

Reaching Every Day to Achieve Justice, Equality and a Fully Inclusive Future



MESSAGE FROM OUR LEADERSHIP

At MDSC, we are proud that we have been there for our families each and every day for the last 40 years — always innovating, always improving, and always reaching to make a positive difference in the lives of people with Down syndrome.

From the very founding of our organization, MDSC's calling card has been our close connection to our members. It is an ideal that has proven invaluable during tumultuous times, whether for our families going through a particular challenge or a societal upheaval like the Covid pandemic.

With this Annual Report, we are homing in on our organizational and community accomplishments in 2023 — a year in which we were continuing to learn to live with Covid while also reaching and striving to innovate in order to build brighter tomorrows. In fact, we made REACH our 2023 yearlong theme. And with your support, REACH we did!

We reached to strengthen our programs and to expand our inclusive MDSC community. We reached to make a difference for our families across the lifespan. We reached to create new opportunities for individuals with Down syndrome. We reached so that everyone in our community could reach for, and achieve, their dreams. And we made every effort possible to be there when our loved ones with Down syndrome or their families reached out for a helping hand.

As our story goes, MDSC was founded in the early 1980s when a group of dedicated parents of children with Down syndrome began gathering in a living room. On the surface, their agenda was simple — to share what their hopes and dreams were for their children and brainstorm how they might achieve them. But armed with passion and persistence, these visionary leaders organically developed a bold mission — to build a brighter future not only for their



Maureen Gallagher, M.S.



Stacy R. Lindborg, Ph.D.

children, but for every child with Down syndrome across the state. Foreseeing what would help families most, they planned and launched MDSC's inaugural statewide Annual Conference. For the first time, they brought together families of loved ones with Down syndrome in Massachusetts to share critical information and resources.

Earlier this year, we gathered as a community for that same flagship event. Not only was it our first in-person Annual Conference since 2019; it was also our 40th Anniversary Conference. As we mentioned from the stage then, it is incumbent on us to consider our history — how we got to where we are today as an organization and a community.

Over the years and decades that followed our founding, MDSC's growth is nothing short of remarkable. A few families gathering to support each other and share information quickly transformed into dozens, which continued to grow, while always staying true to our grassroots origins. Now, today's MDSC is a nationally recognized powerhouse, connecting with over 8,000 families annually, not only from MA, but from around the country and the world.

Not only have we developed award-winning programs such as Parents First Call, for new and expectant parents which has been replicated in 19 states; Advocates in Motion for

teens and young adults; and our Your Next Star Employment Program to prepare adults for transition to employment opportunities; we have developed critical public awareness and education initiatives changing perceptions and opening doors for our loved ones at every stage of life.

We've operationalized our best practices in the areas of education, employment, family support and legislative advocacy into four standard-setting Centers of Excellence. And our impactful statewide and national advocacy efforts have yielded the passage of numerous critical, groundbreaking pieces of legislation over the past 12 years.

Working in collaboration with many of our advocacy partners, we passed the Down Syndrome Information Act, Real Lives Bill, ABLE Act, National Background Check Bill, Organ Transplant Bill, and Higher Education Bill. And, we are far from finished! We're now working on the "ABA Bill", which requires insurance to cover critical at-home Applied Behavioral Analysis therapy for those who need it.

As we reflect and show our appreciation for all who came before us, we are still REACHing so that we can continue to be there for our loved ones with Down syndrome for many years to come. In 2023, we succeeded in achieving our mission as a direct result of steadfast supporters like you who understand the importance of the work we do.

We need your ongoing support to continue to positively impact the lives of people with Down syndrome and their families. Last year, in order to map out our vision for this future, MDSC's Board of Directors approved a new 5-year Strategic Plan, which sets ambitious goals for advancing acceptance and inclusion:



Maureen Gallagher, M.S.
Executive Director, MDSC



- Meeting the needs of all MDSC members across their entire lifespan including developing a new initiative for aging adults with Down syndrome and their families.
- Fostering an environment of belonging and increasing access for families of diverse backgrounds by bolstering our Diversity, Equity and Inclusion practices.
- Advancing systemic change through statewide and federal advocacy efforts.
- Serving as a leader in the Down syndrome sector in Massachusetts and nationwide, including through our four Centers of Excellence.
- And ensuring that MDSC can sustain our current programming needs and our ambitions for future growth.

More than ever, we hold great hope for a brighter tomorrow for our loved ones, and we owe it all to YOU! Whether you served in a leadership role, significantly contributed to one of our events, hosted a community fundraiser, made a contribution to one of our many programs, or funded a grant to make our work possible, we salute you for your support.

