



DD Community Forum

Monday, November 1

3:00 PM – 4:30 PM

on Zoom

[Register Here](#)

Hosted by Advocates in Action.

Please submit any questions you have about this event to: MichelleWhite@AdvocatesInAction.org

Self-Directed Hiring During COVID-19 Update

As a reminder, during the COVID-19 pandemic, people who self-direct can hire any qualified adult, including family members, parents, and legal guardians. All self-directed staff, including family members, must be able to pass a background check.

Rhode Island has approval for this to continue until six months after the end of the federal public health emergency. We have asked for approval to continue this even after this period for family members who are not legal guardians. Legal guardians will not be able to continue working as paid staff after this period.

Any staff working with self-directed individuals, including family members, should be working with the individuals on the goals in their Individual Support Plan and have documentation of the supports being provided and progress towards goals.

Self-Direct Supports, COVID Vaccines and Direct Support Workers

COVID-19 is a virus that spreads fast. There is a new form of the virus called Delta. The COVID-19 vaccine helps to keep people from getting COVID-19. The vaccine helps to keep people from getting very sick from COVID-19.

People choose to get the vaccine and your worker can choose to take or not take the vaccine.

Direct Support Workers who got the vaccine help keep you from getting COVID-19. At this time, there are no state or federal laws, or mandates, that require Direct Support Workers to get vaccinated if they work with someone who has a disability.

As a self-directed individual, you choose the people who work with you. You can ask them to be vaccinated. You can ask to see their vaccine card.

If your direct-support person is not vaccinated, you can choose not to have them work for you.

COVID Vaccine and Agency Staff

There have been many questions asking if the RI Department of Health (RIDOH) COVID vaccine mandate for healthcare workers applies to DD agency staff. The RIDOH COVID vaccine mandate does not apply to staff who are not licensed by the RIDOH and who work in settings not defined as healthcare facilities. Settings licensed by BHDDH, including agencies, group homes, and community mental health centers are not defined as healthcare facilities.

Many employers outside of the healthcare network are deciding whether to require employees to be vaccinated. Although the RIDOH mandate does not apply to DD agencies, each agency may decide whether or not to require their employees to be vaccinated.

New Videos on Special Needs Trusts and ABLE Accounts

The Arc has released two new videos that provide an overview of special needs trusts and ABLE accounts to help educate people with disabilities about these financial options. Each video explains why to consider using each tool, how they work, what they can pay for, and how you can get started. These videos are available in English and Spanish.

If you have any questions, please reach out to futureplanning@thearc.org

[Click here](#) to access the videos.

State Councils on Developmental Disabilities Recognizes the Rhode Island Developmental Disabilities Council

Of 56 Councils across the U.S., the State Councils on Developmental Disabilities recognized RIDDC's Self Employment Initiative as a "Success Story Theme: Innovation". Following is the highlight of the program.

In Rhode Island, individuals with disabilities who want to become entrepreneurs can participate in a program that equips them with the skills needed to manage a successful business. The funds are generated by an annual grant from the State Department of Labor and Training (DLT) Real Pathways Initiative with additional funding from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act. The program receives additional support through in-kind funding from the RI DD Council and through long-term job development support for individuals with I/DD from the Office of Rehabilitation Services (ORS) and BHDDH.

This partnership is unique in that many of the partners involved do not focus on serving individuals with disabilities. Because the mission of the non-disability focused partners is related to employment for all regardless of disability, the RI DD Council took the opportunity to build upon common synergies. The collaboration includes numerous partners such as: RI Department of Labor and Training, RI Small Business Administration, RI Center for Women and Enterprise, RI Small Business Development Center, RI Cross Disability Coalition, Office of Rehabilitative Services, and Northern RI Chamber of Commerce. As a result of the RI Self-Employment Initiative, individuals with disabilities can achieve their goal of self-employment.

For more information, contact Sue Babin at suebabin@riddc.org.

