

Living Without Limits

Fall 2024 OCEAN STATE CENTER FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING

Disability Strides

Bit by bit, the Ocean State is renewing its commitment to Rhode Islanders with disabilities. Recent improvements, advocacy victories, and policy advancements are paving the way for better access to healthcare, employment opportunities, financial stability, and independent living.

Simplifying the Voting Process

Over the summer, the Governor's Commission on Disabilities advocated on behalf of the disabled community to enable the mail ballot application form with electronic signature capability. This allowed individuals with vision and motor disabilities to participate in elections without the barrier of traditional paper forms.

For more information about elections, forms, voter registration and more, visit vote.sos.ri.gov

Establishing the Olmstead Commission

Governor Dan McKee recently issued an executive order to establish the Olmstead Commission, ensuring that the state progresses with its legislated task of creating an Olmstead Plan to protect and advance independent living opportunities in Rhode Island.

For more information about Olmstead planning, visit eohhs.ri.gov/Olmstead-Planning

Enhancing Employment Opportunities

Rhode Island launched the Ticket to Work program on September 20 to support working people with disabilities. While the Sherlock Plan allowed Medicaid "buy-in," it imposed limits on income and assets, restricting savings and career growth. The new program, passed after a large advocacy effort in 2023, removes these limits for workers with disabilities under 65.

For more information about Ticket to Work and the Sherlock Plan or to apply for one of these programs, visit eohhs.ri.gov/Consumer/TheSherlockPlan.aspx



Disability Caravan

The weather and visitors turned out in Kennedy Plaza on September 17 for National Voter Registration Day. Together with our partners—the Rhode Island Governor's Commission on Disabilities, Disability Rights Rhode Island, and the Rhode Island Commission on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing—OSCIL welcomed the Caravan for Disability Freedom and Justice.

Ray DeJesus, one of our Tech Coaches, kept the atmosphere lively with DJ music, while we spread the word about OSCIL programs and handed out refreshments. Meanwhile, DRRI registered 27 new voters and helped two people complete mail ballot applications.

Brief remarks from Representative James Langevin and our partners highlighted the importance of voting access for all. Special thanks to the organizers, staff, and the Rhode Island Public Transit Authority for making this event a success!



Have a voting issue?
Call the DRRI
Voter Hotline **1-800-733-5332**

Staff Spotlight: Heather & Darby

In honor of White Cane Day on October 15, we're shining a spotlight on Heather Schey, who uses her lived experience to support

consumers who are blind or have low vision.



Heather joined OSCIL nine years ago as a part-time receptionist and has since advanced to become an Independent Living Coordinator. A dedicated advocate, she serves as a member on RIPTA's Board of Directors and also chairs the Accessible Transportation Advisory committee. She also coordinates OSCIL's Lunch & Learn program and Women's Peer Support Group.

Heather's faithful guide dog, Darby, joined her at OSCIL after she retired her first guide dog, Asher. After nearly eight years together, Asher was ready for a well-deserved retirement, and Heather was quickly matched with Darby through Guiding Eyes for the Blind. The two completed a training program to build trust and teamwork in July.

Now, Heather and Darby are settling into their new routine. Darby loves his comfy bed in Heather's office, and together, they are excited for the adventures ahead.

Heather's commitment to advocacy and empowerment embodies OSCIL's mission for Independent Living, and we look forward to the amazing work she'll continue to do with Darby by her side!

For the full story about Heather and Darby's journey, visit oscil.org/post/retiring-a-guide-dog

You can help ensure accessible voting in Rhode Island!

For every election, the GCD recruits volunteers to survey voter polling places and ensure that all polling places are free of barriers that would prevent someone with a disability from voting. They are now recruiting volunteers for the General Election on November 5, 2024. Each survey takes about fifteen minutes and can be completed at any time during Election Day. Volunteers can use our online survey or a print version.

