



Pause Rhode Island

RHODE ISLANDERS ARE EXPERIENCING UNPRECEDENTED TIMES OF HARDSHIP DUE TO COVID

We have lost jobs, homes, the ability to secure our next meal, and the hardest of all, our loved ones. We're dealing with uncertainty, juggling work from home and childcare priorities. Despite the ongoing chaos around us, we can and will get through this. Now is a good time to pause. To assess. To self-reflect, and ask for help if you can't do this alone.



PAUSE RHODE ISLAND, TOGETHER WITH MENTAL HEALTH EXPERTS, IS HERE TO HELP YOU

[PAUSE Rhode Island](#), along with a unified partnership of Rhode Island mental health experts, is here so you can pause, simply breathe, pick up the pieces, heal and move forward. PAUSE Rhode Island is a program that provides free community outreach and support services for Rhode Islanders dealing with stress and anxiety due to COVID-19.

SUPPORT SERVICES

If you're feeling anxious, stressed, or vulnerable due to COVID-19, we can help you understand your reactions to the pandemic and connect you with agencies that may assist you. We have trained crisis counselors that can provide emotional support to you and your loved ones, and refer you to resources for developing coping skills and stress management techniques.

[Click here for our list of providers.](#)

SELF-CARE RESOURCES

Taking care of yourself during stressful times can help you feel more in control. If you're feeling anxious, stressed, or vulnerable due to COVID-19, we can provide you with self-care tips to help you cope during the pandemic. Check out some of our resources for stress management techniques.

[Family Pandemic Brochure](#)

[Tips for Managing Stress During COVID-19](#)

[Tips to Reduce Your Stress and Anxiety During COVID-19](#)

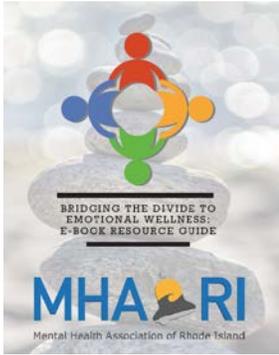
IF YOU OR SOMEONE YOU CARE ABOUT NEEDS ASSISTANCE OR INFORMATION ON HOW TO DEAL WITH COVID-19 RELATED STRESS AND ANXIETY, PLEASE CALL ONE OF OUR 24/7 HOTLINES:

FOR ANYONE 18 AND OVER

Call (401) 414-LINK (5465)

FOR ANYONE UNDER 18

Call 855-KID (543)-LINK (5465)



MHARI Releases Free Behavioral Health Resource Guide

The Mental Health Association of Rhode Island (MHARI) is pleased to announce the release of a free Behavioral Health Resource Guide. It includes 24/7 hotlines, local support groups and free and sliding scale mental health services for those who are uninsured. The Guide is available in E-Book and printable formats in English and Spanish. [Click here](#) to watch a special message from Executive Director, Laurie-Marie Pisciotta, discussing the Guide and the importance of taking care of your mental health.

[E-Book Resource Guide \[r20.rs6.net\]](#)

[Guía De Recursos E-Book \[r20.rs6.net\]](#)

[Printable Resource Guide \[r20.rs6.net\]](#)

[Guía De Recursos Para Imprimir \[r20.rs6.net\]](#)

MHARI Collaborates with Thundermist Health Center to Offer Free Mental Health First Aid Training

Thursday, February 11, 2021

9:00 AM to 3:00 PM



The COVID-19 pandemic is a mental health crisis as much as it is a medical emergency and economic disaster. Many people are struggling with mental health challenges, and as the pandemic subsides and public life opens up again, many will seek help. In order to help increase access to mental health information and resources, MHARI is excited to collaborate with Thundermist Health Center to offer a free

virtual Mental Health First Aid training on February 11, 2021 at 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. The training is part of our Bridging the Divide to Emotional Wellness series and will be facilitated by Jennifer Gaviria, LCSW at Thundermist. This is the first of more training sessions to come, including training in Spanish.

Mental Health First Aid teaches you how to identify, understand and respond to signs of mental illness and substance use disorders. It also reduces stigma and provides behavioral health resources to people who have never before considered treatment. This training gives participants the skills needed to reach out and provide initial support to someone who may be experiencing a mental health challenge, including a substance use disorder and help connect them to the appropriate care.

First Aiders will complete a 2-hour, self-paced online class, and then participate in a 5.5-hour, instructor-led videoconference.



RI Special Election on March 2

The voter registration deadline for the March 2 special election is fast approaching! If you are planning to vote this March and have yet to register, [register online](#) before the January 31 deadline.

[REGISTER TO VOTE](#)

Rhode Island voters will decide seven bond issues during the March special election. Governor Raimondo signed the 2021 state budget that included seven bond issues totaling \$400 million.

