



**The Arizona Developmental Disabilities Planning Council continues our profile series to help community members get to know the people who represent Arizonans with disabilities.**

**Up this month is Council member Vijette Saari**



Vijette Saari is passionate about supporting individuals with I/DD and their families. She considers herself an advocate and has spent a lifetime supporting individuals with disabilities both personally and professionally. Vijette grew up with an older sister who has I/DD and remembers being a part of the therapy and school visits for her sister, but never had any intention of making that part of her career. Through her undergraduate years at Arizona State University, however, Vijette worked with children who have autism and loved it. This love of working with children led to a career as a Developmental Special Instructions (DSI) and Service Coordinator under the Arizona Early Intervention Program (AzEIP) and the Division of Developmental Disabilities in La Paz and Mohave Counties. Later, she became a First Things First Regional Director and then a Director of Family Support and Education with Candelen, a multi-state early childhood services provider. She is now the Grants Manager for Lake Havasu City, where she lives.

Through this time, Vijette and her husband, Damon, had three amazing children: two boys (Raiden, 14 and Kaito, 12), and a girl (Jade, 10). During Vijette's pregnancy with her third child, they discovered that their daughter was suffering from Fifth Disease in-utero. This virus is suspected to be the cause of her daughter's bilateral hearing loss, hypotonic cerebral palsy, and global developmental delays. Treatment for the infection marked the beginning of her daughter's lifetime of visits with specialists. Since then, Vijette has surrounded herself with a village of family, friends, and professionals who deeply care about

the well-being of her daughter. She is confident that Jade is a testament to the miracles of God. Recently, Jade qualified for nationals in the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) Artistic Gymnastics Special Stars. The AAU Special Stars program allows Jade to learn, perform, and compete with a team of gymnasts under the direction of amazing coaches.

Vijette believes that one of the best ways to support the community is to volunteer her time. She was introduced to the Council by staff member Jason Snead during a presentation he was giving to the Mohave Special Needs Advocacy Council (SNAC), which is one of the many groups she volunteers for. During that meeting Jason and Vijette got into a healthy debate about services for those with disabilities and before the meeting was over, she had submitted her application to be part of the Council.

Some of the other groups she is a part of are Arizona Rural Health Association, Mohave Health Coalition, and the Parent Teacher Advisory Council at her children's middle school. She also volunteers as a Raising Special Kids Parent-to-Parent Volunteer, a Girl Scout Troop Co-Leader, and an elementary special education classroom parent. She has earned her Master's degree in early childhood education, is a Fellow of the National Leadership Academy for the Public's Health, and a member of the Infant Toddler Mental Health Coalition of Arizona. Vijette has focused her work on the Social Determinants of Health in varying roles in government and non-profits across Arizona and Nevada. Her contributions to increasing childhood immunization rates in Mohave County were honored with a 2022 Big Shots Award by The Arizona Partnerships for Immunization (TAPI).

Vijette loves to spend time with her family and their three dogs. They enjoy the outdoors, especially boating, camping, and off-roading. Vijette often rereads "The Chronicles of Narnia" series by British author C. S. Lewis and the Harry Potter series by J. K. Rowling. Vijette wants other children and families to have access to the same system of supports that she has been blessed with and believes that we must give people the tools needed to be their own voice. She believes one of the key things the Council should do is provide information about the disability community while also helping individuals use the information effectively. Vijette says, "God gave me the heart of a servant and I enjoy serving other people."

## **April is Autism Acceptance Month!**



The Autism Society of Greater Phoenix (ASGP) has proudly served the Valley of the Sun since 1973. It is the oldest autism organization in Arizona. This is ASGP's 50th year of service! The organization's mission is to create connections, empowering everyone in the autism community with the resources needed to live a full life. ASGP offers education, training, social events, and support to its members, taking pride in supporting autistic individuals and their families across the lifespan and constantly advocating on behalf of the disability community to improve systems of care. ASGP offers support in English and Spanish.

