

# The Outlook

Alabama Department of Mental Health Newsletter



## Assistive Technology Model Homes Expand Independent Living Options in Alabama

**Walking into The Arc of Central Alabama's demonstration home in Birmingham shows what the future of independent living could be like.**

The house looks like any other at first glance, but inside, nearly every room has been fitted with technology designed to support people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Bed shakers can wake residents in the morning. Smart appliances remind them when the stove is left on, or the refrigerator is open. Tablets connect individuals to daily check-ins with care support, while medication dispensers ensure important doses are not missed.

It is part of a larger initiative from the [Alabama Department of Mental Health](#) (ADMH), which recently awarded grants to three organizations, [The Arc of Central Alabama](#), [United Ability](#), and [Northview Health Services](#), to create Assistive Technology (AT) Demonstration Model Homes in Birmingham and Mobile. The goal for the AT Demo Model Homes is to give individuals and families a chance to see how technology can make independent living not only possible, but safe and sustainable.

Unlike traditional residential programs, these homes function as interactive learning spaces. Families, caregivers, and providers can tour the houses to learn more and get new ideas for their own spaces.

At The Arc's demonstration home, families even have the option to stay overnight to experience the technology in action. That opportunity, Jasmeen Davis, Director of Community Waiver Services, says helps families envision what life could look like for their loved one outside of full-time supervised care. "It is about choice," Davis explained. "Every family's needs are different, and these homes show what is possible."

United Ability is approaching the project differently. Its model is a fully accessible studio apartment that opens onto a garden. Visitors will be able to tour the space and take part in training demonstrations, exploring how devices such as smart locks, video doorbells, and adaptive cooking equipment can be tailored to each individual's situation.



Meanwhile in Mobile, Northview Health Services is creating a model home that combines daily living supports with digital safety. QR codes placed throughout the house will link to short videos, offering guidance on skills like meal prep, medication management, and online safety.

The common ideas across all three homes are about person-centered care and independence. Families are not presented with one solution, but rather a plethora of tools that can be customized. Whether it is stove shut-off systems or video-based check-ins for someone living alone, the technology adapts to the person.

For families who have long wondered what independence could realistically look like for a loved one with disabilities, these demonstration homes offer that.

By investing in these spaces, ADMH is ensuring that Alabamians with disabilities have access to practical solutions. With technology and care working together, the path toward greater independence is here.



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## Want to be included in the next issue?

Send us your stories, achievements and events!

[publicinformation.dmh@mh.alabama.gov](mailto:publicinformation.dmh@mh.alabama.gov)

334-242-3417

# Caregiving: How Alabama's Respite Care Program Supports Families

**Caring for a loved one with intellectual or developmental disabilities is a true act of love, but it is also a role that rarely comes with days off.**

For many families, the responsibility of around-the-clock caregiving can leave little time to recharge or run errands. That is where respite care comes in.

Respite care is designed to give caregivers a temporary break, whether for a few hours, a day, or longer. During that time, a trained provider steps in to care for the child or adult with disabilities, ensuring their needs are met and routines are maintained.

Recently, the Alabama Department of Mental Health (ADMH) renewed its contract with [United Cerebral Palsy of Huntsville and Tennessee Valley Inc.](#) to continue providing respite care across the state. This renewal means families can count on uninterrupted access to trusted services and providers.

Respite care can take different forms depending on the needs of the family. For some, it might mean a provider coming into the home so the caregiver can step out to run errands, attend an appointment, or rest. For others, it may involve out-of-home care in an approved setting where the individual can engage in safe, structured activities.

“Caring for a loved one with disabilities is a full-time responsibility, and families need reliable support,” said ADMH Associate Commissioner of [Developmental Disabilities](#), Kathy Sawyer. “We are continually working to improve access, strengthen provider capacity, and ensure that our services are responsive to the evolving needs of Alabama’s families.”

Under the [ID and LAH waivers](#), respite focuses on providing short-term relief to unpaid caregivers, often parents, siblings, or relatives who provide care day after day. In these programs, respite can happen either at home or in another approved setting.

