The Clermont County Board of Developmental Disabilities is committed to expanding the participation rates of people of diverse backgrounds who have disabilities through advocacy efforts, staff training, and commitment to cultural competency.

Our commitment to equality, opportunity, and inclusion for all people with disabilities has led the Clermont County Board of Developmental Disabilities to become fully invested in empowering persons and their families of diverse ages, genders, sexual orientation, spiritual beliefs, cultural, racial, socioeconomic status, language, and ethnic backgrounds. Persons of diverse backgrounds with disabilities often face multiple barriers, including access to services and supports, and discrimination in various community, education, and employment settings. Research indicates that, while people with disabilities face enhanced challenges, those of diverse backgrounds are disproportionately affected. They face higher incarceration rates, over-representation in segregated special education programs, and diminished social and employment outcomes, among other things.

The Clermont County Board of Developmental Disabilities recognizes the value of diversity and what it means to embrace cultural and linguistic competency. We believe individuals of diverse backgrounds must be supported by public and organizational policy and practices in order to achieve full inclusion. This acknowledgement, support, and advocacy of diversity is essential to attaining positive outcomes for people with disabilities and building a sense of community. It is our goal to connect persons with disabilities and diverse backgrounds to the organizations, services, and supports that lead to community inclusion and positive life outcomes.

Clermont DD is committed to cultural and linguistic competency, and we continue to shed light on the issues, policies, and practices that impact people of diverse backgrounds with disabilities. Cultural competency isn’t achieved through an article, event, or webinar. It is achieved by embracing the differences in us all, celebrating our unique contributions, and supporting equity in access, services, and outcomes for all people.

The demographics of Clermont County as of the 2018 US Census data indicate a county with a population of 205,466 people, 95.3% Caucasian, 1.6% African American, 2% Hispanic or Latino, 0.2% American Indian and Alaska Native, and 1.3% Asian. Clermont County has urban areas, due to its close proximity to Cincinnati; however, the county is officially designated as part of “central Appalachia” which is a political, cultural, and bioregional classification that includes southern Ohio, eastern Kentucky, and most of West Virginia. As Clermont DD serves the entire county area, we are fortunate to have the opportunity to work with people from both of these cultural backgrounds.

Examples of diversity awareness and knowledge include areas such as spiritual beliefs, holidays, dietary regulations or preferences, clothing, attitudes towards impairments, language, and how/when to use interpreters. We demonstrate how we have modified service delivery based on the knowledge gained….modified service plans, personnel training, increased satisfaction of stakeholders, and training in the Sanctuary Model.

The Sanctuary Model promotes change in an organization and addresses the ways in which chronic stress, adversity, and trauma influence individual behavior. It recognizes the ways in which whole organizations can be influenced by chronic stress, adversity, and trauma.

The Sanctuary Model is a treatment and organizational change model that integrates trauma theory with the creation of therapeutic communities, which then provides safety for individuals and the staff who work with them.
The philosophical structure of the Sanctuary Model is reflected through seven commitments. These commitments are: non-violence, growth and change, emotional intelligence, social learning, open communication, social responsibility, and democracy. The commitments apply to the entire community, staff, administration, families, students and adults we serve. These commitments help us to remain closely connected to recognizing cultural and diversity competency at all times.

Members of the Behavioral Health Services Department at Clermont DD present information about the Sanctuary Model to partners in the community, in the hopes of expanding others’ cultural competency in the trauma area. These partners include local law enforcement, the Clermont Family YMCA, Ohio Valley Goodwill Industries, and our own families, parents, and individuals served.

The Clermont County Board of Developmental Disabilities respects the cultural diversity in Clermont County and has taken the following actions to support this diversity:

- The agency has the ability to access interpretive services as needed, including a subscription to Language Line Solutions for telephone and in-person interpreter services when contacted by non-English speaking individuals. This information is available during person-to-person meetings and scheduling can be accessed on our website.
- The agency’s Accessibility Plan contains information under Communication Barriers about special consideration of different disabilities and cultures.
- All employees have completed Cultural Diversity training via our web-based training program, and all new hires complete this training during Human Resources Orientation. Additional Cultural Diversity training for staff and individuals takes place within individual departments.
- Staff from Clermont DD also take advantage of diversity training that is offered in the community. Child Focus, Inc. offers a wide array of classes that pertain to the culture of our county. These include: Suicide Prevention--Releasing the Shame and Identifying Resilience Beneath the Shame; Hope 4 the Wounded—Reaching the Children Beyond Risk; Stewards of Children—Child Sexual Abuse Prevention; Culture at a Crossroads, to name a few.
- Clermont DD offers Training Connections throughout the year for parents, providers, and individuals. In 2018, we offered training in conjunction with Greater Cincinnati Behavioral Health Services to discuss classes called Connections for people with co-occurring mental health and developmental disabilities diagnoses. These classes are intended to support recovery, enhance quality of life, reduce symptoms, restore function, and support natural supports. Another training offered by Clermont DD to individuals, families, and providers was Navigating Sexual Health and Wellness, taught by Richelle Frabotta, MSEd from Miami University. Her information covered the cultural norms around sexuality concepts, what Sex Ed is thought to be and what it should be, and resources available for individuals when exploring quality sexuality education.
- The agency continuously assesses cultural competency needs and addresses needs as they arise. Clermont DD’s Disability Awareness Curriculum is presented to groups who are interested in learning more about individuals with developmental disabilities and the Clermont DD program in general. This curriculum gives group members the opportunity to experience what it feels like to have a disability and offers individuals as speakers who tell their own stories in person or through videotaped interviews.
- Crisis Intervention Training is presented to law enforcement officers in Clermont County each year through the Mental Health and Recovery Board. Clermont DD presents at these trainings, to give officers information on the developmental disability culture and how to effectively communicate with individuals in a crisis situation.
- Programs provide various curriculums for individuals and staff to learn about and celebrate different cultural
-beliefs. Discussions are led by employees to promote open discussions about different culture groups that may include spiritual beliefs, holidays, diet, clothing, attitudes towards disabilities, language, gender-related issues, and aging-related issues.
- Community engagement activities take place in a variety of settings so that individuals can gain experience interacting with people outside their own culture.
- Clermont County Turn Up the Voices is the current self-advocacy group that is working hard to break down many barriers in our community by holding activity sessions in public locations and conducting speaking engagements with Clermont DD staff at local civic organization meetings.

Prior to 2017, West Clermont Local School District in our county was faced with 40% of their student population receiving free/reduced lunches. This spurred them to contact a consulting firm to create a poverty simulation to assist their teachers with learning how these students feel when faced with poverty as their number one cultural issue and how it makes the students’ feel when asking for help or even acting out in a variety of ways. Clermont DD borrowed the simulation and presented it at the 2017 All Staff Inservice. Employees were split up into various “families” that were given information about their family status: single mom, three children, no family to rely on, kids needing dental services but they were almost out of food for the month, non-English speaking parent, etc. They visited various stations ran by several business leaders and community members who volunteered for the day. These stations represented services in the community such as medical, children’s protective services, day care, unemployment, and others. This simulation was quite a somber, yet eye-opening experience for many staff and gave them an up-close look at what many Clermont DD families and individuals are faced with each day. Clermont DD is constantly looking for more opportunities like this simulation to present at our yearly inservice day, so that staff remain focused on the cultural diversity aspect of their daily jobs.

Clermont DD staff and individuals are very involved with the Clermont Chamber of Commerce, Cincinnati-Eastside Rotary, Batavia Rotary, and other civic organizations. This assists our agency to remain committed to creating a diverse and culturally-competent mindset at all times.