

DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES NETWORK PRESENTS

DD NETWORK NEWS

A Collaborative Publication from MSCDD, DRMS and IDS

FALL 2025



Save the Date: 2026 MegaConference

June 17-18
We're moving to...
Oxford!

We're exciting to announce we're switching things up this year and the 2026 MegaConference will be held in Oxford, Mississippi at the Oxford Convention Center! We hope to see you June 17-18!

While we will be in a new location, you can be sure we'll have the same amazing keynote speakers, informative sessions, networking, and fun! To follow along for updates, visit msmegaconference.org or follow us on Facebook!

A Look Back on the 2025 MegaConference!



DISABILITY RIGHTS MISSISSIPPI

DRMS is excited to be partnering with the Career Horizons Center at the Mississippi Institute for Disabilities at Mississippi State University.

The Career Horizons Project (CHP) at Mississippi State University is seeking to help Mississippi residents between the ages of 16 - 70 who have disabilities accompanied by or resulting from Long COVID successfully get back to work and maintain their employment. CHP offers FREE vocational counseling and employment services for job placement and retention.

Learn more & submit a referral for yourself or someone you know who has been impacted by Long COVID on our website at careerhorizonsproject.msstate.edu.

PARTNERING FOR COMPETITIVE INTEGRATED EMPLOYMENT



We are also proud to announce we have been awarded an Interest on Lawyers Trust Account (IOLTA) grant to expand access to justice for people with disabilities. With this funding, DRMS will host a series of free legal clinics across Mississippi, offering critical legal services and resources to individuals with disabilities and their families.

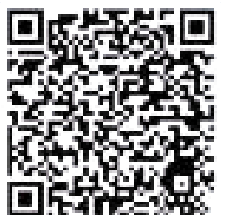
The clinics will provide guidance on a range of legal issues that affect Mississippians with disabilities. Staffed by DRMS attorneys and advocates, these clinics will create opportunities for individuals to ask questions, receive information, and be connected with advocacy resources. Tentatively, the topics for the clinics will cover Medicaid, Financial Planning for families with children with special needs, and special education.

“We are grateful for the support of the IOLTA program in helping us expand our mission of defending and advancing the rights of people with disabilities in Mississippi,” said Polly Tribble, DRMS Executive Director.

For more information and updates on clinic locations, follow Disability Rights Mississippi on social media at @DisRightsMS.



EVENT ALERT! DRMS will be at Disability-Friendly Day at the MS State Fair, sponsored by Joni and Friends! Scan here for more info!



MS COUNCIL ON DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

Mississippi Council on Developmental Disabilities: New and Continuing Grants Expand Opportunities in Mississippi

Across Mississippi, programs dedicated to supporting individuals with developmental disabilities (DD) began providing services July 1, 2025 to expand their reach and impact. This year's grants, both new and continuing, highlight innovative approaches in education, childcare, community supports, health, and recreation. Together, these initiatives continue to uphold our mission of improving the quality of life for people with DD and their families.

Three new programs were launched to address gaps in education and community supports.

Bloom Center – Itawamba Community College (Education):

This program is specifically designed for neurodivergent students with alternative or no high school diplomas. Through a structured four-semester curriculum, Bloom Center provides essential life, academic, and career readiness skills, ensuring that participants receive the personalized support necessary to reach their full potential. Key components of the program include self-advocacy, financial literacy, social skills, supported decision-making, and preparation for independent living, equipping participants with the tools for lifelong success.



JP's (Jullia's Place) – Good Shepherd (Childcare): Designed for toddlers with DD and their families, this program enhances early childhood inclusion by expanding access to integrated therapies, staff and parent training, and advocacy resources to ensure smoother school transitions.

Building Life with Social Skills Training BLAST – Autism Center of North MS (Community Supports): Focused on young adults, BLAST builds communication, stress management, conflict resolution, and career readiness through therapeutic sessions and community role-play, while also supporting parents and caregivers.

Two new initiatives emphasize health and recreation as vital components of quality of life.