However, the [Community Waiver Program](#) (CWP) offers a more structured, time-limited model.

## **WHILE ALL THREE WAIVERS ID, LAH, AND CWP COVER RESPITE CARE, THE STRUCTURE VARIES.**

- ID and LAH Waivers: Designed mainly to give unpaid caregivers short-term relief, either in the home or in a community-based setting.
- CWP: Limits respite to 30 days or 216 hours per year (depending on the care plan), with a strong emphasis on community involvement.

This distinction ensures that respite care is not just a pause button for families, but also an opportunity for the person with disabilities to engage meaningfully in their community.

The renewed contract with ADMH’s providers helps ensure families continue to have reliable access to short-term relief. That break is essential for caregivers who need time to rest, attend to personal matters, or simply manage life outside of caregiving.

The renewal also provides stability for providers. With contracts in place, existing respite care providers can continue their work without interruption, while new providers can join the network. This is especially important in rural or underserved areas, where access to services can be limited.

For more information about respite care services in Alabama, families can contact the ADMH Division of Developmental Disabilities Call Center at 1-800-361-4491.



**BRIDGEPOINT**  
PRIMARY CARE

**OPEN  
HOUSE**

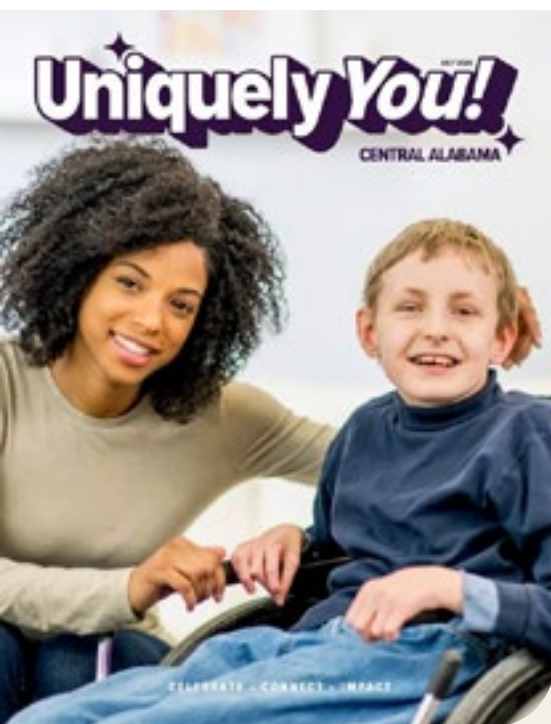
October 29, 2025 at 10 a.m.

2122 Danville Road SW Decatur, AL 35601

## Exciting News from the Centers for The Developmentally Disabled North Central Alabama Inc.!

CDD is proud to announce the opening of **Bridgepoint Primary Care Clinic**, a new resource connecting our community to better health. The clinic is dedicated to supporting individuals who are differently abled while also serving all individuals in the community, with the same commitment and care. Join the **Ribbon Cutting and Open House on October 29th**.

For more information, please contact Centers For The Developmentally Disabled North Central Alabama Inc. 256-260-7982



The Alabama Department of Mental Health is excited to share information about the launch of **Uniquely You Magazine – Central AL**. The first issue will be out around mid-October.

**Uniquely You** is a **free**, one-of-a-kind resource guide and magazine designed to celebrate individuals in our local disability community and connect them and their families to valuable resources, trusted providers, and reputable non-profit organizations. We will work with Uniquely You to showcase individuals with disabilities served by the ADMH – stories of success, resources, and support!

Uniquely You magazine would also like to know who you'd like to see featured. Some of the articles you'll see in upcoming issues include Featured Individual, Featured Family, Ability at Work, Athlete Spotlight, Breaking Barriers and Building Dreams, Walking by Faith, Non-Profit Spotlight, Salute to the Troops, Top Dog, and more.



[Click here](#) or Scan the QR code to be placed on the distribution list and you will receive a digital or printed copy!



[Click here](#) or scan this QR code, If you'd like to nominate someone for one of these articles!

