

OKLAHOMA DEVELOPMENTAL



DISABILITIES COUNCIL

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The **Oklahoma Developmental Disabilities Council** (the Council), authorized by Executive Order of the Governor in accordance with P.L. 106-402, the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act, promotes quality services and programs which enable persons with developmental disabilities to fully realize their maximum potential through increased independence, productivity and inclusion into the community. This is accomplished through comprehensive consumer- and family-oriented activities that promote service system improvements, community capacity-building and advocacy.

There are an estimated 60,000 persons with developmental disabilities in Oklahoma.

The Oklahoma Developmental Disabilities Council received \$897,250 in federal funds for Federal Fiscal Year 2010, provided through the Administration on Developmental Disabilities, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

MAJOR COUNCIL ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

Children and Families: People with developmental disabilities can lead full, productive, lives if given the opportunity to grow up in a caring family environment. The Council supports programs that promote the family unit as the most important factor in child development. “Keeping Families Together,” developed by the Center for Learning and Leadership/UCE and implemented by a multi-disciplinary team of professionals in human service and health agencies, provided assistance to families with infants who have developmental health care needs. The program resulted in the development and continuation of local interdisciplinary service-coordination teams and in the development of the Oklahoma Respite Resource Network, a statewide program that provides funding and human resources information for respite care for children and adults with disabilities.

The lack of adequate child care often limits the options of parents in determining where and when they work, or even if they can hold full-time jobs outside the home. Special Care, Inc. in Oklahoma City was funded to expand the number of child care centers that provide quality care for children with developmental disabilities. With Council funding, Special Care created a specialized training curriculum and trained child care workers throughout Oklahoma. To date, the Special Care curriculum has been used to train hundreds of child care professionals statewide. The program is offered through the Oklahoma DHS Office of Child Care “Reach for the Stars” program.

Youth with Disabilities: High School-High Tech, a national model the Council adopted, encourages students with disabilities to begin academic preparation and skills training while in high school. The program encourages students with disabilities to pursue careers in engineering, science and other fields that require technology skills. The program is a public-private partnership between public school systems, vocational-technical centers, universities, local communities, and private businesses. More than 30 High School-High Tech sites currently operate statewide, and this program continues to expand.

The Council sponsors the annual Youth Leadership Forum, a leadership camp for rising high school juniors and seniors with disabilities. YLF participants learn about taking an active role in their education and post-graduation planning, assistive technology, disability rights law, teamwork, career exploration, and higher education opportunities while building self-esteem and independent living skills. A highlight of the week is working with members of the Oklahoma Legislature on public policy issues, ending with a debate on the House floor. Counselors at the camp are pre- and post-graduate special education teachers, giving them their first experiences as teachers, curriculum developers, and mentors.

Work: People with developmental disabilities want to be viable, productive members of the community. The Council provided funding for a web-based job-search program for persons with disabilities and employers who were looking for employees with disabilities. This program, JobFit, allows potential employees to build and submit a resume, and select potential jobs based on an individualized client profile. Potential employers may screen applicants based on both hard and soft skills related to a particular job by entering a job profile. A component of this program has been adopted by Workforce Oklahoma for its workforce development program. Future employment efforts of the Council will focus on high school students with disabilities and their need for post-secondary planning for post-secondary education and careers.

Recreation: Recreational opportunities provide individuals with disabilities true access to the community and promote the overall stability and well-being of families. The Council co-sponsors Dreamnight at the Zoo at the Oklahoma City Zoological Park and Botanical Gardens. Funding from the Council not only provided a free night at the zoo for these families (including dinner, tram and carousel rides, sea lion shows, and souvenirs), but also created a manual, distributed to all AZA-accredited zoos, so that more U.S. zoos will participate in the future. This manual has been instrumental in the explosion of new zoos in the U.S. now undertaking Dreamnight.

Leadership: People with developmental disabilities and their families often rely on supports and services to meet their basic needs, but these supports and services may be limited by decisions made by people who have no experience with developmental disabilities. Partners in Policymaking, a leadership training model funded by the Council, is designed to achieve a productive partnership between consumers of services for people with disabilities and those who make public policy. Participants develop skills necessary to effectively work with legislators, state agencies, and others whose decisions and actions impact the lives of people with disabilities.

Health: The Council provided start-up funding for an exciting pilot initiative, Sooner SUCCESS. The goal of this project is to develop unified, comprehensive services statewide that meet the needs of children with disabilities and special health care needs, coordinating efforts of health, education, social service, mental health, and other service systems. Funding from the Council provided salaries for six county coordinators, all of whom are parents of children with disabilities. This program continues to expand and our goal is to see Sooner SUCCESS in all 77 Oklahoma Counties.

Communities: Inclusion in all aspects of day-to-day living is an essential need of people with developmental disabilities. The Council promotes programs that overcome these barriers and improve the quality of life for all people. Transportation is one of the biggest barriers to self-sufficiency for an individual with developmental disabilities. The Council funded a project in McAlester to demonstrate the effectiveness of a small transit program designed for persons with disabilities. Oklahomans for Independent Living, a Center for Independent Living, operates a demand-response transit service, with curb-to-curb service. In addition to benefiting users of the service, more than 115 businesses profited as consumers with disabilities could reach their places of business.

The Council provided start-up funding to a non-profit initiative called Court-Appointed Advocates for Vulnerable Adults, Inc. This organization trains and supports volunteer guardians *ad litem*, who work for judges to assure that vulnerable adults who are subject to a court proceeding (typically guardianship orders) maintain their civil rights as citizens while being protected from potential abuse, neglect and exploitation.

Community Awareness of Persons with Disabilities: As more persons with disabilities become active members of their communities, it is important to provide current and positive information to the general public about persons with disabilities and their issues. As part of its public awareness efforts, the Council founded the Justin A. McCurry Resource Library. This library hosts thousands of books, videos, audio tapes, brochures, and subject matter files for use by the general public, as well as by advocates and providers of persons with disabilities. The Justin A. McCurry Library has been invited to become part of the Oklahoma Department of Libraries. As part of this system, library materials will be available on inter-library loan statewide. Any person with a library card from any Oklahoma library (including college and university libraries) can access the materials housed at the Council. Future plans for the library include the creation of DIG: the Oklahoma Disability Information Gateway, which will be an on-line resource and information guide for advocates and people with developmental disabilities.

For more information about Council projects, please contact Ann Trudgeon, Executive Director.