



Time to Celebrate World Down Syndrome Day

World Down Syndrome Day is almost here, and we are counting down the days to one of our favorite moments of the year. On March 21, our community will once again come together for our annual celebration and fashion show at the Columbus Funny Bone. This joyful afternoon highlights the confidence, creativity, and individuality of people with Down syndrome. We are grateful to our longtime friends at SSPDS who will once again support the fashion show and help make this event shine.

March 21 will also mark an exciting milestone for DSACO with the launch of our brand-new Buddy Walk website and the official kickoff of fundraising for the Columbus Buddy Walk's 25th Anniversary. After breaking attendance and fundraising records in 2025, we are energized by what this milestone year will bring. Together, we will celebrate 25 years of walking alongside families, building community, and amplifying voices across central Ohio.

Our popular Book Bundles are also heading into classrooms throughout the region, giving students of all ages the opportunity to learn about Down syndrome and discover how they

can help create welcoming, inclusive school communities. While Book Bundle registration for 2026 is now closed, the impact of this program will continue to ripple through our schools in the months ahead.

Whether you are joining us at the Funny Bone, rallying friends and family to support your Buddy Walk team, sharing Book Bundles with your students, or creating your own ways to celebrate, we hope your World Down Syndrome Day is filled with connection, joy, and impactful moments with the people who make this community so meaningful.

Click or Scan for
EVENT DETAILS



Spring
2026

4

COMMUNITY
OUTREACH

5

MEDICALLY
SPEAKING

6

PROGRAMMING &
GROUPS



3/21

Dear DSACO Community,

As we move into 2026, I want to take a moment to share how excited and energized I feel about where DSACO is headed. This year marks an important moment for our organization, a bridge year that will help us prepare thoughtfully and intentionally for our next Strategic Plan for 2027–2030. Our focus in 2026 is clear: we are listening, learning, and aligning so we are well positioned for the future.

Throughout the year ahead, we will be spending time gathering insights and perspectives from families, partners, and staff across our community. DSACO has always been strongest when it is grounded in relationships, lived experience, and shared purpose. This planning process is about honoring that foundation while shaping what comes next together.

3 THINGS WE'RE FOCUSED ON

Listening deeply and intentionally. This year, we'll be creating meaningful opportunities to hear from DSACO families across ages and stages, community partners, and staff. Through listening sessions, focus groups, and surveys, we want to understand what's

working well, where there are gaps, and what families need most as we look ahead.

Using 2026 as a bridge year for alignment and growth. Rather than rushing toward a new plan, we're being thoughtful about using this year to reflect, align our systems, and strengthen our internal foundation. This approach allows us to build a 2027–2030 Strategic Plan that is grounded in real experience and ready for long-term impact.

Staying rooted in our mission and values. Our commitment remains steady as we do work in amplifying voices, supporting families, illuminating opportunities, and launching innovative solutions so people with Down syndrome and developmental disabilities can live, learn, and thrive. Everything we do this year will be guided by that mission.

2 WAYS YOU'LL SEE THIS WORK SHOW UP

More opportunities for community input. Families will see invitations to participate in listening sessions, surveys, and conversations throughout the year. Your stories, feedback, and ideas will directly shape the priorities and direction of our future work.

Clear communication and shared learning. We'll continue to share updates on what we're hearing, emerging themes, and how community input is influencing decisions. Transparency and communication will be central as we move through this process together.

1 BIG PICTURE VISION

We are building toward a future where inclusion is not the exception but the expectation. By spending this year listening and learning together, we are laying the groundwork for a strong, community informed 2027–2030 Strategic Plan, one that reflects who we are, honors our history, and positions the communities of ElevateDD to continue growing our impact for years to come.

Thank you for being part of this community and for walking alongside us during this important year. I'm grateful for your trust, your engagement, and your partnership as we shape what's next, together.



Troy Hunter
President & CEO, ElevateDD



ElevateDD

Advancing Systems-Level Change for Ohio's Developmental Disability Community

ElevateDD is pleased to share that we have received new funding from the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities to support and expand our work across the state. This investment strengthens our ability to partner with disability organizations, families, and self-advocates to advance systems-level change that reflects the lived experiences of people with disabilities and their families.

Through this work, ElevateDD will collaborate with disability partners statewide to elevate family and self-advocate voices, strengthen shared learning, and support coordinated approaches to policy, practice, and community engagement. Engagement efforts will include listening sessions,

statewide survey and data work, and education and resource initiatives designed to surface priorities, identify gaps, and inform solutions grounded in real experiences across Ohio.

