

HIGHLAND COUNTY BOARD OF DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES NEWSLETTER

SUMMER 2025



Mission Statement

Ensuring effective systems are available to assist people in achieving their life goals.

Vision Statement

Enhancing the quality of life in our community – one person at a time.

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From the Desk of 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 County, 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 Highland 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



Service and Support Administration



Meet Joe.

Years ago, Joe successfully advocated to become his own guardian—a powerful early step in his journey of self-advocacy. Today, he continues to use those same skills as he pursues meaningful employment.

Over time, Joe has engaged with vocational services to build his skills, including supports through Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities. While some of those job placements did not turn out as hoped, Joe remained determined.

This past spring, he took the initiative to seek employment independently—and his perseverance paid off. We are proud to share that Joe is now employed at the World Equestrian Center in Wilmington, OH, working in janitorial services—a skill he developed through earlier vocational training.

Transportation was a necessary piece of the puzzle, and with the support of his Service & Support Administrator, Katie Basford, Joe was successfully connected with transportation resources that get him to and from.

Joe's confidence continues to grow, and judging by the smile on his face, it looks like he may have found a job that truly suits him!



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.

Highland County Board of DD is a participant in this program. Contact Nathan Boatman at 937-708-6573 or your assigned SSA for more information.



Kamp Dovetail Horse Program

KAMP Dovetail is a four-night annual volunteer ran summer camp serving children with special needs. More than 300 children and young adults attend the camp each year. This camp gives all attendees the opportunity to experience unique outdoor activities including horseback riding, fishing, sports, boating, swimming, arts, crafts, and concerts. Every year the camp features a unique theme, the 2025 theme was Natural Parks.

How does the Horse Program Work?

The horse portion of the camp took place on June 16-17, 2025, at an onsite barn located at the far end of the state park in a secluded area. Groups of campers and their personal volunteers rotate between camp activities and have the option to visit the equine center during their camp stay. Campers can participate in activities such as sitting in a western saddle, experiencing a cowboy campsite, and sensory activities as well. There was a grooming station where campers could experience and learn how to groom a horse. There was also a horse painting station where campers could paint colorful designs on a horse. The campers who choose to ride a horse are fitted with a helmet, accompanied to a mounting block, and assisted in mounting a horse. A short ride around the facility is given. Each rider is accompanied by an assigned horse leader and two side walkers who help the rider stay calm and maintain balance. Each rider is assisted with a dismount and the horse is put back in rotation for the next rider.

The Horse Program relies on all volunteer humans, horses, and donations in order to run each year. Donors of the 2025 Horse Program were: Walker Realty and Hess Auctions, Bronson Door Company, Jr's Jently Used and New Tack, Mike & Lori Blackburn, Larry & Nancy Gray, Bob Blackburn, and Brendon Sears.



First row pictures left to right:

- Colby is a 22-year-old gelding who was part of the riding program.
- Campers could experience a Cowboy Camp which was set up in the staging area beside the horse barn.
- Four new mounting blocks were donated for the 2025 Horse Program.
- Stalls inside the barn where the horses were kept.

Second row pictures left to right:

- Ollie and Gracie are mini mules who participated in the grooming station
- Preacher is a Buckskin gelding who was part of the riding program.
- Marley is a paint mare who participated in the painted horse station.
- View of Rocky Fork Lake from the Horse Camp

Highland County Wildcats



Spring was quite busy for our local athletes! We had six of our bocce team players who competed in the SW Regional Special Olympics Bocce Qualifier held at the Countryside YMCA in Lebanon. Two of our teams qualified for the State Games at The Ohio State University. One team earned gold medals while the other two earned silver medals in their divisions. With an increase in interest in this sport, we will add more teams in the future.

Along with bocce, we have had eighteen track and field athletes who were prepared to compete in the SW Regional Track and Field. Despite the cancellation due to inclement weather and never was rescheduled. But it did not stop our group from competing in the State Summer Games. Twelve athletes competed in the State Games which resulted four gold, two silver and four bronze medals.

Bowling anyone?! Forty-one of our local bowlers competed in three bowling matches scheduled with Brown County Special Olympics. This drew attention from other counties to join, and we are hoping to schedule more bowling matches with other counties. Each year, the number of interests continue to grow. It is always great to see new names joining us!

This Summer we have been hosting the annual Wildcats Bocce Tournament. This is only for our local bocce players enjoying fun competition with each other and learn the game. This year we have twenty-four bocce players enjoying the fun competition.

Our flag football players got invited to join the Special Skills Invitational Football which will take place at The Ohio State University. This is a fun day for our football players to learn different basic football drills with the football players for the Buckeyes.

The upcoming Fall Games (Track and Field) will be on Saturday, October 4th starting at 9am at McClain High School track. This event will include local adult athletes and student athletes of Highland County.

We are currently working on scheduling Unified Golf, Unified Slow Pitch Softball, and Flag Football. The schedules will be posted on our Facebook page, Highland County Special Olympics.



People First of Highland County

The local chapter, with eighteen members, meets at Southern State every first Wednesday of each month, starting at 12:30pm. We have had various guest speakers joining our monthly meeting. Our local advocates also attend monthly SOAG (Southern Ohio Advocacy Group) in Chillicothe every third Tuesday of each month.

Our local advocates participated in the virtual DD Awareness/ Advocacy Day to celebrate the DD Awareness Month. Also, they have met with the Highland County Commissioners, Mayors, or Village Manager to spread awareness in the communities of Highland County. All the proclamations were gathered.

Our group participated in the Arc of Ohio Spring Conference held in Hamilton County. We are planning to attend the Synergy Conference in October.



Community First

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

Highland 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 Highland County's workforce.



Hills and Dales Preschool



Superheroes
at work!



Superhero Adventures at Preschool

What a *super* year we have had! Our little heroes have soared through an incredible journey of learning, friendship, and discovery. Every child has grown stronger, braver, and more confident—just like true superheroes!

This year, our preschoolers have:

- Worn their capes of kindness and shared with others.
- Used their “super senses” to explore the world around them.
- Built problem-solving powers in creative play and group activities.
- Celebrated big and small victories with our superhero squad.

We are especially proud of our inclusive environment, where children of all abilities shine. Students with disabilities receive individualized support and therapies—such as speech, occupational, and physical therapy—right at school, as part of their daily routine. Every child is empowered to reach their full potential, and their unique strengths are celebrated every day.

Enroll Now for 2025–2026!

We still have *limited openings* for preschoolers with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) for the 2025–2026 school year. If your child is ready to join our dynamic and inclusive superhero team, applications are now available on our website: www.highdd.org

Let us make next year even more *super*!

Early Intervention and Help Me Grow



Early Intervention Team Members Katie Fouch, Assistant Early Intervention Director and Janda Tattersall, Speech and Language Pathologist attended and helped facilitate a successful Community Baby Shower. We were to meet other agencies, resources, and members of our community, and share information about the Early Intervention services we offer. This event was a huge success and helped many expecting mothers and families of our community.

Highland County Early Intervention and Help Me Grow programs partner once per month, offering a community playgroup for children aged 0 to 5. We have an amazing EI room filled with age-appropriate toys for kids to engage in socialization, problem solving, motor activities and so much more. We are excited to give families the opportunity to connect with each other, while the kids participate in play and sensory experiences with their friends. We enjoy celebrating the EI graduates when they turn three and providing a continued opportunity for them to visit and play.

