



Community Forum



The next DD Community Forum will be on

**Monday, March 22
3:00 PM – 4:30 PM**

The forum will be hosted by
Advocates in Action
on Zoom.

[Register here](#)

Beware of False Information About Vaccine Eligibility

Several towns have reported that false calls are being made to residents about COVID vaccination appointments. Please check with your town or the Department Health if you have questions about the COVID vaccine.

An email has also circulated in Providence claiming that anyone in certain zip codes can get the vaccine. This isn't completely true. Providence is now offering expanded vaccine eligibility to residents age 50 or older in the 02907, 02908 and 02909 zip codes due to the high number of COVID cases in these areas.

The RI Department of Health (RIDOH) warned that, for the most part, only those who are 60 or older are currently eligible for the shot. State officials can also cancel appointments of those who aren't eligible. People who sign up for a shot at a state-run site are required to attest to meeting the eligibility requirements; for the most part, that means being 60 or older. As of March 12th, however, people age 16 to 60 with underlying health conditions may also get the vaccine.

Please see <https://covid.ri.gov/vaccination#elig> for the most current information about vaccine eligibility or to check any information about vaccines that you receive.

Remember:
The COVID vaccination is FREE.
Do NOT give out your Social Security Number
Do NOT give out your medical insurance information

Disability in the Time of COVID-19

A publication from The American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD)

Covid-19 has created new and significant challenges for Americans with regard to accessing employment, healthcare, and education. For Americans with disabilities, these challenges are often devastating and life-threatening.

While the struggles faced by people with disabilities have been widespread and urgent during the pandemic, advocates have had less opportunity to bring attention to them due to sheltering in place, social distancing, and the general movement to online communications during the pandemic.

“Stories about pandemic life from the disability community need to be told, and that’s what we’re doing here in this publication.”

In this online publication you’ll find stories about work, parenting, transitioning out of congregate settings, and accessing services in this new era of virtual meetings and social distancing. All of them support policy recommendations from AAPD on how to support community integration, increase access to critical services, and create opportunities to secure more equitable and inclusive economic recovery for the largest minority in the country: people living with disabilities.

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The [American Association of People with Disabilities](#) is a national cross-disability rights organization advocating for full civil rights for the over 60 million Americans with disabilities by promoting equal opportunity, economic power, independent living, and political participation.



Find the publication on [medium.com](#), a digital publishing platform. In their words, “Anyone can write on Medium. Thought-leaders, journalists, experts, and individuals with unique perspectives share their thinking here. You’ll find pieces by independent writers from around the globe, stories we feature and leading authors, and smart takes on our own suite of blogs and publications.”

NASDDDS Documentary “Our COVID Story” to air on Facebook

Thursday, March 25 at 3:00 PM

<https://www.facebook.com/NasdddsUS>

Laugh, cry, but do not ever forget these moments in history. Join NASDDDS for the world FACEBOOK premiere of "Our COVID Story" in honor of Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month in March. This documentary originally aired at the NASDDDS annual conference in November. The story highlights advocates with intellectual and developmental disabilities along with the state system directors and key partners who have joined together to strengthen the system of supports in each state during these challenging times. A story of creativity, resiliency, and partnership deserving recognition by us all. This documentary is dedicated to those supported, all state staff, providers, DSPs, and other key allies who make it possible. Get your popcorn and watch on Facebook on March 25 at 3:00 pm.

The [National Association of State Directors of Developmental Disabilities Services](#) (NASDDDS) represents the nation's agencies in 50 states and the District of Columbia providing services to children and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families. NASDDDS promotes visionary leadership, systems innovation, and the development of national policies that support home and community-based services for individuals with disabilities and their families.



MAY YOUR TROUBLES
BE LESS
and your
Blessings
be MORE
AND NOTHING BUT
HAPPINESS
come through your
door
IRISH BLESSING

"Survivor Voices: Making a Difference" from the Brain Injury Advisory Council

Kelly Lang and Carole Starr, NCAPPS Brain Injury Learning Collaborative faculty and members of the Brain Injury Advisory Council were instrumental in developing this important video: [Survivor Voices: Making a Difference](#), marking Brain Injury Awareness Month. Check it out! For more information about the Advisory Council, contact Greg Ayotte at gayotte@biausa.org.



Newly Redesigned Screening Site

Mental Health America (MHA) announces a brand-new screening site. The site design has been overhauled to make functionality easier for new users. It hosts online screening tools ([MHAscreening.org](https://www.mhascreeing.org)) along with dozens of articles for individuals who are first seeking help for their mental health and may have never been treated for their mental health concerns before.