October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month

"America's Recovery: Powered by Inclusion"

BHDDH is proud to support National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM). Held each October, NDEAM aims to educate about disability employment issues and celebrate the many and varied contributions of America's workers with disabilities.

Throughout the month, the BHDDH DD Employment Team (Tracey Cunningham-Martins and Jay MacKay) will be hitting the streets of Rhode Island to visit employees at their workplace and record the "Faces and Places" of Disability Employment. We will put them all together to share on the BHDDH website.

Do you want to take part and be recognized for your abilities? All are welcome to participate. Simply contact us and we will gladly set up a visit. Email Jay MacKay at Gerard.mackay@bhddh.ri.gov or call 401-462-5279.

We all play an important part in fostering a more inclusive workforce, one where every person is recognized for his or her abilities — every day of every month.



At work, it's what people CAN do that matters.

What can?
YOU do?
The Campaign for
Disability Employment

www.whatcanyoudocampaign.org

Because myths and stereotypes continue to create barriers to employment opportunities for qualified people with disabilities, the What can YOU do? campaign was launched. It is a national public education effort to emphasize the value and talent people with disabilities add to businesses and organizations.

Senator Wants To Increase SSI Benefits That Haven't Been Updated In Decades

Excerpted from Disability Scoop, see full article [here](#)

U.S. Sen. Sherrod Brown, D-Ohio, wants to update the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program that provides financial assistance to nearly 8 million seniors and people who are blind and and those who have disabilities.

As chair of the Senate Finance Subcommittee on Social Security, Pensions and Family Policy, he has introduced a bill that will improve benefit levels that haven't been updated since the 1980s and stop punishing the program's participants for getting part-time jobs, marrying and saving for the future. He says he's trying to incorporate parts of his proposal into the \$3.5 trillion reconciliation package that Congress will consider in upcoming weeks.

Brown said 300,000 Ohioans are SSI beneficiaries. Their average monthly benefit is \$585, which comes out to about \$7,000 each year. The most they can get is \$794 a month, which works out to far less than the minimum wage. According to Brown, SSI is the sole income source for 60% of its beneficiaries.

"The program's eligibility rules literally haven't been updated in decades in many cases, not even for inflation," Brown said at a subcommittee hearing this week on the matter. "They force millions of disabled and older Americans to live well below the poverty line and punish them for any of their own efforts to build a little financial security ... It sends a pretty absurd message ... SSI's outdated rules make it impossible for beneficiaries to live with dignity."

Brown said a recent analysis by the Urban Institute found reforms in his bill would lift 3.3 million people out of poverty. He noted that his bill is endorsed by groups as diverse as AARP, AFL-CIO, and the National Women's Law Center and said he's working with Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer of New York on the bill, as well as Senate Finance Committee Chair Ron Wyden of Oregon.

"It is time for a crucial update for a program that is so important," Wyden declared at the hearing, expressing support for Brown's bill and criticizing policies that cut the modest benefits of young people with disabilities who try to work and make an income.

The top Republican on Brown's subcommittee, Indiana's Todd Young, agreed the program's effectiveness needed to be reviewed but cautioned "we can't spend more and hope it helps." He said it was designed to be a "program of last resort." Although it was initially created to assist elderly low-income people, Young said its primary beneficiaries now are non-elderly adults with disabilities and children, and he said the nation's social safety net programs need to be put on more solid financial footing.

"If we don't act now, the trust funds and these programs will be exhausted leading to significant benefit cuts," said Young.

Stephen Evangelista, the Social Security Administration's acting deputy commissioner for retirement and disability policy said the federal government expects to pay around \$56 billion

in federal SSI benefits this year. He described it as “a vital lifeline that enables beneficiaries to meet their basic needs of food, clothing, and shelter.”

The maximum federal monthly benefit amount in 2021 is \$794 for individuals (about 75% of the federal, individual poverty line) and \$1,191 for couples where both individuals are eligible for the program, Evangelista testified.

