



25 Years of Making Every Step Count

This year, DSACO is thrilled to celebrate the 25th Columbus Buddy Walk®! We absolutely cannot wait to bring our families together to honor the community that has been built by everyone who has walked this journey over the last 25 years.

Reaching this milestone is about more than 25 years of one event. It represents 25 years of families showing up for one another, friendships being formed, voices being heard, and people with Down syndrome being recognized for who they are and all they bring to their communities. Every person who has ever participated has helped make the Columbus Buddy Walk what it is today.

The funds raised every year through the Buddy Walk fuels the work we do all year long. With the support received through months of fundraising by our dedicated Team Captains, DSACO can provide the resources needed to offer programs and services benefiting thousands of people throughout our 25-county service area.

On October 4, we will come together to honor the history behind this tradition while looking ahead to the future. Whether you have been part of the Buddy

Walk for decades or are joining us for the first time, this year's walk is an opportunity to be part of something bigger than any one family or one moment.

Gather your family and friends and join us as we mark this extraordinary milestone and continue moving Forward Together.

Important Dates:

September 15

Jumbotron photo deadline

September 19 | 10 AM – 6 PM

Team Captain t-shirt pickup & tailgate party

September 25

Event day tailgate table/chair rental deadline

October 4 | 7 AM

Columbus Buddy Walk event day setup

3/21

Dear DSACO Community,

A year ago, I stepped into this role knowing there was much I needed to learn.

What I did not yet understand was how much of that learning would happen not in meetings or planning sessions, but in the lives people would trust me enough to let me witness.

Over this first year, families have invited me into moments that are joyful and complicated, ordinary and extraordinary. I have heard stories told through laughter and others through tears. I have celebrated accomplishments that once seemed far away and sat with people navigating uncertainty and loss. I have watched children discover something new about themselves and adults with Down syndrome remind a room, without needing to say it aloud, that belonging is not something anyone should have to earn.

I came to ElevateDD hoping to serve this community well. A year later, I am beginning to understand just how much this community is changing me.

3 MOMENTS I WILL CARRY WITH ME

I think about our newest families.

Some arrive carrying questions they never expected to ask. Then they walk into a New Parent Celebration. There is no single moment when uncertainty disappears, but something quieter happens. A conversation begins. Someone holds a baby. Another parent recognizes a feeling they once carried themselves. Phone numbers are exchanged. Stories are shared. A family looks around the room and realizes that whatever lies ahead, they will not have to discover it entirely alone.

I have watched children spend summer days learning, laughing, making friends, and working at things that do not always come easily.

And I will never forget watching people learn to ride bicycles.

At first, someone is running alongside them, a hand steadying the bike and encouragement coming from just behind. Then the hand lets go. The bike keeps moving. For a few seconds, everyone watching seems to know what has happened before the rider does.

Then comes the smile.

There is something beautiful in that moment, not because independence means doing everything alone, but because someone had the support they needed until they were ready for the next few feet.

I have seen that same confidence in our adults. At our first Derby Day, I watched adults with Down syndrome serve guests, joke with people, do their jobs, and be part of the evening. Not as symbols. As hosts. Coworkers. Friends. Adults participating fully in the life of their community.

Those moments reveal something that can get lost when we talk broadly about "inclusion." Inclusion becomes real in the ordinary details of a life. It is having somewhere to go and something meaningful to do when you get there. It is being expected to contribute. It is being known.

2 WHAT I AM LEARNING ABOUT COMMUNITY

I have learned that a strong community does two things particularly well:

1. It celebrates with you.
2. It stays with you.

There has been so much to celebrate this year: new skills, friendships, first bike rides, performances, jobs, advocacy, babies welcomed, goals reached, and expectations rewritten.

But families have also trusted us with grief, fear, disappointment, and loss. Those moments have taught me that community is not proven when the room is full and everyone is cheering. Sometimes it is proven when the room gets quiet. Sometimes moving forward means taking a giant leap. Sometimes it means asking for help. Sometimes it means having someone sit beside you when there are no useful words.

We do not share one DSACO story. There is no single experience of Down syndrome, no one definition of family, and no common path that unfolds neatly from beginning to end. Our lives move at different rhythms. We want different things. We encounter different barriers and celebrate different victories.

Together does not require sameness. It requires choosing not to leave one another behind.