We will also continue investing in leadership development and support for families and self-advocates, creating meaningful opportunities for participation, learning, and long-term capacity building within the disability ecosystem.

We're grateful for this support and excited to work alongside partners across Ohio as this work moves forward. More updates and opportunities for engagement will be shared in the months ahead.



Announcing a New Fundraising Event: DSACO Derby Day!

Make plans to join us on Saturday, May 2 at COHatch Polaris for a fun evening. Stay tuned for more details and ticket sales coming your way. Space will be limited so act fast!

Count Me In!

The NEW Universal Charitable Deduction that began January 1 makes it a great year to start a recurring gift. This new policy will enable many families to deduct up to \$1,000, or \$2,000 for joint filers, from their taxable income. Now that is a true win-win: a tax benefit for you and a stronger community advancing authentic inclusion!



Apoyos y Servicios

Abril 11 | 10 AM – 12 PM

Aprenda sobre los servicios y apoyos disponibles a través de las escuelas públicas y agencias locales y estatales, comprenda la diferencia entre servicios y apoyos, y explore cómo el proceso del Programa de Educación Individualizado (IEP, por sus siglas en inglés) puede ayudar a identificar lo que su hijo pueda necesitar.

Esta es una excelente oportunidad para hacer preguntas, conectarse con otras familias y obtener herramientas útiles para apoyar el éxito de su hijo.

Este evento es gratuito pero su registro es necesario antes del 3 de abril, 2026. Se proveerá cuidado de niños y desayuno ligero.

¿Preguntas? Envíe un correo a Vanessa Armenta at varmenta@dsaco.net

Arte sin limites

Mayo 16 | 10 – 11 AM

¡Ven a explorar tu creatividad, conectarte con otras familias y celebrar la alegría de la expresión! ¡Todas las habilidades son bienvenidas! El taller consta una actividad artística de creación de una mariposa monarca, acompañada del aprendizaje sobre su proceso de migración.

Evento gratuito para familias DSACO con niños de 6 años en adelante. Su registro es necesario a más tardar el 1 de Mayo.

¿Preguntas? Envíe un correo a Vanessa Armenta at varmenta@dsaco.net

Dabaaldegga Farxadda Ciidda Fidriga

March 28 | 5 - 7 PM

Ciidda Fidriga waa mid ka mid ah labada ciidood ee ugu waaweyn Islaamka, tan kalena waa Ciidda Adxaa. Muslimiinta adduunka oo dhan ayaa u dabaaldega maadaama ay astaan u tahay dhammaadka soonka bisha Ramadaan oo socday bil dhan, laga bilaabo waaberiga ilaa qorrax-dhaca.

Nagu soo biir dabaaldeg farxad leh oo aad kula kulmeysa qoysaska kale ee DSACO. Fadlan isdiiwaangeli ugu dambayn Maarso 6, 2026

Su'aalo ma qabtaa? Fadlan la xiriir Amina Said: asaid@dsaco.net

M.O.M.S. Outreach – Mom Prom

April 25 | 6 – 10 PM

Combustion Brewery | Pickerington

Mom Prom is more than a party, it is a chance to celebrate the special bond shared by moms of people with Down syndrome and to take time just for YOU. Join us for a night of dancing, laughter, and fun as we celebrate this year's theme: Pajamas at the Disco!

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D.A.D.S. Outreach – Columbus Clippers

April 18 | 4:05 PM

Huntington Park | Columbus

Join your fellow DSACO dads at Huntington Park for a fun night at the ballpark! Watch the Columbus Clippers take on the Iowa Cubs from the Sluggers Suite while connecting with other dads in a relaxed, welcoming atmosphere.

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DSACO Improv Comedy for All!

April 21 | Doors open at 5 PM

The Funny Bone | Columbus

Our talented performers return for a high energy improv show featuring members from both DSACO classes and special guest improvisers. With years of experience and plenty of quick wit, it is a show you won't want to miss - and a portion of ticket sales benefits DSACO!

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medically speaking



with Greta J. Hilbrands, PsyD



Collaborative Care and Behavioral Tools

At Nationwide Children’s Hospital, the Down Syndrome Program provides comprehensive, interdisciplinary care for children, adolescents, and young adults with Down syndrome and their families. This unique clinic brings together experts across their fields to work collaboratively to address the complex needs of this population.