Your commitment, partnership and trust ensure that we can offer the very best programs to meet the needs of the entire Down syndrome community in Massachusetts.

Your leadership and support are truly valued and appreciated.

Together, we will continue to REACH every day to achieve justice, equality and a fully inclusive future!

Stacy R. Lindborg, Ph.D.
Board Chair, MDSC

ABOUT THE MDSC

For nearly four decades, the Massachusetts Down Syndrome Congress has fought to ensure that all individuals in Massachusetts with Down syndrome are valued, included, and given every opportunity to pursue fulfilling lives.

Today, MDSC has 8,000 members, a professional Board of Directors, a dynamic Management Team, and a vision to ensure that every person with Down syndrome has the opportunity to reach his or her full potential.

Our broad array of programs, our four Centers of Excellence and our comprehensive Resource Library, serve people with Down syndrome throughout their lifespans; and families throughout the state and beyond, putting MDSC on the cutting edge of Down syndrome advocacy nationwide.

MISSION STATEMENT

To ensure that individuals with Down syndrome in Massachusetts are valued, included, and given the opportunities to pursue fulfilling lives by providing information, networking opportunities, and advocacy for people with Down syndrome and their families, educators, health care professionals, and the community-at-large.

OUR VISION

The MDSC wants to be recognized by people with Down syndrome and their families, educators, health care professionals, and the community-at-large as the preeminent organization in Massachusetts for information, networking, and advocacy for and about Down syndrome.



OUR PURPOSES

- To engage, educate, and involve the public in advancing the possibilities and potential of all people with Down syndrome throughout the lifespan.
- To continue to create and foster opportunities for meaningful employment and ensure the availability of resources to support meaningful societal engagement for adults with Down syndrome in the community.
- To advocate for improved systemic change and policy in issues such as community inclusion, higher education, employment, housing and benefit programs for adults with Down syndrome.
- To enable networking, social/friendship opportunities and partnerships, in person and virtually, to support all people with Down syndrome and their families, including aging individuals and their families/caregivers and historically under-resourced communities.
- To advocate that all individuals with Down syndrome have high quality education, which includes transition planning and life-long learning.
- To advocate for all individuals with Down syndrome to have access to high quality medical, dental and behavioral services and research.
- To empower all people with Down syndrome to have the opportunity to become self-advocates.
- To continue to ensure that expectant and new families receive accurate and up-to-date information and desired supports.
- To maintain the development and dissemination of information and best practices through the Resource Library and MDSC's Centers of Excellence, covering the lifespan of individuals with Down syndrome.

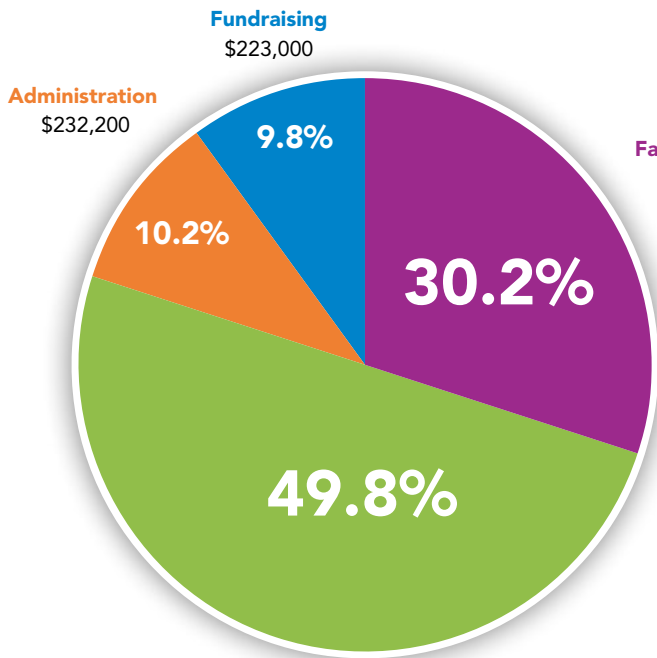
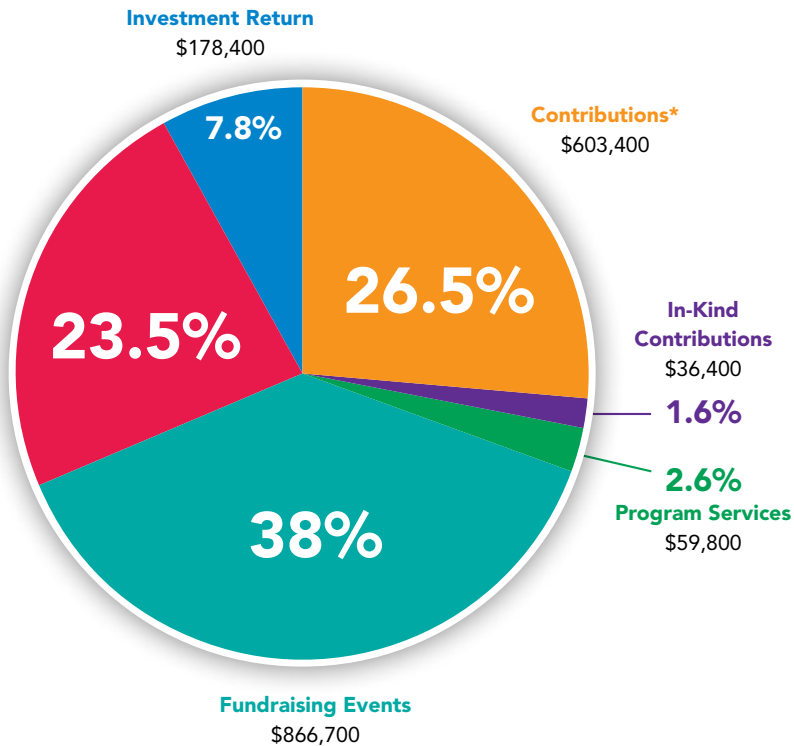


