

# Annual Update

October 2015 - September 2016



Creating change that improves the lives of Alaskans with disabilities



GOVERNOR'S COUNCIL  
ON DISABILITIES &  
SPECIAL EDUCATION

*Council Submits its 5-Year State Plan: Over 2015 and 2016, the Council outreached extensively to obtain public comment for the state 5-year plan process, visiting 90% of the state's population centers to ensure that the plan included a strong rural perspective as well as urban perspective. Over spring 2016, the Council received public comment which was incorporated into the plan which was submitted federally in August 2016.*

*From the Council's extensive feedback process, the following five long term goals were identified to drive the State 5-Year Plan, running from 2017-2021:*

- **GOAL # 1 – Community Inclusion, Supports, and Services:** Improve service delivery to empower individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDDs) to live and thrive in their communities with formal and informal supports and services that promote independence.
- **GOAL # 2 – Employment:** Alaskans with disabilities and their families will receive the necessary employment services and supports needed to become competitively employed in an integrated setting.
- **GOAL # 3 – Early Intervention:** Strengthen policies and programs so that infants and toddlers with disabilities, their families, and caregivers receive appropriate early intervention services and supports.
- **GOAL # 4 – Education:** Participate in activities that lead to enhanced practices so that children and youth with disabilities have access to appropriate qualified professionals, curriculum, inclusion, support, and resources to ensure they have the skills they need for educational success and future independence.
- **GOAL # 5 – Healthcare:** Alaskans with disabilities will have greater access to needed health care services that will improve their quality of life.

## Council State 5-Year Plan



## ADVOCACY AND LEADERSHIP

Advocacy on behalf of Alaskans with disabilities and their families is one of the primary responsibilities of the Council. The Council conducts its advocacy efforts on both state and federal levels due to its multiple roles.

## STATE ADVOCACY

The Council held its annual Juneau council meeting with legislative advocacy visits and a visit with Governor and First Lady Walker at the Governor's Mansion, discussing the Council's legislative priorities for 2016.

### Priorities included:

- 1. HB 76:** The Council advocated for successful passage of HB 76, a bill to update the Council's enabling statute by removing the word "gifted" to more accurately reflect the work the Council does for individuals with disabilities.
- 2. HB 188:** The Achieving a Better Life Experience Act (ABLE) bill became law in August 2016 allowing a savings account for qualified individuals with a disability which does not impact public benefits. The Council and partners were integral in successful passage of this bill.
- 3. HB 77:** The Disability Training and Identification Bill was an advocacy position for the Council and sought to improve interactions between individuals with disabilities and law enforcement officials. While this bill was not passed ultimately, the Council expects to continue its advocacy on this issue in the next session.
- 4. Developmental Disabilities Registration and Review (DDRR):** The Council continued to advocate for the Home and Community Based Services System, developing a position paper around the DDRR, detailing cost savings measures which might assist in drawing similar numbers annually for the IDD waiver.

The Council also supported 19 individuals to participate in the annual Key Coalition's Key Campaign to discuss issues important to Alaskans with developmental disabilities with legislators.

## FEDERAL ADVOCACY

The Council, along with its partners, met with U.S. Senators Lisa Murkowski and Dan Sullivan, detailing priorities for Alaskans with disabilities. The Council also continued to work with partners on implementation of federal laws such as, the Workforce innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), the Achieving a Better Life Experience Act (ABLE), and Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

## SELF-ADVOCATE SUPPORT

**Peer Power Alaska** The Council has continued to support Alaska's statewide self



advocacy organization for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities:

- Peer Power grew from 49 members in 2015, to 242 members in 2016, due to extensive collaborative statewide outreach by Peer Power Alaska and the Council.
- Membership now includes 15 different Alaskan communities: Anchorage, Chugiak, Eagle River, Fairbanks, Homer, Juneau, Kenai, Ketchikan, Kiana, Kodiak, Palmer, Seward, Soldotna, Wasilla, and Willow.
- Outreach was completed to over 3,000 members of the general public in FY16 through joint trainings, presentations, conferences, and job fairs.