There were 345 polling places open for the State Primary Election on September 10, 2024, for which the GCD recruited 28 volunteers who covered 206 polling places. For the General Election on November 5, 2024, there are 455 Voter Polling Places open, so they need more volunteers.

The data that volunteers provide enables the GCD to work with local Boards of Canvassers to remove barriers to voting on the day of the election and in future elections.

To learn more, watch the 35-minute training video online at gcd.ri.gov/events/news

If you would like to volunteer, please email Crystal Martin, Assistant ADA Coordinator for Employment and Services, at crystal.m.martin@gcd.ri.gov

“ Our goal is to double our number of volunteers to cover the entire state on November 5th. ”

OSCIL Hosted 2 New Support Groups in September

Deaf Peer Support Group

On September 19, OSCIL's Deaf Peer Support Group had its first meeting at OSCIL North in Pawtucket. The group came together to share experiences, connect, and discuss important topics that matter to the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community.

Throughout the session, several key areas of focus emerged:


- Interpreter Education & Advocacy
- Voting Rights & Access
- Learning About DHS Applications & Programs

Everyone was excited about the possibility of inviting guest speakers for future meetings. The group is eager to keep the conversations going, bring in more resources, and continue building a supportive community. Mark your calendars for the next gathering, tentatively set for October 24.

If you want to learn more, attend the next meeting, or get involved, please reach out to OSCIL's Deaf Services team:


 **(401) 738-1013**

Adriana Okwara

 (401) 249-2937

adriana.okwara@oscll.org

Margie Molloy

 (401) 244-7792

margaret.molloy@oscll.org



Peer Support Group

OSCIL has launched a new peer support group for people—ages 25 to 35—with disabilities. The group kicked things off on September 12 with a laid-back ice cream social and board games to help everyone get comfortable and start connecting.

The focus of the group is still taking shape, but there was a strong feeling that everyone wanted to break through social barriers and not be defined by their disabilities—a theme that will likely guide future meetings.

The next meet-up is set for November 14 from 4:30 to 6:30 PM.

If you want to attend the next meeting, or would like to be added to the mailing list for this group, please email Molly Smith at molly.smlth@oscll.org.

A Message from Our Executive Director:

As we close out another fiscal year at OSCIL, I want to take this opportunity to extend my heartfelt gratitude to all our staff, board members, stakeholders, partners, and consumers.

Your hard work and dedication have been instrumental in advancing our mission to support individuals with disabilities and promote community living. Each of you has played a vital role in our successes this year—whether through your day-to-day efforts, strategic insights, or invaluable feedback.

To our staff, thank you for your unwavering passion and professionalism. To our board members, your guidance has been crucial. To our partners, your

collaboration has strengthened our impact. And to our consumers, your voices inspire us to strive for excellence.

As we look ahead, I am excited about the opportunities that await us and confident that, together, we will continue to make a meaningful difference in our community.

Thank you once again for your commitment and hard work. Here's to another year of achievements!

Warm regards,

Mireille



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Upcoming events

Youth Peer Support Group

Support Group Consultant Molly Smith will host the next young adult support group on November 14.

Lunch & Learn

October 30: Eye2Eye will share information about their wide range of peer support services for people with vision loss.

November 20: Join the Association for Autism and Neurodiversity (AANE) for a conversation about the services and programs available to people who are Autistic/ Neurodivergent and the people who support them.

White Cane Day

A free, family friendly event at the Crowne Plaza Hotel Atrium on Sunday, October 20 will feature free swag, activities, resource tables, music, and more.

For more information about upcoming events, check out OSCIL's calendar at oscil.org/events



Stay up-to-date on OSCIL news and events. Subscribe to our email list today!

RI Housing Committed to Disability Inclusion

On July 31, OSCIL's outreach team presented our Disability Sensitivity Training to a group of over 50 employees and managers at Rhode Island Housing. Richard and Heather enjoyed talking about disability with this audience that was engaged and eager to learn!

Would your business or organization benefit from this training?

To learn more or schedule a workshop, visit

oscil.org/sensitivity