

Developmental Disabilities Network Journal Marks 3rd Anniversary

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The DDNJ aims to make research accessible to individuals with disabilities, families, and communities.

The Institute for Disability Research, Policy & Practice (IDRPP) is celebrating the third anniversary of the launch of the [Developmental Disabilities Network Journal \(DDNJ\)](#). The DDNJ is an academic journal focused on publishing research on disabilities that is accessible to everyone and that includes perspectives from individuals with disabilities and their families.

From its inception, the DDNJ has sought to address a specific problem in the body of research on individuals with disabilities: individuals with disabilities themselves are often not actively included in the research that is meant to help them.

Matthew Wappett, executive director of the IDRPP and editor-in-chief of the DDNJ, said that in many contexts, there is still an assumption that individuals with disabilities aren't able to understand scholarly research. But when people with disabilities are fully included in research, Wappett said it can "reflect more authentically what the needs, hopes, dreams and desires of people with disabilities are."

Over the last three years, content from the DDNJ has been downloaded 13,000 times in 70 countries. The journal has included content from people with disabilities from many different backgrounds in alignment with its mission to include people with disabilities at all levels—from the editorial board to the peer-review process.

With the help of Christopher Phillips, Utah State University's digital accessibility officer, the DDNJ is available in a form fully accessible to people with disabilities. The editorial board includes people with developmental disabilities, and the board as a whole regularly sends back submissions that are not accessible.

In collaboration with Utah State University Digital Commons, the DDNJ is an open-source publication, ensuring that research and information are available at no cost to people with disabilities, their parents, siblings, and caregivers, direct-support professionals, and community members.

Additionally, the companion [DDNJ Author Insights Podcast](#) launched in December of 2021, offering perspectives on disability research and the effect it can have on all people's lives.

"We want [our content] to be understandable and relevant to people of all abilities," said Mary Ellen Heiner, an assistant editor of the DDNJ. "That's what it's all about."

The DDNJ's early issues have covered a variety of topics related to disabilities: a special edition on COVID's impact on services featured content from both service providers and people who rely on services that less available during the pandemic, and an issue devoted to mental health included authors and reviewers who had personal experience with mental health challenges.

In the coming years, Wappett hopes to see the journal make even more progress toward its founding goals, especially when it comes to participation from people with intellectual disabilities. Without much precedent for academic journals that are fully inclusive to people with disabilities, Wappett and others at the IDRPP are working to find effective ways to continue moving forward with the DDNJ's impactful work.

Learn more about the [Institute for Disability Research, Policy & Practice](#).