WELCOME

Greetings! Welcome to the Iowa Developmental Disabilities Council’s annual magazine, *Creating Change*.

2022 marked the first year of the Iowa DD Council’s five-year plan for progress. This year we worked to increase leadership, advocacy, and civic participation with our network of advocates. We also increased employment opportunities for Iowans with disabilities.

The DD Council would not be successful in our efforts without the leadership and hard work of our council members, self-advocates, and family advocates. This magazine provides a snapshot of the impact the Iowa DD Council and advocates have had in creating change in Iowa. We hope you enjoy revisiting everything we have accomplished this year!

Sincerely,

Brooke Lovelace, Executive Director

HAPPY NEW YEAR!

My name is Brady Werger, and I am the Chair for the Iowa DD council. The council has allowed me and other self-advocates to have a voice, tell their advocacy stories, and create the change that they want to see in Iowa. I am excited to be a part of the positive work that the council continues to do. This magazine highlights some of that success. I know that myself and others will continue to be better advocates thanks to the council.

Brady Werger, Iowa DD Council Chair
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**IOWA DD COUNCIL UPDATES | 4**
4 | Council Members
4 | About the Iowa DD Council
5 | Rebrand

**AWARENESS MONTHS | 6**
6 | DDAM
7 | NDEAM

**COVID-19 EDUCATION | 8**
8 | COVID-19 Vaccine Campaign

**2022 MYM! CONFERENCE | 8**
8 | Knowledge is a Superpower
9 | Mia Peterson Award
9 | Lifetime Advocacy Award
10 | Keynote Speakers
11 | MYM! Sponsors

**LEADING CHANGE | 12**
12 | Monthly Capitol Chats
12 | Take Action Center
12 | Youth Leadership Academy
13 | Community Living Ambassadors
13 | Virtual Legislative Town Hall
13 | Capitol Advocacy Days

**VOTING FOR ACCESSIBILITY | 14**
14 | Primary Elections
14 | Capitol Snapshots

**VOTING MATERIALS | 15**
15 | Position Statement on Voting
15 | Inclusive Communications
15 | Voter Assistance

**COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS | 16**
16 | Advocacy 101 Training
16 | Updates to I Able Plans
16 | Summit at Wartburg College

**COMMUNITY EMPLOYMENT | 17**
17 | Customized Discoverys

**2023 PREVIEW | 18**
18 | Town Hall Grants
18 | 2023 Make Your Mark! Conference
19 | 2023 Legislative Agenda
IOWA DD COUNCIL UPDATES

IOWA DD COUNCIL MEMBERS

Kristin Aller, Self-Advocate
Alecia Balduf, Self-Advocate
Julie Bergeson, Iowa Department on Aging
Roxanne Cogil, Family Advocate
M.J. (Matt) Conaway, Self-Advocate+
Carol Cross, Family Advocate
Brittney Drinovsky, Family Advocate*
Eric Evans, Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services+
Amber Gale, Family Advocate
Catherine Hedderich, Self-Advocate
Kevin Harris, Family Advocate+
Mike Hoenig, Self-Advocate+
Hugh Kelly, Vice-Chair, Self-Advocate*
Scott Lyon, Disability Rights Iowa
Paula Motsinger, Iowa Medicaid Department
Tiffiny Poage, Iowa Department of Education
Rob Roozeboom, Self-Advocate*
Mark Smith, Family Advocate
Steve Steveson, Family Advocate
George Thompson, Family Advocate+
Mike Vratsinas, Self-Advocate
Judy Warth, University Center for Disabilities and Development*
Brady Werger, Chair, Self-Advocate*
Jean Willard, Child Health Specialty Clinics

* Executive Committee member
+ New member in 2021

ABOUT THE IOWA DD COUNCIL

The Iowa Developmental Disabilities Council was created in response to a federal law, the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act. The purpose of this law is to make sure people with developmental disabilities and their families receive the services and supports they need and have a say in those services.

The Iowa DD Council advocates for services and supports that help Iowans with disabilities live and fully participate in their communities. We do this through advocacy, systems change, and capacity building activities. The Council is made up of 24 volunteers who represent people with disabilities and their families, state agencies, and other disability advocacy partners.

