MASSACHUSETTS DOWN SYNDROME CONGRESS

ON MY WAY:
Charting New Paths Forward Together



2025 ANNUAL REPORT

MESSAGE FROM OUR LEADERSHIP

On Our Way: Charting New Paths Forward Together



Maureen Gallagher, M.S.



Jonathan F. Tabasky, Esq.

For more than four decades, MDSC has been ON OUR WAY — always innovating, always improving, and always striving to make a positive difference in the lives of people with Down syndrome and their families.

On My Way was more than MDSC's theme last year. It became the truest way to describe what we witnessed, again and again, in our community. As one of our Buddy Walk chairs put it beautifully: "On Your Way means something different and unique for each family." We saw that in action everywhere — a child taking her first steps at a New Family Social, a teenager finding his voice at the Educators Forum, a longtime advocate finally seeing a bill she fought for become law, and self advocates standing on our stages, in their own words, declaring exactly where they were headed next.

We are ON OUR WAY to ensuring that our loved ones have access to critical services. Governor Healey signed MDSC's ABA Therapy Bill into law — a landmark victory more than a decade in the making. Now, private insurers and MassHealth are required to cover the cost of in-home Applied Behavioral Analysis therapy for individuals with Down syndrome, correcting a critical gap that previously mandated ABA coverage only for those in our community also diagnosed with autism.

We are ON OUR WAY in addressing lifespan needs, launching our fifth Center of Excellence: the Center on Down Syndrome and Aging, a landmark new resource equipping families with expert guidance as our loved ones with Down syndrome live longer, fuller lives than ever before. Funded through the Lighting the Way, Lifespan Fund with support from the Massachusetts Department of Developmental Services, this new Center reflects our deepening commitment to supporting aging adults with Down syndrome and their families. We unveiled the Center at Brighter Futures: A National Conference on Adults with Down Syndrome and Aging, co-hosted with NDSS, bringing together more than 500 attendees from 24 states and 2 countries.

Of course, day in and day out, our community continues to be ON ITS WAY through the foundational programs that make MDSC's mission possible. Our signature Parents First Call Program continues to serve as a lifeline for families, with trained parent mentors available 24/7. Our Buddy Walk & Family

Festival, Boston Marathon, and Boston Bruins partnership programs celebrated our community while raising critical awareness.

Through Advocates in Motion and the Self Advocate Advisory Council, we empowered teens and adults with Down syndrome to develop leadership skills and advocate for themselves — including self advocates who stood before hundreds at our Annual Conference and Buddy Walk to share, in their own words, exactly how far they've come. And through MDSC Cares, we provided essential support to families navigating extended hospital stays and complex medical care, ensuring no family faces these challenges alone.

MDSC's Centers of Excellence remain a cornerstone of our work, each a national hub connecting members near and far to our expertise. Our Legislative Action Center mobilizes advocates around the policy priorities that improve lives; our National Parents First Call Center serves expectant parents, providers, and organization leaders across the country; our Center on Inclusive Education equips parents and educators with best practices for the classroom; and our Philip Donahue Your Next Star Employment Center prepares candidates for the workforce while partnering with employers to build inclusive hiring programs. With the addition of our newest Center on Down Syndrome and Aging, these five Centers now ensure that families can find expert support and guidance at every stage of life.

Together, we have achieved so much, but there is still important work ahead. Today, while we celebrate these achievements, we recognize that our journey continues. With significant changes being proposed in federal disability policy, MDSC is working closely with our local and national partners to protect critical funding for Medicaid, education, health care, research, and community-based services essential to our loved ones. With our collective voices and by sharing our personal stories with legislators, we help them understand what's at stake when they make funding and policy decisions.

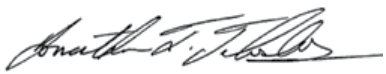
More than ever, we need your support to continue on this way — toward better schools, better jobs, better healthcare, and a more inclusive world for our loved ones with Down syndrome. Whether you served in a leadership role, contributed to one of our events, hosted a community fundraiser, or funded a grant to make our work possible, we are profoundly grateful you are on this journey with us.

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 and beyond.