2023 FINANCIAL STATEMENT

Connecting Revenue with Expenses

REVENUE

Total Revenue \$2,280,700



EXPENSES

Total Expenses: \$2,266,700

* Includes \$233,781 with donor restrictions



PARENTS FIRST CALL

Providing critical personalized supports when families need it most

Claudia Argueta, 40, and her husband Eligio were surprised when they were told their second child would almost certainly have Down syndrome. Feeling alone, Claudia says it was a lifeline when a hospital social worker connected her with MDSC Bilingual (Spanish) Specialist Tatiana Salinas. Tatiana's own journey of raising a beautiful daughter with Down syndrome, Chiara, had a profound impact on Claudia, including making her rethink her preconceived notions about Down syndrome.

Tatiana helped the Arguetas connect with gently used baby clothes donated by other MDSC families as well as expensive baby supplies. When Claudia and Eligio's precious son Isaias was born in April 2022, they felt as prepared as possible.

Immediately the family faced other major stressors when Isaias had breathing complications that sent him to the NICU for three months, and then home with an oxygen tank. During this time (when Eligio was facing his own medical challenges, including surgeries), the MDSC CARES Program was there for the Arguetas, providing crucial support in the form of gift cards, supplies, and connection, which was perhaps most appreciated at Christmastime.

Even after that first year, when Isaias was able to come off of supplemental oxygen, the Arguetas say MDSC has continued to be an indispensable resource — whether through the Virtual Annual Conference, Spanish-speaking family gatherings, or simply the ability to talk with Tatiana about what's worrying them.

Today, Isaias is a happy child who loves reading, dancing and playing games, and because of MDSC, they say, they are hopeful about his bright future. "We thank MDSC so much for the constant support," Claudia says. "We appreciate what you have done and continue to do for us."

MDSC was there for the Argueta family, providing crucial support in the form of gift cards, supplies, and connection, including at Christmastime.

MDSC's nationally renowned Parents First Call remains a bedrock program for MDSC, providing new and expectant families with critical 24/7 support. Our team of trained parent mentors offers each new family accurate, up-to-date, balanced information, not to mention a truly special custom welcome package delivered right to their door.

In 2023, Parents First Call held more programming than ever to serve all our families: bi-monthly New Family Socials, New Mom (0-18 months) and Toddler Mom (1½ - 3½ years) gatherings, and Prenatal Support Group meetings as needed.

Our 4-7 and 8-12 year old playgroups, which had migrated online during Covid, came back fully in person, as we worked to provide more and more meaningful opportunities for families to connect in intimate, supportive environments.

Photo by Eddie Vargas Photography





new and expectant families received personal one-on-one support, information and guidance from Parents First Call in 2023

ADVOCATES IN MOTION

Fostering opportunities for self advocates to reach their full potential

The way Emily and Mark LaMarca of Ashburnham see it, the day their son Cole was born, they not only gained a son, they also got an additional extended family in the MDSC. “MDSC was there first to celebrate Cole,” Emily says. “They took joy in Cole’s victories alongside us and supported us through the challenges.”

