The Ohio Developmental Disabilities Council is one of a national network of state councils, committed to self-determination and community inclusion for people with developmental disabilities. One of the Council’s goals is to educate and inform how state and local government services provide services to people with developmental disabilities, representatives from state agencies, and nonprofit organizations and agencies that provide services to people with developmental disabilities.

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What is Community Outreach?

- Outreach is an activity of providing services to populations that might not otherwise have access to those services.
- A key component of outreach is mobility. The group providing outreach cannot be stationary.
- Outreach also has an educational role, raising awareness of existing services.
- Outreach is often meant to fill a gap in services provided by the mainstream.

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Ohio Developmental Disabilities Council’s Outreach Efforts Extend from Amish Communities to Inner City

In such Amish communities as Baltic, Killbuck and Millersburg, the Ohio Developmental Disabilities Council’s outreach programs are having a big impact. A five-year, $100,000 grant from the Council to the DDC Clinic in Millersfield has helped open a medical clinic in Wayne County that not only provides needed healthcare, but supports research into the diseases unique to geographically and genetically isolated societies.

The grant is proving valuable to unlocking the secrets to some of these unique diseases and providing medical treatment that has dramatically changed the lives of individuals - children, in particular - suffering from these ailments.

For example, glucose-galactose malabsorption is a rare, recessive genetic disorder that was once a death sentence in the Amish community. This disease prevents the body from absorbing nutrients broken down in the small intestine. Now, when children are diagnosed with the disorder they are put on a carbohydrate-free diet and do quite well.

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As a symbol of their humble origins, the hat remains on display today at the clinic. Dr. Baozhong Xin was hired in 2005 to head research into the genetic disorders plaguing Amish children. Since then, the clinic has identified more than 70 rare genetic disorders for which it can test and treat. Of those, Andres said, two-thirds are “highly treatable.”

“The success we’ve had at the DDC Clinic has been nothing short of astonishing,” Andres said. “Eleven years ago, 80 percent of those coming to the clinic had no diagnosis. Now, thanks to the tremendous research that has been conducted here, nearly everyone who walks through the door can be diagnosed on the same day.”

Dr. Hong Wang, who made house calls in a horse and buggy when he started, is now medical director of the DDC Clinic.

The outreach into Holmes and Wayne counties has its roots in the Geauga County Amish settlement. In 1998, community leaders recognized the diseases unique to their community. Six Amish families sat around the kitchen table at the home of Bill Fisher and passed a straw hat. The $50 they collected that day was used as seed money to start a clinic for special-needs children.

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This success did not go unnoticed by the Amish community in Holmes and Wayne counties. This is the largest Amish community in Ohio and one of the largest in the United States. They saw the success that the DDC Clinic was having and wanted to incorporate those services in their community.

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Columbus Couple Launches Minority Autism Awareness Program

Reginald and Angela Fields knew there was a problem. They didn’t have a name for it, but they could tell something wasn’t right with their youngest son, Grant. He was about 2 years old and wasn’t developing at the same pace as his older brother. There were speech issues, and at times he seemed to be regressing.

There were many trips to doctors and specialists. However, it wasn’t until Grant was 4 that Reginald and Angela received the diagnostic: autism.

Reginald, then a reporter in the Cleveland Plain Dealer’s Columbus bureau, and Angela, who is in sales, began researching autism to learn all about the disability affecting their son. During this process, they discovered that children with autism in minority and underserved communities were diagnosed, on average, 18-24 months later than white children.

“We believe it’s a case of a lack of information available in those communities,” Reginald said. “There is no cure for autism, but early diagnosis and treatment is the key to making the greatest strides with a child. The earlier treatment begins, the better chance the child has of living a more independent life.”

To help meet the challenge, Reginald and Angela formed the nonprofit organization, Living Beyond Autism, in 2011. Its mission is to educate and inform the underserved minority and underserved communities around Ohio of the importance of early diagnosis of autism.

To help Living Beyond Autism meet its goals, the Ohio Developmental Disabilities Council awarded the organization a $20,000 grant.

“We believe it’s a case of a lack of information.”

— Reginald Fields

Living Beyond Autism has used the funds to:

• Host focus groups of 21 minority parents of children with autism. The sessions focused on their knowledge of the disability and chronicled their efforts to seek a diagnosis.

• Create a video documentary, created from focus group participants, to show at schools and churches in hopes of making people aware of autism and encouraging them to seek early diagnosis.

• Create public-service announcements to run on television stations throughout the state.

• Host a one-day program on autism awareness at the King Arts Complex in Columbus.

• Organize a walk to increase autism awareness in minority and underserved communities.

Most of these efforts have been focused on Central Ohio, but the couple hopes to expand the effort across the state.

“It’s all about raising awareness,” Reginald said. “The gap between when a white child is diagnosed and when an African-American child is diagnosed was more significant that I had anticipated. I think that gap can be tightened simply by making people more aware of autism.”

Grant is now 12 years old, attending a charter school and doing well.

Reginald and Angela are taking their video documentary to local churches and civic organizations to spread the word of autism. If you would like to have them speak to your organization, contact Living Beyond Autism at 416.973.3582 or via email at info@livingbeyondautism.org.

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