Mia Ives-Rublee, who heads the Center for American Progress’ disability justice initiative, said many people who rely on SSI to keep a roof over their heads continue to struggle with “daily living expenses and outdated rules due to the fact that the program has had few updates since its creation in 1972.” She said it was difficult for her to find jobs after she graduated from high school because she uses a wheelchair. She relied on the program to make ends meet as she pursued an education so she could get a job, but she said she “got in trouble several times for earning small stipends — just a few hundred dollars over three months — for working at summer camps” and wasn’t allowed to accumulate any savings for fear of hitting the program’s \$2,000 asset limit.

After getting a job at the North Carolina Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services, Ives-Rublee spent six years trying to help clients navigate the cumbersome benefit application system. She said benefit approvals can take anywhere from several months to several years, and “thousands of people die or go bankrupt every year waiting for disability benefits as a result.”

“Current SSI policies are archaic, and benefits are too low, which causes real harm to beneficiaries,” she told the committee. “While the program used to be the most successful anti-poverty program for disabled people, it now forces and traps disabled people into poverty. Many of these individuals have no other options to support themselves, which forces them into perpetual evictions and instability.”

Brown told reporters his bill would update asset limits and income rules to compensate for inflation. He proposes raising the asset limit to \$10,000 for an individual and \$20,000 for a married couple, instead of the current \$2,000 asset limit for an individual and \$3,000 limit for a married couple. His bill would also allow people to earn up to \$400 per month from jobs without affecting benefits, and it would eliminate a benefit cut that happens now if two SSI beneficiaries marry.

Brown said he will try to “include as much of this as we can” in the upcoming \$3.5 trillion spending package. At minimum, Brown says the package will include his proposal to raise the asset limit for SSI beneficiaries.

“We want people to be able to get part-time jobs, if they can, and make a little money and save a little money,” said Brown. “I hope sooner rather than later to raise the program to better than above the poverty line... This was started to keep people out of poverty, but the amount of money isn’t nearly enough to keep people out of poverty. So the first step is the asset levels.”

Contacting DD Staff

See the full Division Contact List attached to this newsletter.

Monday-Friday 8:30-4:00
for questions or support
(401) 462-3421

Para español, llame
(401) 462-3014

Send general questions to the
AskDD email address.

BHDDH.AskDD@bhddh.ri.gov

Please do not email critical issues.

Sign Up for Our Email List

If you aren't receiving email updates
and newsletters from BHDDH, you can
[sign up here](#) or on our website. Go to

<https://bhddh.ri.gov/developmentaldisabilities/events/newsandupdates/> to sign up or to see
past quarterly newsletters and issues of DD News.

 **SIGN UP FOR THE BHDDH NEWSLETTER**

If you are experiencing a mental health crisis, BH Link is here for you

BH Link's mission is to ensure all Rhode Islanders experiencing mental health and substance use
crises receive the appropriate services they need as quickly as possible in an environment that
supports their recovery. Call 911 if there is risk of immediate danger. Visit the BH Link website
at www.bhlink.org or for confidential support and to get connected to care:

CALL (401) 414-LINK (5465) If under 18 CALL: (855) KID(543)-LINK(5465)

Visit the 24-HOUR/7-DAY TRIAGE CENTER at 975 Waterman Avenue, East Providence, RI

Stay Informed with Information on COVID-19

Rhode Island Department of Health COVID-19 Resources

Hotline (401) 222-8022 or 211 after hours;
Email RIDOH.COVID19Questions@health.ri.gov
Website <https://health.ri.gov/covid/>

Center for Disease Control COVID-19 Information

Website cdc.gov/coronavirus
Videos <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/communication/videos.html>
Includes a link to ASL videos

RI Parent Information Network (RIPIN)

Website <https://ripin.org/covid-19-resources/>
Call Center (401) 270-0101 or email callcenter@ripin.org

Advocates in Action – for videos and easy to read materials

Website <https://www.advocatesinaction.org/>
Website offers BrowseAloud, which will read the website to you