One challenge happened post-Covid when Cole was excited about joining the Advocates in Motion Program but nervous about being back in person. With support from MDSC staff, Cole not only overcame that hurdle, he went on to rack up many more victories.

Cole wasn’t given a leadership position in name only; it was imperative that he feel totally comfortable taking the reins.

Soon after publishing his own *Kids Illustrated Cookbook*, MDSC gave him an opportunity to teach his ample cooking skills in real-time — inviting him to present a “Cooking with Cole!” workshop at MDSC’s 2023 Annual Virtual Conference.

Then, since last fall, Cole, along with his mom, actively co-led monthly cooking sessions as part of A.I.M. Brunch Bunches. Even then, MDSC made sure that Cole wasn’t just given a leadership position in name only; it was imperative that he feel totally comfortable taking the reins.

“While he mostly took a backseat at first,” says Teen & Adult Services Director Brooke Harvey, with encouragement “he now enthusiastically jumps in, going from group to group to offer help wherever needed.”

As Emily says, “The MDSC truly encapsulates what we hope Cole’s life to be filled with — kindness, compassion, determination and opportunity.”

In 2023, MDSC’s A.I.M. Teen & Young Adult Program provided in person, inclusive, interactive events each month for young people with Down syndrome and their peers, fostering social relationships among program participants while simultaneously providing exposure to fitness/healthy lifestyles, job and career skills–building, sports and the arts. Participants developed leadership and self–advocacy skills, formed meaningful relationships, and built self–confidence.





self advocates between 13 and 22 gained leadership skills, life skills, and made friends in our Advocates in Motion Program

SELF ADVOCATE EMPOWERMENT

Customizing programs and supports to achieve life goals

By all measures, Nykenge (Nikki) Blue led a full, rich life well before getting involved in MDSC's Teen & Adult programming: a loving family at home, a high school diploma in hand, a paid position as a greeter at her town's Teen Center, and hobbies including singing, dancing, cooking (favorite dish: chicken and rice), and traveling.

"This year I am reaching to be an independent young lady."

Still, last year, when Nikki did get involved in MDSC, it was immediately evident that she had big dreams for her future, and that, at 22 years old, now was the time to act. With that in mind, MDSC gave Nikki an opportunity to record a video testimonial for broadcast at MDSC's Virtual Annual Conference. Speaking to our REACH theme, Nikki declared, "This year I am reaching to be an independent young lady."

With that goal in mind, MDSC worked with Nikki and her family to enroll her in MDSC's Your Next Star Employment Academy, where it was believed she could stretch her wings. And stretch she did. "From the moment she walked in the door, she brought energy and enthusiasm into the group," said Tara Buffum, MDSC's Employment & Special Events Coordinator. Never one for being shy, Nikki quickly became a leader, asking and answering questions, volunteering, and encouraging peers to do the same. Even when unable to attend an Academy session, Nikki took it upon herself to complete the missed work at home, arriving the following session fully caught up.

For Nikki, the Academy gave her a chance to reflect on her job, which involved checking high school students' IDs four days a week. She didn't dislike it, she realized, but it was too easy, uninspiring. What she really wanted was something more social — an office setting or a restaurant, where she might interact regularly with co-workers or customers.

With a clearer vision of her future, Nikki worked with MDSC and her family to plan for the next big step. She became the MDSC's 11th Allen Crocker Intern, a role in which she could learn new skills, have more job responsibilities, practice her public speaking skills, and explore new career opportunities. She'll be completing the MDSC internship soon and has already secured a brand new job with an MDSC Your Next Star employer.

"She has really come into her own with the confidence she shows in new situations, always willing to step outside of her comfort zone and trust the group she is with to support her," Tara says. "Nikki has shown amazing progress over the course of the year, and we're so excited to see her achieve her career goals!"

In 2023, four self advocates like Nikki served as Allen Crocker Interns, earning a salary while working in the MDSC office on a project of their choosing. Meanwhile, our Self Advocate Advisory Council (S.A.A.C.) gave its 16 members opportunities to connect and lead while advising the MDSC Management Team on issues of importance to self advocates. The S.A.A.C. met monthly to plan events for peers and brainstorm how to increase self advocate engagement in MDSC.

In addition, S.A.A.C. members took on leadership roles at the Educators Forum and Virtual Annual Conference, organized a team for the Buddy Walk, conducted medical outreach and presented at the Berkshire Family & Individual Resources (BFAIR) annual meeting.





adults with Down syndrome participated in S.A.A.C. leadership activities or networking and socializing events organized by self advocates for self advocates

EDUCATION

Powerfully combining expert guidance
with priceless community building

Erin and Jeremy Singer know well that the value of MDSC programs isn't just the expert guidance, it's also the community building that accompanies it.

