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"Helping people to live, learn and work in our community"

Pandemic losses take toll on families, disability community *by Rita Price, FCBDD Communications Coordinator*

Scott Swick was thrilled when his service coordinator, Toi-Lin Van Horn, stopped by one day with home-sewn masks for him and his roommates. Swick appreciated the scarlet-and-gray face covering, but what he really wanted was a hug.

Van Horn had to remind him they couldn't touch. "It broke my heart," she said.

The pandemic's curtailment of social interaction was especially difficult for the 57-year-old Swick, who delighted in time with family, friends and his ARC Industries co-workers. He died of complications from COVID-19 in December, one month ahead of his roommate Richard Wright.

Wright passed away at 95 and is believed to have been the oldest person served by the Franklin County Board of Developmental Disabilities. "Nothing got to Richard," Van Horn said. "Until this virus."



Scott Swick



Richard Wright

Quiet and reserved, Wright had enjoyed exploring his community on foot and was often seen ducking into a shop for coffee and a doughnut. Despite his advanced age, Wright had opened up in recent years and seemed to enjoy engaging in "little conversations," Van Horn said.

Swick never needed encouragement on that front. He was active in Special Olympics, the Down Syndrome Association of Central Ohio and liked just about everyone. "Scotty was a real comedian," said his mom, Jan Worthington. "It wasn't unusual for me to be stretched out on the couch on a Saturday night and have a text pop up: There was Scotty in a bar with his brother, on the stage playing his harmonica."

He was crazy about sports and cheerfully shifted his allegiance, picking a new favorite team every time he was asked. "We had a wonderful relationship," Worthington said. "Scotty was deeply loved."

According to the state, at least 175 Ohioans served by county boards had died from COVID-19 by early February. Approximately 18 were in Franklin County, where their losses are profoundly felt.

"Everyone's been trying so hard," service coordinator Alli Johansen said. "But with our people, things can get detrimental pretty quickly."

She oversaw services for Shannon Suber, 41, who died of COVID-19 in October. Witty and strong-willed, Suber was proud of living as independently as possible. "Everyone loved his sense of humor," Johansen said.

Suber's obituary said he had a gift for listening when others needed to talk.



Editor's note: The Franklin County Board of Developmental Disabilities, along with public agencies nationwide, has been in pandemic mode for a year now.

From the start, the coronavirus outbreak upended routines and operations. It idled buses and silenced classrooms, pushed meetings online and sent us home with laptops. Our smiles are still mostly hidden behind masks.

Some staff members and many of those we support have fallen ill; as of this writing, at least 18 people served by the board have died from COVID-19.

We mourn their loss. And we take pride in the efforts of FCBDD employees to carry on and adapt, continuing to provide safe service and support -- including long-awaited vaccine appointments -- to people with developmental disabilities. This edition of Dateline is dedicated to the commitment and compassion so many have shown.

Story continued on page 2

Early Childhood programs strengthen family connections

To a giggly 3-year-old, being asked to put Play-Doh on your head – or your nose – is just plain funny. For a preschool teacher watching via Zoom, it's an opportunity to see whether that child can identify parts of the body.

FCBDD Early Childhood staff found all sorts of ways to keep working with young children, and to conduct assessments of their needs and abilities, when the pandemic closed buildings last spring.

Delivering mostly-virtual services to nearly 1,000 young children for more than six months was neither easy nor ideal. But the effort yielded silver linings as parents partnered with teachers and mastered new technologies, said Becky Love, Director of Early Childhood Education.

"The blessing in all this is that we've had better access to families," she said. "So some of what we've had to do, we'll keep."

With flexible times and visits to childhood centers not required, parent participation in certain meetings shot up to 98 percent, Love said. More fathers were able to join in. Teachers helped parents secure items for at-home activities so that children could follow along, using the same supplies as their online instructors.



Early Childhood staff member Kelly Thompson and student snuggle after some messy fun.

Something as simple as making sure kids had bean bags to toss meant that teachers still would be able to observe their motor skills from afar.

"Before we could do any of this, we needed to build relationships with families," teacher Christine Hunter said. "Their buy-in was crucial. They weren't a fly on the wall in the classroom - they were there."

Early learning sites have re-opened and programs now operate on a staggered schedule, with groups of students alternating classroom days. Some families opt for a hybrid approach, while others still participate remotely.

Though adaptations work well, Hunter and others can't wait until everyone can be together again. There's still no online substitute for hugs.