Every five years, the DD Council develops a state plan with goals to address new ways of improving the lives of Iowans with developmental disabilities. Self-advocates, families, state agencies, providers, educators, and other stakeholders provide input into the development of the state plan. These are the DD Council’s goals for the next five years:

1. Develop strong advocates and leaders who create the change they want.
2. Improve policy and practice that positively impacts people with disabilities.
3. Strengthen communities to support people with disabilities.
REBRAND

The Iowa DD Council network consists of three entities:

1. Iowa DD Council
2. infoNET
3. Iowans with Disabilities in Action

Each entity works together as one to create change with and for persons with developmental disabilities so they can live, work, learn, and play in the community of their choice.

In August, we launched a new website that makes it easier to find all of our resources in one place!

Now, all of the resources and information from the Iowa DD Council, infoNET, and Iowans with Disabilities in Action can be found in one convenient location, at iowaddcouncil.org.

We are excited to offer a more organized and accessible resource for members of our network. We are on a mission to support members like YOU in your advocacy!
March is National Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month (DDAM). The purpose of this month is to raise awareness about the inclusion of people with developmental disabilities in all facets of community life. It also aims to bring awareness to the barriers that people with disabilities face in connecting to the communities in which they live.

Through various advocacy efforts, the Iowa DD Council aims to ensure that Iowans with developmental disabilities and their families participate in the design of and have access to needed community services, individualized supports, and other forms of assistance that promote self-determination, independence, productivity, and integration and inclusion in all aspects of community life.

To celebrate DDAM 2022, the Iowa DD Council and Iowa’s University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (Iowa’s UCEDD) hosted a virtual town hall. We were joined by numerous Iowa legislators and Community Living Ambassadors project participants for an interactive discussion on the ambassadors’ lives, successes, and personal journeys in transitioning into community living as individuals with disabilities.

Watch the webinar here: https://youtu.be/ciykav5MgVM
NATIONAL DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT AWARENESS MONTH

National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) is celebrated every October. The purpose of this month is to educate people about disability employment issues and celebrate the many contributions of America's workers with disabilities.

In 1945, Congress enacted a law declaring the first week in October each year “National Employ the Physically Handicapped Week.” In 1962, the word “physically” was removed to acknowledge the employment needs and contributions of individuals with all types of disabilities. Then, in 1988, Congress expanded the week to a month and changed the name to National Disability Employment Awareness Month.

As part of NDEAM 2021, the Iowa DD Council interviewed advocates around the state to learn more about their employment stories. Ian Jensen, Mike Vratsinas, and Rob Roozeboom each shared details about what they do for work, their favorite parts of their jobs, and why it’s important for everyone—including individuals with disabilities—to have the opportunity to be employed.

Additionally, in partnership with Iowa Workforce Development, the Iowa DD Council hosted an informational webinar called “More Money Less Problems: Learn How to Work & Keep Your Benefits.” This was geared toward self-advocates interested in learning how to get a job, work more hours at their job, and keep their benefits without losing services.

During this event we were joined by Brian S. Dennis, M.S., CRC, Workforce Program Coordinator for Disability Services with Iowa Workforce Development and Melissa Boens, Medicaid Program Manager with Iowa Medicaid Enterprise on Medicaid for Employed Persons with Disabilities (MEPD).

Employment Videos:

- Ian Jensen
  TechZone

- Mike Vratsinas
  Maple Grove Elementary

- Rob Roozeboom
  Rise Ministries


“More Money, Less Problems: Learn How to Work & Keep Your Benefits” webinar:

Watch here: [https://youtu.be/WpipCdjsBWs](https://youtu.be/WpipCdjsBWs)
COVID-19 EDUCATION

COVID-19 VACCINE CONFIDENCE CAMPAIGN

As the COVID-19 pandemic continued, people with developmental disabilities remained at a higher risk for serious illness from the virus. Receiving the COVID-19 vaccine and boosters is the best way to prevent the spread of the virus, and our goal was to educate individuals with disabilities—as well as their family members and support staff—about the benefits and accessibility of the vaccine.

