**December 3, 2024| Vol. 50**

**DELAWARE DIVISION FOR THE VISUALLY IMPAIRED NEWSLETTER**

 **Providing educational, vocational, and technical support to empower and foster independence for Delawareans with visual impairments.**



**NEWS**

**December is Safe Toys & Celebrations Month**

About 10% of eye injuries in children that require emergency room visits are linked to toys. In recognition of Safe Toys and Celebrations Month this December, the American Academy of Ophthalmology encourages parents to be careful when selecting holiday gifts for kids. They suggest steering clear of items that can shoot projectiles, like crossbows and BB guns. Additionally, the Academy provides guidance on safely opening champagne to ensure that New Year’s festivities remain joyful and accident-free.

**December is also:**

**December 2-8: Geographic Atrophy Awareness Week**: Prevent Blindness has created this awareness week to increase the understanding of GA, a serious type of dry age-related macular degeneration that impacts one million people in the United States.

* Prevent Blindness is providing free educational resources GA, including facts sheets, a webpage, expert videos, and more. Found here: <https://preventblindness.org/geographic-atrophy-week-2024/>

**December 3- International Day of Persons with disabilities:** The day focuses on advocating for the rights and welfare of individuals with disabilities across all sectors of society and development. It aims to increase awareness about the challenges faced by people with disabilities in various areas, including political, social, economic, and cultural life.

**December 25-**

* **Christmas Day**
* **Hanukah Begins**

**December 26**-

* **Boxing Day**
* **Kwanzaa**

**December 31- New Year’s Eve**

**Santa Reads Braille- Letters from Santa Claus in Braille**

**Braille Works**

*Sometimes, “it takes more than seeing to believe.”*

Santa’s Braille Workshop is open!

[Parents, request your letter here.](https://brailleworks.com/santa-reads-braille/?fbclid=IwY2xjawG68_ZleHRuA2FlbQIxMQABHQrZLPa1nMpbhKugDyvdqUjCjs5hSM5RJE7AtpMsobjX3XuJfaXrGeu2-w_aem_qGlsc7Br7-Z85GZ7Y4WAxA#parents)

[Teachers, request your letters here.](https://brailleworks.com/santa-reads-braille/?fbclid=IwY2xjawG68_ZleHRuA2FlbQIxMQABHQrZLPa1nMpbhKugDyvdqUjCjs5hSM5RJE7AtpMsobjX3XuJfaXrGeu2-w_aem_qGlsc7Br7-Z85GZ7Y4WAxA#teachers)

**We’re Santa’s special helpers.**

Does Santa read braille? Of course, he does! And we help him out during this busy time of year by embossing his letters to kids.

Parents, teachers, and friends: There’s no cost to you. Just let us know who the letter is for, and we’ll take care of the rest. We’ll even postmark the letter as shipped from the North Pole! We’ve made Santa’s words more accessible to people with a visual impairment by converting them to braille and including a large print copy.

[Click here to read Santa’s Letters.](https://brailleworks.com/santa-reads-braille/?fbclid=IwY2xjawG68_ZleHRuA2FlbQIxMQABHQrZLPa1nMpbhKugDyvdqUjCjs5hSM5RJE7AtpMsobjX3XuJfaXrGeu2-w_aem_qGlsc7Br7-Z85GZ7Y4WAxA#letterList)

**Why Letters from Santa?**

Here at Braille Works, we also understand the fun side of Christmas. Santa and his elves, flying reindeer, stockings hung by the chimney, and a host of other traditions. These are wondrous things that bring smiles and laughter to children around the world. In fulfilling our mission toward Making the World a More Readable Place™, we are honored to bring Santa Reads Braille to children who are blind or visually impaired.

Full article here: [https://brailleworks.com/santa-reads-braille/?f](https://brailleworks.com/santa-reads-braille/?fbclid=IwY2xjawG68_ZleHRuA2FlbQIxMQABHQrZLPa1nMpbhKugDyvdqUjCjs5hSM5RJE7AtpMsobjX3XuJfaXrGeu2-w_aem_qGlsc7Br7-Z85GZ7Y4WAxA)

**SSI Announces Changes to Accessing In-Person Services**

In our ongoing commitment to serve the public more efficiently, we are expanding appointment-based services at our [local Social Security offices](https://secure.ssa.gov/ICON/main.jsp). By scheduling appointments, we will aim to reduce wait times, streamline service delivery, and improve the overall customer experience. Nearly 400 field offices have already moved to appointment-based service this year. These offices have seen significant improvements in wait times due to more efficient and helpful visitor experiences and increases in the number of customers able to complete their business online.

We are implementing appointment-based services nationwide in two phases. The first phase is a transition period now through January 5, 2025. The purpose of this transition period is to educate our customers about needing to schedule an appointment for SSA services. As a reminder, many of our services can be provided via phone with an appointment and do not require a customer to walk into an office for service.

Effective January 6, 2025, we will require customers to schedule an appointment for service in our field offices, including requests for Social Security cards. We encourage customers to become accustomed to our:

• [Online Services](https://www.ssa.gov/onlineservices/), where many transactions can be completed conveniently and securely, and

• [Automated Services](https://www.ssa.gov/agency/contact/phone.html) or our National 800# to schedule an appointment.

Customers who are not able to handle their business online or with the automated options, may call their [local Social Security office](https://secure.ssa.gov/ICON/main.jsp) or our National 800# to schedule an appointment.

We want to make clear that we will not turn people away for service who are unable to make an appointment or do not want to make an appointment. For example, members of vulnerable populations, military personnel, people with terminal illnesses, and individuals with other situations requiring immediate or specialized attention may still walk in for service at our field offices. Some of our offices also have minimal to no wait times, and they will still serve customers who walk in.

