



## Building New Castles - The Court Street Project

Building New Castles is now in its second year of operation. In the first year, the project hit many milestones and gained the support of many partners. These milestones include,

- Three vacant/blighted properties were rehabbed
- Three owner-occupied properties received grants to make exterior improvements
- Three curb cuts were installed
- Numerous vacant lots were cleaned up
- A community garden was created

The second year, there are more projects in the works;

- Six universally-designed homes will be built and sold at a significant discount
- Approximately 10 owner-occupied homes will receive funding for improvements
- Missing and deteriorated sidewalks will be replaced to make the community more accessible/walkable
- Additional community gardens will be created with functional art rainwater collection systems
- Two community clean-up days will remove garbage and debris from the neighborhood
- The neighborhood will be designated an Elm Street Neighborhood through the Department of Community and Economic Development, which will give the community priority and technical support on grant applications and planning

The project is supported and receives funding from three local foundations. For the past six months, the Caroline Knox Memorial Trust provide funds for owner-occupied repairs. On March 27, the Almira Foundation and the Lawrence County Community Trust provided DON with their maximum yearly grant for the project. This is the first time an organization has received the maximum yearly grant from both of these foundations in a single year. Funds from these foundations will be used for owner-occupied improvements and neighborhood sidewalks to make the community more accessible/walkable.

### **DON Services Attendants Required to Use EVV System**

All direct care workers are mandated by the Commonwealth to be enrolled and using

#### **Upcoming Events**

**DON Dinner Dance**  
*Fri., April 26*

**DON Fishing Derby**  
*Fri., May 10*

**Freedom Fair**  
**Fireworks Festival**  
*Sat., July 20*

Electronic Visit Verification process by September 1, 2019. DON Services is using HHAeXchange as their vendor and all attendants should contact their DON Services Independent Living Coordinators and get assistance with using one of the devices that will allow you to be compliant with the State and Federal Law. An attendant can use their smart phone via an HHAX APP or a telephony system via their own cell phone and/or the consumers phone. All direct care workers should get enrolled with EVV (electronic visit verification) as soon as possible. Consumers that do not require their attendants to use the EVV system risk having their services placed on hold.



## Emergency Preparation

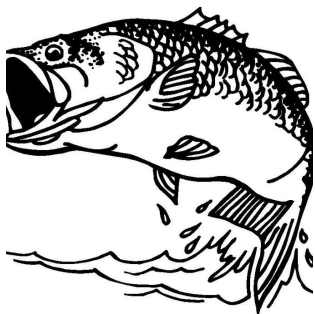
As part of a CIL special projects collaborative funded through a one-year grant, DON is actively participating in a multi-pronged state-wide initiative to bring about positive changes in the lives of individuals with disabilities. DON's focus is on Emergency Preparedness and Voter Registration.

Monthly coordination calls are facilitated by the project manager with homework assignments distributed and earlier assignments reviewed.

This Spring, DON is fulfilling two grant-driven "deliverables" assigned by the project manager over this past winter; 1) contribute to and distribute emergency preparedness surveys to consumers and to first responders and 2) define and coordinate outreach to media outlets to launch an Op-Ed and public awareness campaign focused on Voter Registration for individuals with disabilities.

DON anticipates that a series of activities will unfold in the late Spring and early Summer including emergency preparedness training seminars for consumers and first responders and, in addition to Opinion-Editorials and media outreach, the introduction of new voting machines soon to appear in area counties. DON has been in contact with county Election officials responsible for selecting and overseeing the new voting machines in each county.

## DON Fishing Derby



Disability Options Network is hosting a annual fishing derby and we would love for you to join us! Bring your own bait, gear, and packed lunch. No Fishing License is required. It will be on May 10th, 10am - 2pm, located at McDaniel's Launch at Moraine State Park. There are limited seats on our bus, so it will be on a first come first serve basis with reservations due no later than May 1st. You may meet us there!

Directions online at <https://www.morainepreservationfund.org/map.html>

To make reservations, please contact Jeannie Surgalski at (724) 652-5144 ext.

## Debunking the Three BIGGEST Myths about Disability Benefits and Work



There are several common myths about how working will affect disability benefits and health care coverage. Here are the three, most common and why they are wrong.

