

Frederick County Commission on Disabilities 2019 Annual Report

As part of its bylaws, the Frederick County Commission on Disabilities (COD) is required to submit an annual report to the County Executive to address three specific areas:

- (a) The status of services and programs for people with disabilities in the County;
- (b) Recommendations for the more effective delivery of services and programs to people with disabilities; and
- (c) Annual budget and policy priorities for delivery of services to people with disabilities.

Work to date in these areas has been limited because the COD did not meet from February 2018 until February, 2019. Once the COD reconvened, the process to seat new Commissioners began. In April, the COD Executive Committee interviewed candidates to fill the existing vacancies. The Executive Committee presented its recommendations for new Commissioners at the May COD meeting and existing Commissioners voted to send those recommendations to the County Executive. Once approved, the COD was fully seated for the first time in over a year. At this time, the COD has one vacancy created by the resignation in August of a long-term Commissioner.

A new slate of officers was voted on in June and the COD's work began again in earnest in July. The July meeting was devoted to identifying focus areas and priorities for the coming year. These include:

- Studying the nature of existing barriers to employment for individuals with disabilities;
- Understanding the impact the lack of transportation has on various facets of life including isolation and loneliness;
- Identifying opportunities for the COD to engage with the community; and
- Pinpointing gaps in community accommodations for individuals with disabilities.

In light of a wealth of existing digital tools such as 2-1-1 now available to the community, the COD opted to forego updating *Keys to Independence*, (a compendium of resources for those with disabilities started by the COD several years ago) in favor of devoting our resources and capital to other projects that require more immediate attention such as those listed above.

The Executive Committee has established a regular meeting two weeks before each full Commission meeting. In addition, the COD formed the Community Outreach Committee. This Committee's first task will be to review, edit and finalize a brochure explaining the purpose of the COD and to identify opportunities for the COD to reconnect and re-establish its presence within the community.

In October, we were pleased to work with the County Executive's office to have a proclamation issued honoring October as Disability Employment Awareness Month. The COD worked diligently to connect with service organizations, advocates and members of the disability community to encourage them to take part in the celebration. As a result, attendance at the proclamation ceremony was high. The video shown highlighting the employees and employers was well received and gained a great deal of attention on social media. This was a great start to reinvigorating our work and re-connecting with our community following the COD's long hiatus.

The COD is exploring ways in which it can follow up on the success of the proclamation. In 2020 the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) will celebrate its 30th anniversary and the COD is considering how we might use this event as both a celebration and an educational opportunity for our community to learn more about the contributions and needs of those living with disabilities.

To ensure the COD is informed about the services and programs available, we devote a portion of each meeting to presentations from service organizations and advocates to educate Commissioners on issues, challenges, needs and successes within the community. COD Commissioners have the opportunity to ask questions and we use the information to guide our priorities and activities. This year the COD has heard presentations from:

- Stephan Buckley, Director of the Frederick County Development Center
- Lisa Sewell, certified peer visitor with the Amputee Coalition
- Past COD Chairs Mari Lee and Keith Nolan
- Stuart Harvey, Frederick County Director of Elections
- Joy Rowe, Frederick County Senior Services Division
- David Olney, Frederick County Division of Public Works
- Doug Silvern, Coordinator of the Veterans Case Management services at Service Coordination, Inc.
- John Gretz, County resident interested in disability related issues

Frequently, we receive requests directly from the community, asking the COD for support to address an issue such as the inappropriate use of handicapped parking spaces or the lack of adequate equipment to aid a person with a disability to cross the street. These community inquiries allow the COD to glean a better understanding of the challenges those living with disabilities face and will inform in large part the ways in which we interact and seek to educate the community in the coming year.

The current COD is comprised of individuals with a wide array of backgrounds and experiences who have tremendous energy and enthusiasm for the work that lies ahead. That expertise and commitment, together with input from the community, service providers and advocates, will help the COD fulfill its mission to advise the County Executive and other elected officials about the needs of our neighbors living with disabilities.