

Published by the Franklin County Board of Developmental Disabilities
"Helping people to live, learn and work in our community"

Senior worker thrives in first community job

The busy warehouse felt so big and so confusing that Stephen Lee could barely find his way to and from the break room. Discouraged, he thought about giving up on both the job and his dream of working independently.

"I got lost a lot," Lee said. "I wanted to quit, but I said, 'No! Quitting is for losers.' It was kind of hard, but I grew."

Lee, 65, stuck with his Project SEARCH job-training program and in March – the anniversary month for Ohio's Employment First initiative – celebrated one year as a DHL employee. Lee had spent the previous 14 or so years working at ARC Industries and had never before held a competitive job.

"Stephen's the first person from Project SEARCH hired on at DHL," said Amanda Lee, his service coordinator at the Franklin County Board of Developmental Disabilities. "He's doing really, really well. I can definitely tell he is proud of himself."

Lee also has impressed and inspired his co-workers at DHL, a global logistics company that distributes food, medical supplies, skincare products and more. "Stephen was given an award for best attitude," Amanda Lee said. "His DHL colleagues nominated him and that was really meaningful for him."

Former Ohio Gov. John Kasich signed the Employment First initiative in 2012, marking a major policy shift away from the default option of sheltered-workshop employment for people with developmental disabilities.



Steve Lee, a Project SEARCH program graduate, has found employment success at a DHL warehouse.

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Nursery grows flowers and employment futures

Students and young adults with autism have nurtured more than 40,000 plants and flowers over the past several months at Lettuce Work, a nonprofit nursery now open for the season.

The New Albany-area farm and greenhouse trains and employs people with autism spectrum disorder and uses 100 percent of proceeds to support its program. "Every year we've doubled our sales. It really took off," said Doug Sharp, who started the organization about seven years ago with his wife, Julie, to help chart a path for people whose disabilities and social skills make it difficult to transition from school to work.



Lettuce Work, a nonprofit nursery open to the public, trains and hires young adults with autism.

The Sharps have a 21-year-old son with autism who worked at the nursery and now is thrilled to have landed a retail job elsewhere. "He's moved on, and that's what we want," Sharp said. "They can make a lot of mistakes here – we coach and teach. And then, hopefully, they're ready for other jobs."

Lettuce Work started out growing hydroponic lettuce for wholesale distribution, but shifted last fall to annuals, perennials, hanging baskets and herbs. The greater variety gives workers different experiences and also creates more revenue than the lettuce operation, which took up far more space, Sharp said.

"There's more to do, and that seems to work better for us," he said. "We have about a dozen young adults out here every day."

Lettuce Work is open daily and also offers online sales for curbside pickup. For more information, go to www.lettucework.org or call 740-913-0495

FCBDD family spotlight: *Corey Ferguson balances role as father, professional advocate*

Just minutes after arriving for what they expected would be a routine, 39-week appointment, Corey Ferguson was climbing into an ambulance alongside his wife. Sirens blared as they rushed to the nearest hospital, where Andrea delivered their daughter. A pinched umbilical cord caused the infant to be born with hypoxic-ischemic encephalopathy (HIE), and set her parents on an uncertain journey.

Eleven years later, Linleigh Ferguson is thriving and her dad works for the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities, focusing on family outreach and education. Linleigh also is big sister to Brody, 8, and Everly, 6. Corey often shares their experience as he helps to support other families.

So Linleigh is the inspiration for your current job?

I spent 13 years at Wexner Medical Center coordinating programs in neonatology, cardiac surgery, and eventually the Nisonger Center. Through life with my daughter my pain became my passion, which inevitably became my purpose. I enrolled in a graduate program and made a career change into public service, specifically supporting people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families. I want to use what I learned to help others. This isn't easy.

Describe some of the advice you try to offer families with special-needs children.

One thing I've learned that I share is that the storm isn't meant to disrupt your life; perhaps it's there to clear your path. That's still your child, still the same amazing person they're meant to be. There's some grief in this, yes. And that's okay. It's been 11 years and I still have that. Take it a day at a time, find people who know the resources. There's a lot of importance in networking, and there are no stupid questions. There are many people who care.

Linleigh's services through FCBDD began right away, correct?

We've been here from the very, very beginning. Linleigh started with Help Me Grow, and then attended the early childhood program on Johnstown Road. She now receives services and supports via a waiver and the outstanding care coordination from our SSA, Katy McAtee. I cannot say enough wonderful things about her.

