

Admin Division Spotlight: Developmental Disabilities Council

This month's spotlight is on Admin's Developmental Disabilities Council (DDC).

The DDC, federally funded under the Developmental Disabilities Act, engages in activities that include needed community services, individualized supports and other forms of assistance that promote self-determination for individuals with developmental disabilities and their families.

DDC is housed in Admin's Office of Executive Policy and Programs (OEPP), which serves residents of South Carolina through the administration of statutorily assigned programs that provide essential services to people living

with disabilities, those in need of help with home utility expenses, small and minority-owned businesses and citizens needing assistance navigating government resources. Led by OEPP Divisional Director **Amy Hornsby**, this work is accomplished through several areas, which include the State Ombudsman for the Governor, Small and Minority Business Certification and Contracting, and the DDC.

DDC is comprised of six extraordinary staff members pictured above, Grants Administrator **Wesley Woodsman**, Program Coordinator **Cheryl English**, Program Assistant **William Fariior**, Program Manager **Lori Rodgers**, Executive Director **Valarie Bishop** and Administrative Specialist **Ester Williams**.

Admin HR spoke with Valarie Bishop to learn about the important work of the DDC.

Director Bishop understands the need to advocate and support the individuals and families they serve, stating, "families are the foundation of our society, we must provide support for them." Staying true to their core values of kindness, persistence, learning and collaboration, the DDC "encourages individuals and their family members to be actively involved in the decision-making process regarding the support and services they may need."

Originally established in 1971 by Executive Order of the Governor and reauthorized in 2010 and 2015, the DDC provides leadership in planning, funding and implementing initiatives that improve quality of life for people with developmental disabilities and their families through advocacy, capacity building and systemic change.



Top Row (L-R): Grants Administrator Wesley Woodsman, Program Coordinator Cheryl English, Program Assistant William Fariior. Bottom Row (L-R): Program Manager Lori Rodgers, Executive Director Valarie Bishop, Administrative Specialist Ester Williams.

The South Carolina legislature also provides support to these individuals. In 2022, Act 209 created the Employment Initiative Act which encourages state agencies and other political subdivisions to provide a competitive wage for individuals with disabilities. Since 1938, it has been legal for South Carolina employers to pay individuals with disabilities less than minimum wage. Act 209 phases out the practice of subminimum wages by August 2024. Additionally, in 2017, the South Carolina General Assembly passed the Persons with Disabilities Right to Parent Act which requires the South Carolina Department of Social Services, law enforcement, probate courts and other parties to protect the parenting rights of persons with disabilities.

“Passing those Acts was a large group effort. It takes many people's time and energy for things like that to come together,” reflects Bishop on these recent achievements.

DDC also uses grant funding to support initiatives for their constituents. During the height of COVID, the council was able to assist with vaccine clinics and coordinate vaccines for individuals that were homebound.

A program known as Partners in Policymaking is also funded through DDC. This initiative is a leadership training program created to teach individuals how to become agents of long-term change, actively partner with policymakers, envision future possibilities and become empowered, strengthened and encouraged.

Approximately 471 people have graduated from the program since its inception. There are many success stories. “One of the first participants in the program now runs a large organization in South Carolina that helps with employment, housing needs and teaches people with disabilities,” said Bishop.

So, what is the DDC's ultimate goal? According to Bishop, they simply “want to make a difference.” Though the council has many initiatives and achievements of which to be proud, Bishop believes that at its core, “advocacy is the most impactful thing that we do. Teaching people how to advocate for themselves, or a loved one, making sure their voices are heard.”



Amy Hornsby and Valarie Bishop

Admin staff and members of the public can volunteer to support the DDC by serving on one of their committees. “We have different committees that fall under the council,” Bishop explains. “We can refer [the volunteer] to some of the programs that we are funding.” To learn more about joining a committee please contact the DDC office by calling 803-734-0469.