My daughter is growing up around this community. She is still far too young to understand words like disability, advocacy, or inclusion, but she is already learning something more important than their definitions.

She is growing up knowing people with Down syndrome as friends and neighbors, performers and advocates, colleagues and leaders. She will grow up seeing people fall in love, work, learn, struggle, celebrate, need help, offer help, and build lives of their own.

I spend much of my professional life thinking about how we create a world where inclusion becomes ordinary. Because of the people who surround her, I hope it will simply be ordinary to her from the beginning.

That is a gift I do not take lightly.

1 BIG PICTURE VISION

When we chose Forward Together as the theme for the 25th Columbus Buddy Walk, we thought about where DSACO is going. But forward does not mean forgetting what came before us.

We move forward carrying more than forty years of families who refused to accept a world with smaller expectations for their children. We carry the people who built programs around kitchen tables, fought for classrooms and opportunities, formed friendships that became support systems, and kept showing up long before many of us arrived.

Forward does not mean the road becomes easy, or that everyone has to move at the same pace.

Sometimes forward is a first pedal. Sometimes it is walking through the door, stepping onto a stage, speaking up for yourself, or standing beside another family on the hardest day of their lives.

Sometimes forward is simply knowing there is another hand to reach for.

On October 4, thousands of us will gather for the 25th Columbus Buddy Walk. I know I will see families who have been walking this road for decades and families who are just beginning. I will see children whose worlds are opening wider every day and adults building lives defined by their own interests, relationships, ambitions, and choices. I will see people celebrating someone walking beside them and others carrying the memory of someone who cannot.

Thousands of different stories. Thousands of different hopes. No two paths exactly alike. And yet, for a little while, we will all move in the same direction.

Maybe that is what this community has been teaching us all along. The goal was never that every road would look the same. The promise is that none of us has to walk it alone.

So we carry what came before us. We make room for one another as we are. We reach back when someone needs a hand, and we keep making the road wider for whoever comes next.

And then, hand in hand, we move forward.

With gratitude,



Troy Hunter

President and CEO, ElevateDD

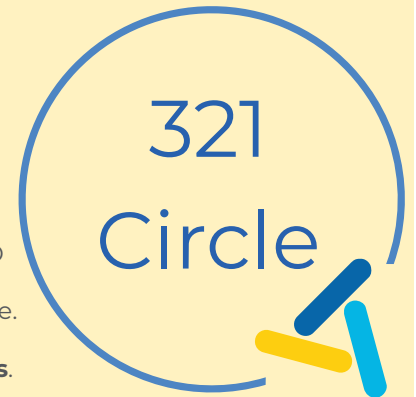
Forward Together, For Families

Mark your calendars and plan to support our **Week of Giving, November 16 – 20!** This week of generosity celebrates the power of families coming together to create connection, opportunity and belonging for people with Down syndrome and their loved ones. Make a gift to DSACO to help carry this work forward and ensure families have the support and community they can count on for years to come.

Join the 321 Circle!

Inspired by three copies of the 21st chromosome, the *321 Circle* is a community of donors who give \$321 or more each year to help create lasting opportunities for people with Down syndrome. Your support provides steady, meaningful funding that helps DSACO continue building a more connected and inclusive community, today and into the future.

Visit dsaco.net/get-involved/give/ for details.



ADOPT -i- FAMILY

Down Syndrome Association of Central Ohio

Adopt-A-Family 2026

We are thrilled to announce that our Adopt-A-Family Program will return for the 2026 holiday season! Whether you need a little assistance this time of year or have the means to provide support, you can help make the season brighter for everyone.

Applications for support will open on Sunday, November 1 and close on Thursday, November 12.

Visit dsaco.net/adoptafamily to learn more.

Community Access Fund

DSACO's Community Access Fund provides financial reimbursement to people with Down syndrome for funds spent on activities in the community - up to \$250 every year! These activities may include, but are not limited to, sports, swimming lessons, gym memberships, summer camps, physical/speech therapies, art, and music, dance, or voice lessons.

Reimbursement happens quarterly based on the deadline schedule below:

Q3 | Submit form with receipts by September 15 for payment by September 30
Q4 | Submit form with receipts by December 15 for payment by December 31

Questions? Contact Kirsti Osborne at kosborne@dsaco.net.