What do you hope for your daughter?

For her to be engaged and supported is what I'm after. She's much more cognitively aware than she gets credit for. She's non-verbal and non-ambulatory, but I make a joke and sometimes she'll laugh. It's finding things that she enjoys, can participate in, and smile. We had an outing to see the Trans-Siberian Orchestra and she loved it; I've also taken her to an (OSU) men's basketball game. I'm really excited to see what kind of mischief she'll get into with her siblings. And as they get older, we look forward to watching them love and support each other.



The Ferguson family, from left: Brody, Linleigh, Andrea, Everly and Corey

Senior worker thrives in first community job

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FCBDD partners with Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities and together they collaborate with ARC Industries, Project SEARCH and area businesses to help make community employment the first option for people who, like Lee, want to work.

"He's such a success," said Rebecca Ackerman, ARC's Program Coordinator for Project SEARCH at DHL. She said Lee has become something of an ambassador at the company's Lockbourne warehouse, building awareness about employment among people with developmental disabilities just by coming to work and doing his job.

"We've probably had 30 or 40 people come up to ask about what we do," Ackerman said. "It might be for a brother or sister, son or daughter. Some aren't from here and didn't know these kinds of programs are available."

Lee, a part-time worker who has autism, cerebral palsy and other disabilities, isn't the fastest worker on the floor, and that's OK, Ackerman said. He capably bundles and packages products, navigates his schedule and uses a time clock. He also gets along with just about everyone.

"I never have a harsh word for anyone," Lee said. "You have to have a good attitude. That's everything." Toni Crump, one of Lee's co-workers at DHL, said his positive outlook shows. "Steve is an awesome guy," she said. "He takes pride in what he does."

Though he enjoyed his time at ARC Industries, Lee said he feels more independent at DHL and earns a good wage. "I decided it was time for a change," he said of making the leap, relatively late in life, to community employment. "Now I'm saving to go see my brother in Florida."

People with disabilities learn to protect themselves

People with developmental disabilities face a higher-than-average risk of assault, abuse and bullying. But there's plenty they can do – no matter the level of disability – to boost their emotional and physical safety.

"Self-defense is way bigger than hitting people," Matt O'Brien, an instructor and trainer with IMPACT Safety, said during a recent class. "Karate is really good for one thing. But what we're teaching is really good for all this other stuff."

O'Brien and his colleague Olivia Caldeira are working with about a dozen ARC Industries participants who signed up for a multi-week course on personal-safety skills for people with developmental disabilities. IMPACT Safety, a program of LifeCare Alliance, has decades of experience helping to empower vulnerable populations.

"It all starts with, 'How does this person make their wants or needs known?'" Caldeira said. "It's important to give people choice and a sense of control."

Everyone, for example, can learn to convey a "stop" message, whether with hands out and a firm voice, or through gestures and expressions. Program participants get plenty of practice on that front when O'Brien plays the role of a shady guy making unwanted approaches. And everyone, whether they are able to speak or not, whether they walk or use a wheelchair, finds ways to tell him to get lost.

"Do you have to let a stranger get close to you? No!," O'Brien told the class. "If you can remember stop signs, you've got 90% of what we're telling you."

Because people with developmental disabilities often rely on others for assistance with daily tasks and decisions, it can be difficult for some to realize that they have the right to set and enforce personal boundaries. "Perpetrators are drawn to people who are vulnerable," Caldeira said. "We have to make sure people with disabilities are empowered. It's about body autonomy for people who might not have had that."

Letting go of a passive mindset also is important when interacting with caregivers, seeking help or reporting abuse. "People are taught stranger danger, but if you look at the statistics, it's usually someone they know," Caldeira said.

Sessions focus on safety in various situations and settings, and also include self-calming strategies to reduce anxiety and stress.

For now, classes are virtual due to the coronavirus pandemic. But it hasn't taken long for participants to get the hang of interacting with O'Brien and Caldeira on screen, and to embrace the empowerment message: During a one recent class, three people showed up in Superman shirts.

For more information or to schedule a workshop, email info@impactsafety.org or call 614-437-2967



IMPACT Safety hopes to return to in-person sessions, such as the one above, after the pandemic.