The seven questions are listed below:

- **Question 1:** Issues \$107.3 million in bonds for the University of Rhode Island Fine Arts Center, the Rhode Island College Clarke Science Building, and the Community College of Rhode Island
- **Question 2:** Issues \$74 million in bonds for state beaches, parks, recreational facilities, and water projects
- **Question 3:** Issues \$65 million in bonds for building and renovating public housing projects
- **Question 4:** Issues \$71.7 million in bonds for transportation infrastructure
- **Question 5:** Issues \$15 million in bonds for the Early Childhood Care and Education Capital Fund
- **Question 6:** Issues \$7 million in bonds for the Cultural Arts and the Economy Grant Program and the State Preservation Grants Program
- **Question 7:** Issues \$60 million in bonds to fund improvements to industrial facilities infrastructure

You can also register by mail by sending in a paper form. Make sure it is postmarked before January 31 to ensure you will be able to vote.

[DOWNLOAD FORM](#)

Also, if you would like to register to vote in-person go to your local board of canvassers office. Make sure to call ahead to verify their business hours. If you do not know your local board canvassers office number click on the button below to find out.

[FIND THE PHONE NUMBER](#)

If you are not sure of your voter status you can also verify registration using the link below:

[VERIFY VOTER REGISTRATION](#)

Once you're registered don't forget to make your plan to vote. Go to votesaferi.org for all the information you'll need. There's multiple ways to vote in this election such as voting early at your local board of canvassers, voting in-person on Election Day, and by mail ballot.

Webinar: Bridging the Digital Divide for HCBS Beneficiaries

Thursday, February 18, 2021, from 3:00 to 4:30 PM

[Click here to Register](#)

Many older adults and people with disabilities do not have the financial means to pay for internet service in their home nor purchase an internet enabled device - such as a PC, tablet, or smart phone. Further, many lack the skills needed to confidently navigate the internet and digital communities by themselves. This is particularly relevant with the transition to telemedicine and virtual services in place of in-person visits due to the COVID-19 public health emergency. This dynamic is leaving many people vulnerable and isolated, which affects their ability to obtain medical services, procure basic goods and services, address social determinants of health, and stay connected while social distancing.

This webinar provides an overview of key concepts, barriers, and opportunities. The panelist presentations will focus on:

- Funding -- Home internet service and purchase of internet enabled devices.
- Delivery of Services and Supports -- Potential HCBS stakeholder roles: states, service providers, etc. Holistically assessing technology needs. Providing set up and ongoing ongoing supports. Addressing unique challenges rural communities face.

Knowledge and Skills Needed -- Using software and apps. Instilling awareness of online etiquette, protocols, and vulnerabilities. Promoting participation in digital communities and self-sufficiency.

How Do YOU Think Physicians Feel About Intellectual Disability?

Alice Bacherini, a PhD Student in Ethics of Communication, Scientific Research and Technology Innovation at the University of Perugia (Italy), and her mentors Professors Giulia Balboni and Susan M. Havercamp (The Ohio State University, USA) are conducting a study exploring the healthcare experience of adults with intellectual disability. They are interested to know the impressions about physicians, and about physicians' beliefs on intellectual disability.

PROCEDURE:

Participants will be asked to respond to a survey about what they think physicians believe about adults with intellectual disability.

TARGET GROUPS:

1. Family members of children or adults with intellectual disability
2. Disability professionals (e.g., direct support professionals, case managers or others)
3. Healthcare providers (e.g., physicians, dentist, nurses, psychologists) working in the field of I/DD

DURATION:

About 30-40 minutes

To participate, please visit the online survey
(<https://forms.gle/ZHjQmBN4BoUKMyGk9> [forms.gle])

If you have any questions, please email Alice Bacherini
alice.bacherini@studenti.unipg.it.



UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI
DI PERUGIA



Nisonger Center

Future Financial Planning for People with Disabilities Study

The University of Delaware is conducting a [national survey \[nlcdd.us7.list-manage.com\]](http://nlcdd.us7.list-manage.com) focused on future financial planning for people with disabilities and their families. Future financial planning is taking steps to make sure you have the money and services you need in the future.

This survey is for:

- **People with physical or intellectual or developmental disabilities themselves** (with or without experience with financial planning)
- **Family members of people with physical or intellectual or developmental disabilities** (with or without experience with financial planning)
- **People who work supporting people with disabilities** (DSPs, case managers, agency leaders, transition coordinators, etc.)
- **People knowledgeable about financial planning for people with disabilities** (scholars, advocates, benefits counselors, etc.)
- **Legal experts** (attorneys, judges, etc.)
- **Financial experts** (financial planners, people who manage trusts, etc.)



The survey will ask you to share your knowledge and experience about the barriers and facilitators that people with disabilities and their families face throughout the financial planning process. You will also identify ways to improve the financial planning process. Your input will help inform strategies to improve financial planning and services for people with disabilities and their families.

