



John R. Kasich, Governor
John L. Martin, Director

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March is Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month - 2012 Kickoff Event Focuses on Statewide Opportunities -

The Ohio Statehouse Atrium will host the annual celebration of Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month on March 1, 2012, from 10 a.m. – noon. “*Our Community is Better Together,*” the statewide theme for this year’s Awareness Month activities, encourages communities to welcome individuals’ differences, as well as their similarities. The Statehouse Kickoff event will focus on the many opportunities emerging in this spirit throughout the state, and raise public awareness of the many *abilities* that people with disabilities have. In 2011 nearly 500 attendees from all across Ohio were hosted at the Statehouse.

Self advocates from throughout the state will be spotlighted throughout the program, and will share their unique experiences, underscoring the 2012 Awareness Month “*Together*” theme. Professionals within Ohio’s developmental disabilities system, which serves more than 80,000 individuals, also will participate and represent many service providers and support organizations.

Ohio Public Images (OPI), a statewide information and advocacy organization promoting positive images of people with disabilities, along with the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities (DODD), sponsor the kick-off celebration. The two organizations work in collaboration with many other stakeholders, to provide a venue for diverse agencies and providers to share ideas and information. Self advocates participating in the annual event also enjoy the opportunity to share their individual successes and challenges, and network with legislators, agencies, and others with an interest in Ohio’s disability services community.

According to Lon Mitchell, Executive Director of Ohio Public Images (OPI), “Each year, the statewide kickoff event reinforces the fact that once we focus on the abilities of *all* citizens, we *all* benefit. By welcoming people with disabilities as equal community partners in the workforce, as well as in our schools and neighborhoods, our communities will be stronger.”

For more information: Sherry Steinman, DODD Public Information Officer, (614) 644-0262 or sherry.steinman@dodd.ohio.gov. Visit www.dodd.ohio.gov for additional information.

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