALL abilities are invited and welcomed! This day of fellowship and fun features a community resource expo, meet-and-greet with princesses and superheroes and activities. Highlighted by a special walk and roll around the stadium in celebration of those we love and support, the evening also includes a ballpark dinner and tickets to that night's Scrappers game! Dinner includes a personal cheese pizza, chips, a cookie and a drink.

**Individuals with developmental disabilities can attend this experience for free.** General Admission tickets are \$10 each (\$40 value). Families that need financial assistance can request up to 4 free tickets. Contact Dawn Kramer for more information: [DawnKramer@tcbdd.org](mailto:DawnKramer@tcbdd.org) or 330-652-9800

**Be sure to register by July 6<sup>th</sup> to guarantee your event t-shirt.**



Register online or by  
contacting Dawn Kramer:  
330-652-9800  
[DawnKramer@tcbdd.org](mailto:DawnKramer@tcbdd.org)



Scan and view last year's  
event video

# School Bus Annual Inspection Success

We are proud to share that TCBDD successfully completed the first of our two annual school bus inspections, and thanks to the outstanding work of our maintenance team, we are excited to announce that we passed 8 out of 8 inspected buses! This is a huge accomplishment and a direct reflection of the time, effort, and attention to detail that goes into keeping our fleet safe and reliable for daily transportation.

An annual school bus inspection is a detailed, state-required safety check where each bus is thoroughly examined to ensure it meets all safety and mechanical standards. Inspectors review critical components such as brakes, steering, tires, lights, emergency exits, mirrors, suspension, and other essential systems. These inspections are extremely important because they ensure our buses are safe, dependable, and fully prepared to transport students every day.



A special thank you goes to Mike Ciferno, Paul Menhat, and JonPaul Menhart for your hard work and dedication to the safety of our students. Your commitment plays a major role in the success of our transportation program and the trust our families place in us.

We also want to recognize that this was Mike Ciferno's final annual inspection before his retirement on June 30, 2026. Mike, thank you for your years of service, expertise, and dedication. You have made a lasting impact, and you will truly be missed!

Our next annual inspection is scheduled for July 7, 2026, and we are looking forward to another successful outcome.

## Transportation Team Strengthens Partnerships Through Specialized Training

We are excited to announce that our TCBDD Transportation Leadership Team will be traveling to Howland Local School District Transportation to provide specialized training for their bus drivers. This training will focus on wheelchair compliance, transportation safety, and the proper methods of wheelchair securement to ensure students are transported safely and with dignity.

Our leadership staff are Certified Child Safety Restraint System (CSRS) Technicians for school buses and bring years of hands-on experience transporting students who use wheelchairs and specialized mobility equipment. Their knowledge and dedication to safe student transportation make them an outstanding resource for our community partners.

This is an exciting opportunity for TCBDD to collaborate with a local school district, share best practices, and help strengthen transportation safety across our region. We are proud to support Howland Local Schools and to play a role in serving even more students throughout our community.

# Team Member Elevates Voice of DSPs

Jeff Hovis, who has served as a Direct Support Professional with Clear Skies Ahead for the past 10 years, was selected to participate in the Spring 2026 cohort of ANCOR's nationally recognized DSP Ambassador Program. This highly competitive program recognizes outstanding DSPs across the country and supports their growth as advocates and leaders in the field of developmental disabilities services.

Jeff primarily supports individuals in Geauga County, while also contributing in Trumbull County. His selection is a testament not only to his dedication and professionalism, but also to the quality of support and commitment to community inclusion that we strive for at Clear Skies Ahead.

The program was held May 18–21, 2026, near Salt Lake City, Utah, and focused on strengthening skills in storytelling, advocacy, and public representation of the DSP workforce.

We are incredibly proud of Jeff and grateful for the opportunity this brings to elevate the voice of direct support professionals and the individuals they serve. Please join us in congratulating Jeff on this well-deserved recognition!



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