As we have proven time and again: whether individually or collectively, we are all, together, ON OUR WAY to a brighter future for our loved ones with Down syndrome.



Maureen Gallagher, M.S.
Executive Director, MDSC



Jonathan F. Tabasky, Esq.
Board Chair, MDSC

ABOUT THE MDSC

For more than 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 over 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 five 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

MDSC will be sought after locally, nationally and internationally for its forward-thinking approaches, collaborative partnerships, and proven excellence in advancing opportunities for individuals with Down syndrome to reach their full potential across their lifespan.




BUDDYWALK





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 advocate for improved systemic change, policy and sustainable funding sources to support advances in community inclusion, higher education, employment, housing and benefit programs for people with Down syndrome.
- To foster an environment of belonging and increase access to programs and services for diverse populations within the Down syndrome community.
- To continue to ensure that expectant and new families, in Massachusetts and beyond, receive accurate and up-to-date information and desired supports.
- 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 that all individuals with Down syndrome have high quality education, which includes knowing options related to transition planning and life-long learning.
- To enable networking, social/friendship opportunities and education to support all people with Down syndrome and their parents, grandparents, siblings, and caregivers.
- To advocate for all individuals with Down syndrome to have access to high quality medical, dental and behavioral services and research opportunities, leading to lifelong health and well-being.
- To empower all people with Down syndrome to have the opportunity to become self advocates.
- 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 statewide and nationwide.


