



GOVERNOR'S COUNCIL  
ON DISABILITY

# GOVERNOR'S COUNCIL ON DISABILITY

## GCD NEWSLETTER

Volume 11, Number 3, June 2025

[Governor's Council on Disability](#)

### Inside this Issue

#### Page 1:

- GCD presents Inclusion and Youth Leadership Awards

#### Page 2:

- Legislative Session Ends—Next Steps
- Celebrating 35 years of the ADA

#### Page 3:

- Artists invited to participate in GCD poster contest
- The Youth Leadership Forum is not possible without you

#### Page 4:

- College Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

#### Page 5:

- Connecting with Adult Children

#### Page 6:

- Helen Keller Deaf-Blind Awareness Week

#### Page 7:

- Explore Missouri this summer

#### Page 8:

- Upcoming Events
- Stay connected with the GCD

## GCD PRESENTS INCLUSION AND YOUTH LEADERSHIP AWARDS

by Claudia Browner

For over 30 years, the Governor's Council on Disability (GCD) has presented the Inclusion Award and Youth Leadership Award to spotlight individuals and organizations who are creating greater access and opportunity for Missourians with disabilities—through innovation, advocacy, and a commitment to improving lives.

On May 29, the GCD recognized the 2024 Inclusion and Youth Leadership Award winners at the annual [Missouri Rehabilitation Association \(MRA\) conference](#) at Lake Ozark. This statewide training conference brings together professionals to learn innovative ways to empower and support individuals with disabilities and was the perfect venue to honor and celebrate the achievements of the honorees.



The 2024 awards recipients were:

**Inclusion Award Winner — True Manufacturing, O'Fallon**

**Inclusion Award Honorable Mention — Kit Brewer, Project CU, Inc., St. Louis**

**Youth Leadership Award Winner — Arabel StandingBear, Neosho**

**Youth Leadership Award Honorable Mention — Lucas Fritsche, Perryville**

Congratulations to all of the award winners!

For more information about the awards programs and this year's winners and nominees, visit our [Inclusion Awards](#) and [Youth Leadership Awards](#) websites.

The Governor's Council on Disability accepts nominations for the annual awards programs each fall. If you know of an individual or organization who deserves recognition for their commitment to advancing disability inclusion and improving lives, I encourage you to participate by submitting a nomination. The nomination forms will be available online by October.

*Photo: Kit Brewer, Lucas Fritsche, Arabel StandingBear, and True Manufacturing —Katie Anderson, Ken Talley, Matt Lucas*

## LEGISLATIVE SESSION ENDS—NEXT STEPS

by Laura Mueth

The 2025 legislative session is now over. It concluded a day earlier than scheduled, on Thursday, May 15. For bills that have been [Truly Agreed To and Finally Passed](#) by the General Assembly, the next step is consideration by Governor Kehoe. You can contact the Governor's Office to share your thoughts on the bills using the [contact form](#).

The final issue of the [Legislative Update](#) in July will include the bills impacting people with disabilities that were sent to the governor and the action he took on them. If he vetoes any bill, the House and Senate could attempt to override the veto during September's veto session.

The next few months are a time to look at successes of the session and consider what is important to you or your groups for next year. If you did not have the opportunity to share thoughts or a bill idea with a representative or senator this session, they can be contacted over the summer. If you had legislators who worked on your behalf on a particular bill you can take time now or over the summer to thank them for their efforts.



## CELEBRATING 35 YEARS OF THE ADA

by Claudia Browner



This year, we commemorate the 35th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). This significant civil rights legislation was enacted by President George H.W. Bush on July 26, 1990. The ADA ensures that individuals with disabilities have equal access and full participation in employment, government programs, communication, and public spaces. Although notable strides have been made towards access and inclusion, advocates for disability rights continue to provide policy recommendations to fully realize the ADA's potential in all aspects of community life.