"The fact that [Education Director] Carlyn [Foreman] was a special ed teacher was very comforting. She was so supportive in multiple ways."

Such was the case in those early days when the couple had their son Gideon in 2012 (along with his twin Ezra) and soon after began attending New Family Socials at the MDSC office. Which was the more crucial component, Erin pondered — the guidance of MDSC's Family Support staff or the fact that they instantly made lifelong friends? It didn't matter, they were both game changers!

In 2022, when Erin signed herself and Gidi up for the inaugural year of MDSC's Learning Program Boston, she wasn't surprised to find the same magical duality at work. "I loved it. The teachers were really good," she said about the program. But equally critical, she noted, was the time they built in for all the participants to bounce ideas off one another. "The way they would teach, and then we would share our experiences was amazing. We all happened to have boys around the same age, but lived in different towns, so it was great to hear what different towns offer."

The icing on the cake, she recalled, was the final session, a "Curriculum Day" which happened to be in the same room where they first attended New Family Socials. Beyond the nostalgia, she and Gidi were thrilled to finally meet their new friends face-to-face.

Given the Singers' appreciation for social opportunities, the Covid pandemic posed a particular challenge. "Both of my boys had a hard time with the isolation," Erin recalled, but even when it was optional to return to school, the risk to Gidi's immune system was just too scary. Fortunately, MDSC was there with critical support, she recalled, not only with timely educational webinars they could watch anywhere, anytime, but also professional advice, particularly from MDSC Education Director Carlyn Foreman. "The fact that Carlyn was a special ed teacher was very comforting. The IEP stuff is intimidating, so being able to share it with her and bounce ideas off her helped me so much," Erin said. "She was so supportive in multiple ways."

In 2023, we hosted the second year of MDSC's Learning Program Boston (LPB), a parent-focused educational intervention program for sharing instructional strategies, resources and activities to improve academic outcomes for students with Down syndrome.

After a four-year hiatus, MDSC's Educators Forum was back in person at the College of the Holy Cross, where we hosted about 250 special educators, administrators, paraprofessionals, support professionals, and parents from more than 102 school districts.

MDSC's Education Resource Parent Volunteer Program provided personal support to MDSC families seeking resources and guidance related to their child's education. And thousands of families took advantage of MDSC's education-related workshops, webpages, and medical and educational webinars.



ELLY BEAN BOATS

BY GIPEONT SINGER



	TRIAL 1	TRIAL 2	TRIAL 3	AVERAGE
CUP	53	60	87	66.67
TI/FOIL	76	67	69	70.67
STYROFOAM	74	75	82	77



Results

TRIAL #1	TI/FOIL	76
TRIAL #2	STYROFOAM	75
TRIAL #3	CUP	87
AVERAGE	STYROFOAM	77

Each trial had a different amount of beads on top of the white cup for displacement.

Reasons this might have happened:

- A combination of trial & substance used... it was impossible to get them exactly the same each time.
- A different thickness of substance... they weren't exactly the same.
- A count of beads per trial was not used.
- A different amount of substance was used.
- A different amount of substance was used.

Interesting things we noticed:

The boat floated over 20 seconds and started rolling the beads during the trial of water until it had enough beads to sink to the bottom of the bucket when it got too heavy instead of floating.

It felt though we started with that to stability and gently pulling the boat into the center of the water. How all moved around the water in different directions with different speeds.

During the trial a new trial was used in the experiment and made something.

Students got really into water.

Students got really into water.

Students got really into water.



general and special educators, paraprofessionals, administrators, specialists and parents learned best practices in educating students with Down syndrome through MDSC webinars, workshops, education manual and two major conferences

PUBLIC AWARENESS

No better way to make a difference

Suzi and Mike Thomas have never forgotten the day 13 years ago when their beautiful second child, Ethan, was born at Winchester Hospital. The news that their baby had Down syndrome came as a great surprise.

When he was just five months old, the Thomases attended their very first Buddy Walk. There, on the grounds of the Wakefield Common, it was like the skies had opened. First, they realized just how good it felt to share all their concerns about Ethan's education, his health, and his future. Then, by the end of the event — having been surrounded all day by unique, extraordinary people with Down syndrome of all ages — they came to see just how bright Ethan's future actually was.

"With our MDSC community in our corner, we knew that Ethan and our family would be just fine," they said.