BRIGHTER FUTURES
mdsc
ndss







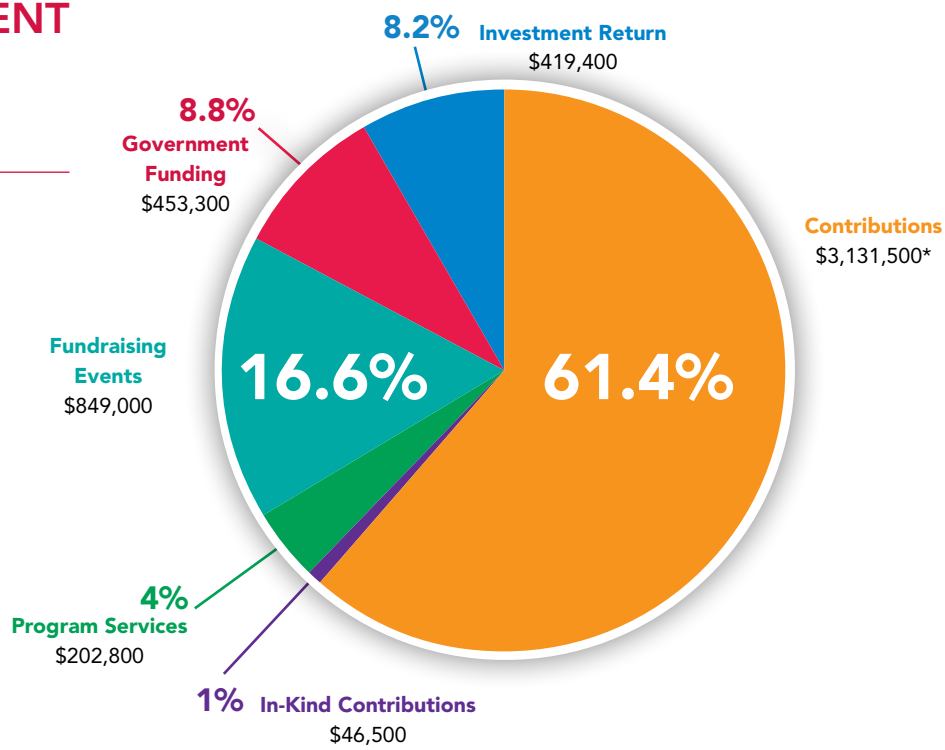
2025 FINANCIAL STATEMENT

Connecting Revenue with Expenses

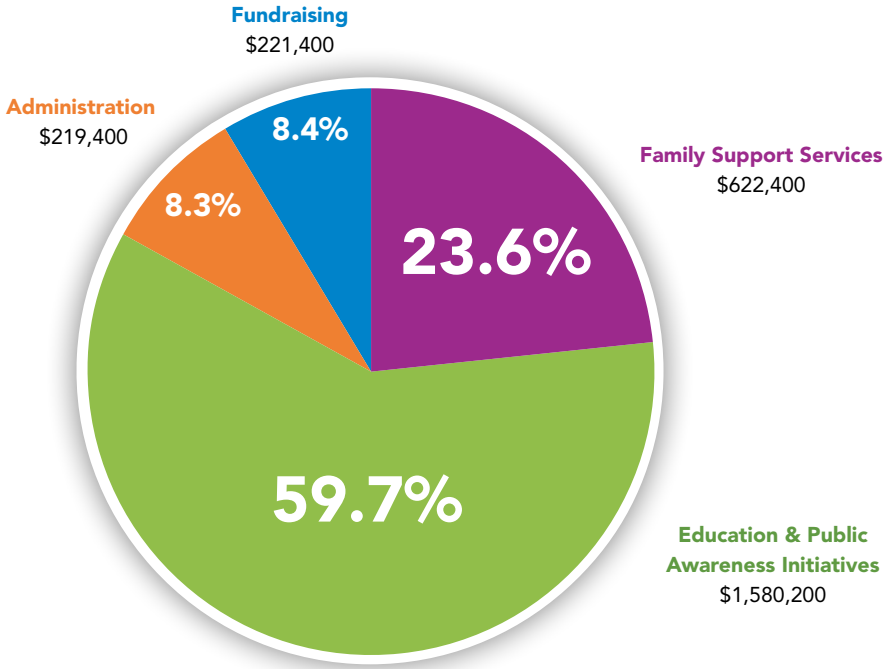
For Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 2025

REVENUE

Total Revenue $5,102,500



*Includes $2,714,200 with donor restrictions



EXPENSES

Total Expenses: $2,643,400

For more detailed financial information, please contact us at mdsc@mdsc.org.


DDYWAL
down syndrome society


2025 ON MY WAY


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SQUAD
SQUAD
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MDSC 2025 ON MY WAY
BUDDYWALK
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PARENTS FIRST CALL

Building a community where everyone belongs

When Levi was born on May 31, 2025, his Down syndrome diagnosis came as a complete surprise to his parents, Robyn Selwitz and Josh Kohler. “It wasn’t even a thought in my head,” Robyn says. In the days that followed, Robyn started reaching out to friends until someone suggested MDSC. She filled out the new-parent intake form and heard back right away from Katie Chiarenza, MDSC’s Family Support Coordinator, who found their First Call match.

While Levi was still in the NICU, a package arrived on their porch, including a handmade blanket and hat, “Downright Adorable” onesie, books and other helpful resources. “I said to Robyn, ‘I hope you’re ready for something that is going to be great but is definitely going to make us cry,’” Josh recalls.

The connection Katie arranged, with a family in their hometown, became a lifeline. “We were so alone and confused,” Robyn says. “We didn’t know anyone with Down syndrome. We knew nothing.” Hearing other MDSC parents talk about still living full lives pushed back her fear. “They helped us visualize what our lives could be,” she says. “They inspired hope.”

> I want Levi to feel empowered to be anyone he wants. MDSC helps us see that kids like Levi have beautiful, bright futures ahead.

Since then, the Kohlers have built a life inside the MDSC community — New Family Socials, music classes and virtual support groups. Last year, though Levi was just five months old, they signed up for the Buddy Walk, launching Levi’s Squad. Once they shared Levi’s story, the response was immediate and support “started pouring in,” Josh says.

For Josh, what MDSC offers goes beyond any single program. “There’s a real feeling of being invited into a community,” he says. Robyn agrees: Even if they can’t make events, knowing they’re happening is reassuring.

Looking ahead, Robyn explains: “I want Levi to feel empowered to do anything and be anyone he wants to be. Organizations like MDSC help us see that kids like Levi have beautiful, bright futures ahead.” Josh adds that he hopes Levi grows up fitting into multiple communities. “MDSC will be a part of that,” he says, “both by the community it creates and the messages of acceptance it puts into the world.”