To scan the code, use your camera on your phone and it will pull up the website.



**HOW TO RESERVE A LICENSE PLATE:** <https://buff.ly/g4oLZEj>

1. Have your VIN (Vehicle Identification Number) ready. You'll need it to complete the form.
2. Go to <https://buff.ly/a8Wz5Kb>
3. Click on "Reserve Pre-Commitment Plate."
4. Select the Plate Type: Choose "Alabama Department of Mental Health."

## KEY DIFFERENCES BETWEEN....

# 988



- Emotional support
- Crisis de-escalation
- Connection to community resources
- Relies on law enforcement / emergency medical intervention only when necessary

# 911



- Urgent threats to life or safety
- Immediate intervention for physical danger
- Medical emergencies
- Crimes in progress



## Suicide Prevention Month Recap: Building Strength, Dignity, and Hope

**This September, the Alabama Department of Mental Health (ADMH) joined partners statewide to observe [Suicide Prevention Month](#), focusing on the theme of strength, dignity, hope, and purpose.**

Throughout the month, ADMH worked to raise awareness about suicide risk, expand conversations in communities, and connect individuals to life-saving resources.

One of the most powerful tools remains the [988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline](#), which has been contacted more than 132,000 times by Alabamians since its launch in July 2022. The lifeline continues to serve as an immediate and compassionate connection during moments of crisis.

This year, ADMH highlighted the work of the [Alabama Crisis System of Care](#), including regional crisis centers and mobile crisis teams that bring help closer to home. ADMH also supported [Project Zero Suicide](#), which hosted town halls in Marion, Winston, Cullman, and Clay counties. These events created safe spaces to talk openly about mental health, identify warning signs, and provide skills through Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST).

Another initiative, “R U OK? Day,” encouraged Alabamians to check in with one another a reminder that asking someone if they’re okay can be the first step to saving a life.

Throughout September, ADMH reinforced that prevention is everyone’s responsibility. Together, we fostered open conversations, shared resources, and reminded our communities that help is always within reach. Suicide prevention is ongoing, and while September amplified awareness, the work continues every day.

# Recovery Month Recap: Restoring Every Aspect of Life

This September was [National Recovery Month](#), a time to celebrate resilience, raise awareness about substance use disorders, and emphasize that recovery is possible.

This year's theme was "Recovery is REAL: Restoring Every Aspect of Life" which underscored the importance of rebuilding not only health but also purpose, relationships, and community.

The Alabama Department of Mental Health (ADMH) marked the month with a range of efforts designed to expand access, support, and hope. Through the Recovery Is Here campaign, in partnership with community colleges and statewide agencies, we mobilized awareness and lifted up recovery voices across Alabama.



A highlight of the month was the Information Fair in Tuskegee on September 10, where more than 20 recovery support organizations gathered to provide education, connect community members with services, and distribute free Narcan kits. This event brought vital tools directly to the public and underscored the department's commitment to putting resources into local communities. ADMH also participated in the yearly Recovery Night that is hosted at the Regions Field in Birmingham.

ADMH also spotlighted the [Certified Recovery Support Specialist Training Program](#), which equips peers with lived experience to guide others through their recovery journeys. These specialists are playing a growing role in expanding the recovery workforce across Alabama.

Resources such as the Connect Alabama app and the 988 Lifeline were promoted throughout the month to ensure that support remains accessible at any time.

Recovery Month served as a reminder that recovery is not just possible. It is happening every day. ADMH remains committed to supporting every individual in building a healthy, meaningful life in recovery.





## Recovery Month 2025





Angela Marks spread prevention awareness at the conference.