Money is a very personal topic. You will not be asked for personal information like your name or address. Your answers will help the researchers understand how future financial planning for people with disabilities is going and how to make it better.

It will take about 15 minutes to complete, depending on your experience. Your responses will be confidential and no identifying information about you will be collected or shared with others.

This survey is part of a project, funded by a foundation that is interested in improving the future financial planning process for people with disabilities and their families. Your responses will be analyzed with others who take the survey and included in a report that will be published in the summer of 2021.

If you have any questions about this study or if you need support taking this survey, please contact the primary investigators, Caitlin Bailey and Cory Gilden, at cebailey@udel.edu and cgilden@udel.edu.

Biden Pandemic Strategy Puts Focus On People With Disabilities

by Michelle Diament, <https://www.disabilityscoop.com>

As President Joe Biden introduces a coordinated federal approach to address the COVID-19 pandemic, he's turning attention to the virus' impact on people with disabilities.

Biden laid out a broad [200-page plan](#) and signed a slew of executive orders late last week to increase access to vaccines, require masks in certain settings and implement a host of other moves in the face of a raging pandemic. Among the many changes he announced are several aimed at curtailing the coronavirus' outsized impact on the disability community.

The White House said “focused guidance” on COVID-19 for people with disabilities will be coming from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. And, the administration is promising greater assistance to intermediate care facilities for people with disabilities and increased support for those receiving home- and community-based services.

Another major change is that the federal government will collect data on how COVID-19 is affecting people with disabilities. Disability advocates had long sought such data, arguing that it’s not possible to properly address a problem that goes unmeasured.

Separately, the Biden plan calls for “detailed technical guidance” to be released in the coming weeks from the U.S. Department of Education and the CDC on how to safely reopen schools that will include information on serving students and staff with disabilities or who are immunocompromised.

And, the strategy includes a commitment to establish new models to get vaccines to high-risk individuals, specifically including institutions for those with intellectual and developmental disabilities, and to “work with CDC to review concerns about vaccine guidelines for people with disabilities and other groups.”

In speaking about his national strategy, Biden acknowledged that things will take time.

“We didn’t get into this mess overnight and it’s going to take months for us to turn things around. But let me be equally clear: We will get through this. We will defeat this pandemic,” Biden said. “Help is on the way.”

Sean Luechtefeld with the American Network of Community Options and Resources, or ANCOR, which has advocated for vaccine priority for people with developmental disabilities, said his group is cautiously optimistic.

“When it comes to President Biden’s vaccination plan, the explicit inclusion of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities is the surest sign yet that we’re moving in the right direction,” said Luechtefeld whose organization represents disability service providers across the nation. “At the same time, the devil is always in the details.”

Luechtefeld said ANCOR will be pushing the Biden administration to ensure that any models created to get vaccines to high-risk populations account for people with developmental disabilities who receive home- and community-based services and those disconnected from the disability support system, not just individuals living in institutions. Julia Bascom, executive director of the Autistic Self Advocacy Network, called the plan a “good first step.”

“We hope updated CDC guidance can help clarify to states that many people with developmental disabilities, especially people with rare conditions, are at high risk and should be included in high-priority groups for vaccination,” Bascom said. “We’ve stressed to the administration that federal guidance alone will not suffice; since states are already implementing the early stages of their vaccination plans, they will likely need extensive support and technical assistance in order to update those plans and get the vaccine promptly to high-risk people with disabilities.”

Furthering The Promise: Increasing Opportunities For Integrated Employment

Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division blog 12/30/2020

Throughout 2020, the Civil Rights Division is publishing a series of blog posts highlighting the impact that ADA enforcement efforts have had on people's lives. We celebrate the many ways the ADA has transformed American society and enabled a generation of Americans with disabilities to thrive. At the same time, we recognize that many barriers to equal opportunity still exist. We recommit to our work of making the promise of the ADA a reality, enabling all Americans with disabilities to achieve their dreams and reach their full potential.

Furthering the Promise: Increasing Opportunities for Integrated Employment

Working and taking an active part in the local community are central to achieving the ADA's goals of integration and economic independence for people with disabilities. Yet not that long ago, the main option available to many Rhode Islanders with intellectual or developmental disabilities was to work in segregated facilities where they spent their days doing tasks like sorting trinkets for as little as 14 cents an hour. The other option was to attend segregated day programs where they sat at tables coloring or doing jigsaw puzzles. Many of those individuals wanted to work and participate in their communities, alongside their friends and neighbors.

Rhode Island's practice of unnecessarily isolating people with disabilities from their communities began to change when the United States entered into two agreements: the [2013 Interim Settlement Agreement with the State of Rhode Island and City of Providence](#), and the [2014 Consent Decree with the State](#). Under these agreements, the state and city are changing employment and day services. Adults now receive employment services to help them find and maintain jobs in the community. They also get day services that allow them to engage in mainstream activities, like walking with friends on the beach and participating in sports. Youth now get trial work experiences in integrated employment alongside people without disabilities, and as a result, can work in integrated employment, such as typical businesses. They can also now participate in community-based day activities, such as volunteering.