## COMMUNITY CHOICE & SUPPORT



Alaska Association on Developmental Disabilities

- 1. Technology for Cost Savings & Independence:** The Council collaborated with DSDS on a technology work group, developing a white paper exploring technology as both a way to increase independence for individuals with disabilities and also save on the long term cost of care.
- 2. Medicaid Reform and Redesign:** The Council continued to support efforts, submitting a letter of support for SB 74 which successfully passed the House and Senate. Successful passage included allowance of telepractice for Home and Community Based Services.
- 3. Public Comments:** Comment was provided to the Division of Senior and Disabilities Services (DSDS): The updated DDRR "waitlist" policies, proposed changes on regulations regarding HCBS waiver provider certification, the Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD) Waiver Renewal Application, 1915(i) eligibility



HB76 bill signing. Pictured L-R: Council member Jill Burkert, legislative aide Grace Abbott, Governor Bill Walker, and Representative Charisse Millett.



Council members, staff, and partners with U.S. Senator Dan Sullivan following a meeting to discuss advocacy priorities

Council members, staff, and partners with U.S. Senator Lisa Murkowski following a meeting to discuss advocacy priorities





From left to right: Alexis Henning, Governor Bill Walker and Jeanne Gerhardt-Cyrus



Council member, Sara Kveum, discussing services and advocacy priorities with Governor and First Lady Walker



Christie Reinhardt, pictured with Temple Grandin

and services draft document, as well as four draft policies and procedures documents.

**4. interRAI Assessment Research:**

The Council began meeting with experts related to the interRAI assessment tool as well as researching national and international usage of this tool to better understand its potential applicability for Alaska’s developmental disability population to assess level of care for services.

**5. DD System Assessment:** The Council began work with DSDS, the Trust, AADD, and other partners to move forward with a DD System Assessment to develop a shared vision and values moving forward.

**6. Continued Trust Collaboration:** The Council has continued to partner with the Trust on the Micro-enterprise grant, the Beneficiary Employment Engagement Initiative, the DD mini-grants, and many other projects related to services for individuals with a developmental disability.

**7. Federal Rule Implementation:** The Council was an active partner in redesigning the Alaska case management (care coordination) system so that it is conflict-free in addition to providing comment on DSDS’ second and third versions of its Transition Plan to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) for the Integrated Settings Final Rule.

**8. Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD):**

The Council’s FASD Work-group is taking the lead in coordinating the multiple state partners that are working to develop a unified system of care for Alaskans with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD). Without a significant or co-occurring disability, services for Alaskans with FASD must be cobbled together from behavioral health, foster care, schools, DVR and corrections with no defined means of care coordination. To lay the groundwork for expanded coverage, a presentation was made to The Mental Health Trust asking them to name FASD as a Developmental Disability and research was started to determine whether new

SDS assessment tools will be able to screen and capture the challenges faced by individuals with a FASD. We also presented at the Practical Applications for Addressing Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD) in the Justice System training sponsored by the Alaska Bar Association and actively participated in an Ad Hoc group that is working to provide competencies and resources for therapeutic foster parents caring for children with prenatal exposure to drugs or alcohol.



**Alaska Safety Planning Empowerment Network (ASPEN):**

A collaboration between the Council, the University of Alaska Anchorage’s CHD, Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC), and Alaska Network on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault (ANDVSA), this statewide partnership invested in helping Alaska community providers serve the needs of people with disabilities who are victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking.

**Activities and Accomplishments:**

- Secured Alaska Area Institutional Review Board (IRB) and Tribal Review and conducted a needs assessment of a rural community, implementing a strategic plan in 2016.

Positive outcomes include: collaboration between disability agencies, domestic violence/sexual assault shelters, independent living centers, behavioral/mental health agencies, and tribal organizations, with of a “no wrong door” model facilitated allowing referral and wrap-around care, increased cross-training between service delivery systems, and long-term systemic changes.

- 2017 community selected with planning for focus groups and key informant interviews having begun.

