Fayette County Board of Developmental Disabilities

Summer 2025 Newsletter

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Fayette County Board of Developmental Disabilities

From the desk for Superintendent Larry Gray

It is hard to believe 2025 is halfway over and we are in the mist of summer. As many of you know, I was in search of a bear in the wild last year which took me on several journeys into the woods. I was able to finally see a bear in Tennessee at Cades Cove which is close to Pigeon Forge Gatlinburg area. It was a small bear but nonetheless he was forging in the woods along the road, and we stopped to get a picture. But now, this year we have had several sightings in Ohio. The picture below is from Clinton County, and they were tracking a bear that visited Highland, all the way to Green Hills area in Cincinnati. I do not really know how bear communicate but I am thinking somehow the bear in Tennessee got word to their cousins in Ohio that I was on the hunt to find them too. I have looked but did not find a bear locally. Stay tuned for our next newsletter as the Bear Chronicles continue.

We have been busy this year in Fayette County. Many wonderful things are happening as you will read below in our newsletter. I hope everyone is enjoying their summer. I am looking forward to what new and exciting things lie ahead for the rest of this year.

Larry Gray, Superintendent

Fayette Progressive Preschool

The Little Dragons enjoyed a year of preschool in our four classrooms. Students were taught using The Creative Curriculum, Heggerty and A Little Spot of Feelings and Emotions. We held special events that not only included our students and their families (Muffins with Misses, Donuts with Dudes), but our community as well. The Little Dragons faced off against the seniors from the Miami Trace baseball team and a fun game was played!

Students took field trips to the Mighty Children's Museum in Chillicothe and visited their future kindergarten classrooms in both Washington Court House City Schools and Miami Trace.

We were able to complete our new sensory help thanks to a generous donation from Valero. The Little Dragons sure do enjoy the room.

We are currently accepting applications for the 2025-2026 school year. To complete an application: PowerForm Signer Information | Docusign.

Fayette County Board of DD and Fayette Progressive Preschool celebrated the retirement of Bus Driver Sue Kunie at the end of May. A big thank you goes to Sue for her safety and care while transporting our preschool students to and from school.

We wish Sue the best in her retirement. She will be missed!

Service and Support Administration

Summertime is a time of getting together and enjoying the nice weather! Provider, Friends of Leroy Brown, helping people experience Cox Arboretum, Young's Dairy and Franklin Conservatory.

Taylor's dream of seeing Metallica in concert came true! Here is Taylor with her staff from Frontier Community Services and Adena Hospice.

Service and Support Administration

Celebrating Independence Day with Friends

This year for Independence Day, Shawn decided to entertain friends at his home. Shawn wanted to cookout, play games, and have time to spend with some of the people that are important to him. Shawn contacted his SSA, and they planned the party by deciding a guest list, activities, and a menu to serve. During the cookout Shawn hosted his friends with hamburgers, hotdogs, several different side dishes, and drinks. Shawn even made sure that a friend that could not attend had a plate sent to his home. Several people enjoyed playing cornhole and ladder toss. Mostly they enjoyed sitting on the covered patio and talking. The cookout was a huge success. Shawn would like to thank everyone who could attend. Shawn proved he was the host with the most!

Ellen is Getting It Done

Ellen has decided to make changes in her life, and she is going all in! Ellen is working on making improvements in herself by working out at the YMCA, taking walks in her neighborhood with her dog Cinnamon and being more active in the community. Ellen has the support of her friends, her trainer, Eric, and her nutritionist, Derrick. Ellen has made big changes in her daily routine including trying new healthier foods and pushing herself to stay active. Elizabeth Brennfleck said, “Ellen and her have talked for a long time about getting healthier but this time feels different.” Elizabeth and Ellen meet and talk about their health journey as they support each other. Her friend, Rana Helms, stated that “Ellen is working hard to become happier and healthier. She has inspired me as well as others to become healthier.”

Ellen biggest change has been her changes in her way of thinking. Emily Bollinger said Ellen is focusing on being positive, meeting new people and stepping out of her comfort zone. Ellen has navigated through grief of loss and stressful situations and has continued to be positive through it all. She is developing trust in her friends and has opened up and allowed them into her life.

Ellen enjoys going shopping with her friends, watching movies and classic tv series, and talking to her friends. She is very talented artist and enjoys doing crafts and giving them to friends as veery personal gifts. She is a loving pet mom to her dog, Cinnamon and her cat, Pumpkin.

We are all very proud of Ellen and her hard work.

Blue Envelope Program

Flashing lights approaching behind your vehicle give all of us a little jolt of anxiety – no matter the situation. Imagine that anxiety amplified knowing that your ability to communicate with officers may be hindered by your disability. Thousands of drivers throughout Ohio know this feeling – and a simple blue envelope can help.

The Southern Ohio Council of Governments (SOCOG) is pleased to announce the launch of the Blue Envelope Program across the state of Ohio. The program uses communication tools to assist individuals with developmental disabilities during interactions with law enforcement and emergency personnel.

"The Blue Envelope Program is a powerful example of how compassion and understanding can shape public safety," said SOCOG Executive Director Kelly Rosler. "By fostering better communication between law enforcement and individuals with disabilities, it builds a safer, more inclusive community for everyone."

The key part of the program is the Blue Envelope itself. The envelope has space on the outside for information about the disability and/or medical conditions of the driver or passenger of the automobile. A copy of an ID/driver's license, vehicle registration, and vehicle insurance card can be kept inside the envelope which would be handed to a law enforcement officer during a traffic stop. Having this information in one place makes it easier to communicate with officers and reduces anxiety during a traffic stop.