Parents First Call remains MDSC’s cornerstone program, providing 24/7 support to new and expectant families through trained parent mentors. Every family connects with a mentor within 24 hours of reaching out and receives a personalized welcome package. Offerings include New Family Socials, New Mom and Toddler Mom gatherings, Julia’s Way Breastfeeding Support, a New Dads Group, Prenatal Support meetings, and Baby Sign Language workshops in English and Spanish.

Our First Call Replication program has now trained 35 Down syndrome organizations across 21 states, and shared our model internationally with groups in Brazil, Dubai, and Japan. Parents First Call has also deepened its DEI commitment: our Spanish-speaking WhatsApp community now includes more than 80 members, we trained 9 First Call parents from diverse backgrounds this year, and our new Haitian Creole support group is helping more families feel welcome from day one.





Photo by Geof Simons

153 new and expectant families received personal one-on-one support, information and guidance from our First Call Program in 2025

ADVOCATES IN MOTION

Giving Matt room to dream

When Heidi and Lane Seiger's son Matt was born in 2007, they learned about MDSC, though it wasn't until the following year, at MDSC's 25th Annual Conference, that the Seigers became actively involved. "It was reassuring to be around people who were facing the same things we were going through," says Heidi, who has only missed one MDSC conference since.

Still, Matt's parents were concerned his behavioral challenges might make it difficult for him to join Advocates in Motion, MDSC's teen and young adult program. That changed at Matt's first Annual Conference, where he joined the Self Advocate Track. Watching older kids sitting together, clearly at ease, Matt turned to his parents and said, "I want to be like them." Heidi and Lane reached out to MDSC's Program and Services Director Brooke Kulik, and Matt's self advocate journey began.

AIM is broadening Matt's tolerance to just be open. It's an incredibly important avenue for him.

At first, Matt didn't speak much and kept to himself. But before long, he made a connection with MDSC's own Dan McLean, who worked as a DJ at many of AIM's dances and special events. The two developed a special bond, and MDSC responded by fostering an apprenticeship between them. Now, Matt is learning to spin records himself, working hand-in-hand with Dan to provide entertainment at AIM events.

Now 18, Matt has a full day-to-day schedule that includes basketball, school and therapies, leaving little time for unstructured activities, his parents say, which is exactly why AIM matters so much. Today, Matt has become completely comfortable at AIM meetups, taking part in arts and crafts and games when not DJ'ing, and treasuring his time with friends without his parents in the room. "He wants freedom," Heidi notes.

In addition, Heidi adds, AIM has helped Matt to become more willing to try things he might otherwise avoid, "broadening Matt's tolerance to just be open." As an experiential learner who needs repetition before new skills stick, AIM gives him a safe place to practice the social skills he'll rely on as he works toward his own dreams: more independence, roommates, maybe even a girlfriend one day. "The AIM program is an incredibly important avenue," Heidi says.

MDSC's Advocates in Motion program serves teens ages 13 to 22 through meetups and socials held across Massachusetts, giving self advocates a place to build friendships, try new activities, and grow more independent. Beyond regular meetups, MDSC hosted family events throughout the year, including ice skating, a Weir River Farm Sunset Picnic, and a Western Massachusetts Family Picnic.

Self advocates took center stage at our 41st Annual Conference in March 2025. In the Self Advocate Track, participants made music, played theater games, created personal collages, and finished with a dance party led by DJ Dan. Our Self Advocate Advisory Council, for adults 20 and older, also planned quarterly SAAC Socials, including Karaoke Night, Frosty Festivities, and Bowling Night. Team AIM and Team SAAC, led by captains Alex Robichaud and Nikki Blue, joined the Buddy Walk.





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

MDSC CARES

Present, even in the hardest hours

Even before Leila was born, Isabel Leon and her husband, Oliver Bautista, knew she would arrive with an extra chromosome. A behavior analyst who believes in neurodiversity, Isabel never felt the shock some parents describe. “Society was the problem, not the Down syndrome,” she said. What she wasn’t prepared for was Leila’s heart.

> MDSC was always there for us, and I’m so grateful they have a program that helps families like ours.