Pandemic losses take toll on families, disability community (continued from page 1)

Service coordinator Samantha Keigley also is mourning the loss of two people she served. Patricia Patterson, 58, died of complications from COVID-19 in July, and her roommate Martha Swank, 62, died in October.

Patterson always looked forward to Mondays and her time at ARC Industries, where she had made many friends. She loved to sing and dance, especially along with the movie *Mamma Mia!* The experience delighted every time, and Patterson never had trouble inspiring others to join in. "Once a week, the whole group would watch it with her," Keigley said. "If you met Patti, you loved her."

Patterson had been active in Special Olympics, favoring swimming and basketball. She also liked bowling and good pizza.

Several FCBDD and day-program employees reached out to share stories of good times with Patterson after learning she had died, and those remembrances have comforted her family, Keigley said.

Swank also was a social butterfly. She attended Goodwill for many years and although she considered herself retired, still participated in activities. She loved her friends and enjoyed shopping, Tyler Perry movies and her Snuggie blanket. "Her personality was one of a kind," Keigley said. "She was funny and sarcastic."

Even during her illness, Swank inspired those who cared for her. "When I would call to check on her in the hospital, the nurses told me they fought over her," Keigley said.

Swank cherished her relationships and often worried that her friends might not know when she died. "That was her biggest fear," Keigley said. "She wanted to be remembered."



Patricia Patterson



West Central School tackles pandemic transitions

The sudden closure of schools last spring left little time to prepare. Dr. Maryalice Turner, principal at West Central School and Transition Services, remembers citing the example of the Apollo space crew confronted with a fast-failing ventilation system.

“NASA is saying, ‘What is in that ship? What is in there that you can use?’ We’re a transition school,” Turner told her staff. “What do we have that we can use to help our kids?”

Printers started running non-stop; bags were stuffed with therapy instructions, pamphlets and packaged food. Instructors equipped families as best they could, then set about figuring out how to continue transition services for students with severe developmental disabilities.

At that point, school computers were not set up with cameras and microphones, and staff didn’t yet have laptops. “They basically packed up and went home, and started using their own stuff,” Turner said.

The journey since has been bumpy but amazing. Turner wound up with a two-inch binder that told much of the story. “It was all the recommendations that our team had come up with,” she said. “Some of it was so stellar that I was blown away by the effort and thoughtfulness.”

West Central even pulled off a highly successful, virtual graduation ceremony, a feat that likely will be repeated this year. “It turned out so well,” Turner said. “Hundreds of people watched it. Way more than when the gym is full.”

Though school has re-opened, many students have not yet returned and some teachers are providing services both remotely and in homes.

The biggest remaining challenge is finding ways to create “a meaningful day outside the classroom,” transition specialist Jill Hicks said. “We help transition our students from school to adult life. Our community was a big resource.”



West Central students leave frozen food on porches for Meals-on-Wheels recipients. Hot-meal delivery is paused during the pandemic.

Aquatics team makes waves with super snorkels

The first few times she returned to the swimming pool at West Central School, 15-year-old Sindy Molina wasn’t sure what to make of her instructor.

“I look like a Martian Teletubby,” Lori Patzer said.

Patzer and other members of the FCBDD aquatics staff now don bulky, full-face snorkel masks -- topped with big blue filters – to prevent transmission of the coronavirus during recreation and therapy sessions. The head gear is proving to be a game-changer for people with developmental disabilities who cannot safely wear masks in the water but who need to stay close to instructors.



West Central student Sindy Molina and aquatics instructor Lori Patzer

Aquatics instructor Wesley Barrett, the parent of two special-needs children, discovered the snorkels while researching safety options. Too many months had passed without the sounds of happy splashes and laughter in the natatorium.

“The kids absolutely love this place,” aquatics instructor Bob Helber said. “But we hadn’t been back in the water until we found these snorkels.”

Unlike many other programs, aquatics couldn’t transition to a digital format during the pandemic (though instructors did make videos of themselves blowing bubbles in cereal bowls).

The pool is an important resource for West Central students, many of whom have mobility issues. “The greatest thing to me about water is that it levels the playing field,” Patzer said. “In here, they’re free.”

Special Olympics staff, athletes eager for games to begin

For the better part of a year, Franklin County Special Olympics athletes have had to trade gyms and playing fields for computer screens and Zoom. Everyone's still smiling, but sometimes the laughter mixes with tears.

"There is that familial aspect to our program," said Ryan Phillips, director of Franklin County Special Olympics. "We miss each other. We miss us."