We appreciate your partnership in sharing this information and helping our customers through this transition. Thank you for your continued support as we work together to improve service accessibility and responsiveness.

**Secure your financial future: Tools for people with disabilities**

**U.S. Department of Labor Blog**

By: Lisa M. Gomez

October 29, 2024

If you’re a person with a disability who is looking to secure your financial future, you’re not alone. You might be asking: Can I work if I receive SSI or SSDI? How can I save money I am earning from my new job? Can I use my ABLE account for things I buy to go to work? What do I do about healthcare if I lose my job? The U.S. Department of Labor has a financial toolkit that can help. The Secure Your Financial Future toolkit, jointly developed by the Employee Benefits Security Administration (EBSA) and the Office of Disability Employment Policy, is an up-to-date repository of financial literacy tools and resources beneficial to all Americans, including individuals with disabilities, striving to achieve financial stability. We all need clear and accurate information to secure our financial well-being.

No matter the stage of your employment journey, below are quick links to answers to important questions and tools and resources to help you meet your financial goals. Be sure to explore the “Retiring from a Job” topic for tools on how to get a head start on planning for a secure retirement:

**Preparing for a job-** Every day, millions of Americans – including those with disabilities – look for jobs. Many are searching for their first job, while others are looking for a new job, new career, or a promotion. Before you get ready to start, prepare a budget, determine your expenses and how much you need to earn and consider whether work might have an impact on any public benefits you receive.

**Starting a job-** Once you get a job, decisions need to be made about pay and benefits. You may also need to request a workplace accommodation whether you are working in an office, at home or some other environment. If your new job offers a 401(k) or other retirement savings plan, sign up and contribute as much as you can – any retirement savings plan you have through your employment is an essential part of your future financial security.

Read full article here: <https://blog.dol.gov/2024/10/29/secure-your-financial-future-tools-for-people-with-disabilities>

**Disability Advocates Sound Alarm Over Possible Medicaid Cuts**

By: Michelle Diament

November 21, 2024

With Republicans set to assume control in Washington, disability advocates are warning that proposals are in the works to drastically reshape Medicaid and undermine the nation’s system of home and community-based services.

President-elect Donald Trump and his allies on Capitol Hill are reportedly looking to squeeze money from Medicaid and other safety-net programs as they hunt for ways to offset the cost of extending tax cuts that were passed during his first term in office.

The moves are setting off alarm bells for disability advocates who have spent years pleading for increased investment in the long-struggling Medicaid home and community-based services program, which serves as the backbone of supports for people with developmental disabilities in this country.

[Full article.](https://www.disabilityscoop.com/2024/11/21/disability-advocates-sound-alarm-over-possible-medicaid-cuts/31179/)

**EVENTS**

**Call for Artwork Submissions for the 2025 LIFE Conference**

The Delaware Developmental Disabilities Council and the LIFE Conference Planning Committee are thrilled to announce that we are accepting artwork submissions for the 2025 LIFE Conference! This year’s event will take place at Bally’s Hotel and Casino, and our theme is "We Are Worthy."

We invite individuals with disabilities and without, from all backgrounds, to submit artwork that captures this empowering theme. Your work can reflect what you believe you are worthy of—whether it’s living independently, pursuing employment, building relationships, accessing quality healthcare, or celebrating joyful moments like cooking, dancing, or hobbies.

**Submission Details:**

**Accepted Formats**: Submissions can include any medium (painting, drawing, digital art, photography, etc.) but must be provided in a high-quality digital format (JPEG, PNG, or PDF).

**Theme**: Artwork should express worthiness, empowerment, or positivity.

**Additional Information**: Artists should include a photo of themselves and a brief paragraph (3-5 sentences) about their inspiration and any information they'd like to share about their work.

**How to Submit:** You can upload your artwork and artist information directly to our Google Drive folder by clicking <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1xzcvVWdlxFpx8THPIzhdrlSeG_YkVzKZ?usp=drive_link>

Alternatively, you can email your digital artwork and artist information to Emmanuel Jenkins at emmanuel.jenkins@delaware.gov.

**Deadline: December 20, 2024**

Selected artwork will be displayed as part of a digital slideshow in the conference lobby, highlighting the creativity and diverse perspectives of our community. Due to space limitations, not all submissions may be selected for display.

For questions or more information, please contact Emmanuel at 302-739-7192.

To learn more about the LIFE Conference or to register, please visit our website at [https://lifeconferencede.org/.](https://lifeconferencede.org/)

Submission Requirements:



**4th Annual Winter Wonderland**

Together, we can help ease the burden for families in need this holiday season. Make a financial contribution or drop off new coats and toys to help school-aged children this winter. Items will be handed out to families at our three Winter Wonderland locations in New Castle, Kent & Sussex Counties. To attend, families must register prior to the events.

Donations and reservations: <https://uwde.org/winterwonderland/>

**Braille Family Fun Day**

The NFB Northern Delaware Chapter cordially invites to Braille Family Fun Day!

Braille Family Fun Day celebrates universal fun with games in braille, print, and tactile versions. This means that everyone can take part in the fun, and possibly use or learn some braille in the process. There will be friends (new and old), family (young and old), food (tasty of course), games (fun for all), and prizes! All are welcome to attend, so invite friends, family, and anyone you think would enjoy an afternoon of fun.

When: Saturday, December 7th from 12 to 3pm.

Where: Route 9 Library and Innovation Center, 3022 New Castle Avenue, New Castle, DE 19720

Questions: Email mailto:northerndenfb@gmail.com



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