### Participate in the Americans with Disabilities Impact Survey: 2025

To honor the ADA's anniversary, the Southwest ADA Center, part of the National ADA Network, is seeking feedback from the disability community to evaluate the ADA's impact over the past 35 years. This input will help develop further technical assistance and policy recommendations for effective implementation of the legislation. You are invited to take part in the anonymous and voluntary Americans with Disabilities Impact Survey: 2025, available online at <https://survey.alchemer.com/s3/8264936/ADA-Impact-Survey-2025>. For questions or assistance regarding the survey, please reach out to [ADAimpact2025@gmail.com](mailto:ADAimpact2025@gmail.com).

### Join the Nationwide Recognition of the ADA

Disability advocates and organizations across the nation are celebrating the 35th anniversary of the ADA through social media campaigns, events, and festivities. If you're seeking inspiration to commemorate this significant milestone, visit [adaanniversary.org](http://adaanniversary.org) for ideas and toolkits.

The Governor's Council on Disability acknowledges and honors the 35th anniversary of the ADA by reaffirming its commitment to advocating for the disability community. This is achieved through collaboration with stakeholders from disability organizations and state agencies to shape policies that promote the full inclusion of individuals with disabilities, as well as by offering outreach programs and hosting events aimed at raising disability awareness.

## ARTISTS INVITED TO PARTICIPATE IN GCD POSTER CONTEST

by Claudia Browner

Each year, the Governor's Council on Disability organizes a poster contest to honor National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) in October.

All residents of Missouri are invited and encouraged to submit original artwork that sparks dialogue and raises awareness about the significance of equal employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities. The artwork selected as the winner will be showcased on the 2025 awareness poster.

**In celebration of the 35th Anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the GCD invites artists to reflect this pivotal milestone in their creations.**

The ADA prohibits discrimination based on disability and ensures that individuals with disabilities have equal opportunities and full participation in every facet of society, including the workforce.

Get started on your artwork now and submit your entries before the August 31 deadline for a chance to win!

For further details and to access the entry form, please visit [disability.mo.gov/gcd/PosterContest](https://disability.mo.gov/gcd/PosterContest).

Governor's Council on  
Disability

### POSTER CONTEST



SUBMIT ENTRIES BY  
August 15, 2025

CALLING ALL MISSOURI  
ARTISTS



Submit your artwork for a chance to be featured on the Governor's Council on Disability's 2025 National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) Poster

The theme for the artwork contest is the **35th Anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)**

**ADA35**

FULL PARTICIPATION - EQUAL OPPORTUNITY -  
INDEPENDENT LIVING - ECONOMIC SELF-SUFFICIENCY



LEARN HOW YOU CAN PARTICIPATE AT  
[disability.mo.gov/gcd/PosterContest](https://disability.mo.gov/gcd/PosterContest)

QUESTIONS? CALL  
573-751-2600

## THE YOUTH LEADERSHIP FORUM IS NOT POSSIBLE WITHOUT YOU

by Reece Ellis



There are 114 counties in Missouri, 554 school districts, and nearly 900,000 students — or about one in every seven people in our great state. Among them are young leaders with disabilities who have the potential to shape our communities for the better. Helping us find and support those future leaders is where you come in.

The [Missouri Youth Leadership Forum \(MO-YLF\)](https://disability.mo.gov/youth-leadership-forum) has always been a program built on community. Whether you're a parent, teacher, rehab specialist, transition coordinator, advocate, or alum, your outreach and encouragement are what connect us to the students who need this opportunity the most. This year, 20 delegates from across the state will join us in Columbia from July 15–19 for a life-changing week of leadership development, mentoring, disability history, career planning, and self-advocacy training.

We want to say thank you. Thank you to the families who trust us with their students, to the alumni who return each year to mentor the next generation, and to the community leaders and employers who donate their time to speak on panels and offer guidance.

