



DON Dispatch

February &
March 2019

Disability Options Network Fiscal Year in Review

The fiscal year for the Center for Independent Living closed on Sept. 30, 2018. For the year, which began on Oct. 1, 2017, the CIL served a total of 585 consumers and assisted 515 more with just information and referral services across Allegheny, Armstrong, Beaver, Butler, Lawrence, Mercer and Westmoreland counties.

The Durable Medical Equipment Re-use program which provides assistive devices — such as canes and power chairs — to help folks maintain their independence was able to support 95 people to secure 109 assistive devices worth more than \$95,185.

The CIL now has more than 700 followers on our Facebook page where we share disability-related news, information and events. The employment program has 30 active consumers working in career skills development, career assessment and job finding by linking with local OVR and Career Link.

In support of the CIL's core services of advocacy, information & referral, independent skills training, transition and peer support, DON Enterprise secured more than \$382,000.00 in funding which has been used to provide home repairs and adaptations to keep consumers with disabilities living independently in the community when they had no place else to turn and limited resources. Staff has also been able to strengthen partnerships to secure accessible, affordable rental properties for consumers in several counties.

DON Rehabilitated and gave a way a home to a consumer. DON invested over \$200,000 in the home and community. The home included multiple accessible home modifications, including a ramp, door widening, role-in shower and converting the home to a wide open floor plan. In addition, this was a training home to teach new construction workers new skills in home modifications, demolition and construction. These skills will prepare them for future projects from home modifications to new home builds.

State Representative Dan Miller's

Save the date!

March 13th through 15th, 2019

At Beth El Congregation
1900 Cochran Road, Pittsburgh, PA 15220

- Informative Sessions**
Topics of interest for parents, students, providers, and professionals seeking continuing education.
- Resource Fair**
State, county, local agencies; service providers, advocacy and support groups; post-secondary education organizations and employment opportunities.

In partnership with many nonprofit organizations and sponsors!

DON will be part of this event

Free and open to the public.

More information may be found at www.DisabilitySummit.com

DISABILITY & MENTAL HEALTH Summit

State Representative Dan Miller • 42nd Legislative District
650 Washington Road, Suite 102 • Mt. Lebanon, PA 15228 • (412) 343-3870

New including sessions on a range of disabilities & mental health issues spanning from early intervention to adults/seniors

Paid for with State Funds

Disability Options Network to Participate in Year Long, Statewide Program

Disability Options Network (DON) is one of Pennsylvania's 18 Centers for Independent Living (CIL) that will work within a collaborative program to address three areas of need for persons with disabilities: 1) Emergency Preparedness; 2) Voter Participation and 3) Reducing Violence and Abuse Against Persons with Disabilities. Funding for the year-long program came from the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation while the overall management of the program has been assigned to the Lehigh Valley Center for Independent Living (LVCIL).

Each participating CIL has been asked to select two areas of interest from the three listed above and to work collectively with their fellow CILs to bring about significant and positive changes in these areas of need. DON has selected Emergency Preparedness and Voter Participation as our areas of focus in 2019. For Emergency Preparedness, DON will collaborate with fellow CILs to create and implement a Consumer Survey and a First Responder Survey beginning in January 2019. As a follow up to the surveys, two training curricula will be developed; one curriculum for consumers and one for first responders. The curricula will be offered to consumers, first responders and other interested parties through a series of interactive training seminars. The overall goal is to improve preparedness by individuals with disabilities and to educate and strengthen the first responder community to respond effectively and respectfully.

For Voter Participation, DON will work with our partners to facilitate a series of Op-Eds, Letters to the Editor and other media outreaches to encourage civic participation and to increase voter registration and voting at all levels of the election processes. In addition, the program envisions a series of public meetings, presentations and workshops to increase voting and engagement. DON consumers are cordially invited to participate in this exciting program! The collaborative program will end on September 30, 2019.

Voter Participation and Accommodations

Full political participation for Americans with Disabilities is a right. Voting accommodations include your right to bring a person of your choosing to the poll to assist you in casting your vote. If you need a personal assistant to help you vote, you can indicate that on the back of the mail-in voter registration form even though it says "for office use only". You can submit the voter registration form to update your information even if you have already registered to vote.

