



Annual Report to the Community

Expanding Access and Independence

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Message from the Director



With enthusiasm and a sense of accomplishment, I present our Annual Report to the Community for Fiscal Year 2023. It was a year marked by significant strides and notable achievements, all made possible by the unwavering dedication of our exceptional staff and the invaluable partnerships we have forged with community and government stakeholders, businesses, families, and self-advocates. With the expansion of eligibility criteria through the passage of the Developmental Disabilities Eligibility Reform Amendment Act, we have successfully extended services within our Developmental Disabilities Administration to include people with developmental disabilities, not just intellectual disabilities, significantly expanding our reach and impact.

Our efforts to enrich services and resources have been diverse and substantial. An amendment to our Individual and Family Services (IFS) waiver resulted in My Life, My Way, a participant-directed services program that allows people supported to become their own bosses. People who enroll in this service enhancement act as common law employers to manage their staff, which means they can hire someone they trust to help meet their needs, and, with the help of a third-party support broker, they oversee and manage their budget, taxes, and payroll. This service enhancement is a testament to our mission to empower individuals with disabilities and their families.

In alignment with our commitment to equity and inclusion, DDS had the privilege of participating in the city's inaugural Racial Equity Pilot Cohort. Through developing and implementing our Racial Equity Action Plan, we are actively addressing barriers to inclusion and improving equitable access to District services. We carry this same spirit and tenacity with efforts to assist people with disabilities in obtaining and maintaining meaningful employment.

In January 2023, DDS and 15 partner agencies, applied for and were awarded a technical assistance grant from the U.S. Department of Labor through its National Expansion

of Employment Opportunities Network (NEON) program. Administered by the DOL Office of Disability Employment and Policy (ODEP), NEON connects government agencies to ongoing supporting to increase employment outcomes for people with disabilities. This initiative supports Mayor Bowser's priority to have our government workforce reflect the residents of DC by expanding employment opportunities for people with disabilities at all levels within District agencies. In addition, RSA continued to see success as people who found work while supported by our agency averaged \$2.81 per hour above the minimum wage in 2023. Eighty percent of high school students with disabilities, ages 16-22, received at least one pre-employment transition service during the school year and we exceeded our target for the percentage of participants who earned a recognized postsecondary credential.

While the conclusion of the federal Public Health Emergency and the expiration of flexibilities under Appendix K have presented unique challenges, they have also provided us with opportunities for growth and innovation. DDS has been steadfast in our efforts to ensure a seamless transition for our supported individuals, offering comprehensive education and support throughout this period of change.

None of these accomplishments would have been possible without our staff's dedication and hard work, whose commitment to our mission is truly inspiring. As we look to the future, let us continue to work together with determination and compassion, ensuring that every person with a disability has every possible opportunity to thrive.

andrew P. Reese

Andrew P. Reese Director

Who We Are

The Department on Disability Services (DDS) is comprised of the Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA) and the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA). Through these administrations, the agency coordinates a diverse network of service providers to assist people with disabilities in leading vibrant, self-directed lives. DDS offers an array of supports, including:

- Coordination of Home and Community Based Services for People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities,
- Vocational Rehabilitation Services,

- Independent Living Services, and
- Transition Services, for youth ages 14 22 years.

The agency also includes the District's Disability Determination Division (DDD), which processes the Social Security Administration's (SSA) disability claims, including Supplemental Social Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI). DDD examines the cases to render a medical determination of eligibility; SSA makes the final approval or denial of District disability claims.

Who We Support

From October 1, 2022, through September 30, 2023

8,205

people received support

2,511
were supported
by DDA

5,694
were supported
by RSA

Ability at Work

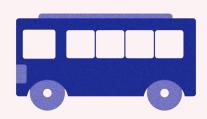
In FY 23, **605** people supported by RSA obtained successful employment outcomes. Of these, **514** (85 percent) were employed in high-demand fields. Top fields include hospitality, business/information technology (IT), and customer service/retail.