We updated our online resources to include the latest information about who is eligible for the vaccine, how to get one, and more. Plus, as part of our #LookingForward campaign, we shared a story from Emma Bouza and her daughter Ruby, who has Down Syndrome. Emma explained why her family decided to get the COVID-19 vaccine, what they were able to do after being vaccinated, and why she thought other people should consider getting the vaccine.

Watch Emma and Ruby’s video: https://youtu.be/VKEbD2NN5Rc
Access COVID-19 resources: https://www.iowaddcouncil.org/covid-19
#LookingForward provider toolkit: https://bit.ly/3Cua25o

2022 MAKE YOUR MARK SELF-ADVOCACY CONFERENCE

KNOWLEDGE IS A SUPERPOWER: MAKE IT YOURS!

This year’s conference theme was all about sharing information to strengthen and empower attendees in their advocacy efforts. Each session was designed to gain knowledge and skills to become a superhero for individuals and their community.
ANNUAL MIA PETERSON SELF-ADVOCACY AWARD

Kris Graves was the winner of the 2022 Mia Peterson Self-Advocacy Award! This award was created in 2021 to honor Mia Peterson, a lifelong leader and disability advocate. The purpose of this award is to recognize an Iowan with a disability who embodies Mia’s legacy and works to advocate for the rights of all people with disabilities.

Kris was nominated for the Mia Peterson Self-Advocacy Award because of her efforts to create change by educating people about her struggles with, and self-advocacy around, mental health issues, while also advocating for the needs of other types of disabilities.

After living in two in-patient mental health facilities and a group home, she successfully advocated for herself to return to the community to live on her own. She has now lived successfully in the community for over 16 years and is employed part-time as a peer support counselor. She has also been actively participating in disability advocacy groups for the last six years.

“Kris has come a long way in her life, from the onset of mental health issues and being forced to live in institutions, to advocating for herself to live in the community,” said Dawn Francis, who, along with Brady Werger, nominated Kris for the award. “She is actively engaged in her community, continues to tell her story to educate people, and continues to advocate on various disability issues through the various groups she is in.”

“Kris is a great person and so supportive,” said Brady. “She is someone who, if you are having a bad day, you can call her and she will put a smile on your face.”

The entire Iowa DD Council congratulates Kris on her wonderful achievements! She is truly dedicated to creating positive change for all Iowans with disabilities.

2022 LIFETIME ADVOCACY AWARD

Creating positive change isn’t always easy and can take years of effort. This year, we felt it was important to recognize the great work of someone who has spent more than 30 years advocating for and with people with disabilities. Michael Hoenig received the 2022 Lifetime Advocacy Award for his ongoing work as an advocate, mentor, and friend to the disability community.
2022 Lifetime Advocacy Award Continued

In 1993, Mike helped create an advocacy training project called Iowans with Disabilities Exercising Advocacy Skills (IDEAS) and went on to become involved in numerous other initiatives including the Conner Training Consortium, the Iowa Department of Public Health’s Living Well with a Disability program, the People First conference, and the Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental Disabilities training program. As co-chair of the Council on Disability Awareness, Mike worked to ensure that the University of Iowa’s websites met the highest standards of accessibility. In 2016, the university’s websites were cited as the most accessible in the nation. He also co-hosts the Disability Exchange podcast!

Mike recently retired after working as a program coordinator at the UCEDD for 29 years. For the past three years, he also worked closely with the Iowa DD Council to implement a new youth leadership academy. Mike is continuing his lifelong advocacy work by serving as a DD council member.

Robert Bacon, former director of the UCEDD, was one of the people who introduced Mike when he received this award during the Make Your Mark! Conference.

“The title of the award describes Mike’s life perfectly,” he said. “Because of who Mike is as a person and lifelong advocate, Iowa is in a better place.”

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS USED KNOWLEDGE AS THEIR SUPERPOWER

Two real-life superheroes joined the Make Your Mark! Conference as our keynote speakers to share their stories of advocacy and employment success!

Eric Garcia is the senior Washington correspondent for The Independent and a columnist for MSNBC. He is also the author of We’re Not Broken: Changing the Autism Conversation. As a person with autism, Eric has worked hard to navigate his professional roles and successfully advocate for himself as a journalist.