Providence has shown that local government services can help make integrated employment a reality for youth with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Nearly every single high school student covered by the settlement agreement successfully completed multiple 60-day trial work experiences in typical businesses. As a result, the United States agreed and the court ordered Providence to be released from the agreement ahead of schedule.

The stories below show how Rhode Islanders with disabilities thrived when empowered to work and participate in their communities.

In high school, Marilyn Lima dreamed of getting a culinary job. But instead, after graduating in 1984, Marilyn did factory work in a sheltered workshop. "She was bored," says her current employment service provider. Although she dreamed of a different career, Marilyn was stuck in the sheltered workshop for over 20 years.

Because of the agreement with the state, Marilyn finally received integrated employment services. She landed a job working as a dietary aid in the dining room of a nursing home. "I serve people," says Marilyn. "I set up 72 trays every day, wash dishes, serve residents, and clean the

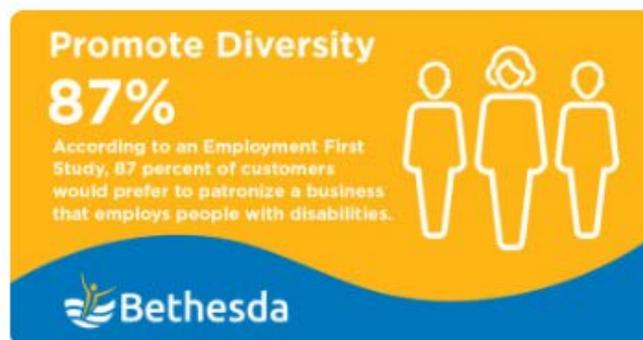
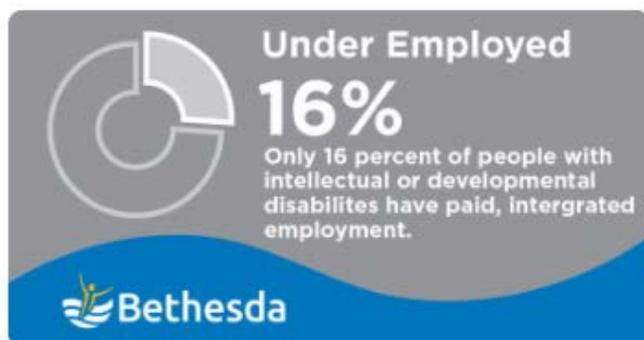
dining room.” When Marilyn first began working as a dietary aide, she received on-the-job coaching. Over time, Marilyn became more independent, and the job coaching support tapered off. “She’s very good at what she does,” says Marilyn’s supervisor. Having a job has increased Marilyn’s independence. Marilyn lives in her own apartment, and spends her paycheck the way she wants. Marilyn loves everything about her job, especially the people. “My boss is super. She’s even given me a couple raises!” Marilyn continued working until October of this year and hopes to return to work soon.

Genaro Vazquez, Jr. attended a special education program in a Providence, Rhode Island school, where he spent most school days sorting, assembling, and packaging items at an in-school sheltered workshop. But after the agreement with Providence, he received services that included volunteer rotations at a nursing home, a café, and at Petco.

Petco hired Genaro after he finished school. Genaro is responsible for restocking food and litter and helps customers on the sales floor. He also helps teach other Petco volunteers. “My favorite part is seeing all the dogs,” says Genaro. Genaro’s supervisor says Genaro is a hard worker. “He’s very self-motivated, and he knows exactly how to do his job,” she says. Genaro not only excels at his job, he’s modest, too. When his supervisor says “Genaro is a leader,” he responds, “I wouldn’t say I’m a leader. I just like to help people.” Outside of work, Genaro is interested in joining the Partnership for Adult Learning at Brown University. Genaro continues to work in his community throughout the pandemic.

To learn more about the ADA’s history and impact, please visit the department’s ADA Anniversary [webpage](#), which includes this and other blog posts honoring [Faces of the ADA](#). To learn more about the department’s ADA work generally, see www.ada.gov or call the department’s toll-free ADA Information Line at 800-514-0301 (TDD 800-514-0383).

Employment: Access and Opportunity for People with Disabilities



Source: <https://bethesdalc.org/newsroom/blog/employment-access-and-opportunity-for-people-with-disabilities/#.YBL3G-q3k2w>

Silver Linings

Night to Shine

Friday, February 12, 2021

[Night to Shine – Grace Church \[thatsgrace.org\]](https://thatsgrace.org)

The 2021 virtual Night to Shine experience is going to be an incredible event that includes music, special guests, dancing, a crowning ceremony where each honored guest will be crowned a king or queen of the prom and more! We are excited that technology makes it possible to celebrate our honored guests while staying safe!