Visit the **Parents & Caregivers** page under the **Families** tab on dsaco.net for more information.

ElevateDD Updates

Welcome Barry Cunningham!



We're pleased to introduce our new Senior Manager of Finance & Administration, Barry Cunningham!

Barry brings nearly two decades of finance, accounting, and risk management experience across the non-profit, energy, banking, and financial advisory sectors. Most recently, he served as a Bookkeeper and Staff Accountant at Acclarity Group, where he managed financial operations, grant accounting, and month-end close for a portfolio of non-profit clients, while also developing budgets and Standard Operating Procedures to support sound

financial stewardship. Earlier in his career, he served as Director of Finance and Risk Management at several oil and gas companies where he oversaw corporate financial planning, insurance and risk management, and employee benefits administration. His background also includes experience in Banking and Investment Banking serving as financial advisor, personal banker, and municipal securities underwriter.

Barry holds a B.A. in Economics and Spanish from Bucknell University, where he graduated cum laude.

Originally from West Virginia, Barry has called the Columbus area home for over 20 years. He lives with his husband, JT Tackett, and their 14-year-old son.

Welcome Larry Onokpite!



Dr. Larry Erhuvwuoghene Onokpite is an interdisciplinary researcher and educator. Before joining ElevateDD, he served as a Graduate Research Associate at West Central School, operated by the Franklin County Board of Developmental Disabilities.

His research broadly focuses on reading (disabilities), cognition, literacy, and theory development. He has presented his work at national and international conferences and serves as a reviewer for several academic journals.

Larry has also held teaching, research, and academic development roles at

The Ohio State University, the University of the Witwatersrand, and Tshwane University of Technology. Having studied and worked in Nigeria, South Africa, Canada, and the United States, he brings an international and interdisciplinary perspective to his work.

Larry recently completed his PhD in Special Education at The Ohio State University. He also holds a Master of Education in Literacies, Languages, and Literatures; a Bachelor of Education with Honours; a Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy; and an associate degree in Science (Biology) Education. Outside of his professional work, Larry enjoys running marathons.

ElevateDD's Webinar Series

Check out upcoming webinars hosted by ElevateDD.

For more information visit elevatedd.org/webinars.

Leadership Access Scholarship

Check out this exciting opportunity from ElevateDD! This scholarship helps reduce financial barriers to event registration so people with developmental disabilities and their family members can participate in Ohio-based learning and leadership opportunities that support advocacy, systems learning, and community engagement.

Learn more and apply at elevatedd.org/leadershipaccessscholarship.



Learning Aid Ohio Spring Enrollment

Learning Aid Ohio connects families with grant-funded, one-on-one tutoring for students with IEPs. Families can choose from our pool of approved tutors or invite someone they trust to apply.

Spring applications open on November 12.

Learn more and apply at learningaidohio.org.

2027 Faces in the Community Calendar

We can't wait to show you our newest calendar, featuring all of the beautiful faces that make up our vibrant DSACO community! Calendars will be available for purchase beginning at the 2026 Columbus Buddy Walk. Stay tuned for more details!

Post-Secondary Scholarship

Applications for the 2027 Post-Secondary Scholarship will open on Monday, November 2.

Visit dsaco.net/postsecondaryscholarship for details!



Forward Together During Down Syndrome Awareness Month

Down Syndrome Awareness Month is celebrated every October, and this gives us another opportunity to recognize the contributions of people with Down syndrome while continuing to build a more inclusive future. Awareness leads to action by helping create greater understanding, remove barriers, and ensure people with Down syndrome have opportunities to participate fully in their communities.

This month, we're reminded that inclusion happens in everyday moments, from classrooms and workplaces to neighborhoods and social spaces. It means challenging outdated perceptions, creating meaningful opportunities, and making sure people with Down syndrome are seen for who they are and what they bring to their communities.

As we move Forward Together, we invite families, educators, allies, and community members to find a way to get involved. Share your story, join us at an event, strengthen your advocacy, or join DSACO's 321 Circle by making an unrestricted gift of \$321 or more. Every action helps move us closer to a future where people with Down syndrome can thrive and belong.



Ways to Celebrate

Celebrate the 25th Columbus Buddy Walk with us!

Visit columbusbuddywalk.org for details.