Advocating at the local, state, and federal levels can seem intimidating for many, but advocacy is one of the best tools communities can use to influence positive change. Kayla McKeon, Manager of Grassroots Advocacy at the National Down Syndrome Society and the first registered lobbyist with Down syndrome, shared her advocacy journey, the importance of sharing one’s story, and how to win over changemakers to make a positive difference in your community.
2022 MYM! SPONSORS

Thank you to this year’s conference sponsors! Without the partnership of these organizations, we would not be able to offer so many great sessions and educational opportunities during the event.

CareSource | Exclusive Sponsor

CareSource is nationally recognized for leading the industry in providing member-centric health care coverage. The company’s managed care business model was founded in 1989 and today CareSource is one of the nation’s largest Medicaid managed care plans.

IAble | Protector Sponsor

IAble is a savings and investment plan that allows individuals with disabilities and their families the opportunity to save and invest their money for disability-related expenses on a tax-advantaged basis. All this without risking essential federal government benefits. IAble is sponsored by the State of Iowa and administered by the Iowa State Treasurer, Michael L. Fitzgerald.

Amerigroup | Star Sponsor

Amerigroup Iowa is one of the managed care organizations providing benefits and services to members enrolled in Iowa’s Medicaid programs: IA Health Link, Iowa Health and Wellness Plan, and Healthy and Well Kids in Iowa.

University of Iowa Center for Disabilities and Development (UCEDD) | Star Sponsor

Iowa Compass and Project Recovery Iowa are programs supported by the Iowa Department of Health and Human Services and are located at University of Iowa Health Care’s Center for Disabilities and Development, Iowa’s University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities.

Iowa Compass has information about programs and services for Iowans with disabilities, their families and service providers. Project Recovery Iowa is a program designed to support Iowans of all ages with disabilities and complex health conditions (as well as their families and service providers) with feelings of isolation, anxiety and depression magnified by the pandemic and natural disasters.

ChildServe | Sensory Room Sponsor

ChildServe improves the health and well-being of nearly 5,200 children each year through specialized clinical, home, and community-based programs and services. They are experts in pediatric rehabilitation and care for children and young adults who have a wide variety of developmental delays, disabilities, injuries, and other special healthcare needs.

They offer specialty services, uniquely equipped facilities, and state-of-the-art technology. Their mission is simple: They partner with families to help children with special healthcare needs live a great life. The children and young adults they serve inspire them to provide possibilities and improve quality of life in a caring environment.

NEW THIS YEAR: SENSORY ROOM

There was an exciting new addition to the 2022 conference: a sensory room sponsored by ChildServe! This was an opportunity to take a break from the conference and relax in a quiet space with low lighting and calming activities.
LEADING CHANGE

MONTHLY CAPITOL CHATS

Monthly virtual Capitol Chats give advocates the chance to learn about legislative policies impacting Iowans with disabilities. During the eight Capitol Chats hosted this year, our policy analyst Amy Campbell and (now former) public policy director Bill Kallestad provided advocacy advice and updates about what was happening at the Capitol.

“Capitol Chats kept me connected and knowledgeable on what’s going on,” said one attendee.

These events are also great opportunities for the public to ask questions and discuss the latest changes. Nearly 300 people participated this year!

Capitol Chats will continue in 2023! Visit https://iowaddcouncil.org/upcoming-events/ for upcoming dates.

TAKE ACTION CENTER

Another resource that is part of our infoNET project is our Take Action Center. Hosted on our website, the Take Action Center allows people to find out who their legislators are in Iowa and Washington D.C. and send a message to them directly. Advocates can craft their own message or use one developed by our staff about issues they care about.

This year, 31 individuals sent 121 messages to members of Congress or the president. We had more than 37 different advocates send 90 messages to state senators and representatives and 20 messages to our governor.

YOUTH LEADERSHIP ACADEMY

The third annual Youth Leadership Academy (YLA) took place during the summer of 2022. YLA is an introduction to leadership skills for youth with disabilities. The interactive training focuses on five themes: leadership, goal-setting, self-determination, civic engagement, and social networking and mentoring.