137 (23%)

Business/IT

(4%)
Transportation



59 (9%)
Customer
Service/Retail

Expanding Access and Independence

DDERAA Reaches More People

FY 23 was a year of innovation, collaboration, and unwavering dedication to our mission to provide high-quality, innovative services that enable people with disabilities to live meaningful, productive lives fully integrated in communities and neighborhoods across the District. With the passage of the Developmental Disability Eligibility Reform Amendment Act (DDERAA) in March 2022, we advanced efforts to connect

eligible people with developmental disabilities to critical community-based services. During FY 23, DDS saw a substantial increase in new applicants requesting services, doubling the number of people newly eligible for support through our Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA). The chart below shows a one-year comparison.

Fiscal Year	Intake Applications	People Newly Eligible for Services
2022	103	82
2023	262	169

Managing Life Their Way

We also amended our **Individual and Family Services Waiver (IFS)** by implementing participant-directed services through the *My Life*, *My Way* program. This program allows participants to be their own bosses, acting as common law employers to manage their own staff. This means they will be

able to hire someone they trust, like a family member, to help meet their needs and, with the help of a third-party support broker entity, oversee their own budget and manage taxes and payroll.

Number

Career Exploration

RSA provided **Pre-Employment Transition Services** (**Pre-ETS**) to 3,429 students during the 2022-2023 school year. Pre-ETS prepares students with disabilities, ages 14-22, for life after high school by equipping them with work-based learning experiences, training, and counseling that could lead to post-secondary education or employment. Please see the chart to the right for the Pre-ETS Activity breakdown.

Pre-ETS Activity	Number of Participants
Work-Based Learning Experiences	740
Job Readiness Training	901
Counseling on Postsecondary Education	1233
Career Exploration	1563
Self-Advocacy Training	796

Oral History Project Kicks-off DDAM 2023



The honorees and partners for From Lives Apart to Lives Together. Front row (left to right) Elijah Lee, SchoolTalk DC; Ron Price, Bob Williams. Back row: Ricky Price, Kim Scott, CEO of My Own Place; Director Reese, Ricardo and Donna Thornton, Rebecca Salon, Noah Beaufford of SchoolTalk.

DDS stakeholders joined SchoolTalkDC for the debut of From Lives Apart to Lives Together, an oral history project about people who resided at the District's former institution for people with intellectual disabilities. The private screening, which took place on March 1, 2023, was attended by a packed audience, ushering in National Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month (DDAM).

From Lives Apart to Lives Together is a collaborative effort between Project ACTION!, a self-advocacy group, and SchoolTalk's DC Youth Leadership Network (DCYLN). The project captures personal stories about life at Forest Haven. Two former DCYLN participants, now full-time employees with SchoolTalk DC, produced the videos. **Noah Beaufford,** a graduate of Eastern High School, created safe spaces and trusting environments to conduct interviews with former residents of Forest Haven. **Elijah Lee,** a graduate of Anacostia High School, filmed and edited the videos.

One person featured holds a special place in the heart of DDS. Program Support Assistant Deborah Gaither-Phillips shared her experiences at Forest Haven and the support she received from family members and DDS. She participated in the panel



Program Support Assistant Deborah Gaither-Phillips (right, pictured above with Director Reese) resided at Forest Haven until she was 17. She participated in the panel discussion with the audience after the film screening, demonstrating her resiliency and determination to live life her way. Gaither-Phillips has been employed full-time with DDS since 2016.

discussion with the audience, demonstrating her resiliency and determination to live her life her way. You can view her story and others on YouTubeLives2Gether.

Full link: https://www.youtube.com/
playlist?list=PLWrQYjBgtMGROReZXrz32qSwV56W3z_Qz

Partners for this project include Project ACTION!, Quality Trust for Individuals with Disabilities, DC Developmental Disabilities Council, DC Department on Disability Services, and local historian and advocate Bob Williams.

DC Mayor Muriel Bowser joined us at our annual Developmental Disability Awareness Month celebration, issuing a <u>proclamation</u> honoring the occasion and highlighting <u>FY 23 Fair Shot Budget</u> investments for disability services such as:

- \$500K to expand eligibility for individuals with developmental disabilities to provide the same services as individuals with intellectual disabilities, and
- \$11.5M to retain direct support professionals—who care for our most vulnerable residents—by raising wages over a three-year period.