While Autism Acceptance Month starts on April 1st, acceptance happens every day. Acceptance begins with an understanding that everyone's unique experiences are valid; ASGP creates space for each member of the autism community to speak openly and without judgment, and is proud to celebrate and recognize the many varied experiences across the autism spectrum.

When we celebrate differences, we put acceptance into action by embracing the unique experiences and diversity of needs across the autism community.

Autism is the fastest growing developmental disability in the United States, with 1 in 44 children diagnosed. There are 5.8 million adults with autism and another nearly 1.1 million are nearing adulthood in the next few years, effectively aging out of state-funded supports and services.

The Autism Society knows what it is like to raise a loved one with autism. Its Executive Director, staff, the majority of its Board of Directors, meeting leaders, and volunteers are parents of someone on the spectrum and/or who identifies as autistic. One of the most important things ASGP can do is connect those it serves with others who understand the challenges and blessings of raising a loved one with a disability. It is equally essential for autistic youth and adults to feel supported and valued.

Leticia Discoe is the parent of a child with autism and has received support from ASGP. She shared, "The Autism Society of Greater Phoenix is an amazing resource. I've met some wonderful people and learned many new things. Their experts are friendly and helpful. Their events are fun and informative. Our kids need this village, and it's so helpful to know, as special needs parents, that you aren't alone."

Join the Autism Society during Autism Acceptance Month to celebrate differences. Together, we can demonstrate acceptance in action and empower everyone in the autism community with the resources needed to live a full life.

[Click here for information on the Autism Society of Greater Phoenix.](#)



Title Sponsor



## ALL IN FOR AUTISM DAY

**APRIL 15, 2023 | 10AM-2PM**  
**Rillito Race Track,  
4502 N 1st St Tucson AZ 85718**  
Tickets: \$20 per adult, \$5 for kids 14 & under

SCAN HERE TO GET YOUR TICKETS!



[www.as-az.org](http://www.as-az.org)



The Autism Society of Southern Arizona is excited to announce their All In For Autism Day to celebrate Autism Acceptance Month. Saturday, April 15th will be a fun-filled day for all ages. Several local organizations will join them to provide entertainment:

- Main stage activities
- Accessible Zumba, Yoga and theater classes
- Story time with the Tucson Public Library
- Adult Social Zone with a mocktail bar
- Resource fair
- Instrument petting zoo

- Reptile petting zoo
- Art activities, including a community mosaic art project
- Soccer activities
- Science Zone
- Games and jumping castles
- Board games
- Food trucks
- And much more!

Kate Elliott, Executive Director of the Autism Society of Southern Arizona, stated, "Navigating the world of autism and services can be overwhelming and isolating. We at the Autism Society of Southern Arizona strive to be a place where parents of children with autism and autistic adults can come to find resources, education, and connection to the community."

The Autism Society of Southern Arizona is honored to have its Sustaining Sponsors, Banner University Health Plan and Mercy Care, and its Title Sponsor, Premiere Retirement Planning and Wealth Management, helping it to create this event.

"The partnership brings together the expertise and experience of Banner University Family Care, which has been providing healthcare services to families and individuals with special needs for decades, and the Autism Society, which is committed to helping those living with ASD achieve their full potential and lead fulfilling lives," says Banner University Family Care. "The collaboration will allow members to access the latest research findings, evidence-based practices, and innovative technologies."

Jeff Vogan, President of Premier Retirement Planning & Wealth Management states, "As a parent to a remarkable daughter with autism, I know how important it is to create a more inclusive world of people with special needs like our sweet angel, Megan. It takes a lot to understand their world and the variety of resources and programs that can afford them a higher quality of life. This is why Premiere Retirement Planning and Wealth Management chooses to support the Autism Society of Southern Arizona and its work to support families affected by autism and create a more accepting and understanding community. The Vogan family and Premiere Wealth are 'All In for Autism!'"

[Click here to buy tickets for All In for Autism](#)

## **April is Sexual Assault Awareness Month**



## **Service Provider Training: Addressing Sexual Violence in I/DD Communities**

Presented by the Arizona Coalition to End Sexual and Domestic Violence (ACESDV).

