



TEXAS COUNCIL for  
DEVELOPMENTAL  
DISABILITIES

# 2024 ANNUAL REPORT

*Inclusive. Innovative. Impactful.*

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Connecting Texas	1
How We Work	3
Our Council	4
Live Work Play	5
Health & Safety	6
Community & Family Support	7
Leadership & Advocacy	8
Public Policy	9
TCDD Funding	10

## CONNECTING TEXAS

Whenever we review our recent work and accomplishments, several themes always emerge. In 2024, one theme stood out: connection. This report focuses on highlights from the past year that center on the theme of connection. But before getting into the details, we'd like to reflect on why creating connections is important to our mission and share some ways that connection drives our progress.

Texans with developmental disabilities (DD) come from diverse cultural and generational backgrounds. They live in urban centers as well as remote rural areas. They participate in life in different ways. Connection in our community requires a unique approach and a deep reach into all corners of our complex and expansive state.

Our partnership with the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service supports disability community coordinators who serve as our on-the-ground team across Texas, including in communities in West Texas and the Rio Grande Valley. Our coordinators create connections while providing training and expert resources on disability topics. This initiative fosters a broad network of disability advocates and gives us vital insight into unmet needs and practical ways to improve support and services for people with DD.

Connection builds off cultivating relationships. Through grant awards, we partner with nonprofits, universities, and local and statewide advocacy groups led by people with DD. These grants develop innovative projects to support people with DD in making their own decisions on how to live, work, and engage in community life.

Along with grant projects, we're also a trustworthy resource and conduit for Texas legislators and policymakers to connect with people with DD in their districts and better understand how policy decisions impact the disability community.

Meaningful connection develops by creating different ways for people with DD to engage with us and also with each other. This goes from presentations to large audiences at state and national conferences all the way down to local "platicas" meetings that bring neighbors together to solve language barriers and make sure Spanish-speaking families have access to important disability resources.

Beyond providing information, we connect people with DD to new opportunities to speak for themselves on things they care about. Texas Partners in Policymaking, our advanced leadership training program, helps people with DD and their family members develop leadership and advocacy skills to build relationships with elected officials and policymakers. These connections ensure people with DD can inform and engage on policy issues that impact their lives.

We believe connection can turn barriers into opportunities, stigma into understanding, and isolation into engagement. If we want Texas to be a place where people with DD are meaningfully included in their communities and have control over their lives, then creating connections isn't just a noble effort — it's necessary.

After reviewing this report and learning more about our work, we invite you to create a connection of your own. Contact us, continue the conversation, and help us improve the lives of people with DD across Texas.



Students with DD from the HUB Houston joined disability community coordinators, master gardeners, and the Harris County Extension horticulture agent for an inclusive gardening tour at the Houston Centennial Garden. The HUB plans to design a sensory garden of its own in the future.



# creating connections so all people with disabilities are **fully included in their communities**



Our mission is to create change so that all people with disabilities are fully included in their communities and exercise control over their own lives. TCDD helps people with DD achieve their goals for independence, productivity, and community integration through the development of a comprehensive system of services and support. TCDD is one of 56 state councils on DD in the U.S. and its territories created through the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act (DD Act) (PL 106-402).

## HOW WE WORK



GRANT  
PROJECTS



LEADERSHIP &  
ADVOCACY



COMMUNITY  
ENGAGEMENT



PUBLIC  
POLICY

## CONNECT WITH US

We invite you to get involved in our work to improve the lives of Texans with DD! You can visit us online at [tcdd.texas.gov](https://tcdd.texas.gov) to connect with a disability community coordinator in your area; contact a member of our staff; find useful resources and information; sign up for our newsletter; follow us on social media; and discover more ways to engage with TCDD and the disability community across Texas.



# — OUR COUNCIL

We're led by a governor-appointed Council that includes people with DD, family members of people with DD, and representatives from agencies and organizations that provide DD services and support. Council members accomplish directives outlined in the DD Act while serving as a resource for Texas decision-makers and community leaders on issues that impact all aspects of daily life for people with DD.