Businesses Making a Difference for People with Disabilities

October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM). During our annual NDEAM celebration, DDS/RSA recognized eleven organizations that have supported efforts to help people with disabilities obtain and retain employment. Business Relations Specialist Sylvia Bailey-Charles coordinated the online event, which also included a panel discussion with people who gained employment with the support of RSA.

Director Reese commented, "Ensuring that persons with disabilities obtain and retain employment successfully requires different solutions. Many players are involved in helping job seekers find alternate solutions for penetrating the evolving workforce." RSA Deputy Director Evans noted that the agency not only equips job seekers with disabilities to be fully prepared for work, "We also support businesses with their diversity and inclusion goals by identifying and connecting them to qualified candidates for employment opportunities." Those connections include Employer Spotlight presentations, mock interviews, work-based learning experiences, and internships for youth and seasoned adults.

Kari Cooke, Director of the Mayor's Office for Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing (MODDHH), was the keynote speaker for the October 24 event. Director Cooke has an established career in policy development and community engagement through her

work at the Center for Disability Rights, National Black Deaf Advocates (NBDA), and the US Department of Labor affiliate programs.

Outstanding Employers

- Bitty & Beau's Coffee, Georgetown
- Joe's Seafood, Prime Steak, and Stone Crab
- Sunrise Senior Living
- UnitedHealth Group

Aspiring Professionals Internship Host Employers

- Office of the State Superintendent of Education
- Department of Buildings
- Department of Transportation
- Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services
- University of the District of Columbia
- Department of Forensic Sciences

Video Resumes Offer Employers a Different Perspective on Hiring People with Disabilities

To remove barriers to employment for people with disabilities, DDS and the Department of Behavioral Health (DBH) partnered to promote video resumes for job seekers with disabilities. A video resume uses clips and photos to convey the same information found in a written resume. It is a creative accommodation that connects the person and employer in meaningful ways.

The planning and preparation of producing a video resume can reduce a person's anxiety about meeting a prospective employer. And the format helps employers see the potential within

the person. To learn how you can assist a job seeker you support in producing a video resume, visit the DDS website and check out these resources from Able Opportunities, Inc.

- Video Resumes: Representing Yourself at Your Best
- Ready to Make an Impressive Video Resume
- <u>iPad "How-To" Training doc and Silly Film Training Series</u>

LaRaven Gaymon: Don't Wait for Someone Else



Never be idle; always stay busy. That's the mantra LaRaven Gaymon learned from her mother, and it's the phrase that guides her personal and professional life. Gaymon connected with DDS/RSA her senior year at H.D. Woodson High School; her goal was to attend college. She began as a psychology major at Trinity University and quickly switched to criminal justice. After graduation, Gaymon secured a paid internship with the DC Department of Forensic Science through the Rehabilitation Services Administration's (RSA) Aspiring Professionals Program. Finding a job in her field of study was difficult, but the practical experience she gained as an intern led to a full-time position with United Health Care Group.

As a Customer Care Coordinator, Gaymon assists people in resolving problems with medical appointments and medication. Her patient caseload includes elderly patients and people with disabilities. "It's a good fit for me right now because I understand what disabled people go through." United Health Care's training program is equipping her to interact effectively with people who may be facing a crisis. "Each person's situation is different. I try to understand what they are going through and work to resolve the issue as quickly as I can."

Gaymon carries this empathy for others into her role as an advocate for the Developmental Disabilities Council. She is adamant in expressing that people with disabilities are people first. "When I first went to college, administrators didn't think I could handle the class load. It was difficult initially, but I learned from a few failures. Trinity and I discovered that I needed a flexible schedule with day and evening classes. Graduate students took notes for me, and tutors helped me with assignments as needed." From that experience, she learned that people with disabilities must be proactive in getting the help they need. "Don't wait for someone else to initiate your success."