Immediately, the Thomases started attending other MDSC events — New Family Socials, the Annual Conference, and D.A.D.S. family gatherings. Ethan's kindergarten teacher signed up for the MDSC Educators Forum.

"With our MDSC community in our corner, we knew that Ethan and our family would be just fine."

And while each event was invaluable in its own way, every fall, when the second Sunday of October rolled around, they realized that absolutely nothing compared to the Buddy Walk. They also realized that the Buddy Walk was the perfect vehicle for their family to make a difference by bringing together friends and family for their Ethan's Entourage team. "There's just no better way to celebrate Down Syndrome Awareness Month with our whole community," they said.

By 2023, Suzi and Mike didn't just serve on the Buddy Walk Planning Committee, they stepped into the role of Buddy Walk chairs, and their whole family got into the act, finding fun, creative ways to raise awareness in their hometown leading up to the walk. "Ethan is so outgoing and happy that we often refer to him as 'the mayor,'" they said. Their daughter, Briana, got her high school girls soccer team to volunteer at the walk.

In 2024, Suzi and Mike are once again chairing the Buddy Walk Committee. Why do they work so hard to support the MDSC community? It's simple they say: With Ethan just beginning his teenage years, he is constantly growing and changing, and so are his goals and dreams. "We are grateful to know that MDSC will be there for us every step of the way!"

Helping the public understand the value of our loved ones with Down syndrome is critical to the MDSC mission. We do this by leveraging the power of social and mass media to extend the voice of our community, while making it easy for our members to conduct their own outreach efforts.

The MDSC Buddy Walk remains our flagship public awareness event. In 2023, we offered Buddy Walk teams two ways to walk — in person in Wakefield or in their own communities. Along with other annual events — Boston Marathon, Falmouth Road Race, Bruins Alumni Game — we continue to open eyes in Massachusetts and beyond.





3,675

families, self advocates and friends came together at our Buddy Walks and other awareness and fundraising events to celebrate the lives of people with Down syndrome

PUBLIC POLICY

Advancing legislation and policies that help families in critical ways

In 2014, Mandee and Jeremy Spittle were proud to welcome two beautiful twin girls, Emma Grace, who had Down syndrome, and Sophia Joy, into their lives. From the beginning — both girls spent their first four months together in the NICU — the Spittles were grateful for the support of the MDSC CARES Program and the MDSC community.

“Thanks to the state and national policy work of MDSC, the future for our family and thousands of others is bright.”

And in the years that followed, throughout dozens of hospitalizations (Emma had 14 in a seven-month period), near total isolation (for fear of contracting Covid, which Emma still caught five times), and pure exhaustion, there was just one constant: “even in our most difficult days, MDSC was there for us,” they said, “every step of the way and in real and meaningful ways,” with phone calls, gifts, and countless resources and connections.

With Jeremy’s dedicated career in policy at the State House, it didn’t take long for the Spittles to grasp just how critical MDSC’s leadership in the advocacy realm was for their family. When the Covid vaccine rolled out, they saw MDSC lobby for people with Down syndrome to be a top priority for healthcare and other critical services. When MDSC helped pass the Real Lives Bill and ABLE Act, they knew that their family’s future financial stability and freedom were vastly improved.

Seeing an opportunity to give back and pay it forward to an organization that had been a lifeline, Jeremy volunteered to serve on MDSC’s Government Affairs Committee. His partnership proved critical. In 2022, while he was working as a legislative director, MDSC worked with Jeremy and other statehouse leadership to shepherd the landmark Higher Education Bill through the state legislature. With the Spittle family and MDSC working hand in hand, the groundbreaking law is now helping open the doors of higher education in Massachusetts to countless individuals with intellectual disabilities across the state.

“Thanks to the state and national policy work of MDSC, the future for our family and thousands of others is bright,” they said.

Over the past dozen years, MDSC has established itself as a powerful state and federal disability advocate. Our work has led to the passage of several landmark laws — the Organ Transplant Bill, Real Lives Bill, National Criminal Background Check Bill and Down Syndrome Information Act, and on the national level, the ABLE Act. Most recently, former Governor Baker signed MDSC’s priority Higher Education Bill into law in 2022.