Phillips and his staff, volunteer coaches and athletes fill gaps as best they can and stay in touch online, by phone and with delivery of "Boredom Buster" activity packets. The mailings include ideas for daily physical activities, word puzzles and corny jokes. "It's a shotgun approach," Phillips said.

Patty Bryant isn't one to critique the offerings. She appreciates them all. "I'm glad they came up with these," said Bryant, a long-time Special Olympics athlete. "I'm really missing my buddies."



Special Olympics athletes stay in touch and enjoy trivia games on Zoom.

Even before the pandemic struck, Bryant was still recovering from staggering losses: Over just a few years, both her mother and father passed away, and she had to leave her family home. Then the shutdown ended her movie-theater job.

"She's maintained an incredibly positive attitude," Phillips said. Bryant now has a new apartment, job and a puppy named Bailey who makes cameos during Flyers Activity Night (FAN) Zoom meetings.

Though they remain wary of the timeline, Phillips and others hope for a return to activities during the summer or fall. "It's been hard for folks, especially when your circle is small," he said. "Some of our athletes have been in this 30 years. Worlds revolve around it."

Vaccine effort reaches people served by FCBDD

Thousands of Franklin County residents with developmental disabilities and their support staff have now received at least one dose of vaccine to help protect them against COVID-19.

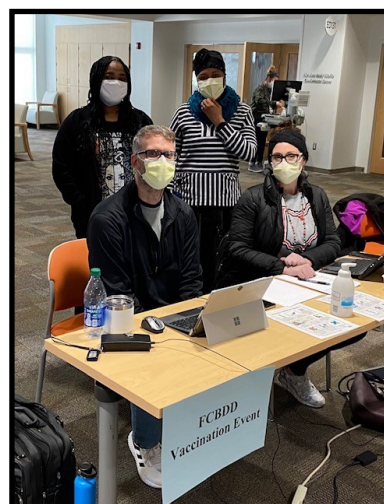
Many of the immunizations were scheduled through a massive outreach project coordinated by FCBDD administrators and staff. The aim was to quickly deliver as many vaccines as possible during specially designated clinics at Nationwide Children's Hospital and through Franklin County Public Health.

If the idea sounds simple, the fast-moving preparations were not.

Director of Administrative and Support Services Larry Macintosh and his assistant, Joni Sparks, worked tirelessly in January and February to develop and oversee scheduling programs; Service Coordination Director Lee Childs had her staff contact everyone eligible to help with appointments and check on transportation.

"It's been a huge logistical challenge that's been very much worth it," said Jed Morison, FCBDD Superintendent and CEO. "All told, we're talking about 11,000 vaccines if everyone takes advantage."

Morison also thanked Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine and Department of Developmental Disabilities Jeff Davis for working to secure vaccines for this vulnerable population while overall supplies remain scarce.



FCBDD staff members assist with the Nationwide Children's Hospital vaccination event. Front row, from left: Scott Holbrook and Lindsey Musser - Provider Compliance Review Specialists. Back row, from left: Service Coordinators - Kim Allen Green and Fatoumata Sow.

Maintenance, IT and Transportation tackle COVID challenges

The **FCBDD Maintenance Department** is full of handymen, facilities manager Mike Boyce says, workers who “can fix just about anything they come across.”

The pandemic has tested those skills. Boyce’s team had to quickly become expert, for example, at making all sorts of plexiglass barriers to reduce the risk of coronavirus transmission in reception areas, classrooms and other spaces where line-of-sight is important.

Asked if he now has nightmares about acrylic glass, Steve Yarnell smiled. “Every night,” he said.

Boyce said Yarnell and other maintenance employees have done a great job responding to new needs, from constructing safety and outdoor education equipment to serving as a pop-up distribution site for some 80,000 face masks.



Steve Yarnell, Facility Senior Technician

The **Transportation Department** has faced a churn of program openings and closings, sanitizing protocols and major bus-route changes. Director Bill Ryan said he’s “happy and proud,” of the job his drivers and staff have done to remain flexible and positive under challenging conditions.

“Attitudes have been great,” he said. “And our routing department has been excellent. I say, ‘This is what I need,’ and they come back with an answer.”

Long-time bus driver Linda Oliver said the key is to accept change, “commit to what’s needed,” and remember who you serve.

“I love the job and I treat the people on my bus as if they were my own,” she said. “And really, they are my own. I am responsible for them and their safety.”



Linda Oliver, Bus Driver

Information Technology staff also have had to pivot over the past year, often without warning.

The shift to remote work left little time to prepare as hundreds of staff members jumped on Webex and Zoom. IT Director Travis Sherick and his team juggled system security, bandwidth and program needs, and saw help-desk calls grow by 50 percent.