Leila was born with a heart condition and spent her first 40 days in the NICU at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center. Isabel described the NICU as a positive experience in its own way: she watched her daughter grow, learn to take a bottle, and start breathing on her own, and nurses taught her and Oliver to care for Leila, skills new parents usually learn alone.

In mid-March, Leila was moved by ambulance to the Cardiovascular ICU at Boston Children’s Hospital for her first heart procedure, and Isabel essentially lived at the hospital from then on. Life there was highly medical and closely monitored, “a different world,” as she put it, but Isabel found ways to make it feel like home: changing Leila’s diapers, bathing her, and brushing her beautiful hair. Oliver visited some evenings and took over on weekends.

MDSC was fortunate to be able to support the family along the way. That support took many forms: phone calls, financial assistance, and small gestures that mattered, like a care package that included a gift card for the hospital coffee shop and a note checking on Leila’s surgery schedule. “It was so nice, a message from the outside world,” Isabel said. “MDSC really gets it.”

Leila was the family’s north star through it all. She was a happy baby who loved people, smiling early and often, expressive, and fond of making eye contact. She won over her family, her friends, and her medical team, who all treasured every day with her and loved getting to know her personality.

“MDSC was always there for us, and I’m so grateful they have a program that helps families like ours,” Isabel said.

In loving memory of Leila, who passed away peacefully in her parents’ arms on August 21, 2026.

When a child with Down syndrome faces an extended hospital stay or ongoing complex medical care, families often find themselves navigating overwhelming challenges alone. MDSC Cares provides comprehensive support during these critical times, recognizing that medical complexities can create both practical and emotional burdens.

MDSC Cares delivers curated care packages with comfort items, practical necessities, and resources for children and parents, as well as ongoing connection through regular check-ins, resource coordination, and guidance through complex healthcare systems.

Families appreciate having advocates who understand their unique challenges and can connect them with other families facing similar circumstances. Whether provided prenatally, during the early years or adulthood, MDSC Cares is there during life’s most uncertain moments.





160 families received financial assistance and direct support from the MDSC Cares Program

EDUCATION

Enabling parents and self advocates to find their voices

Micaiah Elow, 16, has grown up inside the MDSC community. For his mother, Melissa, that's meant knowing she can call for anything — a question about school, a resource she didn't know existed, or just someone who understands. "I have never called MDSC and not gotten the answers and response I needed," she says. "Were it not for MDSC, our community would be a lot smaller."

I have never called MDSC and not gotten the answers, resources, and response I needed.

That support has helped the family through harder chapters too, including bullying Micaiah experienced growing up. Being part of MDSC's community gave them space to talk about it openly and get advice from people living it too, long before Micaiah was ready to talk about it himself.

MDSC's Education programs, which the Elows have actively engaged in, have been central to helping them develop the skills and knowledge to advocate for themselves and others. The Elows have advocated fiercely for MDSC's causes over the years, including the Higher Education Bill, which opened doors for individuals with Down syndrome and other disabilities to attend state colleges. Micaiah and Melissa were on hand when then-Governor Charlie Baker signed the bill into law.

Along the way, Micaiah has been learning to use his own voice — first at home, in small ways, like learning to say "I don't like that" when something isn't right. But it was at MDSC's Educators Forum that he took his biggest step yet: standing before a room of teachers and administrators and talking, for the first time, about being bullied. "The Ed Forum was the first time he put it into words for himself," Melissa says.

Micaiah remembers feeling "half nervous and half excited." Ultimately, he says, "I wanted them to know that I can speak up for kids with disabilities," Micaiah says. Of everything he's done with MDSC, the Ed Forum keynote remains his favorite. Micaiah has taken on other visible roles since developing his leadership skills and speaking up on behalf of himself and others. "It allows him to be himself," Melissa says. "Each time, getting up in front of an audience gives him more confidence."

"I honestly don't even know how to thank MDSC for all they've provided," she says. "The community is always there, and they always step up."

MDSC's Center on Inclusive Education provides families and educators with practical tools, training, and resources year-round, including our free Resource Library, with more than 600 resources, and the 2nd edition of our "Educator's Manual, Meaningful Inclusion for Students with Down Syndrome".