Today, MDSC’s state-of-the-art Legislative Action Center makes it easy for constituents to reach out to their lawmakers on critical issues, like our top federal priority of ending the outdated practice of paying people with disabilities subminimum wages, and statewide, the Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA) Bill, which will require insurance to cover a proven, at-home therapeutic intervention for our loved ones.





advocates connected with their legislators by responding to MDSC's Legislative Action Center or attending an MDSC advocacy event

CENTERS OF EXCELLENCE

National Parents First Call Center expands to include breastfeeding support

In May 2023, MDSC made the exciting announcement that the organization Julia's Way would be immediately integrated into MDSC's National Parents First Call Center, one of MDSC's four Centers of Excellence. Since its founding in 2016 — by MDSC mom Ella Cullen, RN, — Julia's Way has used education, advocacy and awareness to inspire parents, medical professionals, and the general public about the realities and benefits of breastfeeding babies with Down syndrome.

Now, operating under the auspices of MDSC, the wheels are set in motion to advance Julia's Way's critical mission on an even broader scale.

To that end, last fall, MDSC's Julia's Way hosted a fall webinar, Facilitating Breastfeeding in Babies with Down Syndrome, designed just for medical professionals, including lactation consultants, nurses, speech language pathologists, occupational therapists, and physicians.

Around the same time, Julia's Way, having won a generous grant from the Friends of La Leche League (LLL), was featured in the October issue of LLL Today, a new online publication by LLL International. As part of the grant, Julia's Way offered a webinar just for LLL leaders. Eighty-five leaders representing at least 13 countries registered to learn all about the importance of supporting new and expectant mothers of babies with Down syndrome as they navigate their breastfeeding and/or pumping journey.

The reviews were unanimously positive, with leaders commenting that the case studies "helped pull together all the information," for much needed resources to share with parents. They also committed to "make sure to send parents to Julia's Way for peer support."

Under MDSC, Julia's Way is continuing to connect directly with its key audience of breastfeeding, pumping, and expectant mothers of babies with Down syndrome through a virtual support group. These critical monthly meetings, hosted free of charge by Julia's Way's certified lactation consultants, offer moms a priceless opportunity to share about their journey, meet other moms like them, and ask questions in a safe, supportive environment.

One mom, Marisa, eminently grateful for the virtual support she received, put it like this: "Where there's a will, there's a Julia's Way!"

Operating under the auspices of MDSC, the wheels were set in motion to advance Julia's Way's critical mission on an even broader scale.

Each of MDSC's four Centers of Excellence shines a spotlight on a key programmatic area in which our expertise is unique, highly-regarded and national in scope.

The Legislative Action Center provides information on MDSC's state and national policy priorities and gives users a streamlined way to take action. The National Parents First Call Center serves new and expectant parents, medical providers, Down syndrome organization leaders and parent volunteers as it relates to diagnosis and early life. The Center on Inclusive Education provides a wealth of tools, training, and adapted curricular materials, grounded in best practices for teaching students with ID/DD. The Your Next Star Employment Center helps prepare qualified candidates with Down syndrome for the workforce.





participated in and benefited from the
MDSC's Centers of Excellence and Resource Library

EMPLOYMENT

Providing essential career-building services so workers can get back to work

Launched in 2015, the Your Next Star Employment initiative was conceived as a public awareness campaign. The goal was to outreach to employers, helping them understand the value of hiring people with Down syndrome and providing guidance in setting up a hiring program.

Times have changed and so has Your Next Star (YNS), now known as the Philip Donahue Your Next Star Employment Center. When Covid hit in March 2020, people with Down syndrome, including workers, were immediately and disproportionately affected: those who were gainfully employed either lost their jobs or had to leave their positions due to health concerns. The unemployment rate for people with disabilities skyrocketed, and YNS was forced to largely go on hiatus.

But in 2023, an expanded YNS program rebounded with force at a critical time — when the economy and larger society were reopening, but people with disabilities were still being left behind. MDSC’s Your Next Star Academies stepped in to fill the gap, providing essential career-building and employment placement services that would allow our loved ones with Down syndrome and other disabilities to reenter the workforce.

For the first time ever, YNS held an innovative Entrepreneurship Academy, providing five self advocate entrepreneurs, in a range of fields, tips and tools for expanding their businesses and achieving their dream. In other firsts, MDSC held a Career Exploration Academy for 17–21 year olds, timed to coincide with April school vacation week; and our flagship academy, for students and adults 18–plus, transitioned to a semester-long program, allowing for a deeper dive into critical topics.

In addition to ongoing partnerships with PwC Boston, Colletley’s Cookies and RSM US LLP, the Academy established exciting new partnerships with Revere Hotel and our friends at Omar’s World of Comics. Omar’s not only hosted an Academy at their Lexington store; they provided a 5-month paid internship in their new kitchen for a YNS graduate, Faith, and a peer.

According to Faith’s mom, Roxanne, the internship taught her valuable skills, built her confidence and, ultimately, “was by far the most important work experience of my daughter’s life.”