This free 4-hour training provides vital information on how to prevent, recognize and respond to sexual violence in I/DD communities. It will be offered virtually, on May 18th.

Presenters will discuss the dynamics and traumatic impact of sexual violence and how to recognize abuse, as well as explore strategies for a trauma-informed response.

This training is for disability service providers who serve the I/DD community and can be used for Direct Care Worker continuing education.

**When:** Thursday, May 18th

**Time:** 9:00 AM - 1:00 PM MST

**Where:** Virtual

[Click here to register for Sexual Violence in I/DD Communities](#)



Pictured are Workgroup leaders from left to right in front row: Asim Dietrich and Jason Snead, back row Melanie Soto, Gina Griffiths and Dr. Kimberly Yellow Robe

The Arizona Sexual Violence and Disability Network is building an inclusive movement to prevent sexual violence of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) throughout Arizona. Too often, people with I/DD experience sexual violence in the U.S. - and Arizona is no exception. [Data from the Bureau of Justice Statistics](#) (BJS) reveals that people with disabilities experience violent victimization (which includes sexual assault) at four times the rate of people without disabilities. Other BJS data mentioned in this [NPR article](#) found that people with intellectual disabilities are seven times more likely to experience sexual violence.

A statewide network on this topic was created to address this silent epidemic in Arizona. The Arizona Sexual Violence and Disability Network is a passionate group of people who believe that change is possible when we work together with a clear focus, shared commitment, and measurable goals. Our mission is to identify and respond to the critical needs of individuals with I/DD and other disabilities who face the most significant risk of sexual violence in Arizona. The first two to three years of the Network focused on developing publications and easy-to-use resources, providing in-person and online webinars and training,

and following key legislation to educate others on policy issues. Publications can be viewed on the [Network's recently launched website](#).

The Arizona Sexual Violence and Disability Network was initially formed in 2018 as the "Arizona Sexual Violence and I/DD Response Collaborative". Although the Collaborative met regularly before an incident at an [Arizona healthcare facility](#) that gained nationwide attention, the events created an even greater sense of urgency to address the sexual violence of people with I/DD throughout the state. The incident involved a woman with disabilities who could not respond to what was happening to her. She was raped many times and impregnated by a nurse who eventually pleaded guilty to sexual abuse and vulnerable adult charges.

This incident sparked deep concern that such blatant sexual violence could occur with no one knowing and no guardrails in place to ensure the safety of those who are most at risk and often the most isolated in our society. Moreover, the abuse was long-term and may have gone unnoticed for years. This systemic problem can occur in group homes, private homes, and other settings across Arizona. In response to this event, then-Governor Doug Ducey issued Executive Order 2019-03, Relating to Enhanced Protections for Individuals with Disabilities, on February 6, 2019. This resulted in the creation of 30 recommendations summarized by [The Abuse & Neglect Task Force](#). Shortly after that the Network was formed to continue this vital work.

Much of the Network's day-to-day work occurs through meetings of five Workgroups. In 2022, the Workgroups defined their goals and objectives during a strategic planning process and these goals are being implemented in 2023. The Network is holding its inaugural conference (a full-day in-person meeting) on September 14, 2023, at Ability360 in Phoenix.

The Network's five Workgroups are:

- Criminal Justice
- School Abuse Prevention Best Practices
- Training and Prevention
- Trauma Informed Care Access for Individuals with I/DD
- Tribal Resources

The Arizona Sexual Violence and Disability Network is looking to recruit new Workgroup leaders and members who strongly believe in building collaboration and desire to address sexual violence. The Network welcomes people with I/DD, people of diverse backgrounds (including Black, Indigenous and people of color communities), and people who work at the intersection of disability and sexual violence. If interested in joining, contact Tori Glaude at [Glaude@thearc.org](mailto:Glaude@thearc.org) and [fill out this form](#).