As a psychologist within this team, my role focuses on supporting families through behavioral and developmental challenges. I provide brief behavioral consultations to help caregivers manage common concerns such as noncompliance and aggression. Additionally, I offer psychoeducation about developmental milestones specific to children with Down syndrome, helping families understand what to expect and how to foster growth. When needed, I determine whether additional evaluations—such as for Autism Spectrum Disorder, ADHD, or cognitive functioning—could help families access appropriate interventions and resources.

My goal is to empower families with practical strategies they can implement at home. Here are some evidence-based behavioral interventions that parents often find helpful:

1 Positive Reinforcement

Catch your child being good! Offer specific praise or small rewards for desired behaviors (e.g., sharing, following directions, sitting in chair). Reinforcement strengthens positive behaviors over time. Teach a new skill by rewarding **small steps** toward the desired behavior. Instead of waiting for the child to do the full behavior perfectly, you reinforce progress along the way.

Planned Ignoring

2 Used to reduce attention-seeking behaviors that are not harmful or dangerous (such as whining or mild tantrums). The idea is simple: *do not give attention to the unwanted behavior*, because attention—even negative attention—can reinforce it.

- **Stay Calm and Consistent:** When the behavior occurs, avoid eye contact, verbal responses (even “no”), or physical reactions.
- **Reinforce Positive Behavior:** As soon as your child stops the behavior or starts engaging in something appropriate, give immediate praise or attention.

3 Visual Supports

Use pictures, videos, or icons to outline daily routines (e.g., morning, school, bedtime). Visual supports reduce anxiety and improve transitions by making expectations clear. Using visual timers with warnings ahead of transitions is also helpful to reduce frustration.

4 First-Then Strategy

Present tasks in a “first-then” format: “*First brush teeth, then play with toys.*” This approach increases compliance by pairing less preferred activities with motivating rewards.

5 Forced Choice

Instead of asking open-ended questions (which can lead to refusal), you offer **two acceptable options**—both of which meet your goal. This gives the child a sense of autonomy and control, reduces power struggles, and keeps choices simple.

Example: Instead of saying, “*Do you want to brush your teeth?*” (which invites “No”), say: “*Do you want to brush your teeth with the blue toothbrush or the green toothbrush?*”

Through collaboration and family-centered care, the Down Syndrome Program strives to help every child reach their fullest potential. I am honored to contribute to this mission by supporting families in understanding and navigating behavioral and developmental needs.

Programming & Groups Color Key

 NEW & EXPECTANT PARENTS  EARLY CHILDHOOD  SCHOOL AGE  TEENS  ADULTHOOD  COMMUNITY

New Parent Celebration

A new baby is a cause for celebration! DSACO is excited to invite our families who have welcomed a child with Down syndrome in 2025 to join us for brunch at COSI on Saturday, March 28. Spend the morning connecting with other new parents, then enjoy general admission to COSI for your whole family and explore the museum at your leisure.

Little Buddies North and Southeast

Little Buddies Parent Resource Group is a monthly group for expecting and new parents or families of children with Down syndrome (preschool age or younger) in the Central Ohio area. We offer support and information for families prenatally through preschool. This group meets in two convenient locations: Pickerington and Worthington.

Jump Start Swim Clinic

DSACO is partnering with Goldfish Swim School to offer unique Jump Start Swim Clinics specially designed to introduce kids to the water and teach the fundamentals of water safety. Goldfish Swim School is hosting exclusive clinics just for DSACO families at three different locations. Registration opens April 20!

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School Age Group

Join DSACO's School Age Group, created for families who have a child with Down syndrome in school. This group meets quarterly at different locations to connect with other families, explore resources, and enjoy fun activities together. It's a great opportunity to build community and make lasting friendships!

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Summer Learning Academy

Looking to help your child thrive in math, literacy, and social skills during the summer? Designed for students on IEPs, Summer Learning Academy (SLA) provides personalized, one-on-one, and small group instruction led by certified teachers. SLA focuses on helping students achieve their academic goals and prevent summer learning loss in a supportive and engaging environment. Applications open March 6!

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iCan Bike

Biking is more than just exercise and transportation: it's a social activity, rite of passage, and first taste of independence. Transforming biking into an inclusive activity is the mission of iCan Bike, a national organization that conducts bike camps for people with special needs. This year's camp will be hosted at Columbus Academy from June 1-5, 2026. Registration opens March 2!