“Faith’s internship at Omar’s was by far the most important work experience of my daughter’s life.”

With a flexible curriculum covering everything from time management and problem-solving to financial literacy and creative thinking, MDSC’s Your Next Star Academies have evolved into three distinct branches: the standard Employment Academy (for 18+ year olds to boost confidence and sharpen employment-seeking and interpersonal skills), the Entrepreneurship Academy (equipping self advocate entrepreneurs with skills and resources to help them launch and sustain a successful enterprise), and a Career Readiness Academy (offering hands-on soft skills and employment skills training for students 17–21 to complement transition programming).

At the same time, MDSC has expanded our YNS employer outreach and career services, building a critical employee-employer pipeline, all the while helping improve the employment landscape for individuals with Down syndrome and other disabilities throughout Massachusetts.



Your Next Star Entrepreneurship Academy




6,501

employers, human resource professionals,
partners and others reached through presentations
of the Your Next Star Employment Center

MDSC LEADERSHIP

MDSC Board of Directors

Board Officers:

Chair: Stacy Rachelle Lindborg, Ph.D.

Vice Chair: Jonathan Tabasky, Esq.

Board Members at Large:

Susan Lawson Cann

Judson DeCew, Ph.D.

Adam Delmolino

Richard Fleming, Ph.D.

Clare Gillan

Dave Granfors

Taiese Bingham-Hickman, Ph.D.

Roxanne Hoke Chandler

Drew Keller

Bob Mills

Jim Molla

Stephanie Santoro, M.D.

Margaret Van Gelder

Francisco Zamudio

MDSC Management Team

Maureen Gallagher
Executive Director

Ashley DeNoble
Program Specialist

Joshua Komyerov
Communications & Operations Director

Reaghan Bik
Development Director

Lauren Foley
Community Engagement
& Research Coordinator

Tatiana Salinas
Bilingual (Spanish) Family Support Specialist

Tara Buffum
Employment & Special Events
Coordinator

Carlyn Foreman
Education Director

Jacquie Sherman
Executive Assistant / Project Manager

Elaine Crowley
Administrative Director

Laura Green
Program Specialist

Kristen Tenglin
Centers of Excellence Director

Sarah Cullen
Family Support Director

Brooke Harvey
Teen & Adult Services Director

MDSC Honorary Board of Directors

Mrs. Beverly Beckham and Mr. Bruce Beckham

Mrs. Louise Borke and Mr. Gerald Brecher

Mr. Sean Buckley and Mrs. Sandra Buckley

Mr. Francis Callaghan and Mrs. Gillian Callaghan

Mr. Edward DeNoble and Mrs. Allyson DeNoble

Mrs. Danielle and Mr. Anthony DeCotis

Mr. Brian Diercksen and Mrs. Suzanne Diercksen

Mrs. Nancy Donahue

Mr. David Falcone and Mrs. Lauren Beckham Falcone

Mr. Oliver Foley and Mrs. Kinnon Foley

Mr. Charles Gadbois and Mrs. Karen Gadbois

Mr. Michael Gunter

Mr. Roger Kafker and Mrs. Dawn Kafker

Mr. David Kelleher and Mrs. Liza Kelleher

Ms. Ann Kelly

Ms. Katherine Craven and Dr. James Kryzanski

Mr. Neal Lyons and Mrs. Kathy Lyons

Mr. Andrew Majewski and Mrs. Lisa Majewski

Dr. Sohail Masood and Mrs. Mona Masood

Mr. Robert Mills and Mrs. Laurie Mills

Mr. Stephen and Mrs. Donna Narey

Mr. James Padula and Mrs. Jessica Padula

Mr. John Campbell and Ms. Susanna Peyton

Mr. William Regan and Mrs. Peg Regan

Mr. John Reichenbach and Mrs. Lynn Reichenbach

Mr. Tom Sannicandro

Mr. James Shay and Mrs. Monica Shay

Dr. Brian Skotko and Ms. Carrie Liken

Dr. Mitchell Sokoloff and Gwen Sokoloff

State Senate President Karen E. Spilka

Mr. Jonathan Tabasky and Mrs. Kerri Tabasky

Mr. Andrew Tapley and Mrs. Susie Tapley

Mrs. Barbara Vanderwilden

Mr. John Vanderwilden

Mr. Christopher Vincze and Mrs. Janet Vincze

Mr. James Whalen and Mrs. Diane Conley



20 Burlington Mall Road
Suite 261
Burlington, MA 01803
www.mdsc.org
781-221-0024