“

*We talk about policies that need to be talked about, what's going on around Texas, dealing with provider issues and all types of problems in the state, [and] other issues that need to be addressed.*

**Eric Shahid, Council member from Somerville**

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## Council Members

Andrew “Andy” Crim, Chair, Fort Worth  
Jamie Thomas, Vice Chair, Abilene  
Deborah “Debbie” Carlisle, San Antonio  
Kyle Cox, College Station  
Beatrice Degree, Missouri City  
Roni Jo Frazier, Porter  
Shana Halvorsen, Sugar Land  
Barbara Knighton, Spring  
Lisa Marenco, El Paso  
Scott McAvoy, Cedar Park  
Amanda Miles, Alvin  
Angela “Angie” Panzica, Houston  
Michael Peace, Poteet  
Robert Schier III, Elgin  
Eric Shahid, Somerville  
Meridith Silcox, Splendora  
Lora Taylor, Katy  
Kimberly Torres, Houston



## Agency Representatives

Disability Rights Texas: Sean Jackson, Patty Anderson; Texas Center for Disability Studies at The University of Texas at Austin: Dr. Sandra Magaña, Dr. Nina Zuna; Center on Disability and Development at Texas A&M University: Dr. Dan Zhang, Robin Miller; Texas Education Agency (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act): Elizabeth Danner, Katherine Snelling; Texas Health and Human Services Commission (Title XIX Medicaid): Kate Layman; Texas Health and Human Services Commission (Older Americans Act): Sara Damiano, Katelyn Le; Texas Workforce Commission (Rehabilitation Act): Jonas Schwartz, Lauren Chenoweth; Texas Department of State Health Services (Title V Maternal and Child Health): Kristi Miller, Ivy Goldstein

Strengthening connections between families and service providers makes it possible for more children with DD to find the support they need when transitioning from grade school to adult life. Our progress this year boosted early childhood support across the state. Texans are also more informed about program delivery and best practices to support young adults with DD. Texas State University joined other universities in enrolling students with DD in college. Collaborations in South Texas — including an accessible adaptation of the state’s food handler certification — increased jobs and entrepreneurship among people with DD.

### Enhancing Community Support for the Transition into Adult Life

Texas Parent to Parent (TxP2P) created an online transition center with resources, videos, and other information to help families of youth with DD with the transition into life after grade school. For youth with DD, the period between the end of grade school and adult life can be difficult to navigate. Many families lack access to support for their children and rely on a patchwork of services that can be unreliable and include long waiting lists. TxP2P developed the online transition center to support and connect families of youth with DD transitioning into life as young adults.



DEVELOP FAMILY  
SUPPORT  
NETWORKS



OPEN DOORS  
TO HIGHER  
EDUCATION



HELP YOUNG  
ADULTS PLAN  
LIFE GOALS



ADVANCE  
CAREERS &  
EMPLOYMENT  
OPPORTUNITIES





# — HEALTH & SAFETY

We prioritized activities to connect self-determined individuals with a DD-informed health care system. This year, projects built capacity for teachers and clinical providers to identify and share resources on co-occurring mental health conditions; increase support in the transition to adult medicine; use telemedicine to increase access and quality of care for those aging with DD and dementia; and educate those treating substance-use disorders. TCDD advanced oral health care and promoted ways for people with DD to receive dental exams without sedation while raising awareness of policy barriers that reduce access to health care.

## Developing Networks of Dental Care Providers For Texans with DD

The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston developed an innovative training program in collaborative care for people with DD at dental and medical schools across Texas. The project engaged dentists to work with a team of professionals from the health care, dental care, and behavioral health fields. TCDD supported this work to give health care and dental care professionals a deeper understanding of how discrimination in health equity impacts people with DD. The initiative included additional projects coordinated by Baylor College of Medicine and the University of Houston-Clear Lake.



UTHealth Houston hosted a workshop to inform health professionals of the importance of oral health and regular dental care for adults with DD.

## Training Educators for DD and Mental Health Dual Diagnosis

Project TEDD (Training Educators in Dual Diagnosis) provided "train-the-trainer" workshops for hundreds of K-12 educators who teach students with DD. The project, coordinated by Texas Tech University, strengthened the educators' ability to recognize, understand, and work with students who have DD and mental health conditions. One educator from Breckenridge ISD said Project TEDD gave him practical tips for behavior intervention strategies and classroom accommodations.

“  
[The strategies] are not only beneficial for my own students but also valuable for sharing with paraprofessionals and general education teachers. The resources and information from Project TEDD will help teachers understand the underlying function of student behavior while also providing methods for addressing the behaviors to enable the students to succeed. Additionally, the training will help raise awareness of the possibility of underlying mental health issues in our DD students.

Project TEDD participant, Breckenridge ISD

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When families and caregivers of people with DD are more aware of resources in their communities, they are better able to connect with organizations that meet their cultural needs. This year, we informed and supported families to better care for people with DD in their homes and communities. Participants in financial literacy training programs enhanced their skills in making purchases and managing money, both of which led to greater independence in their communities.