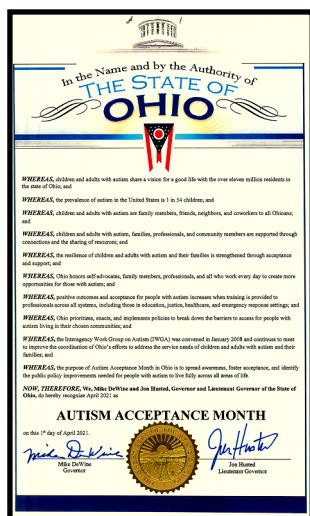
Autism advocates urge new name for observance month

The Autism Society Central Ohio is joining national advocates in calling for a state and federal designation of April as Autism Acceptance Month instead of Autism Awareness Month.

"In furtherance of our mission to improve the lives of all affected by autism, we are working to move from the passive idea of autism 'awareness' to 'acceptance' and, ultimately, 'action' to include full inclusion for all," said Kathi Machle, managing director for the Autism Society Central Ohio.

Many advocates have been using the term "acceptance" for a while, including during events last month. Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine issued a proclamation recognizing April 2021 as Autism Acceptance Month, and legislation has been introduced to make the change permanent in the state. Supporters hope for a federal-level designation as well.

"While we will always work to spread awareness, words matter – the need for acceptance is greater than ever, as we strive for individuals on the autism spectrum to live fully in all areas of life," said Christopher Banks, President and CEO of the Autism Society of America.



Special Olympics returns with spring sports, social club

Franklin County Special Olympics athletes finally bid farewell to Zoom and reunited in early April for practices and much-needed social activities. But gatherings soon were on hold again after a surge in COVID-19 infections pushed the county to “purple,” the highest warning level in the state’s coronavirus advisory system.

“Hopefully it’s just a pause button, and we’ll be back at it sooner than later,” said Ryan Phillips, director of Franklin County Special Olympics. “We had said as an organization that purple is a definite no-go. That’s a hard stop for us.”

Athletes were disappointed but not surprised, Phillips said. They understood that there might be stops and starts as state and local Special Olympics officials proceed cautiously.

Still, the hiatus has been long and painful, and for some spring-sports athletes, had stretched to two years by the time the first practice was held. “There’s going to be a lot of catching up, and that’s a priority,” said Megan Bender, FCBDD Special Olympics specialist.

To expand opportunities for interaction among all the eager participants, staff and coaches are adding a social club component so that current-season athletes may come to the practice venue on their off-practice nights and visit with friends, play corn hole or take a walk on the trails at JFK Park in Reynoldsburg.

“I have missed it. It’s been a whole year,” said 63-year-old Steve Segal, a Special Olympian for more than 40 years.

Segal was among those happily dusting off his tennis skills during the first practice as he prepares for a season that, once underway, still will be different. The Flyers likely won’t be traveling to competitions, due to COVID-19 precautions, and the Ohio Special Olympics again canceled Summer Games. Officials hope to resume state-level competition in the fall.

Segal said he wants everyone to continue to follow safety rules. “If I were the governor of Ohio I would make sure everyone is wearing their masks and doing what they’re supposed to do so we can get back to normal,” he said.

Athletes are eager to proceed but recognize that the focus has shifted from “how we can keep people safe at home, to how we can keep everyone safe together,” Phillips said. “People have been ready for so long.”



Steve Segal, a long-time Special Olympics athlete, is happy to be back on the tennis courts at JFK Park in Reynoldsburg.



Josiah Tanga plays tennis, basketball and soccer for the Flyers.

Tim Sparks of ARC Industries retires



Tim Sparks

Tim Sparks, a friendly and familiar face to all in the FCBDD administrative offices, retired in April after a combined 16 years with the county board and ARC Industries.

Sparks served as a direct-support professional for the ARC night crew that provides janitorial services at FCBDD. Kurt Schmitter, Director of Workforce Development at ARC, said Sparks always did a great job helping people with disabilities succeed.

“He’s very friendly and has a great sense of humor. I love his laughter,” Schmitter said. “And Tim’s so, so good with our people. He’s loyal and dependable. We’ll definitely miss him.”

Sparks’ wife, Joni Sparks, is an administrative assistant at FCBDD. Now that Tim will no longer be arriving as Joni’s workday ends, we hope they’ll enjoy many relaxing evenings. Best wishes to both.

Good For You

Notable achievements in the FCBDD community

Thanks to Chief Business Officer Dot Yeager for completing the board's long-term financial forecast, which indicates that finances continue to be stable. Plans are on target to stay off the ballot until the current property-tax levy expires in 2028.



Self-advocate and northwest Columbus resident Christine Brown has been elected vice president of the Ohio Self-Determination Association. Congratulations, Christine, and thanks for all you do to advocate on behalf of people with disabilities and to educate the public.