This year marked the fourth year of MDSC's Learning Program Boston (LPB), a parent-focused educational intervention program. Our Educators Forum, "The Power of Belonging: Building Stronger Schools Together," brought together more than 200 parents, caregivers, educators, and professionals at the College of the Holy Cross, featuring a keynote from author and consultant Dr. Paula Kluth.

Our 13-member Education Task Force and our trained Education Resource Parents continue to provide families and educators with personalized guidance throughout the year.





3,913

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

PUBLIC AWARENESS

Putting our community center stage

Every summer, MDSC brings "Down Syndrome Nation" to Red Sox Nation, filling the Fenway Park stands with families to celebrate and raise awareness. During pre-game ceremonies, MDSC partners with the Sox to honor members who have made valuable contributions to the Down syndrome community in Massachusetts.

In 2025, MDSC was honored with the PBATS Ability Transcends Challenges Award, recognizing the Your Next Star Employment Center's impact.

The goal is multi-faceted: raising awareness in the stands, where our crowd has grown to nearly 300 in recent years; on the field; on the scoreboard, announcing Down Syndrome Awareness Night at Fenway; and, occasionally, on the broadcast itself. Over the years, MDSC self advocates have thrown out first pitches, served as honorary bat kids, installed the bases, and even sung the national anthem to a standing ovation from 30,000 fans.

Increasingly, MDSC has worked closely with the Red Sox to stage more ambitious ceremonies with national reach. In August 2025, MDSC was honored with the Professional Baseball Athletic Trainers Society's Ability Transcends Challenges Award, recognizing the impact of MDSC's Your Next Star Employment Center. The award was presented on field at Fenway to three self advocate entrepreneurs who grew their own businesses through the program: painter Mike Avakian, photographer Tucker Collins, and artist Kayla Snover.

This June, in the 14th year of the MDSC-Red Sox partnership, the Red Sox honored three families on the field: Dr. Taiese Bingham-Hickman and her sons London and Lincoln, an MDSC board member and founder and CEO of the New England Equity Collective and longtime runner on MDSC's Falmouth Road Race and Boston Marathon teams; Jeremy and Mandee Spittle and daughters Emma and Sophia, longtime advocates behind MDSC's public policy efforts including the ABA Bill and the 2022 Higher Education Bill; and Ed and Ella Cullen and daughter Julia, whose family founded the Julia's Way breastfeeding support program, now part of MDSC's National Parents First Call Center.

MDSC also arranged for Texas Rangers first baseman Jake Burger — the only active MLB player with a child with Down syndrome — to spend time with MDSC families during batting practice, signing baseballs and connecting genuinely with a community that, thanks to nights like this one, is advancing MDSC's work well beyond Boston.

Helping the public understand the value of our loved ones with Down syndrome is critical to MDSC's mission, which we achieve through in-person events, traditional media as well as online.

The Buddy Walk & Family Festival remains our flagship public awareness event, offering teams two ways to walk — in Wakefield or in their own communities. Along with events like the Boston Marathon, Falmouth Road Race, and Bruins Alumni Game, we continue to open eyes across Massachusetts and beyond.

For nearly two decades, our Bruins partnership has raised well over $2 million through the Alumni Hockey Game and 50/50 Raffle, with the Boston Bruins Foundation also directly funding MDSC's Parents First Call program. This year, our newest partnership took shape as self advocates Micaiah Elow and Melissa Reilly were honored through the Celtics' Heroes Among Us program, a full-circle moment for an organization with Celtics ties dating back to its earliest days.





8,500 families, self advocates and friends joined MDSC's public awareness and advocacy efforts to celebrate the lives of people with Down syndrome

PUBLIC POLICY

Advocating for Critical Policies

Leah Campbell has spent her career advocating for people to get what they deserve: first as a licensed independent clinical social worker supporting students in schools, and then, the day her daughter Mia was born, as an advocate for her family and others with Down syndrome.

When Mia was young, Leah and her husband, Matt, began working with Dr. Brian Skotko, chair of MDSC's Medical and Scientific Advisory Council, to address behaviors Mia was experiencing. Applied Behavior Analysis, or ABA, was the recommended path, but getting insurance to cover in-home ABA for a child with a diagnosis of Down syndrome meant going up against a system built to say no.