A sound support system is also essential. Gaymon credits her success, in part, to RSA Business Relations Specialist Sylvia Bailey-Charles and Vocational Rehabilitation Specialist Miriam Bolanos. "They prepared me for interviews and made sure I knew how to advocate for myself to secure appropriate accommodations." This support forged Gaymon's message to employers: "People with disabilities need equity, not equality. We deserve respect, not tolerance. Yes, recognize our disability, just don't focus on it. Consider our mental strengths, our intelligence and dedication."

DDS Selected for the NEON Initiative



The US Department of Labor (DOL) has selected ten states and the District of Columbia to participate as "core states" in its National Expansion of Employment Opportunities Network (NEON) initiative. DDS will manage the District's initiative and receive technical assistance from recognized subject matter experts to increase Competitive Integrated Employment for people with disabilities.

The DOL Office of Disability Employment Policy has administered NEON since its 2019 launch. The initiative connects government agencies to consulting, capacity-building support, and ongoing mentoring to increase employment outcomes. It also complements Mayor Bowser's efforts to elevate the District Government as a model employer of people with disabilities on all levels. DDS has three outcomes for the NEON initiative.

Outcome I: Assess the Current Landscape—Complete an assessment of policies and practices across District government agency partners to support State as a Model Employment (SAME) to fill competitive integrated employment (CIE) positions with people with disabilities to work at all levels of government.

Outcome 2: Improve outreach and engagement of key populations—Identify potential talent pipelines and best practice approaches to fill openings DC Government, with a particular focus on engaging and employing youth/young adults with disabilities at all levels within the government.

Outcome 3: Develop a SAME Workplan—Working with the cross-agency Employment First Leadership Workgroup, develop a work plan that reflects the needs and opportunities identified in the Landscape Assessment.

California, Colorado, Delaware, Hawaii, Kansas, Kentucky, Missouri, New York, Rhode Island, and Tennessee were among the other states selected for the NEON initiative.

Engaging Diverse Communities

The DDS Outreach and Engagement Committee works to identify and build trust with underserved communities, especially residents of various cultures. During FY 23, the agency participated in more than 130 outreach events such as fairs, forums, and educational workshops to connect residents with support services and assist them in gaining independence.

Promoting Health & Well-Being: Know Your Rights!

Our 5th Annual Latinx Conference for Spanish-speaking residents with disabilities and their families attracted nearly 200 attendees. Held at the Columbia Heights Educational Campus, this free, Spanish-language-only event gave attendees access to information, support, and resources in their native language with interpretation available for non-Spanish speakers. Topics included mental health supports, future planning, and healthy relationships.

Representatives from various government and community-based organizations also provided information about District programs and the importance of self-advocacy. Throughout the year, we also conducted an array of outreach activities to connect Ethiopian, and Eritrean communities to programs and services, hosting community resource events for Amharic-speaking communities with interpretation and translation in English and Tigrinya.









Returning to Community-Based Program

With the federal Public Health Emergency (PHE) finally declared over in May 2023, DDS conducted various information sessions to educate providers and the public about the PHE unwinding to ensure that people with disabilities would have a smooth transition back to community-based day programming. More than 90 community-based organizations and District agencies participated in the **Provider Fair** in July. Held at the Washington Convention Center, the free event connected more than 500 District residents with disabilities and their families to supports that could help them achieve and maintain self-sufficiency and independence. Providers offering individualized day supports, residential programs, wellness services, employment development, and more were on site.



More than 500 attended the DDS 2023 Provider Fair. Held at the Washington Convention Center, the event offered residents with disabilities easy access to an array of providers and community-based organizations that can help them achieve and maintain self-sufficiency and independence.

SILC Consumer Forum and Youth Summit

In collaboration with the DC Statewide Independent Living Council and the DC Center for Independent Living, DDS hosted the 2023 SILC Consumer Forum and Youth Summit to promote independent living services for District residents with disabilities.

The theme of the event was the Impact of COVID-19 on DC's Disability Community. More than 150 people attended sessions on housing, employment, transition, and mental health services.