Community of Practice in Autism in RI

October Meeting

Zoom Webinar

4 A's of Autism:

Awareness to Acceptance to Appreciation to Action as a Pathway to Fulfilling and Productive Lives

PRESENTER: Stephen Shore, PhD,
*educator, consultant, author, speaker with
autism.*

Attend this webinar and change the way you think about autism! Dr. Stephen Shore will share his lived experiences as an autistic man to explain how making fulfilling and productive lives for autistic individuals can be the rule rather than the exception. He will charge participants to reframe their thinking away from deficit, disorder, and deficit towards seeking abilities based on individual strengths. The session ends with generalizing focus on strengths-based thinking to the rest of humanity – and finally, to the audience themselves.

REGISTRATION

OCTOBER 6, 2021
4:00 - 6:00 PM
ZOOM WEBINAR

Advance registration is required
using the link below:

<http://bit.ly/38DRVJN>



After registering, you will receive a confirmation
email with information about joining the webinar.

Professional Development:

Continuing Education Credits (2.0 credit hours) from NASW-RI and RIMHCA will be available pending approval.

To be eligible for CEUs you MUST:

- JOIN USING YOUR UNIQUE ZOOM LINK PROVIDED UPON REGISTERING,
- SIGN INTO WEBINAR USING BOTH FIRST & LAST NAMES, and
- PARTICIPATE THE DURATION OF THE WEBINAR.

Questions & Requests:

If you need a reasonable accommodation, please indicate your request on the registration form as soon as possible.

For registration questions, contact Elaine Sollecito at esollecito@ric.edu or 401-456-2764.

For questions about the Community of Practice or this meeting, contact Paul LaCava at placava@ric.edu or 401-456-4735.



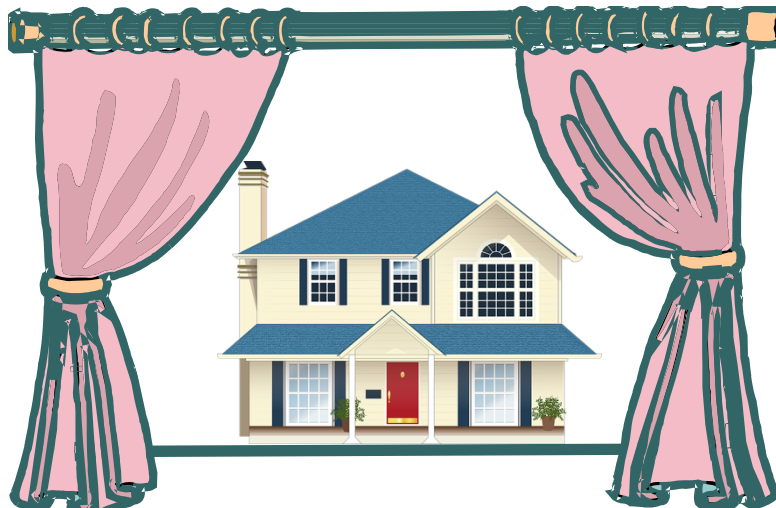
Registration information is also available on the Sherlock Center website at www.sherlockcenter.org.

Personal Lifetime Advocacy Networks of RI

Housing Alternatives Information Service

*Are you a parent of a person with a disability,
wondering where your son or daughter will live
when it is time to move out of your home?*

**Find a new window on the world
of creative housing options**



Please contact one of our housing information and referral consultants:

- Deb Langevin at (401) 317-0200 or dlangevinplanri@gmail.com. She is actively working to assure a customized community living option for her son
- Iraida Williams at (401) 317-0212 or iwilliamsplanri@gmail.com, a Spanish-speaking parent, who has proactively sought out a variety of person-centered outcomes for her loved one
- Heidi Showstead at (401) 317-0217 or heidishowstead@verizon.net, a woman with disabilities who has lived independently throughout her adult life

*PLAN RI is grateful for the support of the John E.
Fogarty Foundation, RIFORCE & the Carpcionato Group*