[REGISTER HERE](#)

Who can be an honored guest?

Honored guests at Night to Shine must be 14 years old or older at the time of the event. Each honored guest must be registered to attend the virtual experience.

How much does it cost?

This event is absolutely free! We want to be a blessing to families of people with special needs by providing a safe, fun and honoring experience without them having to worry about the cost!

Pre-Prom Events

Saturday, February 6th from 1-3 pm, come have fun at our **Shine-Thru** (safe drive-through) event, while you pick up your gift box (which includes special items you will want while you attend the virtual Night To Shine)!

Opt in to attend/pick up your gift when you register for the virtual experience!

Other Ways To Get Involved [\(Click here to volunteer\)](#)

Want to help create an unforgettable experience for every honored guest of Night to Shine? We have opportunities for you to get involved with:

Shine-Thru Gift & Flower Preparation

Shine-Thru Cheer Team

Shine-Thru Check-in Team

Shine-Thru Gift Handouts

Night to Shine Encouragement Team

TREES!!



The Forest Service
recommends
hugging trees
while you can't
hug others!

www.ableopps.com

YouTube comedy show featuring Down syndrome group has Colin Mochrie as guest

By Craig Webb, [Akron Beacon Journal](#)

The pandemic has not stopped the laughs. And the life lessons.

The Northeast Ohio-based Stand Up for Downs group has turned to the internet and more specifically Zoom to continue its work of utilizing comedy to help build confidence and life skills for the Down syndrome community.

The group founded by Canton native Rob Snow has been around for a number of years and started up after his own son Henry was born with Down syndrome.



Participants in the Improvaneer Method group perform in 2019.

It all began with a very personal talk to groups and conventions drawing from his family's experiences mixed with some humor honed from a stint with Chicago's famed Second City improv group.

These speaking gigs grew into a series of comedy shows to raise awareness and funds for the Akron-area Down syndrome community.

Snow, who lives in Medina, started offering improv classes locally for those with Down syndrome. This continued to grow with classes springing up across the country.

When the pandemic hit, Snow said, he wasn't exactly sure how they would continue on. But the organization found an even bigger audience on Zoom. So now there are dozens of classes with participants from all 50 states and Canada. To learn more about the program visit <https://www.standupfordowns.org/the-improvaneer-method>.

"It's growing like crazy," Snow said. "This is something that has really flourished." It has grown to some 40 online classes a week with about 500 participants. And he explains this is more than simply learning how to tell "knock-knock jokes."

By using humor and, more specifically, improv exercises, Snow said, it frees those in the classes to simply be themselves and learn some life skills along the way. Those in classes learn to be more comfortable around others and be willing to make eye contact and hopefully land a well-paying job.

They also learn to laugh and make others chuckle too.

As part of this online expansion, the group is turning to YouTube to help promote the brand with a new show, "Yes and a Guest," that features Snow along with instructor Jenna Swan, a Kent State graduate, lead trainer Maggie Bisesi, who lives in Lakewood, and program graduates Audrey Costilow of Amherst and Nick Doyle of Canton.

The second episode was just posted recently and features comedian Colin Mochrie of "Whose Line is it Anyway" fame. The five-minute show features a few interview questions with the comedian then a series of improv exercises where they try to one-up one another with humorous results.

It was real a treat, Snow said, that students like Audrey and Nick could perform alongside a seasoned pro like Mochrie. "They held up their own for sure," he said. "They were super excited."

If you are experiencing a mental health crisis, BH Link is here for you

BH Link's mission is to ensure all Rhode Islanders experiencing mental health and substance use crises receive the appropriate services they need as quickly as possible in an environment that supports their recovery. Call 911 if there is risk of immediate danger. Visit the BH Link website at www.bhlink.org or for confidential support and to get connected to care:

CALL (401) 414-LINK (5465)

If under 18 CALL: (855) KID(543)-LINK(5465)

Visit the 24-HOUR/7-DAY TRIAGE CENTER at 975 Waterman Avenue, East Providence, RI

Stay Informed with Information on COVID-19

Rhode Island Department of Health COVID-19 Resources

Hotline (401) 222-8022 or 211 after hours;

Email RIDOH.COVID19Questions@health.ri.gov

Website <https://health.ri.gov/covid/>

Center for Disease Control COVID-19 Information

Website cdc.gov/coronavirus

Videos <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/communication/videos.html>

Includes a link to ASL videos

BHDDH Information on COVID-19's Impact on DD Services and the DD Community

Website bhddh.ri.gov/COVID

RI Parent Information Network (RIPIN)

Website <https://ripin.org/covid-19-resources/>

Call Center (401) 270-0101 or email callcenter@ripin.org

Advocates in Action – for videos and easy to read materials

Website <https://www.advocatesinaction.org/>

Website offers BrowseAloud, which will read the website to you

Sign Up for Our Email List

If you aren't receiving email updates and newsletters from BHDDH, you can sign up on our website. From the main BHDDH page at bhddh.ri.gov, select **What's New**, then go to bottom and click on **DD Community Newsletter**. The link to sign up for the BHDDH Newsletter is directly below the title, as shown in the picture at right.