## Empowering Minds for a Stronger Community: 2025 Alabama Children's Policy Council Conference

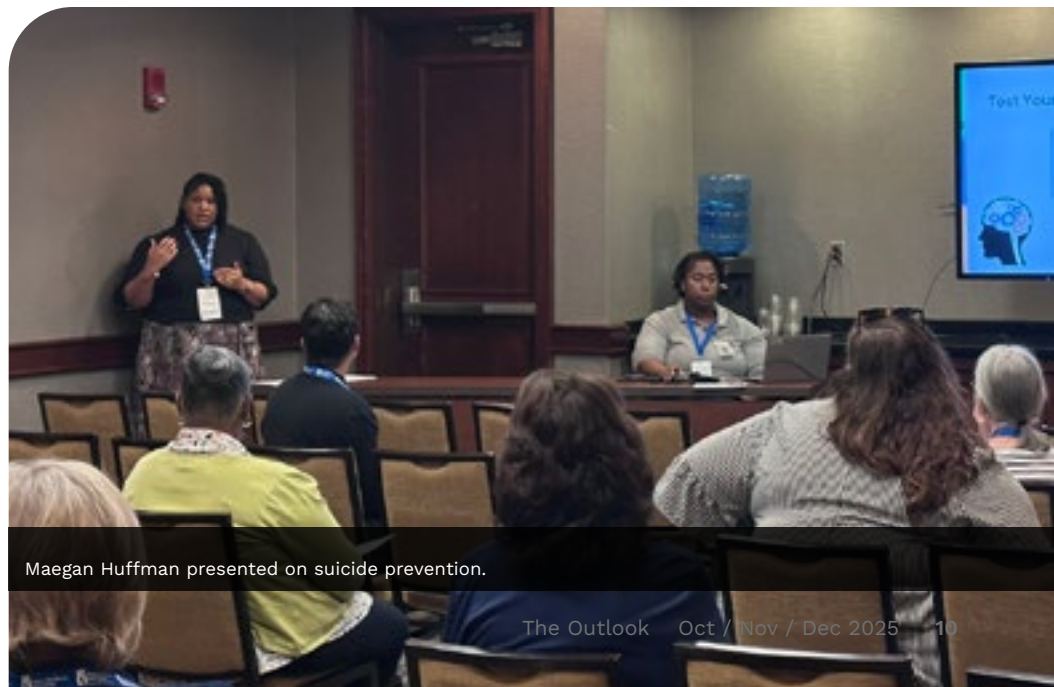
The 2025 [Alabama Children's Policy Council Conference](#) brought together leaders, advocates, and professionals from across the state under the theme "Empowering Minds for a Stronger Community." State officials from the Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education, Department of Education, Department of Human Resources, and the Department of Mental Health (ADMH) shared updates on their work to support children and families.

[ADMH Commissioner Kim Boswell](#) highlighted the importance of modeling healthy behaviors for children, noting that while adults often monitor what kids see on phones and online, children are equally influenced by the behaviors of the adults around them. She also discussed the initiatives and programs ADMH has in place for children, as well as partnerships with schools, community organizations, and families to strengthen support systems across the state.

Keynote speaker Kaylee Brooks emphasized the need for compassion in understanding children who have experienced trauma, noting that responses can vary from internalizing behaviors, such as withdrawal or excessive compliance, to externalizing behaviors, such as defiance or acting out, and that understanding the root of these behaviors is essential for meaningful support.

Breakout sessions featured many ADMH staff, including Maegan Huffman, who presented on suicide prevention and the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, and Brittney Reese with Autism Awareness and mental health advocacy. Chelsea Taylor, Beth Jones, and other staff shared insights on early childhood mental health during the panel discussion, highlighting practical strategies for supporting young children's emotional well-being.

Through collaboration, targeted programs, and a focus on compassionate care, the conference demonstrated Alabama's commitment to empowering children, supporting families, and building stronger communities statewide.



Maegan Huffman presented on suicide prevention.



Donna Rutherford [2nd from left in photo]

## Direct Support Professional Recognition Week Recap: Honoring Everyday Heroes

From September 7–13, the Alabama Department of Mental Health (ADMH) proudly celebrated [Direct Support Professional \(DSP\) Recognition Week](#), honoring the essential role DSPs play in the lives of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

DSPs are the backbone of daily support helping with personal care, encouraging independence, and creating opportunities for fuller, more meaningful lives. Their dedication, compassion, and skill make a profound difference for individuals and families across the state.