A graphic for Pennsylvania Voter Services. On the left is a photograph of Justin Darts, a man wearing a cowboy hat and glasses, with the text "VOTE as if your life DEPENDS on it- Because it DOES!". On the right, it says "Pennsylvania Voter Services" with the URL "https://www.pavoterservices.pa.gov" and a list of services: Register to Vote, Apply for An Absentee Ballot, Check Voter Registration Status, Check Voter Application Status, and Find Your Polling Place.

Pennsylvania Voter Services
<https://www.pavoterservices.pa.gov>

- Register to Vote
- Apply for An Absentee Ballot
- Check Voter Registration Status
- Check Voter Application Status
- Find Your Polling Place

If you are a registered voter who is disabled or over the age of 65 and are assigned to a polling place that is inaccessible, you also have the right to vote by absentee ballots.

New Peer Support Program...It's All About You

Disability Options Network received a grant from FISA Foundation to conduct peer support groups throughout Allegheny County focusing on acquired, physical disabilities. Potential group subjects will include, but not be limited to: disabilities acquired through violence; sexuality after acquiring a disability; LGBTQ; parenting with a disability; prevention of violence against people with disabilities; navigating the system; and more. From the groups, DON will develop a "network" of individuals who are interested in being a peer mentor for people in similar circumstances or those who are newly disabled. These individuals will connect with the interested individual and become part of their support system. Individuals willing to become a peer mentor and will actively engaged receive a stipend.

It's All About You will be conducted the first and third Wednesday of each month from 4pm-6pm starting February 6th. Locations will vary so, please visit our website and/or Facebook page for updates. Refreshments will be provided. Interpreter provided upon request.

Please call Leah Gray at 724-698-1865 for more information or to register for a specific date.

Meet your Independent Living Coordinator

When you see my first name, Shelagh, you probably won't be able to pronounce it and may have trouble spelling it. If you're curious, Shelagh is the Gaelic form of Sheila, which is the Anglican version of Cecelia. Oh, and it means "legless lizard." Picture that, if you like. In Ireland, my last name, Collins, is sort of like "Smith" in this country. We're all over the place.

Except for eight years exploring the Chicagoland area, my home has pretty much been in and around Pittsburgh. I've worked in a newspaper library, a botanical garden, an international advertising agency, a military museum, and as a freelance writer for a B2B (that's acronym-speak for business to business) online publication. I've been a librarian, a writer, a researcher, a proofreader / editor, hotel service coordinator, and done just about every kind of office support job you can think of.

Now, I'm here at the Center for Independent Living – doing everything I can to help our consumers. What I like best about being an Independent Living Coordinator is the satisfaction of knowing that my work has a direct impact on someone else's life and that makes a difference for me in my life as well. When I'm not at my job, I play with my kitties – Bastian and Sage, help twice a year as an Election Officer (that may be me helping you to vote!), practice my bodhran, and sing high soprano in choirs.

If you're curious, a bodhran is an Irish drum. And St. Cecelia, the name mine translates back to, is the patron saint of singers and musicians. I like a story that has a circular start and end.

Plan to Achieve Self-Support (PASS)

The Social Security Administration provides several incentives to help people with disabilities make the climb to financial security. One of these incentives, the Plan to Achieve Self-Support (PASS), is specifically geared towards those receiving SSI support. PASS is specifically designed to help someone with a disability return to work, with the intention of eventually lowering or no longer needing SSI support, and are a way to set aside money for specific expenses related to your employment goals without lowering your SSI income. PASS is individually customized to the individual and their work goals, and can be tricky to write out, but there are a lot of help and support options out there to assist in the planning of PASS. For more information on PASS, you can check out the Social Security website: <https://www.ssa.gov/disabilityresearch/wi/pass.htm>

Disability and Employment, Making it Work

Job seekers living with a disability may have to push through a potential employer's attitude bias even when their disability has no bearing on the ability to do the job. Here are some tips to show employers that, despite different capabilities, you can be the best person for the position:



1. Use a Variety of Job-seeking Methods:

- Use personal contacts
- Classified Ads or job-placement services
- Network (connect with disability advocacy groups, vocational rehabilitation agencies...etc.)
- Use the Internet

2. Do Your Homework:

- Research the company you are applying to
- Check with disability advocacy groups to see if the company has a good reputation for hiring, training and promoting workers with disabilities
- Find out the business strengths and weakness. Many business's websites provide lots of information, including yearly reports. Be prepared to discuss why your strengths make a good candidate. Being familiar with the company shows you're motivated to work there

3. Know What Technologies Can Help You Work Effectively:

Learn what assistive technology is available to help you do your work. Examples are larger computer monitor, contrast keyboard, speech to text software, adapted seating, desk on risers, etc.

