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March 8, 2021

To: ODDS Stakeholders

From: Lilia Teninty, Director, Office of Developmental Disabilities Services

Subject: DD Awareness Month 2021

It has been one year since the first case of COVID-19 was diagnosed in Oregon and the Governor's Executive Order was issued, changing all our lives.

March is also [Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month](#), a time to raise awareness about the inclusion of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) in all areas of community life, as well as awareness to the barriers that people with disabilities still sometimes face.

COVID-19 brought the need for this awareness to the forefront. As it became clear that that people with I/DD faced higher risks if they contract the virus, self-advocates, families, providers and case management entities fought to make their voices heard. The entire I/DD community came together to fight for their medical rights, including having support staff at the hospital and to make sure they had access when a vaccine was available. We also worked to ensure proper safeguards were in place to protect people in their homes and in the community.

This has been a tough year, as some have lost friends or family to this terrible pandemic. We have all faced the challenges of increased isolation and adapting to doing a lot more on screens instead of face-to-face. We also had wildfires and, in some areas, an ice storm to contend with. People with I/DD, their families and providers also confronted issues of racism and institutional discrimination and continued fighting for social justice and equity.

All these challenges also showed how amazingly resilient and powerful this community is when we all work together. Case management entities quickly moved to remote services and helped to adapt Individual Support Plans to make sure people were still meeting their goals. Providers came up with creative ways to keep people connected, organizing Zoom dance parties, drive-by visits and helping people take online classes.

People with I/DD and family members showed their strength and determination in the face of this pandemic. Some people with I/DD started working remotely or found new jobs. Others volunteered, making cards for people in nursing homes or found new hobbies they could do safely. Many people with I/DD and their family members advocated for their health and safety. The I/DD community was challenged with a huge obstacle and once again, showed how strong we are when we work together.

In the spirit of that strength, the Oregon Council on Developmental Disabilities is hosting a [photo campaign](#) this month. We invite you to share photos and stories using the hashtag #BetterTogether21. You can post your photos and stories to their [Facebook page](#) – remember to use the hashtag #BetterTogether21 to connect. You can also email photos to ryley.newport@ocdd.org or go to their [website](#) for more information.

Never has Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month meant so much. I am proud and honored to be part of this amazing community.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lilia". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the beginning.

Lilia Teninty
Director
Office of Developmental Disabilities Services

Previous Director's Messages are available at
<http://www.oregon.gov/DHS/SENIORS-DISABILITIES/DD/Pages/messages.aspx>

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