**Medicaid resumes regular renewal process beginning April 1, 2023**

Beginning April 1, 2023, the Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System (AHCCCS) is required to resume the regular renewal process and disenroll ineligible individuals from AHCCCS and KidsCare. Over the course of 12 months, AHCCCS will complete a full eligibility renewal for all 2.5 million enrolled members, following a careful plan designed to make sure that no eligible members are wrongly disenrolled, and that anyone who no longer qualifies for Medicaid is referred to other health care insurance options. The return to regular renewal processes will be the first time in three years that Medicaid and Arizona's Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) members who no longer qualify for Medicaid will be disenrolled. Members will be notified of their eligibility renewal prior to their month of renewal.

### **What AHCCCS Members Can Do To Prepare for Renewal:**

- The most important thing AHCCCS members can do right now is **update their contact information in Health-e-Arizona Plus** ([www.healtharizonaplus.gov](http://www.healtharizonaplus.gov)). To update contact information, log in to [www.healtharizonaplus.gov](http://www.healtharizonaplus.gov) or call Health-e-Arizona Plus at 1-855-432-7587, Monday through Friday 7:00 AM - 6:00 PM.
- **Sign up for text/email notification alerts from AHCCCS and respond to all AHCCCS requests for information in a timely manner.** To sign up for text/email alerts of AHCCCS notifications, log in to [www.healtharizonaplus.gov](http://www.healtharizonaplus.gov), go to "Message Center" on the toolbar, and click on "Manage My Alerts and Letters." Look for a letter from AHCCCS and respond if needed.



The Division of Developmental Disabilities first-ever Self-Care for Caregivers Conference

In Arizona, one in five adults is a caregiver to a friend or family member, according to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](https://www.cdc.gov) (CDC).

More than half provided care for at least two years. Sixty percent are women.

Caregivers often put the needs of others first. This sacrifice can create burnout and health problems. Caregivers need to be healthy mentally and physically. This allows them to care for others.

For this reason, the Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD) is hosting its first Self-Care for Caregivers Conference. The event will be April 25, 2023 at the Desert Willow Conference Center in Phoenix. **There is no cost to attend.** Caregivers need to [pre-register here](#).

### **What is the Self-Care for Caregivers Conference?**

The event is a day of self-care, learning, and community. It's for caregivers of people with intellectual or developmental disabilities. Caregivers will learn how to care for themselves while caring for others.

The event will have presentations from experts in self-care and mental health. It will also offer workshops, relaxation exercises, yoga, and art therapy, among others.

Caregivers who need help finding respite services while attending can contact their Support Coordinators at the DDD.

**When:** Tuesday, April 25th

**Time:** 8:00 AM - 5:00 PM MST

**Where:** In person at Desert Willow Conference Center 4340 E. Cotton Center Blvd., Phoenix

**Cost:** This event is free of charge, and registration in advance is required to attend.

[Click here to register for DDD/Parent Caregiver Self-Care Conference](#)

[Folleto para la Conferencia de Autocuidado para Cuidadores](#)

## DDD Town Hall Meeting

The Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD) wants to hear from you. DDD is hosting regularly scheduled Town Hall meetings. DDD will present details about Division initiatives and other news. They would also like to hear from members, families and providers about the issues important to them.

Until further notice, all DDD meetings will be held virtually in order to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Persons with a disability may request a reasonable accommodation, such as a sign language interpreter, by contacting the DDD Customer Service Center at 1-844-770-9500 ext. 1. Requests should be made as early as possible to allow time to arrange the accommodation.

**When:** Thursday, April 6th

**Time:** 6:00 PM - 8:00 PM MST

**Where:** Virtual


[Click here to join the DDD Town Hall](#)

## Jason's Advocacy Corner video

This month, Jason Snead, ADDPC staff member and self-advocate, talks with George Garcia, Executive Director of Southwest Institute for Families and Children and a self-advocate. The discussion focused on Supported Decision-Making.