For those that rely on disability benefits, it is important to understand how benefits are impacted when returning to work. A great source of information would be to connect with an Employment Network that can provide guidance in using the Ticket to Work program to receive support in this process while you are returning to work. Disability Options Network is a Ticket to Work provider.

Nursing Home Transition Basics

Nursing Home Transition (NHT) is the process of assisting and empowering individuals with disabilities who want to move from a nursing home back to a home of their choice in the community of their choice.

NHT activities can include:

- Identifying individuals who want to move out
- Educating individuals so they can make informed decisions about transitioning
- Advocating with the individual to ensure their transition plan is what they want and need

Who can be transitioned?

Any individual who is willing to take charge of their own life and is not already scheduled to leave the facility, but is interested in relocation from a nursing facility

The key to a successful NHT is **Self-Determination**. Self-determination is the ability or right to make your own decisions without interference from others. The individual with a disability is responsible for their decisions, thus taking charge of all aspects of their lives. It includes making choices concerning:

- Their future
- Supports & services they want to receive
- Where they want to live
- How they spend their money
- Daily activities they want to engage in

NHT services can provide:

- Assistance with enrolling for personal assistance services
- Assistance with home modifications & durable medical equipment
- Assistance with locating accessible housing

(De) Cluttering Corner

In each newsletter issue, we'll provide you with three tips on how to declutter your home.

1. Pick one room or space you would like to declutter
2. Step back to look at a room or space and think about how you want it to look.
3. Schedule out a day and a time to start the declutter process

Federal Government Shutdown Affects SNAP and HUD

February benefits for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) recipients were released early.

“SNAP is the nation’s most important anti-hunger program. Without it, 1.8 million Pennsylvanians would have greater trouble affording food for themselves and their families,” said Department of Human Services Secretary Theresa Miller. “This early payment allows us to get SNAP recipients their benefits for February, but they will have to make this payment last for an undefined period as the shutdown continues.”

This early payment is SNAP recipients’ February benefit and will be the only benefit payment SNAP recipients will receive for the month of February. Recipients will not receive a payment on their regularly scheduled February payment date. DHS is sending a letter and/or email to SNAP recipients to notify them of this change.

Payments beyond February will be determined based on the availability of USDA funds. DHS is awaiting information from the USDA on plans for March benefits should the partial federal government shutdown continue.

Clients with questions about their benefits can contact their local County Assistance Office or can call the statewide customer service center at 1-877-395-8930. Clients who reside in Philadelphia should call 1-215-560-7226.

Some additional food resources include:

https://www.agriculture.pa.gov/Food/food_assistance/Pages/Pennsylvania-Agricultural-Surplus-Program.aspx

pittsburghfoodbank.org/producetopeople

Produce to People hotline: 412-460-3663, ext. 727

For a full schedule of calendar dates, visit: https://calendar.google.com/calendar/embed?src=pittsburghfoodbank.org_vjsi3r3p5kri7h8rvr0i80kcf4%40group.calendar.google.com&ctz=America%2FNew_York

To ease the financial strain during the government shutdown, some cell phone/satellite television providers are providing payment extensions or revised payment schedules.

Disability Options Network Receives Housing Grant

DON has been awarded a Housing Preservation Grant from the U.S Department of Agriculture (USDA). This 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 Lawrence, Armstrong, Beaver, Butler, Mercer or Westmoreland counties.

Funds from this grant may be used to make accessibility modifications, resolve health or safety issues or make energy efficiency improvements. Funds from this grant will provide up to \$3,000 in repair or renovation costs. Each homeowner is responsible to provide and/or identify matching funds. Funds from this grant will be awarded through an application process and applications will be taken on a first-come, first-served basis.

For further information or to request an application, call DON's housing department, visit DON's Housing Preservation Program webpage at www.doninc.org/HPP or visit DON's New Castle office at 831 Harrison St., New Castle, PA 16101

DON Services is now hiring for personal care attendants for Butler, Beaver, and Mercer Counties. Do you enjoy taking care of others? Do you like working with individuals who has a disability or with the elderly? Are you looking for flexible hours? There are several shifts available such as Day, Early Evenings, and Night. In addition to benefits and training provided.



If you are interested, call (724) 652-5144 or apply online at: www.doninc.org

For More Information Visit, Like, or Follow Us:



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