DD Community Newsletter
[SIGN UP FOR THE BHDDH NEWSLETTER](#)

Contacting DD Staff

DDD has put extended hour phone coverage in place with a central business hour phone number and an on-call number for nights and weekends.

If you have a vital need, please call the numbers on the next page. If you have any general questions or concerns, please email them if you can, in order to try to leave the phone lines free for those who need to call. We will do our best to address your questions directly or through future newsletters.

AM **M T W Th F** PM
401-462-3421

8:30 AM → → → → → ← ← ← ← ← 4:00 PM

WEEKDAYS DURING BUSINESS HOURS FOR:

- **VITAL, NON-MEDICAL SUPPORT NEEDS**
- **QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR DD SERVICES**

During business hours
 (Monday-Friday 8:30-4:00),
 for questions or support
(401) 462-3421
 Para español, llame
(401) 462-3014

PM **M T W Th F** PM
401-265-7461

4:00 PM → → → → → ← ← ← ← ← 10:00 PM

AFTER HOURS ON WEEKDAYS FOR:

- **VITAL, NON-MEDICAL SUPPORT NEEDS**

For emerging or imminent care
 related questions,
 Mon - Fri 4pm-10pm and
 weekends 8:30am-10pm
(401) 265-7461

AM **SAT SUN** PM
401-265-7461

8:30 AM → → → → → ← ← ← ← ← 10:00 PM

ON WEEKENDS FOR:

- **VITAL, NON-MEDICAL SUPPORT NEEDS**

Send general questions to the
 AskDD email address. Please
 do not email critical issues.
BHDDH.AskDD@bhddh.ri.gov

E-MAIL THE DIVISION

BHDDH.AskDD
@BHDDH.RI.GOV

HELP US KEEP THE PHONE LINES OPEN FOR
 THOSE WHO ARE CALLING WITH A VITAL NEED!

WHEN POSSIBLE, PLEASE SEND AN E-MAIL FOR:

- **NON-CRITICAL CONCERNS** about Your Services and Supports
- **GENERAL QUESTIONS** about Your Services or the RI DD System

911

FOR MEDICAL EMERGENCIES
CALL 911
RIGHT AWAY. DON'T WAIT!

For medical or
 healthcare related
 emergencies, call
 your Primary Care
 Physician or 911

CONTACT YOUR DOCTOR

CALL FOR:

- ROUTINE Healthcare Questions
- NON-EMERGENCY Medical Care

FOLLOW YOUR DOCTOR'S ADVICE
DON'T go to their office
unless they tell you to!

SELF-DIRECTED SUPPORTS NETWORK

A NETWORK OF INDIVIDUALS AND FAMILY MEMBERS USING SELF-DIRECTED
SUPPORTS IN RHODE ISLAND

ONLINE MEETING
TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 9, 2021
7:30 – 8:30 PM

Guest presenter: Tracey Cunningham
Associate Director of Employment
BHDDH - Division of Developmental Disabilities

This meeting will take place online using Zoom. When you RSVP, you will receive an email with the directions and a password to join the meeting. You can connect by computer, mobile device or listen using your telephone. You may be prompted to download an app depending on the device you plan to use.

The Self-Directed Supports Network is a resource for individuals and families using self-directed supports through the Division of Developmental Disabilities. Meetings provide an opportunity to share experiences and learn from others.

SPECIAL TOPIC – EMPLOYMENT SUPPORTS FOR SELF-DIRECTION

RSVP LINK: <https://bit.ly/2YUamqz>

Please RSVP using the link above. Click the link or cut and paste into your browser. If you need a reasonable accommodation (e.g., ASL Interpreter, large print) or information in a language other than English, please make your needs known when you RSVP.



For questions, call or email Claire Rosenbaum, Sherlock Center on Disabilities:
Email: crosenbaum@ric.edu Voice: 401-456-4732 TTY: 711

RIDDC Executive Director Featured In Providence Business News

<http://riddc.org/riddc-executive-director-featured-in-providence-business-news/> [riddc.org]

Briefly explain how the RIDDC has helped the developmental disabilities (DD) community succeed on the path of self-employment and entrepreneurship?

We have built a program to assist people and their business regardless of where they are in the process. If someone just has a glimmering idea in their head or if they are already up and running, we have full array of classes, support, and opportunity to get their business to where they want it to be.



It starts with our business classes. There are six classes available which include topics such as: focusing an idea, writing a business plan, building supports, developing an elevator pitch, marketing and branding, finances and bookkeeping, and traditional and social media. The classes offer an opportunity to examine your business ideas, explore opportunities of growth, and bounce ideas off of established business leaders and other entrepreneurs.