“I think my time during the Youth Leadership Academy helped me in a way that I can support the Iowa legislature, and being a leader helped me to meet new people not only to talk about my inspiring disability story, but also to be social whenever I avoid my anxiety,” said Aaron, one of this year’s YLA graduates. “By doing that, the more confident I become, the more of a leader I become, so that in my future I don’t have to be anxious at all, but confident.”

We were proud to have 10 individuals graduate from the program with new skills this year! We were able to have an in-person graduation celebration at the DD Council office.

YLA is a collaborative effort by members of the Iowa DD Council, the Iowa Department of Human Rights, Access 2 Independence, the UCEDD, and ASK Resources.
COMMUNITY LIVING AMBASSADORS

The Iowa DD Council continues to proudly sponsor the Community Living Ambassador project with Iowa’s UCEDD. These ambassadors share their personal stories of moving out of institutions and into communities of their choice. Through these experiences, they discover the rewards and challenges of community living and the options for housing, services, jobs, and benefits.

The Community Ambassadors also shared their stories at the 2022 Make Your Mark! Conference during a breakout session entitled “Community Living and Advocacy are Superpowered.”

VIRTUAL LEGISLATIVE TOWN HALL

In January, we hosted a virtual legislative open house. This event was a chance for people to learn more about the council’s legislative priorities for 2022 and why they’re important. We invited legislators to attend and take part in the conversation to help us continue making positive changes for Iowans.

Watch the recording: [https://youtu.be/bACXbAMXslk](https://youtu.be/bACXbAMXslk)

CAPITOL ADVOCACY DAYS

Iowans with Disabilities in Action, a project of the Iowa DD Council, offers grant funds for advocacy training and support to local advocacy groups and family members of individuals with disabilities. Organizations that receive these funds have the opportunity to attend an advocacy training, followed by a visit to the Iowa State Capitol! If legislators are available, participants can meet with them at the Capitol and talk with them about disability-related issues.

**Participant feedback:**

“I learned so much!”

“This was a very thought-out morning of training, followed by a trip to the Capitol.”

“I really enjoyed going to the Capitol to discuss the benefits of peer support.”

**Four groups took part in Capitol Advocacy Days in 2022:**

- First Resources Corp.
- Iowa Family Leadership Training Institute
- Life Connections
- Spina Bifida Association of Iowa
VOTING FOR ACCESSIBILITY

PRIMARY ELECTIONS

A study by the Election Assistance Commission found that in the 2020 elections, 11% of voters with disabilities had some difficulty voting; that means more than 1.95 million voters with disabilities experienced challenges. This is double the rate of people without disabilities.

One of the Iowa DD Council’s key efforts is to make voting easy by providing training and educational materials before elections. Iowans with disabilities and their families are impacted by a large majority of legislation proposed at the Capitol, so our goal is to help them stay informed through our resources like infoNET and monthly Capitol Chats.

Before the 2022 primary elections, we held a voter education campaign to explain the purpose of the elections, what was required in order to vote, and what kind of voting assistance was available.

To help people learn more about the voting process, we also held a voter training during our August 2022 Capitol Chat. This was a chance to share important information about election dates, steps to register to vote, understanding voting rights, how to cast a ballot, and more.

Attendees were given resources to assist as they prepare for upcoming elections. They left feeling empowered and ready to exercise their fundamental right to vote in the upcoming election.

During the 2022 Make Your Mark! Conference, we were honored to be joined by Molly Widen from the Iowa Secretary of State’s Office who spoke with a panel of advocates and our attendees about various topics related to voter education. This was an informative session that empowered attendees to exercise their right to vote in the upcoming primaries!

CAPITOL SNAPSHOT

If you think it’s tough to keep up with everything that goes on at the Iowa State Capitol, you’re not alone. That’s why we started recording Capitol Snapshots! These are short, weekly video updates posted every Monday morning during the legislative session. The quick updates give you easy-to-understand information about the most recent legislative news.

Iowa Secretary of State Paul Pate even joined the conversation in April! Check out the recording on infoNET’s YouTube page. All Capitol Snapshots are also on the Iowa DD Council website.