Congratulations to Laura Mongold and the Early Intervention team, who were commended at a recent Family and Children First Council meeting for providing excellent partnership support to Help Me Grow, a state program to promote the health and development of children.



Thank you to Susan Thompson, Superintendent of the Madison County Board of Developmental Disabilities, for her generous support of FCBDD Service Coordination staff. Many employees were able to obtain COVID-19 vaccines in that adjacent county.

Congratulations to former Northeast School music teacher and current Gahanna City Council member Karen Angelou for her service as chair of the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission.

Thanks to the Equity Committee for arranging training on diversity, equity and inclusion. Legal Counsel Gwynn Kinsel, committee co-chair, also presented a webinar on harassment. The FCBDD Training Center established by Human Resources Director David Ott continues to be a great venue for these and many other sessions.

Career Milestones

35 Years

Janet Wilbur

30 Years

Cynthia Phillips

25 Years

Karin Crabbe

20 Years

Jacqueline Rasey

15 Years

Annette Griffin
David Nadolny
Crystal Schneider

5 years

Charles Davis
Amanda Lee
David Ott

Our generous staff contributed over \$9,000 to Operation Feed this year to help central Ohioans in need.

Special thanks to Jennifer Schueneman, Controller, and Assistant Controller Mandy Holland for coordinating donations.



FCBDD distributes thousands of face masks

The Franklin County Board of Developmental Disabilities has continued to offer face masks to provider agencies whenever supplies become available to help protect people with developmental disabilities and their direct-support staff during the pandemic.

A recent distribution of 50,000 masks brings the total to more than 125,000 since December. Keith Ogle, Coordinator of the FCBDD Storeroom, oversees distribution efforts at the compound on W. Dodridge Avenue, where providers or their representatives pick up boxes of three-ply, surgical-grade masks.

Distribution wrapped up in mid-April but will resume if FCBDD receives additional supply.

Though many people served by FCBDD have now been vaccinated against COVID-19, cases still remain high in Franklin County as the nation endures another wave of infections. Public-health officials are urging residents to maintain social-distancing measures, avoid large gatherings and to properly wear masks.

For vaccine information, go to gettheshot.coronavirus.ohio.gov



Teen strives to reduce suicide

Thomas Worthington High School student Andrea Nadolny focused her project for the Girl Scouts Gold Award on suicide prevention, creating an easy-to-read, resource-packed infographic for public use.

“Awareness and discussion of mental illness and suicide prevention continue to be very important,” said Angela Ray, Director of Psychology at the Franklin County Board of Developmental Disabilities. “Andrea’s efforts and information will be helpful to many.”



Andrea Nadolny created a mural to go with her infographic on suicide awareness and prevention.

Andrea, 17, is the daughter of Dave Nadolny, FCBDD Senior Fiscal Specialist. He said his daughter lost a friend to suicide a few years ago and wants to do all she can to reduce stigma and reinforce the message that help is available.

He said Andrea’s goal was to create material that is accessible and engaging, but not too technical. The Worthington Recreation Center and Worthington Libraries are displaying versions of her mural and the QR code that downloads the information; government agencies in Alabama and Florida also plan to use it, as will various mental-health organizations. “She’s sent her infographic to every state,” Nadolny said. “We’re so proud of her.”

At a later date, Andrea will learn whether she receives the Gold Award, the top achievement in Girl Scouts.



To access infographic, use your smart phone’s camera to scan QR code.

2021 FCBDD Community Star Awards Nomination Reminder

Know someone whose accomplishments or support efforts in the developmental disabilities community really stand out? Nominations for the Community Star Awards are being accepted until June 14, with winners recognized during a ceremony on Oct. 28.

For details and a nominating form, go to www.fcbdd.org, click on Newsletters under the Publications tab, and open the April 2021 Dateline.



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.

May 2021

- 11-13 Ohio Association of County Boards (OACB)
- 18-20 Spring Conference to be held virtually.
- 25-28 For details go to www.oacbdd.org or call 614-431-0616.
- 19 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](#)
- 20 FCBDD Administration Red Cross Blood Drive at 2879 Johnstown Road - for details please contact Mary Martin at 614-342-5801 or Jeff Baird at 614-342-5951.
- 20 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 \(Zoom\)](#)
- 31 Memorial Day observed - Early Childhood Centers, West Central School and offices of the Franklin County Board of Developmental Disabilities will be closed.