Thank you to the organizations and agencies whose generous monetary and in-kind donations make it possible to run MO-YLF at no cost to students, ensuring equity and access for young people from both urban and rural areas. From accessible transportation to meals, overnight lodging, and supplies, this program runs entirely on the strength of our supporters. Your belief in our mission is what sustains it.

As we prepare to welcome this year's cohort, we are especially moved by the continued commitment of our alumni. Every team leader and facilitator this year is a YLF graduate. Their passion for giving back is proof of the long-term impact this program has in building confidence, community, and capacity for leadership.

Last year we celebrated 20 years of MO-YLF. With your support, we look forward to celebrating 25, 30, 40 years and beyond! To learn more about the Missouri Youth Leadership Forum, including how to support or sponsor, visit [disability.mo.gov/gcd/ylyf](https://disability.mo.gov/gcd/ylyf)



# COLLEGE ACCOMMODATIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

by Reece Ellis

Heading off to college is an exciting time, but it can also come with big changes especially when it comes to disability accommodations. If you're a high school student with an IEP or 504 Plan, it's important to know that the college accommodation process works very differently.

In high school, most accommodations are managed through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which guarantees access to services that support your success. But once you graduate, IDEA no longer applies. In college, accommodations are governed by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. These laws protect your right to equal access, but not guaranteed outcomes.

## Here's what that means:

- You must ask for accommodations. Colleges are not required to identify students with disabilities. You must self-identify and register with your school's disability services office if you need reasonable accommodations.
- You need documentation. Be prepared to submit recent documentation about your diagnosis and how it impacts you including any functional limitations.
- You are in charge. You, not your parents or guardians, must request accommodations and work directly with the disability services office.
- The process is collaborative. Once you register, disability office staff will work with you and your instructors to identify and implement reasonable accommodations that don't fundamentally change course requirements.

## Common college accommodations include:

- Extended time on exams
- Note-taking support or access to class notes
- Priority registration
- Use of text-to-speech software or audiobooks
- Permission to record lectures
- Reduced course loads (though this may affect financial aid)
- Access to adaptive tech or assistive devices
- Accommodations in student housing

However, most services vary widely by school. While all colleges are legally required to offer accommodations that provide equal access, some colleges go beyond the basics by offering learning specialists, mentoring programs, or study skills support—sometimes at an extra cost. As you compare schools, be sure to ask detailed questions about what services are available and how to access them. Start early and don't be afraid to advocate for yourself. College comes with more freedom, but also more personal responsibility. Learning how to navigate this process now can make your transition smoother and your experience more successful.



## CONNECTING WITH ADULT CHILDREN

by Kim Hicks, Office of Equal Opportunity

Currently, there is no universal guidebook for raising children. Many lessons can be learned through the tried-and-true method of trial and error. All parents experience ups and downs, good days and bad days. Mistakes are made, but so are memories.

You might have said out loud or to yourself, "This isn't what I imagined for myself." Perhaps you've thought, "I wish I hadn't said that." Maybe you even considered, "I wish I could do that over." Much of the growth for parents arises from mistakes yet given the hundreds or thousands of hiccups that occur in raising children, they will inevitably grow into adults, and as they mature, the dynamics of the parent-child relationship evolve. Although it's common to experience a sense of distance during this period, it's important to discover methods to sustain a strong connection.

Recognizing how personalities, needs, talents, and tendencies change over time offers valuable insight into nurturing a changing relationship, from offering advice to enjoying quality time together. Understanding their personalities and adjusting to their needs and communication styles is important. How that happens is up to each of us. But remember to keep it simple; don't overthink it, advises child/teen & family psychologist, parent coach, and author Jeffrey Bernstein, Ph.D.

Meet them where they are. Instead of inviting them to an activity you enjoy, participate in something they appreciate. This might involve going fishing, attending a football game, or relaxing while watching their favorite show.

Recognize their adulthood and their potential. Acknowledge that your child is now an adult and deserves autonomy and independence. Respect their opinions, choices, and lifestyle.