Watch the April recording: https://youtu.be/Rdzo3_VHHtA
All Capitol Snapshots: iowaddcouncil.org/capitol-snapshot
VOTING MATERIALS

IOWA DD COUNCIL POSITION STATEMENT ON VOTING

All people have the right to have their voices heard at the polls!

We encourage you to tell your lawmakers about the voting challenges for people with disabilities. Voting should be made easier for people with disabilities—not harder. Trained poll workers, accessible voting locations, and an easier voting system that works for all Iowans are necessary.

Learn more: https://bit.ly/3k5Ss1h

INCLUSIVE COMMUNICATION AND DISCUSSIONS

Everybody has unique needs and abilities. People with disabilities, people whose first language is not English, and people with limited education are often excluded from public discussions—even when those discussions are about themselves. Proper inclusion ensures all people, regardless of ability or background, can participate in all aspects of life.

The Iowa DD Council is dedicated to making meetings and public discussions more inclusive for everyone. Here are a few tips we’ve put together that can help:

• Use people-first language
• Use plain language
• Use a reading level for all

• Use respectful communication
• Prepare for your meetings

Learn more: iowaddcouncil.org/inclusive-communications

VOTER ASSISTANCE

Collectively, more than 450,000 Iowans living with disabilities can make a significant impact on the public policies and practices that affect their daily lives. We have updated our online resources to make it easier for Iowans with disabilities to understand and participate in the voting process.

Explore all voting resources: iowaddcouncil.org/voter-assistance
COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

ADVOCACY 101 TRAINING

Advocacy is important, and we want our community members to have the tools to effectively advocate for themselves and others. We started off January 2022 with an Advocacy 101 training that focused on what advocates do, why advocacy is important, how to shape your message, and other ways to advocate successfully.

Watch the webinar: https://youtu.be/-5Abm6lon_0

IABLE AND IOWA DD COUNCIL: UPDATES TO IABLE PLANS

IABLE, Iowa’s Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) plan, updated its enrollment process this year to break down barriers for someone opening an account on behalf of an individual with a disability. To spread the word about this crucial update and other important facts about the plan, State Treasurer Fitzgerald’s IABLE team and the Iowa DD Council hosted an educational webinar in May.

Watch the webinar: https://youtu.be/aMNzVf8qy0E

SUMMIT AT WARTBURG COLLEGE

Advocates, local area providers, and social work students gathered at Wartburg College for a summit hosted by the Iowa DD Council and Wartburg College’s Slife Institute for Social Work Consultation, Research & Training and Mental Health/Disability Services of the East Central Region.

Attendees learned more about the Iowa Developmental Disabilities Council, watched a free screening of the film Intelligent Lives, and participated in tabling sessions to share their thoughts about what services and supports are still needed for individuals with disabilities in communities across Iowa.
INCREASING COMMUNITY EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

CUSTOMIZED DISCOVERY WITH IOWA VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SERVICES (IVRS)

Customized Discovery is a person-centered approach to employment designed to increase competitive, integrated job placement. Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services (IVRS), in partnership with the Iowa DD Council, has used this method to assist Iowans who have significant disabilities, haven’t worked, worked primarily in segregated settings, or had little vocational success to become and remain successful members of the workforce.

With Customized Discovery, candidates work with a job coach to identify their skills, interests, abilities, conditions, contributions, and support in order to design a pathway to a career that focuses on the candidate’s interest, talents, and contributions—not limitations.

Vienna Hoang, IVRS Resource Manager, said, “IVRS continues to see successful outcomes through the use of Customized Discovery/Customized Employment not only because of the funding through the Iowa DD Council but also because the level of partnership goes beyond the funding. The Iowa DD Council walks the talk when it comes to leading by example, and that has permeated into the communication and partnership between Community Rehabilitation Program partners, IVRS, and case managers at DHHS and the MCOs.”

Chandler’s story is a great example. Chandler has a passion for taking care of animals. Customized Discovery enabled him to find a job at PAWS & More Animal Shelter in Washington, Iowa, where he is part of the Animal Care Team support staff. Chandler says he loves his job and feels like he is a part of the team. Chandler is also passionate about photography and videography, and he will soon be able to incorporate these skills into his job by updating PAWS & More’s social media accounts.