Beginning September 8, purchase a Deals for Down Syndrome coupon book from Penn Station. The coupon books will be sold throughout the fall as long as supplies last, and all proceeds from Central Ohio stores will benefit DSACO!

Pick up one of DSACO's FREE Down Syndrome Awareness classroom packets and gift it to your child's classroom (packets will be available at Buddy Walk Team Captain t-shirt pickup and the Buddy Walk).

Share your story on social media to build awareness! Don't forget to tag DSACO!

Make a gift or consider amplifying your impact by becoming a sustainable monthly donor!

Visit dsaco.net/donate for details.

Attend a Fall Fun Meetup on October 17 – registration opens September 1! Visit dsaco.net/fallfunmeetup for details.



Picnic Anual para Familias Latinas

Sábado 12 de Septiembre 2026 | 12 – 4 PM

Los invitamos a compartir un día lleno de diversión, buena compañía y actividades para toda la familia. ¡Esperamos contar con su presencia!

Disfrute de una tarde llena de diversión, donde podrá participar en varias actividades además de conversar, conectar y compartir con otras familias.

Este evento es gratuito para familias de DSACO.

Si tiene preguntas por favor envíe un correo a Vanessa Armenta a varmenta@dsaco.net.



Somali Picnic

September 12, 2026 | 5 – 8 PM

Waqti wada qaadashada picnic-ga waa hab fiican oo lagu dhiso saaxiibtinimo, lagu xoojiyo xiriirrada bulshada, laguna abuuro xusuus waarta.

Waxaan si farxad leh kuugu casuumeynaa adiga iyo qoyskaaga inaad nagu soo biirtaan maalin madadaalo leh oo ay isugu imaanayaan qoysaska Soomaaliyeed. Ku raaxaysta cunto wanaagsan, hawlo madadaalo leh, iyo fursad aad ku nasataan, isku barataan, kuna dabaaldegaan bulshadeenna.

Waxaan si weyn u rajaynaynaa inaan maalintan gaarka ah idinla qaadanno adiga iyo qoyskaaga!

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

Community Access Fund

Fondo de Acceso a la Comunidad de DSACO

El Fondo de Acceso a la Comunidad de DSACO proporciona reembolsos económicos a personas con síndrome de Down por gastos relacionados con actividades en la comunidad, ¡hasta \$250 al año!

Estas actividades pueden incluir, entre otras: Deportes, Clases de natación, Membresías de gimnasio, Campamentos de verano, Terapias físicas y del habla, Arte, Música, Clases de baile, Clases de canto.

Los reembolsos se procesan trimestralmente, de acuerdo con el siguiente calendario:

T3 | Envíe el formulario y los recibos antes del 15 de septiembre para recibir el pago antes del 30 de septiembre.

T4 | Envíe el formulario y los recibos antes del 15 de diciembre para recibir el pago antes del 31 de diciembre.

¿Tiene preguntas? Comuníquese con Kirsti Osborne en kosborne@dsaco.net.

Para obtener más información, visite la página de Padres y Cuidadores (Parents & Caregivers) en la sección Families de dsaco.net.

Community Access Fund

Sanduuqa Taageerada Bulshada (Community Access Fund) ee DSACO wuxuu dadka qaba Down syndrome ka caawiyaa inay dib loogu soo celiyo kharashaadka ay ku bixiyaan hawlaha bulshada dhexdeeda, ilaa \$250 sanadkii!

Hawlaha waxaa ka mid noqon kara, laakiin kuma koobna: ciyaaraha, casharrada dabaasha, xubinimada jimicsiga, tababare gaar ah, xeryaha xagaaga, jimicsiga, fanka dagaalka, daaweynta jimicsiga/hadalka, farshaxanka, iyo casharrada muusigga, qoob-ka-ciyaarka ama codka. Lacagahan looguma talagelin barnaamijyada DSACO.

Wagtiga kama dambaysta ah ee lagu soo gudbinayo codsigaaga iyo rasiidka waa Sebtembar 15, si lacag-celinta loo bixiyo Sebtembar 30. Codsiga kasta oo la helo ka dib Sebtembar 15 waxaa lagu dari doonaa wareegga xiga ee codsiyada.