Overall, community-based programs became more inclusive through greater physical accessibility and in the way education is provided. We also increased knowledge among community leaders on ways to include people with DD in disability-related research.



FOSTER NEW  
PARTNERSHIPS



SUPPORT LIVING  
INDEPENDENTLY



EXPAND  
TRAINING &  
RESOURCES



ESTABLISH  
PROVIDER  
CONNECTIONS

### Amplifying DD Perspectives in Disability Research

Our Council launched a new initiative to develop participatory action research training that promotes equal relationships between coordinators and participants in DD-related research. Two organizations, disABILITYsa and Strategic Education Solutions, developed training opportunities and resources so people with DD can be actively involved and have a voice in research about disability issues. This initiative also strengthened the connection between researchers and the disability community in Texas.

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*This training gave me the confidence to advocate for disability rights and inclusion in San Antonio. [The training] has transformed me from a bystander into an active participant, and I'm grateful for the chance to make a positive impact in my community.*

**disABILITYsa training participant, San Antonio**

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# — LEADERSHIP & ADVOCACY

We connected people with DD with decision-makers in Texas. These relationships elevated voices and encouraged leaders to include the needs of self-advocates and families in all aspects of state business. Program participants with DD enhanced their self-perception and built greater independence with broadened goals for living and working in their communities. With an increase in appointments to boards and commissions, people with DD were also more engaged in the policymaking process.



Provided **interactive Training Sprints** and networking opportunities to advance participants' advocacy skills in a fast-paced environment.



Supported disability advocates through **Texas Partners in Policymaking** — our advanced leadership training program — to expand their connections, skills, and confidence in creating policy change to improve services and support for people with DD. More than 180 alumni continue to connect for further education, leadership development, and coalition-building.



Connected people with DD and their peers through leadership and advocacy **training programs led by self-advocates**.



*Kason Erwin, TCDD youth ambassador from Lago Vista.*

## Cultivating the Next Generation of Leaders with Disabilities

TCDD selected four exceptional youth ambassadors this year for the Center on Youth Voice, Youth Choice program. This initiative, backed by a five-year grant from the U.S. Administration for Community Living, marked a significant step in promoting alternatives to guardianship for young adults with DD in communities across Texas. The four youth ambassadors participated in a comprehensive training program exploring alternatives to guardianship for people with DD. Following the training, the ambassadors used their creativity and individuality to share what they learned with their communities. Ambassadors also spoke at multiple events, sharing insight into the program and reaching audiences locally and statewide.

Public policy engagement is essential to creating change so that Texans with DD are fully included in their communities and exercise control over their own lives. By connecting with legislators, agency officials, and the public, our Council represents and improves the lives of people with DD in Texas.

The decisions of Texas lawmakers should be rooted in evidence and informed by real-life experiences. We serve as a resource to legislators and their staff to help them better understand the scope and impact of disability-related legislation. Our council is led by people with DD and their family members, giving TCDD an important first-hand perspective.



LEGISLATIVE  
ANALYSIS



UNDERSTANDING  
CONSTITUENTS  
WITH DISABILITIES



POLICY  
EDUCATION



CONNECT WITH  
PEOPLE WITH DD



SHARE ADVOCACY  
OPPORTUNITIES



HOST COMMUNITY  
CONVERSATIONS



GATHER INPUT &  
EVIDENCE-BASED  
RESEARCH



PROVIDE POLICY  
RECOMMENDATIONS



BE A RESOURCE  
FOR LEGISLATORS

TCDD connects with people with DD and their families throughout communities in Texas. By building these relationships, we better understand which services and support are successful and where gaps in the system exist.

Before Texas legislative sessions, the Council releases Public Policy Priorities that guide TCDD's policy advocacy and include recommendations for legislators on disability issues. Our current priorities include the following topics:

- Personal & Civil Rights
- Employment
- Accessibility
- Health and Safety
- Early Childhood & Inclusive Education
- Funding for Services
- Attendant Wages & Training