Those working alongside Chandler say they have seen his confidence increase throughout this process. “I do believe that if you love what you do, it’s not work. It’s a purpose in life,” said Anetia Woodsmall, WCDC Job Developer. “Chandler’s purpose is to rescue dogs and find a loving home for them to live in.”
2023 PREVIEW

There are so many things to look forward to in the year ahead! Find out what we’ll be advocating for at the Capitol and what to expect throughout the year.

TOWN HALL GRANTS

Iowans with Disabilities in Action, a project of the Iowa DD Council, will continue offering grant funds to local advocacy groups that are led by people with disabilities. These are groups that plan to take action in their community by hosting a town hall meeting with elected officials while encouraging Iowans with disabilities to be advocates on disability-related issues.

Local groups of individuals with disabilities, family members, friends, and advocates with an interest in supporting and encouraging Iowans with disabilities to get involved in advocacy are eligible to apply for a town hall grant. The groups that are selected will be expected to meet with elected officials and host a town hall meeting on disability-related issues.

Groups may be formal or informal, but the majority of the members must be individuals with disabilities.

To learn more, visit our website here: iowaddcouncil.org/grant-applications.

2023 MAKE YOUR MARK! CONFERENCE

Gain tools and information to strengthen your advocacy efforts at the annual Make Your Mark! Conference! This event is targeted toward Iowans with disabilities who want to be more involved in advocacy at a local, state, or federal level. Parents, family members, caregivers, direct support professionals, and other disability advocates are also invited to attend.

Stay tuned for more information about this year’s conference theme and dates.

Interested in speaking or exhibiting?

If you’re a leader in your community or work closely with Iowans with disabilities, we’d love for you to participate in our 2023 event! You can learn more about our exhibitor and sponsor opportunities on our website at www.iowaddcouncil.org/mym-conference. Please contact us at contactus@iowaddcouncil.org if you have any questions or are interested in getting involved.
2023 LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

There are several topics we expect to address with legislators this year:

- Fully fund healthcare services and community-based supports to address the workforce crisis in both rural and urban areas.
- Support an inclusive and accessible community for all Iowans.
- Reduce and eliminate ALL Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS) waiting lists.

Our legislative agenda highlights the stories of several people whose lives could be greatly enhanced by changes made at the Capitol this year. Here is Dr. M.J. Conaway's story.

With multiple degrees, including two doctorates, Dr. M.J. Conaway, a.k.a. Matt, is an intellectual, polymath, and scholar. He is also a 54-year-old man with mixed spastic athetoid quadriplegic cerebral palsy, autistic characteristics, posttraumatic stress disorder, and more. Despite having dysarthric speech, he is bilingual in English and German. He types very fast with his mouthstick and drives a power chair with his head.

Even though he requires total assistance with activities of daily living, Matt has been on his own for 30 years. He lived all over the country, far away from so-called “natural supports,” before settling in Iowa. Currently, due to the home care shortage in Iowa City and elsewhere, he lives in a nursing facility in Indianola.

After losing home care in 2019, Matt’s initial institutionalization at the University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics (UIHC) was isolating. Before UIHC, he appreciated his privacy, his autonomy, living in his own home, and the freedom to go out into the community.

UIHC denied Matt “day passes” to leave because if he was stable enough to leave, Medicare would not pay for his stay. The cost of his 10-month hospital stay of unskilled care was $750,000. In 2020, he was transferred to a nursing home in Indianola and later transitioned to a host home in Ankeny. Matt only stayed for six months as the requirements of that funding program were not flexible enough to meet his needs. He ultimately chose to return to the nursing home as it allowed him some freedom, autonomy, and independence.

Matt would like to have his own home again, where he enjoys cooking and being out and about in the community. He can only do this if he can get supported community living set up. He is no longer willing to do come-and-go care from individual providers, as the risk of abandonment by underpaid caregivers is much too great.
MISSION

Create change with and for persons with developmental disabilities so they can live, work, learn, and play in the community of their choosing.