What followed was more than a year of advocacy: insurance calls, clinical jargon, a process that was anything but straightforward. "Nothing was linear," she says. The Campbells became one of the few families in the state to secure health insurance coverage for in-home ABA therapy for a child with Down syndrome.

We couldn't have done the journey without MDSC. And we are forever grateful.

Leah's fight wasn't unique. MDSC had learned families across the state were hitting the same wall. Children were being denied coverage for critical, at-home ABA simply because they lacked an additional autism diagnosis. In 2019, MDSC filed legislation to close that gap, and invited Leah to testify before the Legislature. The work continued through Covid, moving online. "I loved how much MDSC continued to push, even during the most wild times in history," she says. Matt was her rock throughout, making room for the calls and meetings it all required.

For Leah, the "why" was always Mia. ABA gave her daughter a framework to navigate her world safely, built confidence that shaped "everything in her world, and our family's world," and even let Leah's own parents, in their 70s, learn to safely walk Mia from school to the car.

Today, Mia, 12 and heading into sixth grade, no longer needs the intensive support she once did, just occasional check-ins. She's funny, opinionated, and deeply attuned to others.

"It's not about Mia finding success," Leah says. "It's about the larger community not having to fight for it." MDSC, she adds, was there from the moment she learned of Mia's diagnosis and has stayed every step since.

"We couldn't have done the journey without MDSC," she says. "And we are forever grateful."

MDSC's track record as one of the nation's most effective Down syndrome advocacy organizations continued this year, with the State Legislature passing MDSC's ABA Therapy Bill, signed into law in January 2025 and now in effect, requiring insurance coverage for in-home ABA therapy for individuals with Down syndrome.

MDSC currently tracks 26 bills on its legislative platform, including a priority focus on legislation to modernize incentives for the direct care workforce, addressing a critical shortage affecting families statewide. Through our Legislative Action Center, we launched nine Action Alert campaigns this year, generating hundreds of messages to legislators on critical disability rights issues.

In these uncertain times, with significant cuts proposed at the federal level, MDSC has joined coalitions of statewide and national partners to protect the critical services our community relies on.





635

MDSC advocates connected with their legislators through MDSC's Legislative Action Center or by joining an MDSC advocacy event

DOWN SYNDROME & AGING

Providing support for our community across the entire lifespan

For years, John Anton was known across Massachusetts and beyond as a tireless self advocate, often speaking on behalf of the entire Down syndrome community while testifying before Congress, working at the State House, interning on Capitol Hill, or serving as MDSC's Advocacy Specialist. John has led a meaningful and fulfilling life and served as a role model for all those fortunate to have known him.

> I don't know how to say thank you for everything MDSC does. It's almost beyond what anyone could expect or hope for.

Like many of our loved ones later in life, John, now 59, and his family are in need of a different kind of support than they were accustomed to. Now living in a supportive group home, John's day-to-day activities have changed, as he requires assistance with mobility, eating, and communicating. For his mother Janice, herself in her later years, watching her son's decline has been one of the hardest parts of aging alongside him.

It's a concern many MDSC families share — that a loved one who spent a lifetime finding their voice and independence could, later in life, lose pieces of both. As people with Down syndrome live longer than ever before, adults can face accelerated aging, including a significantly elevated risk of Alzheimer's disease.

That gap is what led MDSC to launch its fifth Center of Excellence: the Center on Down Syndrome and Aging, formally announced in March at Brighter Futures, a national conference focused on adults with Down syndrome and aging, co-hosted with NDSS. The launch reflects a broader evolution for an organization that, since 1983, has continually grown to meet its community wherever it stands.

For Janice, what matters most isn't any single resource — it's that MDSC has never stopped showing up, even as John's needs have changed. "I don't know how to say thank you for everything MDSC does: the way you stay in touch with people, the way you support our community. It's almost beyond what anyone could expect or hope for," she says. "The MDSC saw John and his dream long ago and supported him in every way possible on his journey. Today, the journey has changed, but MDSC still provides that same steadfast support in new ways."