- What is Supported Decision-Making?
- What is the difference between Guardianship and Supported Decision-Making?
- Does an adult with disabilities need a lawyer to put a Supported Decision-Making arrangement in place?





Jason asks for help deciding what topics to discuss in future videos. You can reach Jason at [jsnead@azdes.gov](mailto:jsnead@azdes.gov).

## Upcoming Events!



## Primary Care Provider Continuing Medical Education Program

The Primary Care Provider Continuing Medical Education (CME) Program is aimed at providing primary care providers, particularly family physicians and nurse practitioners in Arizona, with continuing medical education related to more equitable and inclusive health care for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD).

With insight and guidance from a diverse group of community partners that includes self-advocates, subject matter experts in supported decision-making, guardianship, and health care for underserved communities, the project team has developed a free CME program with three modules that focus on different aspects of providing medical care for people with disabilities.

The three topics covered by the CME program are:

- Understanding current health inequities among people with I/DD and the History of marginalization
- Consent and capacity as it Relates to people with I/DD
- Applying Supported Decision-Making in the clinical context

[Click here for details of the Primary Care Provider CME Program](#)



The **in-person Family Caregiver Day at the Capitol** will be held April 6th for family caregivers, friends, and supporters. Come to downtown Phoenix to show your support for family caregivers in Arizona. We will invite media and our State legislators. Come to hear speakers on policy issues and shared caregiver stories. We'll have sandwiches and snacks. For program information, contact the Arizona Caregiver Coalition at 1-888-737-7494.

**When:** Thursday, April 6th

**Time:** 10:00 AM - 1:00 PM MST

**Where:** In-Person at Wesley Bolin Plaza, 1700 W. Washington Street, Phoenix

[Click here to register for the in-person Family Caregiver Day.](#)

## Monday Mindset Chat

**Presented by the Sonoran Center for Excellence in Disabilities at the University of Arizona**



Join us for monthly chats focused on addressing the challenges and successes of implementing Employment First in Arizona.

This is an opportunity for YOU to bring your questions, comments, and concerns to an informal meeting with Sonoran Center professionals and practitioners.

### **WHO IS THIS FOR?**

Open to Supported Employment Professionals, Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors, DDD Support Coordinators, Educators, Providers, Job Coaches, and Job Developers.

[Click here to register for Monday Mindset Chats](#)



Arizona Disability Benefits 101 (DB101) provides training for professionals on benefits, health coverage, and employment supports to reduce the myths that are barriers to employment and financial self-sufficiency for people with disabilities.

During this training, DB101 experts will:

- Describe Supplemental Security Income/ Social Security Disability Insurance rules and work incentives, Medicaid and Medicare, and employment impact on state/federal benefits
- Complete and explain Estimator results of the impact of specific earnings on benefits
- Explain motive and support plans for employment and transition to self-sufficiency

**When:** Thursday, April 20th

**Time:** 1:00 PM MST - 4:00 PM MST

**Where:** Virtual

[Click here to register for AZ DB101 for Professionals](#)


**The Arc of Arizona and Chandler Gilbert Arc present  
the 2023 Sprout Film Festival!**




SHOWINGS AT

 **POLLACK TEMPE CINEMAS**

1825 E. Elliot Road  
Tempe, AZ

 **Friday, APRIL 21ST**  
10:30AM & 12:30PM

 **Saturday, APRIL 22ND**  
10:30AM

Inspiring audiences, promoting inclusion and supporting transformative filmmaking as an integral part of social change.

The Sprout Film Festival focuses exclusively on films that celebrate the diverse lives and creativity of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD), strives to challenge assumptions and breakdown stereotypes. By introducing powerful, thought-provoking films from around the world to new and ever-more inclusive audiences, we promote greater acceptance, celebrate difference, and light the spark to help make the invisible, visible.

Sprout films feature actors whose lives reflect the joys and challenges their characters face. These are not "star" vehicles for well-known actors to portray individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Rather, all roles depicting persons with disabilities are played by persons with actual disabilities.