**Autism:** The Autism Ad Hoc Committee finished a Statewide Five Year Plan. This Committee consists of an extensive number of partners including public, private, tribal and behavioral health, infant learning, education, and the University of Alaska, service and support agencies, parents and self-advocates. The plan was completed with five major priority areas. These priorities are reflective of our commitment to improving across the lifespan systems to meet the needs of Alaskans with autism and their families. The priority areas are 1. Screening and Diagnosis 2. Workforce Development 3. Early Intervention and Education 4. Integrated

Systems 5. Funding and Sustainability. The Committee set targets for both short and long term objectives. A big challenge this year was the retirement of the state's only Pediatric Neurodevelopmental Specialist. To help fill this huge gap, we have been very focused on a real systems change that will help us to "grow our own" autism diagnostic professionals as well as help meet the need for specialty care and consultation not available in Alaska. This year also saw the Council actively participating in Alaska's First statewide Autism Conference. This event was sponsored by the Autism Society of Alaska and the Keynote Speaker was the world renowned autism self-advocate, Dr. Temple Grandin.

## EMPLOYMENT

**Alaska Receives National Certification for Employment Course:** The National Association of Community Rehabilitation Educators (ACRE) approved Alaska's Certificate in Employment Services Training, allowing the state to offer, independently in Alaska, a pathway to ensure service providers have the opportunity to attain the required competencies necessary to apply to be a Community Rehabilitation Provider (CRP) with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR). This capacity building effort was a collaboration between the Council and the UAA Center for Human Development and its Alaska Training Cooperative (ATC) as part of the Council's Alaska Integrated Employment Initiative (AIEI) federal grant. The AIEI grant is beginning its fifth year working to better the lives of Alaskan youth and young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities and includes collaboration with advocates, family members, service providers, agency staff, employers, and other community members. For ATC training opportunities: <https://aktclms.org/>



**Business Employment Services Team (BEST)** is a collaboration between the Departments of Health and Social Services and Labor and Workforce Development with the mission of meeting the workforce needs of Alaska businesses and improve hiring outcomes for individuals with disabilities and veterans. Numerous trainings and events for employers were held over the past year, including an Employment First Job Fair reaching 85 employers and over 1,146 job seekers with information on competitive and integrated employment for individuals with disabilities.



**Employer Survey Report:** The Council completed

an employer social norms survey report discussing survey findings on employer perceptions related to hiring individuals with disabilities as well as recommendations. To read this published final report, visit: <http://dhss.alaska.gov/gcdse/Documents/Publications/pdf/2016EmployerPerspectives.pdf>

### Alaska Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) Act:



Legislation introduced on the House side by Representative Saddler and on the Senate side by Senator Giessel, became law August 2016 allowing individuals with significant disabilities occurring before age 26 the opportunity to save without jeopardizing vital public benefits. This program is now under the Alaska Department of Revenue and interested qualified individuals with disabilities can learn more and open an Alaska ABLE Account by visiting: [savewithable.com/ak/home/plan-benefits.html](http://savewithable.com/ak/home/plan-benefits.html)

**Alaska Project SEARCH Support:** The Council supported four Project SEARCH sites statewide, allowing 21 youth with disabilities in 2015-2016 to gain transferable employability skills in hospitals in Anchorage, Fairbanks, Mat-Su, and Kenai. 25 are enrolled for the 2016-2017 school year.

### New Tool to Navigate Benefits and Work Launched:



The Alaska Disability Benefits 101 (DB 101) website went live in October 2016 and helps individuals with disabilities and those supporting them navigate through questions around benefits and work. To learn more and use this website which includes plain language articles with interactive tools in addition to a benefits to work calculator, visit: [ak.db101.org](http://ak.db101.org) For additional tools on how to best use this exciting new employment tool, visit the resources page: [dhss.alaska.gov/gcdse/Pages/db101.aspx](http://dhss.alaska.gov/gcdse/Pages/db101.aspx)

**Public Outreach on Employment:** 1,592 members of the general



GCDSE Employment and Transportation Committee Chair, Lucy Odden, at work at the US Fish and Wildlife Service beside her wall of employment awards.