Respect their space and identity as young adults. Avoid placing undue expectations on them. Remember to be flexible during holidays and other special occasions, as they are entitled to make their own plans now.

They may have grown and become independent, but your words still hold great power. You possess the ability to encourage and uplift them. Avoid being judgmental or critical. Speak words of life that will inspire and elevate them. I hope you find ways to strengthen your connections with those you love.



## HELEN KELLER DEAF-BLIND AWARENESS WEEK

by Lydia Olmsted

Deaf-Blind Awareness Week is observed during the last week of June each year, in honor of humanitarian, author, and educator Helen Keller, who was born on June 27, 1880. Being both deaf and blind, Keller's work significantly impacted the lives of other Deaf-Blind individuals. Established in 1984, Deaf-Blind Awareness Week aims to raise public awareness about individuals who have combined hearing and vision loss, to promote a better understanding of the challenges they face, and to celebrate their unique abilities and contributions to society.



Lydia Olmsted is a vital advocate for the rights of individuals with disabilities, particularly those who are Deaf-Blind. As a student, Lydia became a powerful and respected voice for equal access, advocating for reasonable accommodations and demonstrating her passion and unwavering commitment to inclusion. Her work has garnered notable recognition, showcasing her exemplary contributions and steadfast commitment to the rights of people with disabilities. Lydia served as the keynote speaker for the State of Missouri's inaugural National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) Celebration in October 2024. She received the 2023 Governor's Council on Disability's Annual Youth Leadership Award and the Senator Chuck Graham Memorial Disability and Advocacy Ambassador Award from the City of Columbia Disabilities Commission, acknowledging her exceptional contributions to the community. This recognition was followed by an invitation to deliver the keynote address at the Missouri Centers for Independent Living annual conference.

Here is Lydia's story...I have always believed that Deaf-Blindness is part of me, but it does not define me or stop me from achieving my dreams. I was born with a rare condition called Septo Optic Dysplasia which causes blindness. At age 7, we discovered that my right ear doesn't distinguish spoken words. After discussing with doctors and family members what taste and smell truly are, it was discovered that I was also born with no sense of smell and significantly limited sense of taste.

At school, I did not receive much of the support I needed to access classroom material, learn adaptive techniques for everyday tasks, and many other vital skills. I was fortunate that my mom took me to many classes during the weekends, as well as summer camps in St. Louis, Missouri, to learn the skills needed in order for me to live independently and manage the responsibilities of being a student. I also vividly recall my Grandma insisting that I learn how to read when I was in kindergarten and bribing me with M&M's. My family taught me the importance of advocacy and perseverance at a young age, and I am very grateful. I consider those skills to be my greatest strengths.

Once I graduated high school in 2019, I took advantage of quarantine time in 2020 during the pandemic to research adaptive techniques for independent living, assistive technology, and available tools and devices that could help me. In 2021, I went to Alphapointe, a blindness training and rehabilitation center, to continue building on the skills necessary for college and employment. While at Alphapointe, I learned about the Helen Keller National Center (HKNC) in a drop down menu on a form. I investigated further and discovered that HKNC would be a great fit for providing the specific training I needed given my dual sensory loss.

It took a great deal of persuasion to encourage Rehabilitation Services for the Blind in Missouri to send me to New York for training, but I eventually began my training in 2022. The information and strategies they provided were exactly what I needed at the time to pursue my vocational and independent living aspirations.

I then attempted to study political science in college in Springfield, Missouri, but was unsuccessful due to the combination of almost no accommodations provided by the college and I contracted Covid which has severe long-term effects for me. The biggest

*(Continued on page 7)*

*(Continued from page 6)* **HELEN KELLER DEAF-BLIND AWARENESS WEEK**

challenge from Covid is that I now experience daily episodes of total deafness in both ears which simultaneously causes vertigo. As a result, I temporarily switched my focus to volunteer work and speaking engagements until I could get the necessary training and medical assistance to compensate for my total deafness starting and stopping unexpectedly.