*"Donna stepped up and volunteered to work in the houses after her regular day shift in Administration. She has fallen in love with the people she serves, and they love her in return. She has gone above and beyond in this capacity."*

*"She has volunteered with the Dream Team and attends every game that she can. She has taken our folks into her home for holidays and to community events on her own time. She makes sure their needs are met and that their choices are honored by her and other staff."*

*"Donna truly has the spirit of an excellent DSP. She has care, compassion and understanding with those she serves. She gives her all each day to make sure their choices are respected and met if at all possible."*

This year, ADMH placed special emphasis on sharing [testimonials](#) from DSPs themselves. These stories highlighted the personal journeys, motivations, and daily experiences of those who serve. From professionals inspired by family experiences to those who found their calling in seeing the difference support can make, the testimonials offered a chance to see what inspires DSP workers to continue their work. Additional stories were made available through an online collection, giving staff and families a chance to hear directly from DSPs about the impact of their role.

The week also served as a reminder of the importance of recognizing and supporting this vital workforce year-round. By investing in training, resources, and recognition, ADMH continues to strengthen the profession and ensure that individuals with developmental disabilities receive compassionate, consistent support.

DSP Week was not only about celebration but also about gratitude. This year, we proudly honored the individuals who embody the values of care, dignity, and commitment in their daily work. Their contributions remain at the center of our mission.

**We are proud to share along with the Arcs of Alabama, the Distinguished Direct Support Professional of the Year – Donna Rutherford of the Arc of Walker County!**

Distinguished Direct Support Professional:  
Donna Rutherford

## ADMH Staff: Spotlight on Success

### DR. ELIZA BELLE

Congratulations to Dr. Belle! In honor of Suicide Prevention and Awareness Month, she facilitated a book talk "fireside chat" discussion with April Simpkins, mother of the late 2019 Miss USA Cheslie Kryst (whose life was lost to suicide), on the importance of telling our stories, even when difficult. This event was hosted by the Black Women's Mental Health Institute, an organization that in part, funds and provides free counseling services throughout Alabama as well as clinician training opportunities.

### DR. BETTY CHEATUM

Congratulations to Dr. Betty Cheatum! She received her Ph.D. in Developmental Psychology.

### MARK LITVINE

Congrats to Mark Litvine! He received the 2025 NAMI-Alabama Leigh Few/Margie Annis Person with Lived Experience Award in recognition of a compassionate heart and tireless efforts on behalf of the CIT Program.



DR. ELIZA BELLE



DR. BETTY CHEATUM



MARK LITVINE



## Death Announcement

Veda Porterfield, ADMH, Retired Advocate, passed away on Wednesday, September 24, 2025, in Birmingham, AL. Ms. Porterfield was hired as an Advocate I for Bryce Hospital in 1986 and worked in various capacities with the department until her retirement in 2020 as an Advocate IV.

Grief Counseling for ADMH staff remains available through the Employee Assistance Program (EAP), managed by Behavioral Health Systems, Inc. (BHS). Staff can directly contact BHS at 800-245-1150 or 205-879-1150.

## Mark Your Calendar

### [Turning the Tide: Alabama's Call to Action for Youth Mental Health](#)

Join the Alabama Life Research Institute and the University of Alabama School of Social Work for a solution-focused summit that brings together mental health practitioners, system leaders, and policymakers to address the urgent mental health needs of children and adolescents in our state.

Through panel discussions, collaborative breakout sessions, and data-driven dialogue, participants will explore the realities of childhood trauma, system gaps, and opportunities for cross-sector change. Attendees will leave with concrete, actionable strategies to implement within their own agencies and organizations.

Together, we will create a unified vision for supporting Alabama's youth and building more responsive, effective mental health systems that truly serve our communities.

**WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 12, 2025**  
**9:00AM TO 3:00PM CST**  
**BRYANT CONFERENCE CENTER**

**Serve.**  
**Empower.**  
**Support.**

ADMH Office of Public Information  
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334-242-3417