The Sprout Film Festival was founded in 2003 and is programmed and supported by Sprout, a New York City based non-profit organization dedicated to bringing innovative programming to individuals with I/DD.

*Proceeds benefit the advocacy programs of The Arc of Arizona + Chandler/Gilbert Arc.*

THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS

TICKETS:

General Admission - \$5/ticket  
Groups of 10 or more - \$4/ticket  
All admission passes for all showings: \$12/ticket

 Purchase Tickets Now at  
<https://bit.ly/2023SproutFilmAZ> 



## Southern Arizona's Largest Disability Job Fair for Job Seekers Who Have a Disability



Join employers from Tucson and surrounding areas as they look to add talent to their staff. This is a great opportunity to meet with employers who are looking to hire now. You will receive information about local job openings. Come dressed ready to interview and bring several copies of your resume to present to employers.

**When:** Wednesday, April 26th

**Time:** 9:00 AM - 12:00 PM MST

**Where:** In person at Kino Event Center at 2805 E. Ajo Way, Tucson

[Job seekers register in advance here](#)



The 2023 Self-Advocates Conference will bring together self-advocates, family members, caregivers, and professionals serving the Arizona disability community from around the state to learn and talk about the issues important to all of us. The theme of this year's conference is "We Fall, Fight, and Rise as One Across Arizona". The conference will include:

- Self-advocate keynote speakers
- Presentations on issues important to self-advocates
- Introduction to self advocacy groups across Arizona
- Online fun and games

[Click here to register for the Self-Advocates Conference](#)

**When:** Saturday, April 29th

**Time:** 10:00 AM - 12:30 PM MST

**Where:** Virtual

## Supporting People with Intellectual or Developmental Disability (I/DD)/Aging/Dementia: Screening, Support Adaptation and Access to a Support Network



This free conference is presented by the University of Arizona Sonoran Center for Excellence in Disabilities and will provide information, discuss effective strategies, provide available tools, and present resources for caregivers/support teams who care for people with I/DD and are affected by Dementia.

Throughout this day-long program, practical self-care activities called "Me for a Minute" will be introduced. Participants may enter into the raffle to win fun self-care prizes (e.g., gym memberships, restaurant gift cards, massage gift cards, self-care mini practice books, etc.).

Areas of focus include:

- Background of Aging/Dementia for people with I/DD, and an overview of national resources/network activities
- Adapting Goals/Daily Activities and Support
- Finding Joy in Life as We Approach End of Life
- Clinical Significance/Research, Identification/Screening
- Accessing Local Support and Services

**When:** Wednesday, May 3rd

**Time:** 8:30 AM - 4:00 PM MST

**Where:** Virtual

**Cost:** There is not a charge to attend the conference, but you will need to register to participate.

[Click here to register for Virtual I/DD/Aging/Dementia Conference](#)

If you would like to request any reasonable accommodations please register by April 10th.

Contact Yumi Shirai, PhD, at [yumish@arizona.edu](mailto:yumish@arizona.edu) with any questions.

Conference Partners and Speaker Affiliations:

- Alzheimer's Association
- Arizona Caregiver Coalition
- Arizona Department of Economic Security, Division of Developmental Disabilities
- Banner Alzheimer's Institute
- Barrow Neurological Institute
- Hospice of the Valley
- National Task Group on Intellectual Disabilities and Dementia Practices
- Oakwood Creative Care
- Pima Council on Aging
- Southern Arizona Network for Down Syndrome
- Tucson Jewish Community Center
- University of Arizona Life & Work Connections

Conference funding provided by the Arizona Developmental Disabilities Planning Council

## Disability Data for Arizona

Watch our brief video on how to use the Disability Data Hub for Arizona: Our data hub allows you to explore data on individuals with disabilities living in the state of Arizona. We believe free and easy access to data on individuals with disabilities is important to develop and support capacity building and systemic change. We update our data dashboards regularly, as governmental agencies make their public releases.



[Visit Disability Data Hub Here](#)

See ADDPC website for more events. [Click here.](#)



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