“We serve the entire agency, and this has maybe helped us realize that we’re a partner,” he said. “We should be there at the beginning and middle, not just the end.”

FCBDD Service Coordinators go above and beyond

Normally, Nick Smith might advise his staff not to get too involved in activities and outings with people on their caseloads.

But nothing about the past year has been normal. When he learned that service coordinator Aileen Burnside had been going on bike rides with a young woman who was struggling to adjust to profound changes in her routine, Smith just smiled.

“I know you’re careful, and I know how important this is to her,” he told Burnside. “So keep doing it.”

As the coronavirus pandemic shuttered programs, employment sites and social gatherings, duties of the 280-employee service coordination department at the Franklin County Board of Developmental Disabilities became even more complex.

Department Director Lee Childs said service coordinators have provided meals, picked up medications, shuttled people to appointments and, importantly, acted as a friend.

“In this job, you have to look – look and see what they need,” Burnside said. She coordinates services for one

man had become so paralyzed by anxiety that he hadn’t left his apartment in months. With Burnside’s help, he finally became comfortable strolling around a near-empty mall or park.

“People feel like they’re in control when we’re out walking,” she said. “There’s no control with COVID. They can’t get out; they’ve maybe lost their job. They hear about people sick, people dying. It’s hard.”

She’s grateful supervisors remain flexible and have given staff the tools they need to work efficiently and compassionately during the pandemic. Burnside now takes at least 10 individuals to doctor appointments instead of helping to schedule virtual visits, which might not lead to fully accurate assessments. “No Zoom for them, because body language tells so much,” she said.

Burnside is humble and doesn’t see her actions “as going above and beyond,” said Smith, her supervisor. She allows only that she’s proud to be a dependable presence for people with developmental disabilities.

“So often, people have disappointed them,” Burnside said. “They need to know that they can trust you. And that you’ll follow through.”

Career Milestones

35 years

Patricia Davis

20 years

Carleen Nye
Cameron Underdown

15 years

Jennifer Cunningham
Michelle Burton
Jane Clore
Maria Porter
Kristy Schuyler

10 years

Lindsay Allen
Jessica Bonham

5 years

Yolanda Hairston
Henry Sanders



DD Awareness and Advocacy Day goes virtual

People with developmental disabilities, their family members and community allies are gathering online instead of at the Ohio Statehouse this month as events for the annual Developmental Disability Awareness and Advocacy Day shift to a digital format.

“It opens the door for more people to attend, so that’s good news,” said Melissa Fannon of the Ohio Provider Resource Association. “We’ll use Zoom to schedule the meetings with legislators.”

The association is coordinating the March 2 event with a grant from the Ohio Developmental Disabilities Council, which works to educate policymakers on ways to improve government services and policies that affect people with developmental disabilities.

Self-advocate Christine Brown, who serves on an advisory council for DD Awareness and Advocacy Day, expects some focus on efforts to expand access to broadband and technology throughout the state. “A big lesson is how COVID-19 has impacted us and how our lives have changed during this pandemic,” she said. “Even doctors have gone virtual. Internet is a lifeline. It’s gone from an accessory to a necessary.”

Though she hopes that next year’s event will allow for in-person meetings, Brown said she’s optimistic that the online format draws new participants. “Maybe in the future – who knows – we might do physical and virtual, so that it’s a hybrid,” she said.

Information is at ddohio.wordpress.com, where recordings of speeches and sessions also will be posted.



Dateline

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www.fcbdd.org

Calendar

Editor’s Note: *The following calendar is tentative due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Call 614-342-5950 before attending any meeting to see if it is still scheduled.*

March 2021

- 2 Virtual Developmental Disability Awareness and Advocacy Day, 10:00 a.m.
- 11 Self-Advocate Advisory Council meeting via Zoom 10 a.m.
- 17 Happy St. Patrick’s Day!
- 17 Family Support meeting, 10 a.m. via Zoom. Please contact Amy Magginis at 614-342-5950 for details or click the following link to connect:
[Family Support Meeting Zoom Link](#)
- 21 World Down Syndrome Day Celebration, DSACO - Down Syndrome Rocks! For more information, go to www.dsaco.net or call (614) 263-6020.
- 25 Franklin County Board of Developmental Disabilities Board meeting at 11:30 a.m. via Zoom. Please contact Amy Magginis at 614-342-5950 for details. Click on the following link to connect:
[FCBDD Board Meeting Link \(Zoom\)](#)