1. *If I try to go to work, I will automatically lose my Medicare or Medicaid.*

This is a myth. First, as long as you keep receiving a benefit check of any amount, you will keep your health insurance. If you earn enough that your Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) checks stop, Medicare can continue for up to 93 months. If you currently receive Medicaid, you should be eligible to continue to receive Medicaid even after you stop receiving Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits due to work. To be eligible you need to meet certain requirements, which include earnings below a threshold amount set by your state. Even if your earnings exceed the state threshold, you may still be eligible and should talk to your state Medicaid office.

For more information about Keeping Your Medical Benefits after cash benefits stop, visit [www.ssa.gov/redbook](http://www.ssa.gov/redbook) and [www.socialsecurity.gov/disabilityresearch/wi/1619b.htm](http://www.socialsecurity.gov/disabilityresearch/wi/1619b.htm)

2. *If I use my Ticket to go to work, Social Security will conduct a medical review of my case, and I will lose my benefits.* This is also a myth. Social Security ordinarily reviews your medical condition from time to time to see whether you are still disabled, using a process called the medical Continuing Disability Review, or medical CDR. If you participate in the Ticket program with either an Employment Network or your State Vocational Rehabilitation Agency, and make "timely progress" following your individual work plan, Social Security will not conduct a review of your medical condition. If a medical CDR has already been scheduled for you before you assigned your ticket, Social Security will continue with the medical CDR.

3. *If my checks stop because I go to work and then I have to stop working because of my disability, I will have to reapply for benefits all over again.* It took me forever to be approved for benefits and I cannot afford to wait that long again. As a result, I should not try to work. Again, it's a myth. You will not need to reapply if your benefits ended within the past five years due to your earnings and you meet a few other requirements, including that you still have the original medical condition or one related to it that prevents you from working. This is a work incentive called Expedited Reinstatement. You may even be able to receive up to six months of temporary cash benefits in addition to Medicare or Medicaid coverage while SSA conducts a medical review to determine if your benefits can be reinstated.

Disability Options Network is a Ticket to Work program participant. For more information about these or other Social Security Work Incentives, contact the Ticket to Work help line at 1-866-968-7842 or 1866-833-2967 (TTY). For more information about the Ticket to Work program [visit www.socialsecurity.gov/Work](http://www.socialsecurity.gov/Work)

## Voter Registration Project

Key Dates for the primary:

May 14: Last day to apply for a civilian absentee ballot for primary – apply early- PA has tight absentee ballot law

May 17: Last day for a county board of elections to receive voted civilian absentee ballots

May 21: VOTING DAY FOR THE MUNICIPAL PRIMARY!!

May 28: Last day for a county board of elections to receive voted military and overseas absentee ballots

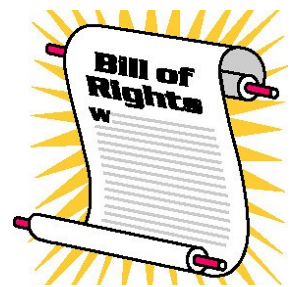
### List of Election Office Contacts

County	Name	Phone	Email
Allegheny	Allegheny County Election Division	(412) 350-4500	No email listed
Armstrong	Jennifer Bellas	(724) 548-3222	<a href="mailto:jbbellas@co.armstrong.pa.us">jbbellas@co.armstrong.pa.us</a>
Beaver	Dorene Mandity	(724) 770-4440	No email listed
Butler	Shari Brewer	(724) 284-5308	<a href="mailto:sbrewer@co.butler.pa.us">sbrewer@co.butler.pa.us</a>
Lawrence	L. Edward Allison Jr.	(724) 656-2161	<a href="mailto:lcvote@co.lawrence.pa.us">lcvote@co.lawrence.pa.us</a>
Mercer	Jeff Greenburg	(724) 662-7542	<a href="mailto:jgreburg@mc0c.co.mercer.pa.us">jgreburg@mc0c.co.mercer.pa.us</a>
Westmoreland	Beth Lechman	(724) 830-3150	No email listed

### PENNSYLVANIA Voters' Bill of Rights

#### You Have the Right to Vote:

- If you are in line at the polling place when the polls close.
- If you are voting in your district for the first time if you have a photo ID, voter identification card or a copy of a current utility bill, bank statement, government check, paycheck or other government document that shows your name and address.
- If you do not have any identification and you are voting for the first time, or if you believe you are registered but your name does not appear on the registration roll you can vote on a provisional ballot by signing a form swearing you are a registered voter.
- If you cannot read, have a disability or require language assistance, **YOU CAN RECEIVE ASSISTANCE** from anyone except the judge of election, your employer or an officer or agent of your union.
- If you are challenged in the polls, you can sign a Challenge Affidavit affirming that you are a qualified voter and that the basis for the challenge is untrue.
- If you need help operating the machine, you can request audible instructions from any election officer, but they may not enter the booth with you.



**YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO VOTE!** It is the law, If you feel your rights have been violated, call **866-687-8683**.

## **Meet your Independent Living Coordinator**

My name is Leah Gray. I am the Deputy Director for Disability Options Network. I oversee services in Armstrong and Westmoreland Counties. I have been with DON for about a year and a half, but I have worked in the independent living field for more than 20 years.

After receiving my MBA, I moved to Atlanta to work with the Olympic and Paralympic Organizing Committees. It was one of the most amazing experiences of my career.

I absolutely love sports. I played wheelchair basketball for 25 years and co-founded an all-women's wheelchair basketball team. I have completed 9 marathons and more than 50 other road races of varying distances. Water skiing, snow skiing, curling, track, field, weightlifting, swimming, handcycling, and skydiving have all helped shape my life.

As a single mother of 2 kids, a daughter aged 21 and a son aged 15, I now enjoy sports through watching them compete. We enjoy country living and our house full of animals (4 cats, 2 dogs, and a chinchilla).

I love being a part of the Center for Independent Living. I received my certification as an Employment Support Professional last year and I look forward to helping DON grow throughout our service area.

## **Lower East Side Clean-Up Day**

The first clean-up day of this year was held on April 6, on New Castle's Lower East Side. This is the site of DON's revitalization project – The Court Street Project. This event was organized by Tri-County CleanWays, Bible Way Church of God in Christ and DON.

Approximately 70 people participated. Jerry Zona from Tri-County CleanWays went over safety measures with the volunteers and sent them out with reflective vests, gloves, grabbers and a supply of garbage bags. The group covered a very large area from Croton Avenue Lockley School and over to East Washington St. and Butler Ave. The group was able to fill two dumpsters that had been donated by Castle Roll-offs. Tri-County CleanWays was also able to get the landfill cost donated by Carbon Limestone Landfill.

Breakfast, lunch, snacks and water were provided by DON with some donations from May's Donuts, Pizza Joe's, Four Star Pizza, Pizza Man Pizza and Towne Mall Pizza. It was a very successful event and another one is planned for August.



## **Understanding your Social Security Benefits**

When you interact with people trying to help you with services, you may have run into the question of what kind of Social Security you receive. It can be confusing and frustrating, but there are a few big differences in those benefits when interacting with other programs, so it is important to know WHAT you receive and how it interacts with your other benefits.

The first benefit that you might receive falls under the category of 'Title II' benefits which will kick in first if you qualify for them. The most common Title II benefit is SSDI (Social Security Disability Insurance). SSDI is an entitlement program, meaning that you are entitled to draw from SSDI if you have paid in enough to the program through your working wages over the years. The amount of your SSDI payment is going to depend on how much you have paid in, and the length of time that you paid in. Other common title II benefits are CDB (Childhood Disability Benefits) which is a person over 18 with no working record who is collecting off the working record of a retired, disabled, or deceased parent. Just like with SSDI, this benefit is still an entitlement based off the work record of someone who paid into the program.

So, what happens if you don't have a work history and don't qualify for Title II, or your Title II payment isn't very high? That's when SSI (Supplemental Security Income) comes in. Unlike Title II benefits, SSI is a needs-based program—it will only pay out to people who meet financial guidelines. The max payout for 2019 for SSI is \$771. If you are receiving Title II benefits below this amount, you will also receive the difference in SSI to increase that amount to the \$771 amount. If your Title II benefits exceed this amount, you won't receive SSI benefits.

Let's add insurance into this mix as well. The differences between Medicare and Medicaid can also be confusing, but you can sometimes determine which you are receiving if you know which Social Security benefit you get. Title II benefits come with Medicare—if you receive SSDI, then you are enrolled in the Medicare part A option, and had to decide to opt in or out of part B. If you receive SSI, you are also enrolled in Medicaid, which is state based and needs based. It is possible to receive both, so don't panic if your situation isn't lining up with this information directly.