Future Planning Lunch and Learn Series in August 2023

This 3-part series addressed an overview of disability and aging services in DC, financial options to plan for the future, and legal decision-making options to plan for the future.

You can view each session here: https://www.youtube.com/ playlist?list=PLEhZQU_WEgEtwv4o0wukDXgWGEOTRgDT-

- Aging and Disability Panel Discussion and Community Listening Session
- Aging and Disability Professionals Networking Event

Special Visitors and Awards

DC Councilmember Visits DDS

Shortly after assuming her role as Chair of the Council Committee on Facilities and Family Services, DC Councilmember Janeese Lewis George (D-Ward 4) and members of her staff

DC Councilmember Janeese Lewis George (left) sitting next to Director Andrew Reese. She chairs the Council Committee on Facilities and Family Services, which oversees the work of our agency.

visited DDS. After a brief office tour with the Director, the councilmember met with the agency's executive leadership team to learn more about our work and the people we support.



Members of our executive leadership team gave Councilmember Lewis George an overview of the work of the agency.

Sharing Our Expertise with Korea

In the photo on the right, representatives from the Korea Employment Agency for Persons with Disabilities (KEAD) recently met with RSA Deputy Director Darryl Evans (far left) and VR Program Manager Ricky Wright (far right) to learn how to improve employment outcomes for people with disabilities in the country. Associate Research Fellows Yegick Lim (center left) and Young-EunBaek (center right) were impressed with our model of individualized plans for employment (IPE) and efforts to match a person's interests to a job. Lim commented that KEAD is looking to implement elements of the US disability employment strategy to improve outcomes for its citizens.



Change Begins with a Conversation



Pictured to the left are panelists for the August 30, 2023, OCA Speaker Series Session on Racial and Disability Equity. In the photo, left to right: Interim Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services Ciana Creighton, **ODR** Executive Director Mathew McCollough; DDS Director Andrew Reese; MODDHH Director Kari Cooke.

In August, Director Reese joined the Office of the City Administrator (OCA), the Office of Disability Rights (ODR), and the Mayor's Office for Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing (MODDHH) for a conversation about racial and disability equity in District Government. The Office of Racial Equity(ORE) hosted the session for the OCA's Speaker Series.

DDS was one of 12 District agencies selected for the first Racial Equity Pilot Cohort, implemented due to the Racial Equity Achieves Results Emergency Amendment Act passed by the Council of the District of Columbia in 2020. The initiative seeks to eliminate socioeconomic inequities experienced by African-American residents and other people of color and specifies that the District include racial equity strategies in its operations. DDS has completed various tasks related to case management systems and data analyses.



The audience listens as panelists respond to questions posed by City Administrator Kevin Donahue about strategies their agencies are using to eliminate inequities experienced by residents of color and with disabilities in the District.

DC Bridging Aging and Disability Networks and the Racial Equity Community of Practice are continuing the systems change efforts that support families, coordinate services across agencies, and engage diverse cultural and linguistic communities to promote racial equity. The primary objectives are to:

- Better support individuals with I/DD as they age while maintaining dignity and rights
- Better support and connection with aging caregivers (family and paid caregivers like Direct Support Professionals - DSPs, Home Health Aides - HHAs, etc.)
- Build capacity for racial equity across aging and disability networks.
- Build sustainable relationships between aging and disability service networks.

Mayor's Community Award for Health and Wellness

October 15 marked the conclusion of National Hispanic Heritage Month and the 46th Anniversary of the SOMOS DC Community Awards Ceremony. This year, Intake and Outreach Supervisor Mark Agosto received the Mayor's Community Award for Health & Wellness for his leadership in connecting Latino residents with disabilities to support services. Eduardo Perdomo, Interim Director for the Mayor's Office of Latin Affairs (MOLA), commented that Agosto's "hard work and commitment to our DC values are exceptional, and we are proud to recognize his presence and participation in our city."