[Visit the new screening site](https://www.mhascreeing.org)



In Bristol Warren, an uncommon bond between teacher and students

By Ted Hayes, <https://www.eastbayri.com/stories/in-bristol-warren-an-uncommon-bond-between-teacher-and-students,88458>

Leah Keith, who has Down Syndrome, helps her developmentally disabled students learn and grow through the power of expression and confidence



Art teacher Leah Keith enjoys a moment with one of her students, Alan Leach. RICHARD W. DIONNE JR.

Even across the dull screen of a 10" Chromebook, the joy was impossible to miss when art teacher Leah Keith logged on Friday morning to talk to one of her classes at Mt. Hope High School.

It was Ms. Keith's 34th birthday, and soon her students would jubilantly sing "Happy Birthday" to the teacher who has become one of their favorites. For now though, it was a time to catch up since the last time they met.

Students clamored for attention on the other side of the screen. Alan Leach held up a small rock he'd painted in a kaleidoscope of purples, blues, pinks and reds. Claudia

Rezendes showed off a collage she'd made following a recent assignment. There were others, too — collages and paintings, short poems and other works of art. The kids were excited to see her, as they are every week. And behind their masks, you could see their smiles.

In the four months since Ms. Keith began teaching art classes at Mt. Hope and Kickemuit, her 16 students' day-to-day teachers say they've seen a marked difference in their kids through their interactions with Ms. Keith, who has Down Syndrome. The adage is that the best teachers teach what they know, and in the case of her students, who all cope with autism, Down Syndrome and other developmental disabilities, that connection has opened up a world that previously was not as colorful, warm or inviting.

"As a special education coordinator, one of my goals is to make sure that these students are prepared when they're ready to have a career," said Kickemuit teacher Rachel Koger, who was instrumental in bringing Ms. Keith into the classroom last year. "Leah is more qualified than any other art teacher I know; when she comes into the room, she has a connection with those kids unlike any other. It's been amazing."

Expression through art

For much of her life, Ms. Keith felt like an outsider. Growing up in Barrington, she yearned to but always had a hard time relating to and fitting in with the wider world around her. But early on she found a doorway in art and the written word. Expressing herself creatively has given her the joy of self-expression, taught her self-confidence and provided a passion and a purpose. It has made her feel connected, and she has thrived.

Over the last four years she has published "I Am Leah," a book of art and poetry now available locally and online, opened up a studio at 30 Cutler St. in Warren, [has a website](#) and was previously honored as the spotlight artist in Art Night Bristol Warren.

"I always loved art," she said. Now, teaching it "is like therapy. I'm happy when I write and paint. It all comes out and I just let it."

That release was what Ms. Koger was looking for when she first thought of Leah as a teacher last year. They'd known each other for years through family, and Ms. Koger said she always had tremendous respect for Ms. Keith's artistic ability and fearlessness. Plus, she always thought she was cool.

"This year it was really hard to find specialists for our students," Ms. Koger said. "I kept advocating and advocating, saying 'We at least need art and music.' They (administrators) said, 'If you know anybody, let us know.'"

Ms. Keith immediately came to mind, and she suggested her to district administrators.

"I thought this would be awesome for her," she said. "She's amazing, she loves kids and she loves to advocate, and help others be strong. I thought it would be awesome if they would consider it." Word soon came back that the district was willing to let Ms. Keith work with the kids, and they put her on the payroll in November. Her tenure has been magical ever since, Ms. Koger said:

Students "absolutely love art and they love her," she said. "They want to show off what they've done; they're super proud. It's really hard for them to (be open) but definitely, their self-confidence and pride has gone up."

The same has been the case at Mt. Hope, where Ms. Keith oversees about 10 students in teacher Sabrina Sanchez's charge.

Art as therapy

Ms. Keith's weekly classes are more than a chance for students to learn traditional artistic techniques. She said Friday that her goal in teaching is to give students assignments that make them think — and challenge them to translate those thoughts onto the written or painted page.

Lessons sometimes include listening to music, and taking that time to meditate on it and try to express how it makes them feel. Another assignment was to make a collage full of images of things that inspire them. Other lessons are open-ended, asking students to express themselves when thinking of large themes like life and fulfillment.

Through it all, Ms. Keith has gotten help from her friend Stephen Alfano and her mother, Debbi Coury, with whom she shares a home on Touisset Road in Warren. While Ms. Coury helps Leah prepare her lesson plans and sometimes plays a technical role in running online meetings, it's definitely the Leah show, she said:

"They have a lot of obstacles in their way toward expressing themselves, and how to navigate their environment and stay calm," she said of her daughter's students. "Leah is really good at bringing them out."

Ms. Keith said she too has benefited from and thrives on teaching. She loves kids, loves instilling some of her knowledge and philosophy, and has a knack for bringing students around her to listen and learn. Though the next year's school budget has yet to be set, both she and Ms. Koger said they hope her lessons will continue.

"I just like being a teacher," she said. "I like hanging out with them and seeing them grow."

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.

401-462-3421

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

401-265-7461

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

401-265-7461

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

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!