Social Security benefits can be tricky, so if you want to better understand what benefits you receive, contact the CIL and set up an appointment. We can help sort through your case and help get you a clear idea of what benefits you receive and how they work for you.

## **Seeking Homeowner Applicants for Home Repairs**

Disability Options Network (DON), a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization, is administering a recently awarded Housing Preservation Grant (HPG) and needs eligible homeowner applicants.

This U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) grant is provided to make needed repairs and renovations for rural owner-occupied very low and low-income homeowners who have a disability, or have a household member with a disability, who are residents of **Armstrong, Beaver, Butler, Lawrence, Mercer or Westmoreland counties**. Funds may be used to make accessibility modifications, resolve health or safety issues, or make energy-efficiency improvements. Funds from the Housing Preservation Grant will provide a dollar for dollar match up to \$3000 in repair or renovation costs. Each homeowner is responsible to provide and/or identify matching funds.

Funds will be awarded through an application process and applications will be taken on a first come, first serve basis. For further information or to request an application: please call DON's Housing Department, visit [www.doninc.org/HPP](http://www.doninc.org/HPP), or visit DON's New Castle Office at 831 Harrison Street, New Castle, PA 16101.

This is an equal opportunity program. Discrimination is prohibited by Federal Law. Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information or assistance with filling out this application should contact our office by telephone (724) 652-5144, Fax (724) 856-8973, or TTY (724) 652-5152.

## **Center for Independent Living Can Make an Impact**

Supporting consumers to navigate life's barriers can have big rewards. One recent story highlights why the CIL is in operation.

A consumer wanted to move into their own place for more independence after acquiring a disability that required many years of reliance on family. Through a relationship with the CIL and the CIL's connection to other agencies, this consumer was able to secure an apartment that was located in walkable city neighborhood in Allegheny County through a very competitive lottery process. Since moving in January the consumer has expanded their social network to join community groups, visit a wellness center for exercise, navigating the neighborhood, and making friends. The consumer's comment to their IL Coordinator was "You have changed my life!"

If you know of someone with a disability that is struggling, encourage them to reach out to the CIL for support and to create their own independent living plan.

## **Rep. Dan Miller's Disability & Mental Health Summit**

Pa State Representative Dan Miller held his 6th annual Disability and Mental Health Summit with partnerships with 21 and Able, The PEAL Center, Allegheny Family Network and the Pennsylvania Youth Initiative. The event was again held at the Beth El Congregation in Allegheny County in March 2019. Disability Options Network was one of seventy-seven organizations at the Resource Fair this year. The three-day event was well attended by consumers, family members and service providers. Two members of our Disability Options Network staff served on the planning committee this year: Amanda McCoy and Leah Gray.

Special guest speakers included the Secretary of the Department of Labor & Industry, Gerald Oleksiak, Congressman Mike Doyle, Caregiver & Media Personality Jennifer Antkoviak, and others, to discuss the latest laws and policy changes impacting people with disabilities and mental health diagnoses. A wide range of workshops included topics such as: Youth & Mental Health, Social Decision Making ; Legal Issues, Job Readiness, and Dating, Impact of Isolation on Older Adults, Influence to Action: Advocacy, Leadership and Transition, Suicide Prevention, Supporting Both People with Disabilities and Businesses, and many more. The event offered continuing education credits for teachers, lawyers, social workers, and Rehabilitation Counselors.

Next year, the Dan Miller 7th annual Disability and Mental Health Summit will be a one-day event on March 6, 2020 at the David Lawrence Convention Center in Downtown Pittsburgh, in celebration of the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

### ***(De) Clutter Corner***

Set aside 20 minutes daily to divide possessions into these four categories to reduce clutter:

- Throw out
  - Throw away anything that can be tossed
  - Include anything worn, in disrepair, out of date, or items you haven't used in 1 year
- Donate
  - Gather anything that can be donated to those that are less fortunate
- Not ready to part
  - Place these in a box labeled with the date
  - If you don't go back to the box in a year, DONATE!
- Find a home
  - Items you truly love or need should have a place within your space

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