While I was speaking at the Centers for Independent Living statewide conference, the director of Great Plains ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) Center hired me on the spot as a consultant. I now assist the center with community trainings about the ADA, raising awareness about accessible recreation opportunities, and answering questions about the ADA from people with disabilities and the community as a whole. I also obtained my certification as an ADA Coordinator from the Center in 2024. ADA Coordinators are hired by businesses and government agencies to oversee their compliance with the law, as well as receive input from the public about the entity's accessibility.

Near the time I started working for Great Plains ADA Center, I became a student at Woodhaven EnCircle, which serves individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities. Shortly after joining the program, I was invited to teach some of their social skills and self-advocacy classes. Working with the students has taught me a great deal about how to communicate my message to a wide range of people with different learning styles. I find the work and advocacy I do for the disability community very rewarding.

While acquiring training for total Deaf-Blindness is still in progress, I know from my past life experience that I will find a way to overcome this challenge just as I have overcome others. My message to other Deaf-Blind individuals and people with other disabilities is to not let your disability stop you from pursuing your dreams. It definitely will not always be easy, but all the hard work and effort will be worthwhile in the end.



## EXPLORE MISSOURI THIS SUMMER

by Claudia Browner

As summer arrives, many of us like to travel and explore the great outdoors. Missouri is home to a variety of travel destinations that cater to everyone, whether you're planning a day trip or an extended getaway. For fantastic ideas to kickstart your adventures, check out the online **Visit Missouri** travel guide. You can tailor your search to discover trip ideas, itineraries, and local festivals and events.

Plan your next vacation by visiting [VisitMo.com](https://www.visitmo.com)

If you have a passion for exploring state parks and historic sites, you can find valuable information and customize your travel plans on the **Missouri State Parks** website at [mostateparks.com](https://mostateparks.com)

The [Accessible Information by Park](#) webpage offers detailed insights into accessibility features available at each location.

Enjoy your next adventure and have a fun summer filled with the stunning sights and events that Missouri has to offer!





### Missouri Governor's Council on Disability—Council Members

- Ronald Hack, Council Chair, St. Louis
- Steve Ahrens, Jefferson City
- Charles Comstock, Kirksville
- Stacey Elster, Wildwood
- Wayne Crawford, Marshall
- Betty Davidson, Ph.D., St. Louis
- Katie Jones, St. Charles
- Kim Lackey, St. Louis
- Elijah Mayfield, Jefferson City
- Susan Orton, Creve Coeur
- Andrew Sartorius, Jefferson City
- Jason Schott, Ste. Genevieve
- Lesia Shelton, Buffalo
- Robert Wallace, St. Louis

### Missouri Governor's Council on Disability—Staff Members

- Claudia Browner, Executive Director
- Reece Ellis, Senior Program Specialist
- Laura Mueth, Senior Program Specialist
- Jennifer Pettit, Administrative Support Professional

## UPCOMING EVENTS

Check out these upcoming disability-related conferences and events! Click on the links to learn more or register.

**June 15—18, 2025**

[National ADA Symposium](#), Atlanta, Georgia

**June 25—27, 2025**

[Transition Training Institute](#), Columbia

**July 15—19, 2025**

[Missouri Youth Leadership Forum](#), Columbia

**July 24—25, 2025**

[Missouri APSE Employment Summit](#), Columbia

**August 24—26, 2025**

[Real Voices, Real Choices Conference](#), Lake Ozark

**September 25, 2025**

[Disability Inclusion Summit](#), Kansas City

**October 16—17, 2025**

[MACDDS Conference](#), Columbia

**October 23, 2025**

[Starkloff Disability Employment Summit](#), Kansas City

If you know of additional events you would like us to share with the disability community, please contact our office.



### STAY CONNECTED

[Subscribe to the GCD Newsletter](#)

[Sign up for the Legislative Update](#)

[Subscribe to receive GCD email updates](#)

[GCD LinkTree](#)