Council staff Kristin Vandagriff and Peer Power Board Member Anna Atla at the Employment First Job Fair offering resources for individuals with disabilities on competitive and integrated employment



Anchorage Project SEARCH Team with their National Project SEARCH 80% Employment Outcomes Award (L-R Laarni Power and Kathleen Hollis with Providence Hospital, Devry Birdsell and Danny Parish with the Arc of Anchorage, and Erin Riehle National Project SEARCH Director).





The Mat-Su Project SEARCH Site Continues to be a Best Practice Example Nationally! Pictured L-R: Business Representative Cathy Babuscio, National Project SEARCH Director Erin Riehle, Kristin Vandagriff Council Staff/ Alaska Project SEARCH Coordinator, and Amber Finley Mat-Su Project SEARCH Teacher.



Ric Nelson, GCDSE Program Coordinator, winning the National Association of People Supporting EmploymentFirst (APSE) Personal Achievement Award



public were reached through employment trainings, presentations, and activities.

The majority of the trainings were held in collaboration with the Alaska Training Cooperative, out of the UAA Center for Human Development as part of the Council's federal AIEI employment grant work.



**Employment First — Real Jobs and Real Wages for Alaskans with Disabilities:**

The Council has continued to partner with the Alaska Chapter of the Association of People Supporting EmploymentFirst (APSE) which seeks to have competitive and integrated employment be the first and preferred outcome for individuals with disabilities.



- Two Certified Employment Support Professional (CESP) exams were held in partnership with Alaska Association of People Supporting EmploymentFirst (AKAPSE) allowing service providers another means of displaying their competencies to apply to be a Community Rehabilitation Provider (CRP) with DVR.
- The Council also is partnering with AK APSE on its first Take Your Legislator to Work event, allowing individuals with disabilities to bring their legislator to work with them to see first hand the impact employment makes.
- To learn more about APSE: [apse.org/](http://apse.org/) If you are interested in taking part in Take Your Legislator to Work or other APSE events, please contact Ric Nelson, Council staff, [ric.nelson@alaska.gov](mailto:ric.nelson@alaska.gov)

**Collaborative Work with DD Act Partners — Disseminating Promising Practices Nationally:**



The Council has worked with the Disability Law Center of Alaska, Alaska's Protection and Advocacy organization on national sub-minimum wage briefs along with Vanderbilt University and the Tennessee Partnerships in Employment Project.

Additionally, the Council has collaborated with the UAA center for Human Development, Alaska University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities on a national Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation Alaska case study. Both efforts seek to put forth promising practices nationally and are a result of the Council's Alaska Integrated Employment Initiative (AIEI) federal grant through the Administration on Community Living.

**EARLY INTERVENTION**

This year was a big year for Early Intervention/Infant Learning Program. While remaining in the Department of Health and Social Services, Alaska's EI/ILP moved divisions from Office of Children's Services (OCS) to the division of Senior and Disability Services (SDS). The Early Intervention Committee meetings devoted many of its monthly meetings to open discussions from our stakeholder partners to facilitate communication and transparency. This move has led to not just a change in divisions but an almost complete change in staff and a move to new offices. The Council has been assisting EI/ILP as they settle into their new home. The Council also assisted the EI/ILP in the development of the new results indicator mandated by the office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), focuses on improving the social and emotional outcomes of infants and toddlers in the program. Parents, providers and staff participated in meetings in Anchorage, Juneau, Chicago and New Orleans to assist with this important work. This year the Council also provided support and input on a set of 9 informational videos on parental rights and procedural safeguards. They were produced by Programs for Infants and Children (PIC) and are now available for providers and families. We are very pleased to be part of this useful video project. <http://dhss.alaska.gov/gcdse/Pages/committees/eic/default.aspx>