The second piece of the program is the Blue Envelope Car Decal. The three-inch decal features the program logo and can be placed on a vehicle's windows to discreetly communicate to law enforcement and first responders that the occupants participate in the Blue Envelope Program. They will be aware that a person in that vehicle may have a disability that could affect their actions or speech. In the event of a traffic accident, the Blue Envelope Car Decal and Blue Envelope allow first responders to access critical information immediately in case you are injured.

The Blue Envelope Wallet Card is included in the packet for people who want a method of communication they can carry in their pocket or purse. It is a smaller version of the envelope that can be used anywhere.

Blue Envelope Packets are available at participating County Board of Developmental Disabilities offices throughout the state of Ohio. The packets are available for free to anyone with a developmental disability.

"The Blue Envelope program promotes inclusion and is a communication tool between law enforcement and community members," said SOAG co-coordinator Travis Dresbach. "Disabilities such as autism spectrum disorder, dementia, physical disability, or mental health conditions may require additional accommodation or awareness during a law enforcement interaction. It is amazing that something as simple as an envelope can do so much."

The flagship Blue Envelope Program was designed by the San Diego Sheriff's Department and has been implemented nationally with various agencies. The program first appeared in Ohio with a program developed by the Mahoning County Prosecutor's office in 2024. SOAG learned of the program and worked to see it implemented throughout the state of Ohio.

Ohio's Blue Envelope Program was made possible through a collaboration of the Ohio Developmental Disabilities Council, Southern Ohio Council of Governments, and the Southern Ohio Advocacy Group.

For more information about Ohio's Blue Envelope Program, visit www.socog.org.

Fayette County Board of DD is a participant in this program. Contact Chad Blakeley at 740-606-9431 or your assigned SSA for more information.

Early Intervention

Early Intervention Team Members Diana Brand, Service Coordination Supervisor, Sylvia Call, Autism Services Coordinator, and Early Intervention Director, Suzie Janasov attended the Fayette County Health Fair to share information about the Early Intervention services we offer and the ADEP program. To kick off the summer season, and offer an exciting sensory experience, child focused activities like bubbles, sensory noodles, and fidgets were provided to engage members of the community.

The Fayette County Early Intervention team offers once per month playgroups for not only the families in our program, but our community as well. Early socialization is a critical piece in child development, and we are excited to give families the opportunity to connect with each other, while the kids engage in play activities and sensory experiences with their friends.

Special Olympics

The Fayette County Dragons had ten athletes compete in the Summer Games that were held June 13th through June 15th. Joey competed in the 50M dash and earned a gold medal. Buffy competed in the softball throw and earned a gold medal. Austin competed in the javelin throw and earned a gold medal. We are proud of our athletes in every sport. They work hard to play and compete with respect of their fellow athletes.

Let me win.
But if I cannot win,
let me be brave
in the attempt.
- Special Olympics athlete oath

FAYETTE COUNTY DRAGONS

Fayette County Special Olympics provides year around sports training and athletic competition in a variety of Olympic-type sports for children and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Athletes are given opportunities to improve their physical fitness, show their talents, and demonstrate courage.

More than eighty athletes are active in Fayette County's program. Athletes are eligible for most sports starting at the age of eight, with no upper age limit. Through the program, "Dragons" develop confidence and are empowered by their accomplishments. They are able to experience joy through participation and sharing of talents, skills and friendships with their families, other athletes, volunteers, and the community.

Community First

Local Teens Gain Skills and Confidence Through 2025 Summer Youth Work Program

Fayette County teens took meaningful steps toward their futures this summer thanks to the 2025 Summer Youth Work Program. Coordinated by the Highland County Board of Developmental Disabilities' Community First Department, in partnership with Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities, the program provided valuable paid work experience for youth ages 14 to 20.

Participants earned minimum wage while building real-world job skills at local businesses across the area. With the support of dedicated job coaches, these young workers developed hands-on experience while helping participating businesses with summer staffing—at no additional cost to the employers.

Running from May 27 to June 27, this year's program welcomed 24 students who were placed at a variety of worksites, including the Highland County YMCA, Rocky Fork State Park, Ponderosa Steakhouse, The Elks Golf Course, Southern State Community College, Hillsboro City Schools, Back-En-Thyme Flower and Gift Shop, and the Fayette County Dog Warden.

Throughout the month, students gained more than just a paycheck. They took on tasks such as maintenance, landscaping, painting, animal care, debris removal, and facility cleaning, including mopping, sweeping, and restroom sanitization. These responsibilities helped participants develop a strong work ethic, learn time management, and practice accountability—skills they will carry forward into future jobs.

The experience also supports long-term career development. Alongside the Summer Youth Work Program, HCBDD offers Pre-Employment Transition Services and Job Development Services, equipping local youth with the tools they need to succeed after graduation.

Thanks to the support of community partners, the 2025 program was another great success. A sincere thank-you goes out to the businesses and organizations that provided opportunities—and mentorship—for the next generation of Fayette County's workforce.

Fayette County

Board of Developmental Disabilities

Fayette County Board of DD, in partnership with Franklin County Board of DD and the Fayette County Senior Fair Board, was able to provide an adult-size changing table for the Fayette County Fair.

This was open to the anyone from the community attending the fair.

Fayette County Board of DD is actively pursuing purchase of their own changing table to be utilized for community events, by applying for grants and seeking donations.

For more information, contact Superintendent Larry Gray at 740-335-7453.