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High School Social Group

The High School Social Group is a monthly gathering for teens with Down syndrome. The goal is to build friendships and foster independence in a safe and fun environment. These monthly events are best suited for older teens who are mostly independent and have a desire to connect with peers (or whose parents would like them to do so).

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Golf Academy

DSACO will once again partner with First Tee – Central Ohio to offer our Golf Academy. This program is open to golfers of all skill levels (including beginners) ages 12 and up. It focuses on learning all aspects of the game of golf while encouraging character-building and developing strength and self-confidence. Each week, golfers will enhance their skills in a safe, supportive, and empowering environment. Registration opens May 1!



Aging and Down Syndrome Caregiver Support Group

Connect over Zoom with other caregivers of adults (age 40+) with Down syndrome on the fourth Tuesday of the month. Each virtual session will provide emotional support as well as experience and resource sharing with a focus on Alzheimer's and dementia.



M.O.M.S.

Join DSACO moms for a relaxing night out where they will share stories, needs, concerns, and ideas. Locations vary. Check our events tab or email a group contact for details. You can also join the M.O.M.S. Facebook Group - an online community where moms share information, experiences, and encouragement with one another.

D.A.D.S.

The mission of D.A.D.S. is to assist and support, through fellowship and action, the fathers, and families of people with Down syndrome. This group allows dads a chance to get to know each other and learn a bit from one another in a social setting. You can also join the D.A.D.S. Facebook Group – an online community where dads share experiences, exchange information, and support one another.

Connecting Parents of Adults Group

Connect with other parents of adults (age 18+) with Down syndrome to share experiences, discuss needs, address concerns, generate ideas, and enjoy each other's company. You can also join the DSACO Parents of Adults with Down syndrome Facebook Group – an online community for sharing information and experiences while being inspired and uplifted.



Additional Programs & Resources

click or scan

New & Expectant Parents



Early Childhood



School Age



Teens



Adulthood



Parents & Caregivers



Educators



Medical Professionals



This list of programs/events is not exhaustive. For the most up-to-date and complete information, please visit our website at www.dsaco.net



Calling All Photographers!

DSACO is looking for generous photographers across our 25-county service area to donate their time and talent by offering free photography sessions to DSACO families. Photos will be featured in DSACO's 2027 Faces in the Community calendar and other promotional materials, making this a unique way to support the Down syndrome community.

DSACO families: don't miss this opportunity to capture beautiful photos of your loved ones and be featured in our upcoming calendar. A list of participating photographers in your area will be available soon!



Stay Connected!

Stay up-to-date on all the events in your area by visiting **dsaco.net**.



Facebook Groups:

- DSACO Black and African American Outreach Group
- DSACO D.A.D.S.
- DSACO "Lending" Library
- DSACO Little Buddies Parent Resource Group
- DSACO M.O.M.S.
- DSACO Parents of Adults with Down syndrome
- Familias Latinas de DSACO
- DSACO Families with Medically Complex Needs
- DSACO Families with Dual Diagnosis (DS + ASD)

Our Mission: To support families, promote community involvement, and encourage a lifetime of opportunities for people with Down syndrome.

Keeping Up is a publication of the Down Syndrome Association of Central Ohio (DSACO), reporting items of interest relating to Down syndrome. DSACO does not promote or recommend any therapy, treatment, institution, or professional system.

DSACO is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization and a community of ElevateDD. Contributions are fully tax-deductible.

SAVE *the* DATE



Summer Social

Sunday, August 2

Huntington Park

Mark your calendars for DSACO's Annual Summer Social happening on Sunday, August 2! Join us for a day of baseball and fun at Huntington Park while we cheer on the Columbus Clippers.

Adult Conference

August 21 - 23

Cherry Valley Hotel

Each year, DSACO hosts a memorable weekend for adults with Down syndrome (18+) and their families, featuring tailored breakout sessions, meaningful connections, and a favorite highlight—the Saturday night dance.



Golf Classic

Monday, July 20

The Country Club at Muirfield Village

Prepare to swing into action for a worthy cause at the DSACO Annual Golf Classic! Join us on the stunning fairways of the Country Club at Muirfield Village for a day of golf and networking. Enjoy the game while raising awareness and funds for people with Down syndrome and their families.

Columbus Buddy Walk

Sunday, October 4

Fortress Obetz

Join us to celebrate the 25th Anniversary of the Columbus Buddy Walk! Registration opens March 21, so get ready to rally your team and start fundraising in support of all of the wonderful programs that DSACO offers to people with Down syndrome, and their families, in 25 Ohio counties!



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