SMILE – UMMC (Health): Enhancing Integrated Dentistry Training and Care for Children with Developmental Disabilities in Mississippi aims to train pediatric dentistry students and residents in Child-Adult Relationship Enhancement (CARE) to improve behavioral strategies, align with national standards, and expand inclusive dental care for children with developmental disabilities in Mississippi.

Arc of Northwest MS Community Garden (Recreation):

This community garden fosters teamwork, leadership, and self-advocacy skills through hands-on gardening, supported by local garden clubs and six weeks of structured instruction.



MS COUNCIL ON DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

Several established programs received renewed support to expand their proven impact.

Family Advocacy Network – USM IDS (Education): Now in its fourth year, this program empowers families to navigate Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and Behavioral Intervention Plans (BIPs) while expanding training, peer support, and regional advocacy.

Bridges to Speak – USM (Education): Entering its second year, Bridges to Speak provides Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) training for students, educators, and caregivers, helping children communicate more effectively at school and home.

No More Waiting – Autism Center of North MS (Community Supports): Serving families on therapy waitlists, this initiative offers caregiver training, trauma-informed strategies, and a robust resource library to empower parents during the waiting period.

U-THRIVE – MSU (Community Supports): This third-year project offers adults with DD structured life-skills training and community activities, while also equipping families and local partners to promote inclusion.

Pathway Weavers – USM IDS (Recreation):

Through freestyle weaving sessions, participants explore self-expression and relaxation, while raising awareness about developmental disabilities.



MSU Adapted Swim Camp – MSU (Health):

Expanding into its second year, this program provides adapted swimming opportunities for children and adults with disabilities, with a long-term goal of developing a statewide instructor certification program.



Moving Forward

These programs represent ongoing efforts to expand opportunities across Mississippi. From early childhood through adulthood, and from classrooms to community gardens, these programs provide meaningful supports that help individuals with developmental disabilities and their families thrive. For more information please contact MS Council on Developmental Disabilities at 601-359-6238 or www.msccd.org.

INSTITUTE ON DISABILITY STUDIES

The Institute for Disability Studies (IDS) employment programs are hosting a series of employment awareness events in conjunction with National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM).



National Disability Employment Awareness Month is part of an annual awareness campaign designed to educate about disability employment issues and celebrate the many and varied contributions of America's workers with disabilities. This year's national theme is "Celebrating Value and Talent." For the fifth consecutive year, IDS received permission from the Department of Labor to adapt the national poster into a Mississippi focused one featuring youth and young adults with disabilities.

IDS' 2025 NDEAM activities will include:

- The fourth annual Together Employing All Mississippi Students (TEAMS) Awards in which Mississippi Special Education Teachers/Staff and two Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services Counselors/Staff will be recognized for their contributions.
- A virtual Career Informational Interview Event on October 14.
- Weekly employment-focused Facebook posts recognizing youth and young adults with disabilities who are making strides toward employment (<https://www.facebook.com/msusmids/>).
- Featured NDEAM activities and informational sharing through weekly pre-employment transition services provided in partnering middle and high schools.

All of this year's events are a collaboration with the Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services, funder of the Transition of Teens to Adult Life (ToTAL) Program, which is a work-based training and internship program for teens and young adults with disabilities ages 14 to 21.

"At IDS, we believe every young person has unique gifts and talents to share with the world," said Beth Robertson, Executive Coordinator for Transition. "National Disability Employment Awareness Month serves as an important reminder to our communities that true equity means opening doors, creating opportunities, and celebrating the contributions of all individuals, including those with disabilities."

Employers and employees in all industries can learn more about how to participate in National Disability Employment Awareness Month and ways they can promote its messages – during October and throughout the year – by visiting www.dol.gov/agencies/odep/initiatives/ndeam.

IDS is Mississippi's University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDD) and has a mission to enhance the quality of life across the life span for citizens with disabilities and their families, regardless of culture, ethnicity, or socioeconomic background. To learn more about IDS or the ToTAL Program, call 601.266.5163 or visit <http://www.usm.edu/ids>.



We are hosting our inaugural golf tournament!

Learn more and register here: <https://commerce.cashnet.com/usmlDS>

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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