

Supporting Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) in Innovative Ways

In November, the Cuyahoga DD Board approved grants of \$50,000 each to the Developmental Disabilities Provider Consortium (DDPC), the HELP Foundation, and Rose-Mary. These organizations will use the money to find creative ways to address barriers to transportation, housing, and childcare – issues that are not related to DSP wages but still impact a person’s ability to do their job effectively.

One innovative idea addressing transportation involves working on a partnership with Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority (GCRTA) to develop “mini-routes” to support DSPs working third shift. Another involves finding a way to use flexible spending accounts (FSAs) for ride share apps like Uber and Lyft to help DSPs access safe transportation when they need it. Recognizing that payroll delays when starting a new job can affect someone's ability to pay their bills, several agencies are looking at ways to support new hires who might need financial help before they receive that first paycheck. One agency plans to use the money to give DSPs one month’s pay as an advance to help with housing and/or other needs they may have as they start their new jobs. Yet another is looking at ways they can support DSPs by helping with security deposits and first month’s rent.

Again, none of these issues relate to the day-to-day work of a DSP supporting people with disabilities, but all of them contribute to whether a person can show up for work and perform at their job well. Cuyahoga DD is proud to have another way to support DSPs through these innovative ideas.



C U Y A H O G A C O U N T Y
Board of Developmental Disabilities
1275 Lakeside Avenue • Cleveland, OH 44114-1129
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Coming Up

Cuyahoga DD Board Meetings
January 25, 2024
February 22, 2024
March 28, 2024

Board meetings begin at 5:30 p.m.
unless otherwise noted.

Agenda and meeting information
can be found on our website:
www.CuyahogaBDD.org



A Message from the Superintendent

If I had to use one word to describe 2023, I think it would be the word “investment.” Last year, we saw a light shine on the developmental disabilities (DD) system – statewide and here in Cuyahoga County – in ways we have never seen before. Together, we invested time and energy into a campaign that helped our elected officials understand the DD system’s critical needs. This action that we took together resulted in a historic \$1.5 billion investment in the DD system in the 2024 and 2025 biennium budget. Thank you for your advocacy.

We made many investments locally last year as well. In the fall, community partners like Playhouse Square and the Cleveland Orchestra partnered with us and made strategic investments in creating inclusive programming, and the Cuyahoga DD Board recently voted to invest in inclusive spaces at the Cleveland Metroparks Zoo and the Great Lakes Science Center. Our Board also recently voted to approve an investment in supporting direct support professionals (DSPs) in new and innovative ways. You can read more about these projects in this newsletter.

As we move into 2024, I hope you share my excitement as we watch what comes of these significant investments in accessibility and inclusion.

I wish you and yours a very happy new year!



Amber C. Gibbs
Superintendent & CEO

Ohio's Biennium Budget – What it Means for the DD System

On July 3, Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine signed and approved the state's two-year operating budget. In 2024 and 2025, Ohio will invest \$1.5 billion in new funds to support people with disabilities. Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities Director Kim Hauck said the "historic investment" made through the budget would not have been possible without "the collective advocacy from the DD community – many of whom made their voices heard by providing passionate testimony during the legislative process." Here are some highlights of how Ohio will invest those funds.

Increasing Support for Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) – Improving DSP wages has long been a topic of conversation in Ohio. The goal of this budget would be to increase DSPs to a rate of \$18 per hour before the end of fiscal year 2025. DODD hopes these funds will increase availability of services like respite care, adult day support, transportation, complex care, and more.

Supporting Youth with Complex Needs – The budget will provide \$5 million per year to better aid youth with complex needs and their families. The funding will be used to provide short-term stabilization and long-term residential settings; increase ICF options, and increase the impact of the Multi-Disciplinary Comprehensive Assessment Team (MCAT) and coaching for families.

Investing in Technology – More than \$3 million per fiscal year will fund the DODD Technology First initiative, which creates regional technology support and close-to-home opportunities for people to try technology that may help them. There will also be rate increases for Remote Support services and additional funds to help providers develop their own technology services. Remember, we have several options for people in Cuyahoga County to try technology including our Lending Library, Custom Living Environment (CLE), and TryTech Apartments. Ask the Cuyahoga DD staff member you work with for more information.

Cuyahoga DD Partners with Great Lakes Science Center and Cleveland Metroparks Zoo

In November, the Cuyahoga DD Board voted to approve a \$65,000 grant to support the Great Lakes Science Center in creating an on-site sensory space and to replace restroom doors throughout the center with ones that are accessible. Cuyahoga DD experts will help the Science Center create and fill the sensory space with items that will support people who might be overstimulated during their visit.

Earlier this year, the Board also voted to approve an \$80,000 grant to the Cleveland Zoological Society, which will be used for a sensory space and the addition of universal changing tables. Again, Cuyahoga DD experts will consult on the installation of the sensory space and the changing tables, which will ensure all zoo visitors have safe and private restroom access.

The Science Center and the Zoo are just two of the latest Cuyahoga County attractions that partner with Cuyahoga DD to make their programming and spaces more accessible. Many of Cuyahoga County's most well-known institutions are meeting their patrons with DD in a way to better ensure a positive experience.

- The Cleveland Orchestra, in collaboration with Cuyahoga DD, presented its first sensory-friendly concert at Severance Music Center at 2:00 p.m. on Saturday, Nov. 4. Its next sensory-friendly performance will be Feb. 24.
- Playhouse Square partners with Cuyahoga DD to offer sensory-friendly performances of family entertainment. Lights are not fully dimmed, ushers help ensure nobody is overwhelmed, and quiet spaces are made available outside of the performance area.



Esterly Photography

- Cuyahoga DD supported moCa Cleveland to create and distribute activity kits to people in under-resourced communities without internet access. Each Creative Tool Box included activities by artists who are also from the disability arts ecosystem.
- The Cleveland Museum of Art has introduced Sensory-Friendly Saturdays. They will provide adaptations to meet diverse sensory-processing needs the third Saturday of each month from 9:00 to 10:00 a.m.

Cuyahoga DD is happy to connect with local organizations that are looking to become more inclusive and accessible. And our Mobile Sensory Space is also available for community events! For more information, reach out to Director of Community Development, Janet Keeler, at Janet@CuyahogaBDD.org.

