

## “Potential to Inspire”

*Jill Hano is an Office for Citizens with Developmental Disabilities (OCDD) New Opportunities Waiver (NOW) Participant*



Born with cerebral palsy, River Ridge native Jill Hano has transformed her life into a powerful testament to resilience and leadership. Cerebral palsy is a group of neurological disorders, usually caused by damage in a developing brain, that affect a person’s muscle coordination and movement. In Jill’s case, it has made it harder for her to walk (especially long distances) and speak, leading some people to question her intelligence.

Despite these challenges, Jill earned a bachelor’s degree in general studies from Nicholls State University. Now in her 40s, Jill continues to thrive in her community and is a hostess at a nearby restaurant.

Jill attributes some of her independence to her participation in OCDD’s [New Opportunities Waiver \(NOW\)](#) since high school. “[Without the NOW], I wouldn’t be as independent as I am. I would be more isolated. I’ve

never been in a group home or a day program, thanks to the NOW.” The NOW offers services in the home and community to individuals 3 years of age or older with an intellectual or developmental disability who meet OCDD Waiver Services eligibility requirements. It provides specific, activity-focused services rather than continuous custodial care to support dignity, quality of life, and security in participants’ everyday lives.

Jill participated in the [Louisiana Developmental Disability Council’s \(LaDDC\) 2014 Partners in Policymaking Class](#), a national leadership training program for people with developmental disabilities that aims to create effective partnerships between policymakers and individuals who need special services. In 2017, she became a member of the LaDDC and currently serves as the LaDDC’s Executive Committee’s vice chair, where she works to increase independence, integration, and inclusion for all Louisianans with developmental disabilities.

“Just as Jill’s service has benefitted my work, her service and commitment to the Council have been nothing short of transformative; she’s leaving a lasting impact that will benefit the Council and Louisiana for years to come,” said LaDDC member and Executive Director of Diverse Learners with the Louisiana Department of Education Meredith Jordan. “Jill has been an inspiring blend of resilience, empathy, and high expectations...Her dedication to advocating for policies and action that enhance inclusivity and accessibility has brought about significant progress in the Council’s goals, setting new standards for supporting individuals with disabilities across our state.”

OCDD Assistant Secretary Julie Foster Hagan has worked alongside Jill on the LaDDC and a variety of workgroups for over six years. “Demonstrating true leadership skills, Jill has helped educate others about what it is like to live with a developmental disability in order to create change in areas such as voting rights, employment, Medicaid services, and education,” she says.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, OCDD allowed family members to become direct support professionals (DSPs). This has given Jill’s mother the opportunity to become her DSP. “The NOW has allowed me to grow and to live the life I want because I’m very independent, but I still need the support,” said Jill. For instance, Jill is very close to and trusts her mom to help her budget her finances and drive her to and from appointments and events.

Most recently, Jill helped bring the Youth Leadership Forum (YLF) to Louisiana in 2023. YLF is a residential leadership program focused on empowering youths with disabilities, providing them with the skills they need to become future leaders, and promoting an environment of disability culture and pride.

When Jill isn’t working, volunteering, and advocating for herself and her community, she lives her life to the fullest and enjoys downtime by going on cruises with her friends and family. “I love traveling and seeing new places, but instead of going on the excursions, I typically stay on the ship or the nearest beach to rest and relax.”

Jill's story is a testament to the potential of all individuals with disabilities to live independently, pursue their passions, and be valued members of their communities. With the right support and opportunities, such as the NOW, every person has the capacity to make a meaningful impact and inspire those around them.



To learn more about developmental disabilities, click [here](#).

To learn more about the services that OCDD offers the DD community, click [here](#).