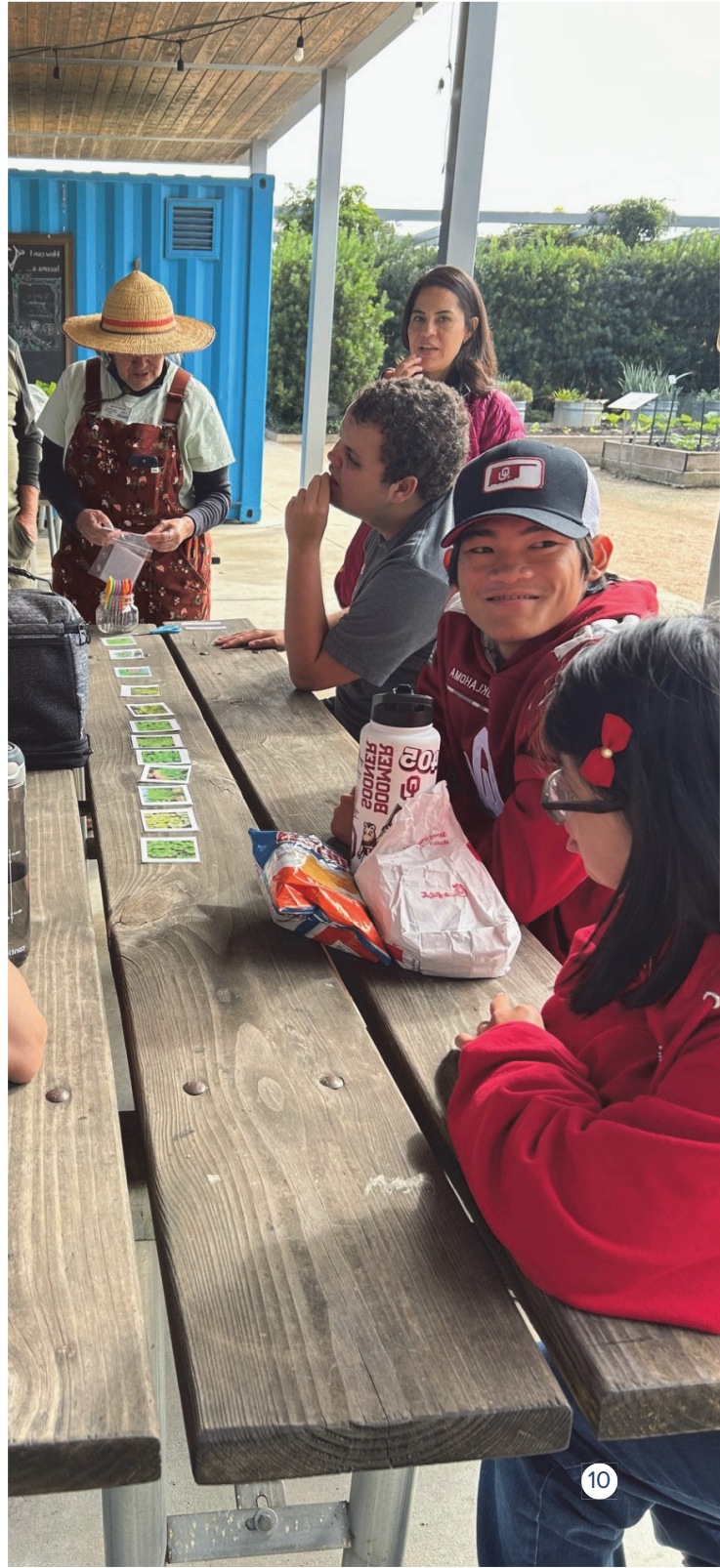
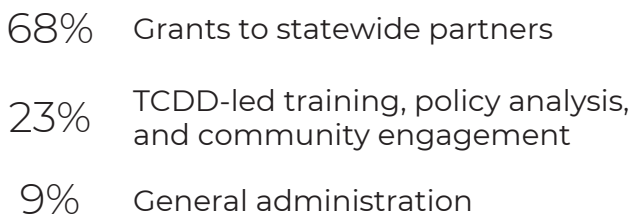
# addressing the needs of Texans with disabilities through **innovative community-based projects**

Every year, TCDD funds grant projects across Texas to achieve strategic goals. In 2024, our Council awarded grant funding to the following organizations:

Alamo Area Council of Governments  
Baylor College of Medicine  
Children's Disabilities Information Coalition  
Coalition of Texans with Disabilities  
disABILITYsa  
Epilepsy Foundation of Central and South Texas  
Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute  
Metrocare Services  
National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Texas  
Paso del Norte Children's Development Center  
Project Amistad  
Rice University  
Special Olympics Texas  
Strategic Education Solutions  
Texas A&M University  
Texas Advocates  
Texas State University  
Texas Tech University  
The Arc of Texas  
The SAFE Alliance  
University of Houston-Clear Lake  
UMass Chan Medical School  
University of North Texas Health Science Center  
University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston  
Valley Association for Independent Living  
West Central Texas Council of Governments

## TCDD FUNDING

2024 Federal Award: \$6.2 million





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award totaling \$6,175,796. Council efforts are those of the grantee  
and do not necessarily represent the official views of nor are  
endorsed by the ACL, HHS, or the U.S. government.