MDSC's fifth Center of Excellence has two central goals: equipping people with Down syndrome and their caregivers to proactively prepare for aging, and advancing the broader understanding of Down syndrome and aging through research and collaboration. The work reaches adults with Down syndrome 30 and older, their families and caregivers, and the professionals who serve them.

Guided by an advisory council of medical and aging experts, the Center has already launched a free caregiver support group for families navigating changes that come with aging, along with a monthly webinar series featuring leading specialists on topics from Alzheimer's diagnosis to financial planning to caregiver self-care.

Launched with funding from the Lighting the Way, Lifespan Fund, and the MA Department of Developmental Services, the Center will provide critical resources and supports for individuals, family members, caregivers and professionals for many years to come.





55 families participated in the newly launched Center on Down Syndrome & Aging caregiver support group, or received individual supports and resources

EMPLOYMENT

Opening doors to the professional world

When Delilah Sheehan attended the Career Exploration Academy at MDSC's Philip Donahue Your Next Star Employment Center in 2024, her stated interests were animals, singing, dancing, reading — and a dream of working at the aquarium. Less than two years later, in January 2026, she was amazed that she landed a job at MG+M Law, a Boston-based firm.

According to her father, Kevin, the Academy is what made the difference. "Her school experience was amazing, but it was a nurturing cocoon," he says. "It didn't stress going out into the world, and that's what the Academy did." It took Delilah out of her comfort zone, helping her understand there's a new world out there she'd need new skills for — resume writing, interview practice, workplace communication. By the time she entered her transition program at the Henderson School, she was already a step ahead, moving from classroom to workplace with unusual ease.

> Without MDSC, none of this would have happened. They opened the doors.

That preparation is what ultimately opened the door to her current role, and Kevin and Julie admit they were more nervous about the opportunity than Delilah was.

Now 22, Delilah works three days a week, taking on restocking supplies, cleaning the kitchen, and sorting mail. "I love it. I'm thriving there," she says. "I'm also making a lot of friends." One attorney gave her a cover for her name badge; colleagues celebrated her birthday this July. Watching Delilah thrive has changed how Kevin and Julie see their daughter's future. "We feel more confident now in knowing what she's capable of," Kevin says. Delilah credits *Your Next Star* with enhancing her social skills: "I've been introducing myself a lot. I'm learning how to be friendly at work."

"It's allowed her to make the transition from academics into the professional world," Kevin says. "Without MDSC, none of this would have happened. They opened the doors."

MDSC's Philip Donahue Your Next Star Employment Center continues to build a pipeline connecting qualified job candidates with Down syndrome and other disabilities to employers who understand their value.

This year, PwC led a personal branding session during our Employment Semester and hand-selected MDSC for a volunteer fair at their Boston offices. Through a new partnership with BrightBridge Neurodiversity Workforce Partners, we facilitated employment matches for 7 Academy graduates and MDSC members. Additional employer partners included Collettey's Cookies, APSE, Jewish Vocational Services, DDS, and MassAbility.

Looking ahead, MDSC remains committed to refining our Academy model while forging new employer relationships that create real pathways from training toward meaningful, lasting employment.





7,501 employers, human resource professionals and others reached through the *Your Next Star* Employment Center website and outreach efforts

MDSC LEADERSHIP

MDSC Board of Directors

Board Officers:
Chair: Jonathan Tabasky, Esq.
Vice Chair: Jim Molla

Board Members at Large:
Adam Delmolino
Patria Espinal
Richard Fleming, Ph.D.
Victor Hernandez
Taiese Bingham-Hickman, Ph.D.
Roxanne Hoke Chandler
Drew Keller
Stacy Rachelle Lindborg, Ph.D
Jessica McCready, Ph.D.
Bob Mills
Jim Petkewich
Stephanie Santoro, M.D.
Margaret Van Gelder

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Program Specialist

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Tara Buffum
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Family Support Coordinator

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Administration & Finance Director

Sarah Cullen
National First Call Center Director

Ashley DeNoble
Program Specialist

Lauren Foley
Community Engagement & Research Coordinator

Carlyn Foreman
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mdsc
MASSACHUSETTS
DOWN SYNDROME
CONGRESS

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