**EDUCATION**

This year the graduation rate of Alaska students with disabilities showed a dramatic increase 41.9% to 57.2%. The Council advocated for many years for the removal of the High School Graduation Qualifying Exam (HSGQE) which was Alaska's high stakes graduation exam for the past decade. This graduation year was the first to not have the HSGQE as a graduation requirement. While we assumed that there would be increased graduation rates for students with disabilities, we could not anticipate the scope of the impact. This is very promising and we remain committed to the collaborative efforts to increase the graduation rate of Alaska students with disabilities. The Education Committee

was also a part of Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) Reauthorization Advisors Group organized by Senator Murkowski to give our specialized stakeholder input to the Senate Committee on Health, Education, and Labor & Pensions (HELP) as they worked on their drafts and amendments. Once the new federal law was passed the Education Committee researched and offered comments to the state on what assessments should be used to best reflect the achievements of students with disabilities. We will continue to work with the state on developing Alaska's new policies and regulations.

This year we partnered with the FASD advocates, health care professionals and educators to change education regulation language to include FASD as one of the diagnosis listed "chronic and acute health conditions" under the special education eligibility category "Other Health Impairment" (OHI). The regulation change also recognizes Advanced Nurse Practitioners (ANP) as qualified diagnosticians for chronic and acute health conditions, including FASD. A recent study reports that as many as 5% of school-aged children may have a FASD. This regulation change makes Alaska the first state in the country to recognize in education regulation the profound impact FASD has on student's performance in school.

Another focus this year has been on suspension, expulsion and discipline of students with disabilities and we have formed a work-group to analyze data and develop recommendations. Kicking kids out of school is not an evidence based behavior intervention and we are very committed to ensuring schools in Alaska not only know this but know what tools they have to replace restrictive discipline practices.

## HEALTH



Alaska Health and Disability Program (AHDP): The Council partners with the Division of Public Health's section of Women's, Children's, and Family Health on efforts to outreach to individuals with disabilities on emergency preparedness and health promotion.

### Emergency Preparedness:

- **GetReady! Toolkits:** Over this past year, 3,484 copies of this toolkit have been distributed throughout the state. To access the GetReady Toolkit, visit: <http://dhss.alaska.gov/dph/wcfh/Documents/disability/GetReadyWebaccessible.pdf>
- **SKIP kit** (Safety Kept in Place 2,822 starter emergency kits were distributed).

- **Emergency Preparedness Presentations:** More than 266 people trained through emergency preparedness presentations, including Residential Licensing requested the Council do emergency preparedness presentations for their Assisted Living Home Administrators Orientation.

### Health Promotion:

- **Healthy Activity Partnership:** health fairs, partnering with CHD on a FitExplorers (a health promotion pilot study), and collaborating with Special Olympics Alaska on a project to improve the health of aging individuals with disabilities.



- **Teddy Bear Picnic:** The Council partnered with inclusive play champions to put on the first annual Teddy Bear picnic at an inclusive playground, drawing more than 2,000 attendees.



2016 Inclusive Practice Award winners: Nikiski Middle/High School Intensive Needs Team.



Teddy Bear Picnic photo credit: Naomi Hodawanus





## Council Members

Banarsi Lal – Fairbanks  
Jill Burkert – Juneau  
John Cannon – Juneau  
Anthony Cravalho – Kotzebue  
Sandra DeHart-Mayor – Anchorage  
Art Delaune – Fairbanks  
Donald Enoch – Juneau  
David Fleurant – Anchorage  
Dean Gates – Anchorage  
Jeanne Gerhardt-Cyrus – Kiana  
Mallory Hamilton – Anchorage  
Maureen Harwood – Fairbanks

Alexis Henning – Anchorage  
Elizabeth Joseph – Kongiganak  
Christine King – Eagle River  
David Kohler – Anchorage  
Margaret Kossler – Anchorage  
Sarah Kveum – Juneau  
Charisse Millett – Anchorage  
Lucy Odden – Anchorage  
Amy Simpson – Eagle River  
Shelly Vendetti-Vuckovich – Anchorage  
Maggie Winston – Kenai

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