After the groundwork for the business is established, we have an expansive community of support to help mentor and advise. We have a staff and partnership of experts from the business community, many of them are currently running successful businesses themselves. We also partner with community organizations that can provide guidance, such as SCORE (Service Core of Retired Executives), the Small Business Administration, The Center for Women in Enterprise, Veterans Business Outreach Center, and students from the business program at Bryant University. Through this process we are able to build a strong and confident entrepreneur with a solid and sustainable business.

Once the business is established, we want to ensure that they have the opportunity to flourish. We offer mini grants that the business may need in order to become fully operational or expand. This could go towards equipment such as a computer, printer, or other tools specific to the business or it could go towards a service that the business might need, such as building a website or social media campaign.

Finally, we have our annual Small Business Saturday Shop RI event. This is a venue that hosts well over 100 businesses in one location (The Crowne Plaza) where thousands of people come to shop at locally owned businesses from all over Rhode Island. This event is held every year on small business Saturday, which is the Saturday after Thanksgiving. In order to ensure that the products available and the business owners are representative of uniqueness and diversity of our state, we partner with the SBA, Veterans Business Outreach Center, and the Center for Women in Enterprise in this endeavor. This event has been wildly successful and the response from business owner and shopper has been overwhelming. We really look forward to providing this opportunity for Rhode Island.

How will Small Business Saturday Shop RI event be handled this year in light of the pandemic?

The pandemic has been devastating to many small businesses in Rhode Island, and we want to do everything in our power to assist them in a safe way. Obviously, thousands of people congregating in an area over the course of a day will not be possible. Our staff has been working tirelessly to establish a virtual event to accommodate as many of the businesses as we can.

I would like to point out that when I say “we” or “our staff” that, although we have many people working directly or partnering with us on this project to make it a success, there is one individual who is the heart and soul of all this. Sue Babin is our special projects coordinator and deservedly won an award from PBN for all that she does for small businesses, particularly those owned by people with intellectual or developmental disabilities. I want to make sure she gets the credit she is due.

Although it is stressful and difficult, Sue and her team are organizing the virtual Small Business Saturday Shop RI event, and once it is up and running you will be hearing about through radio, TV, and social media.

On a positive note, we are running a virtual Entrepreneurs’ Forum where people can network, share updates on their business and hear from scheduled speakers. The focus has been on helping people to strategize on how to promote their business given COVID and maximize use of social media.

We also have ongoing Elevator Pitch contests where people can compete to win some financial resources for their business. The creativity of some of these pitches is so amazing, and I hope to be able to make them public very soon after this contest round is complete.

We always encourage buying from local businesses, but this year it may mean the survival of our small businesses and the economy of the state. Please buy from local small businesses and keep a look out for our virtual event.

How else has the pandemic changed the efforts of RIDDC?

Believe it or not, our self-employment efforts are only a small part of what we do. We focus on civil rights, housing, education, recreation, and just about every area of life. When the pandemic hit, it was jarring at first. Many of our projects had to be delayed, some had to be halted, and most had to alter how they worked. Our focus had to change as well.

COVID-19 has had a disproportionately negative effect on people in congregate settings, such as nursing homes and group homes. Even people with intellectual or developmental disabilities not in a group home often require multiple staff in various locations. Many people we represent utilize public transportation or group transportation. Almost all of these services either changed significantly or stopped all together.

We built a coalition of advocates and worked with agencies that provide services and the state agencies to address these new and unique issues. We all continue to work together to build policies and practices that are pandemic-specific. Some of the issues that we have taken on or continue to address include: ensuring people have access to healthcare, including the right to be accompanied into a hospital. Gathering and appropriately distributing PPE (personal protective equipment). Ensuring access to mental and behavioral healthcare. Planning for the reopening of services.

Beyond the new issues, how we interact had to change as well. We are doing almost everything virtually. That, of course, raises its own set of challenges. We have to make sure people have access to and know how to utilize technology. Even with the technology, people are still often isolated or

stressed over the uncertainty of the situation. To address this, we have established special “circles of connections” to bring people together in a safe way. In addition, we have restarted almost all of our previous projects and offer people the opportunity to participate in them.

How did removing in-person programs, such as the business classes or others, create challenges for those with DD?

One of the best things about the classes is the interaction with business experts from the community. That in person back and forth that is so valuable, is no longer there. Additionally, people have very different learning styles. Many people need hands on interaction to fully understand all the concepts. Communication also suffers. While email and video calls have been helpful, it is not the same as the individual or communal interactions. While the virtual system is helpful, I just don't think the experience is the same.

Humans need personal contacts and community. Even prior to the pandemic, this was a priority for The Council. People with intellectual or developmental disabilities are already at high risk for isolation and the ills that stem from isolation, such as abuse and neglect. The pandemic, and less in person contact, have highlighted this issue even more. While it is not an issue we have solved, it has brought it to the forefront, and it is a priority for many in the state.