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



Fall Fun Meetup

Saturday, October 17 | 3 – 5 PM

Celebrate the fall season with DSACO at a festive meetup! To make it easier for families across DSACO's service area, this event will be hosted at three convenient locations: Van Buren Acres, Lehner's Pumpkin Farm, and Libby's Pumpkin Patch.

Please note: Tickets are limited to people with Down syndrome, their siblings, and parents/guardians.

Van Buren Acres

5066 Keller Rd. | Hebron, Ohio 43025

Lehner's Pumpkin Farm

2920 OH-203 | Radnor, OH 43066

Libby's Pumpkin Patch

41266 State Farm Rd | Albany, OH 45710

Enjoy fall festivities at the location of your choosing while spending time with other DSACO families. We look forward to seeing you!

Questions? Contact Courtney Frost at cfrost@dsaco.net.



DSACO Improv Comedy for All!

Tuesday, November 17

The Funny Bone

145 Easton Town Center | Columbus, OH 43219

Save the date! Our fantastic improv participants will wrap up the fall session with a fantastic performance at The Funny Bone on Tuesday, November 17. The last two shows were such a blast, we wouldn't be surprised if this one sells out!

Stay tuned for more details at dsaco.net/improvshow.



Little Buddies & School Age Indoor Pool Party

Sunday, November 15 | 5:30 – 7 PM

Westerville Community Center

350 N. Cleveland Ave. | Westerville, Ohio 43082

Join us for a splashing good time as our Little Buddies and School Age groups combine for an epic pool party on Sunday, November 15!

People with Down syndrome (ages 12 and under) and their parents and siblings are invited to join us at the Westerville Community Center for this fun and inclusive swim party.

Visit dsaco.net/events/poolparty for details.



Winter Social

Saturday, December 5 | 9 AM – 12 PM

Star Lanes Polaris

8655 Lyra Dr | Columbus, OH 43240

Fee: \$15/family

Join us for DSACO's annual Winter Social on Saturday, December 5, from 9 AM–12 PM at Star Lanes Polaris. Families can enjoy a breakfast buffet, bowling, arcade games, and a special visit with Santa and Mrs. Claus.

Registration opens: Monday, October 12
Registration closes: Thursday, November 12

Visit dsaco.net/events/wintersocial for additional information.

Stay Connected!

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



dsaco.cbus



dsaco_cbus

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.

The programming and events listed in this newsletter are not exhaustive. For the most up-to-date and complete information, please visit our website at dsaco.net.

SAVE *the* DATE



Fall Fun Meetup

Saturday, October 17 | 3 – 5 PM

Van Buren Acres, Lehner's Pumpkin Farm, Libby's Pumpkin Patch.

Celebrate the fall season with DSACO at a festive meetup for Little Buddies, School Age, and Teens! To make it easier for families across the area, this event will be hosted at three convenient locations:

Van Buren Acres, Lehner's Pumpkin Farm, Libby's Pumpkin Patch.

ADOPT -i- FAMILY

Down Syndrome Association of Central Ohio

Adopt-A-Family 2026

We are thrilled to announce that our Adopt-A-Family Program will return for the 2026 holiday season! Whether you need a little assistance this time of year or have the means to provide support, you can help make the season brighter for everyone.

Applications for support will open on Sunday, November 1 and close on Thursday, November 12.

Visit dsaco.net/adoptfamily to learn more.



Winter Social

Saturday, December 5 | 9 AM – 12 PM

Star Lanes Polaris

DSACO families are invited to our much-anticipated annual Winter Social on Saturday, December 5! People with Down syndrome, siblings, and parents are invited

to Star Lanes Polaris for a morning of bowling, breakfast, and meeting Santa and Mrs. Claus.

Dancing with our STARS Gala

Dancing with Our Stars Gala

February 6, 2027 | 6 PM

Hilton Columbus at Easton

Down Syndrome Association of Central Ohio

Join DSACO for the 2027 Dancing with Our Stars Gala, an unforgettable evening featuring adults with Down syndrome performing professionally choreographed dances, along with a silent auction, wine pull, and dinner. Proceeds support DSACO's programs and services for people with Down syndrome. Stay tuned for more details!

Stars Needed!

Self-advocates (18+) interested in performing at the Dancing with Our Stars Gala on February 6, 2027, and able to commit to Saturday morning practices leading up to the event should email mcox@dsaco.net to express their interest.