

DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES NETWORK PRESENTS

DD NETWORK NEWS

A Collaborative Publication from MSCDD, DRMS and IDS

SPRING 2025



Join us for the
2025 MegaConference

June 12-13
Hilton Jackson

Featuring Keynote Speaker
Cody Clark
Magician



Registration opens April 1!
msmegaconference.org

March is Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month

This year, the National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities is sharing the 'We're Here All Year' campaign, highlighting that people with developmental disabilities are working, going to school, volunteering, and participating in their community – just like all of us. When they are engaged and involved in their local community, it is a win-win for everyone.

Meet the DD Network



Learn more about our leadership!

Christy Ashley



Christy Ashley, LMSW has served as Executive Director of the MS Council on Developmental Disabilities since February 2025. Before becoming Executive Director, she served as program coordinator for the Council since 2011. She received her Master of Social Work from the University of New England in Portland, ME. She is currently being supervised for the licensed clinical social work and provides consultations to clients and families at a local private hospital. Before the Council, she began her career at Hudspeth Regional Center, where she worked in Diagnostics and Evaluations. She then transferred to the MS Department of Mental Health's Central Office where she served as representative for Professional Development and later for Clinical Services on various task forces and committees and served as liaison between state/federal authorities for approval of training for all credentialed staff in DMH. With over two decades of experience in both facility and community mental health / IDD treatment, she brings a wealth of knowledge to the Council to further help improve the quality of life for people with developmental disabilities and their families.

Jerry Alliston, PhD, MSW, has been serving as Interim Executive Director for the Institute for Disability Studies (IDS), at The University of Southern Mississippi, since October 2024. Prior to this role, he served as the Associate Director for approximately seven years on the Hattiesburg campus. He earned his doctoral degree in Higher Education Administration from The University of Southern Mississippi as well as a Master of Social Work degree. Currently, he serves on various boards and councils, teaches as an affiliate faculty member for the Luckyday Program, Honors College, the Disability Studies minor, and is an honors thesis advisor. As Interim Executive Director, his primary role is to conduct research and secure funding so that best practices may be implemented in programs throughout Mississippi. With 30+ years of experience in the social sciences and disability fields, he brings a passion for making a difference in the lives of Mississippians with disabilities, their families, and those who serve them.

Dr. Jerry Alliston



Polly Tribble



Polly Tribble is the Executive Director of Disability Rights Mississippi (DRMS), the protection and advocacy system for people with disabilities in the state. Polly has a master's degree in clinical psychology from Mississippi State University. Prior to serving as the Executive Director of DRMS, Polly was the associate psychologist at Mississippi State Hospital, the state's largest psychiatric hospital. Polly has worked at DRMS for decades, advocating for inclusion and assisting people with varying abilities from around Mississippi. She also serves on the Board of Directors for The Alignment Project and on the Mississippi Developmental Disabilities Council. She is currently serving as the Chair of the Mississippi disAbility MegaConference planning committee. She has previously volunteered for Mississippi's chapter of Association of People Supporting Employment First.

Program Spotlight

DISABILITY RIGHTS MISSISSIPPI

The Protection and Advocacy for individuals with Developmental Disabilities (PADD) was the first P&A program, created by the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights (DD) Act of 1975. P&A agencies are required by the Act to pursue legal, administrative and other appropriate remedies to protect and advocate for the rights of individuals with developmental disabilities under all applicable federal and state laws.

DRMS's PADD program serves individuals with developmental disabilities, as well as individuals with intellectual disabilities, autism, epilepsy, cerebral palsy and neurological impairments. DRMS provides a wide range of services to persons with developmental disabilities through the PADD program, including: investigating abuse and neglect complaints, support in pursuing administrative remedies, technical assistance, legal assistance, information/referral, and rights trainings.



**PADD
PROGRAM**

MS COUNCIL ON DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

U-THRIVE (Mississippi State University) provides adults with developmental disabilities (DD) experiences that increase their functional living skills while engaging with their community and peers. It also provides community partners and family members with education and resources regarding the inclusion of adults with DD in their businesses and the community. Accomplishments are achieved through at least 24 didactic meetings and community events across eight thematic units that target critical functional living skills. Sixteen individuals with DD, 16 family members, 24 professionals, 17 organizations, and 29 volunteers (undergraduate and graduate students) have participated. Didactic trainings taught have included Independent Living Skills, Employment, Transportation, Social Relationships, Healthy Living, Money Management, Advocating for Self, Independent Social Relationships, and Food and Nutrition. Each of these units also includes a community outing where participants practice what they have learned in the community. Family member meetings are held to keep family members/caregivers up to date on unit activities so they can help/encourage participants to continue engaging in these activities at home and in the community.



U-THRIVE



INSTITUTE FOR DISABILITY STUDIES

The Family Advocacy Network (FAN), housed within the Institute for Disability Studies (IDS) at The University of Southern Mississippi is designed to increase availability and accessibility of community-based peer support to families of children and youth receiving special education services or are unidentified through Local Education Agencies (LEAs) in the state of Mississippi. Key features of the program include the establishment of family partnerships and the community-based cohorts coordinated across the state to promote inclusion of families and K-12 students in the public school system. Through these cohorts, FAN staff plan to establish a peer-to-peer network with a focus on shared experience and support in the development and appropriate implementation of special education-related services. One additional feature of the program is the training for professionals and families regarding the development of meaningful Individualized Education Programs, behavioral support, and special education policies and procedures, which is completed by FAN staff and cohort members.

As of March 2025, FAN actively works alongside 49 families in 17 counties across the state. Family meetings take place quarterly, with the most active cohorts located in Smith and Lamar counties. Training requests have increased, especially for professionals at Early Head Start, Head Start, The University of Mississippi Medical Center, Fleet and Family Support Center-Exceptional Family Member Program, Mississippi Hearing-Vision Project, and various school districts. For more information regarding FAN services, call 601.266.5163 or email fan@groups.usm.edu.

This project was supported, in part by grant number 2401MSSCDD, from the U.S. Administration for Community Living, Department of Health and Human Services, Washington, D.C. 20201. Grantees undertaking projects with government sponsorship are encouraged to express freely their findings and conclusions. Points of view or opinions do not, therefore, necessarily represent official ACL policy.

FAMILY ADVOCACY NETWORK



If you have information you would like to have included in the next issue, please contact Jane Carroll at jcarroll@drms.ms.



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