SOMOS DC honors diverse individuals who have positively impacted the Latino community. Award categorwies include the Lifetime Achievement Award, Good Governance Award, Arts & Creative Economy Award, Economic Development Award, Education Award, Public Safety Award, Health & Wellness Award, and Housing Visionary Award. The awards ceremony was part of the annual Noche Cultural, the City's culminating event for Hispanic Heritage Month. Agosto was presented a print of a mural painted by Renato and Carlos Salazar, Un Pueblo sin murals es un pueblo demuralizado or A People without Murals is a Demuralized People.



MOLA-Agosto: Pictured above, left to right, Eduardo Perdomo, Director of the Mayor's Office of Latin Affairs (MOLA), DDS Director Andrew Reese, Mark Agosto, and the Director of the Mayor's Office of Community Affairs, lackie Reyes-Yanes.

SEEC was named a 2023 Top Workplaces in the USA. According to its website, Top Workplaces offers credible, year-round employer recognition based solely on employee feedback captured by the Energage Workplace Survey. This provider partners with us for Project SEARCH, a workplace immersion program for young adults with disabilities that offers hands-on experience at unique business host sites. SEEC was also recognized as a Top Workplace in 2021.



Workplace Wellness



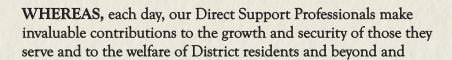
Incident Management and Enforcement Unit (IMEU) Investigator Karey Hall took part in an office wellness spin to create a blueberry smoothie.

A healthy workforce is often a happy workforce. That's why DDS introduced Wellness Wednesdays in 2023. The free hour-long sessions allowed employees to enjoy exercise classes, food demonstrations, chair massages, and other activities every other month. The DC Department of Human Resources hosted a free Biometric Health Screening in partnership with healthcare providers at our offices. The Kaiser Mobile Van was equipped to check cholesterol, blood glucose, blood pressure, and body composition to help employees know their numbers to create a plan for health transformation and illness prevention. Other activities such as Smoothies and Spin reduced stress and enhanced camaraderie and fun at the office.

Direct Support Professionals Week

September 10 - 16 was National Direct Support Professionals (DSP) Week. The DC Coalition of Disability Service Providers hosted an in-person DSP Conference at Gallaudet University on September 15 to celebrate the dedication and service of area DSPs.

Attendees received training to sharpen their skills and enjoyed guest speakers, door prizes, and engaging activities. DDS Director Andrew Reese presented a proclamation on behalf of Mayor Bowser that read, in part:



WHEREAS, Direct Support Professionals Week is an opportunity to raise public awareness and appreciation for the professionals who strive to ensure that people with disabilities are treated with dignity and respect in every area of community living—at home, work, and social settings:

NOW, THEREFORE, I, THE MAYOR OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, do hereby proclaim September 10 - 16, 2023, as DIRECT SUPPORT PROFESSIONAL WEEK in Washington, DC, and call upon all residents of this great City to join me in commending these professionals for their service.

Remembering Judy Heumann 1947 - 2023



Photo credit: Vlasta PilotBFA.com for InStyle online edition, May 25, 2021.

International Disability Rights Advocate and DC resident Judith "Judy" Heumann passed away on March 4, 2023. Often regarded as "the Mother of the Disability Rights Movement," Heumann served as the first director of the DC Department on Disability Services when it was established in 2007. She helped spearhead the passage of disability rights legislation, founded national and international disability advocacy organizations, and held senior federal government positions in the Clinton and Obama Administrations.

Featured in the Oscar-nominated documentary film, *Crip Camp: A Disability Revolution*, Heumann helped found the Independent Living Movement. She was instrumental in developing and implementing national disability rights legislation such as Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and served on numerous boards including the American Association of People with Disabilities, the Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund, the United States International Council on Disability.

"Some people say that what I did changed the world," she wrote, "But really, I simply refused to accept what I was told about who I could be. And I was willing to make a fuss about it."

Discover more at JudithHeumann.com



Department on Disability Services

One Independence Square 250 E Street SW, Washington, DC 20024

202-442-8400 | www.dds.dc.gov **Hours:** Monday - Friday, 8:30 am - 5 pm