Beyond the isolation, we found many people did not have access to technology or completely understand how to utilize technology for maximum effect. Ensuring everyone has access to both a device, such as a tablet or laptop and consistent internet access has been a major barrier.

I think the staff have suffered as well. They love the work they do and really miss the people they work with. It is difficult to plan and adjust projects without getting together. We have started to do small in person meetings, so I am hoping that some of these issues will be resolved.

What are some future goals when it comes to education and training efforts post-COVID?

We want to expand and innovate. Everyone who wants a job or to own a business should have that opportunity.

Our focus has and will remain ensuring that people with intellectual or developmental disabilities are full members of the community. This includes the business community whether through direct employment, owning a business, or sitting on the board of a corporation. What we have found is that the business community in Rhode Island is ready and willing to help in these efforts. It was because many people were segregated that they didn't have the opportunity to participate. We will continue to partner with individual businesses, chambers of commerce, industry associations, provider agencies, advocacy organizations, and the community as a whole to ensure this happens.

We will continue to expand our policy efforts to demonstrate the benefits of community inclusion. Connecting entrepreneurs and employees with intellectual or developmental disabilities to legislators, policy makers, and businesses highlights the benefits to the person, the business, and the community.

The Council will take the successful work being done here, partner with other states and create a community of practice nationwide.

We are striving to make Rhode Island, and the nation, a place where everyone has the opportunity to succeed in the life they want.



Program Snapshot

For more information on any of our programs, please go to www.fosterforward.net.

ASPIRE Initiative

- For ages 14-26 (any youth who spent at least one day in a DCYF placement after age 14)
- Financial education and assistance with setting goals for saving money
- \$100 toward the opening of an Individual Development Account (IDA), and a dollar-for-dollar match, up to \$1,000 per year, toward the purchase of such items as cars, education expenses, housing expenses, health expenses, and investments

For more information, please contact: Victoria Ferrara at 401.438.3900 ext. 105
victoria.ferrara@fosterforward.net

YESS Aftercare Services (Youth Establishing Self-Sufficiency) and Enhanced Case Management

- For ages 18-21, who have been closed to the state's Family Court and DCYF on or after their 18th birthday
- Assistance locating safe and affordable housing, identifying employment, and/or enrolling in an educational program
- Limited funds that help pay for housing and other living expenses (participants become increasingly responsible for their own housing expenses over time)

For more information, please contact: Victoria Ferrara at 401.438.3900 ext. 105
victoria.ferrara@fosterforward.net

Real Connections

- For ages 18-26, who are most at risk of aging out of foster care without permanent connections.
- Help connecting to family or important adults that might have been lost during the young person's time in care.
- Connections to community or personal network mentors and support of that relationship toward permanent connections.

For more information, please contact: Kate Bronner at 401.438.3900 ext. 108
kate.bronner@fosterforward.net

Works Wonders™

- For ages 14-26, who are current or formerly included in the foster care system.
- Career development and employment engagement program that provides 12-16 hours of skills based training
- \$50 completion incentive, potential for 12 weeks of career coaching & paid work-based learning opportunities

For more information, please contact: Bernadette Tavares at 401.438.3900 x 120
bernadette.tavares@fosterforward.net

ASPIRING Young Leaders

- For ages 14 to 21 (any youth who spent at least one day in a DCYF placement after age 14)
- 3 day training on leadership, communication, advocacy, strategic sharing and relationship building
- Candidates should be mature, responsible, respectful and demonstrate leadership potential

For more information, please contact: Victoria Ferrara at 401.438.3900 ext. 105
victoria.ferrara@fosterforward.net

Your Way Home Rapid Re-Housing for Homeless Youth

- For ages 18-24 (any youth who spent at least one day in a DCYF placement after age 14)
- Assistance with housing navigation and short term rental assistance
- Supportive case management services

For more information, please contact: Michelle Lavallee at 401.438.3900 ext. 206
michelle.lavallee@fosterforward.net

VOCA Counseling

- One-on-one counseling and crisis intervention services on-site
- Group sessions on mindfulness/meditation and staff training opportunities
- Open to all victims of crime served by Foster Forward

For more information, please contact: Ana Lopez at 401.438.3900 ext. 203
ana.lopez@fosterforward.net

Foster Forward Storefront

- Donation distribution of gently used clothing and supplies to support foster families in the care of foster children and youth
- Donation distribution of gently used household items for older foster youth transitioning to apartments and young adults receiving rapid re-housing services through Your Way Home
- Seasonal donation distribution for prom dresses, Halloween costumes, holiday gifts, etc
- Meeting space for events and activities for foster youth and foster families

For more information, please contact: Kate Bronner at 401.438.3900 ext. 108
kate.bronner@fosterforward.net