

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

Psychology Department Director Dr. Angela Ray retires

Had it not been for a visit to a special-education classroom with a college dormmate, Dr. Angela Ray might have kept to her initial plan and wound up with a job in public relations. But the school experience affected her deeply. "These are the people I need to serve," she remembers thinking.

Ray graduated from Ohio Dominican University and earned her MA and PhD in developmental psychology from the Ohio State University, where she studied at the Nisonger Center.

She has had a long and rewarding career as a psychologist serving children and adults with both developmental disabilities and behavioral-health needs, a focus that allowed her to help an underserved population. "I learned a lot from them," she said.

Ray retired last month after 11 years as director of the psychology department at the Franklin County Board of Developmental Disabilities. She first joined the agency in 1986, left for a stint in private practice, then returned for a total of 27 years with FCBDD. "It's been a great ride," she said. "I'm very blessed."

Addressing mental health needs in the disabilities system is often a matter of recognizing people's past experiences and trauma instead of merely focusing on the negative behaviors, Ray said, an approach known as trauma informed care (TIC). She embraced the principles of TIC in the department's daily work and is pleased to see awareness growing.

"Angela has been terrific," FCBDD Superintendent/CEO Jed Morison said. "She has provided leadership not only here, but throughout the state in trauma-informed care. We're certainly going to miss her."

Trauma-responsive care can be especially important for people who aren't able to verbalize their struggles. "They don't necessarily need years and years of counseling," Ray said. "They need to have their sensory and communication needs met."

Ray, who grew up in the Gahanna area, said she's grateful to have spent most of her career with an agency that allowed her to take creative approaches, such as working on students' social skills while on a school bus or in the swimming pool, or incorporating music, pets and bubble-blowing into therapy sessions. "I've always been encouraged to do what is best for people," she said with a smile.

She looks forward to traveling, tending to her scrapbooks and photo albums, and spending more time with her husband, children and grandchildren. Ray also hopes to continue helping people with disabilities and mental illness, perhaps through guardianship and advocacy opportunities. "I know enough about the systems that I'd like to be useful."



Dr. Ray's grandson was all smiles at her retirement party.

Young children, transition-age students return to FCBDD classes

Early-childhood and school programs of the Franklin County Board of Developmental Disabilities are resuming for the 2022-23 school year with lots of new students, staff members and plans for navigating the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

"We're calling it Being Back Better," said Becky Love, FCBDD director of early childhood education. "This will be a normal entry, but we're trying to look at our work and routines through a safety lens."

Open House events, for example, are taking place in person but by appointment so that families can meet with

staff in smaller groups, Love said. She expects both ECE sites to be operating at capacity.

West Central School and Transition Services is welcoming more than 20 new students and a new principal (*see story, page 2*).

"I think we're looking forward to returning with a new normal, which retains the elements of our good practices for protecting students and staff," said Jack Brownley, director of schools and special services.

Veteran educator excited to lead West Central School



Rebecca Holthaus, principal at West Central School and Transition Services.

With her younger son heading off to college and his older brother already away, Rebecca Holthaus figured she might be ready for a change, too. “I’m going to be an empty-nester, and I thought I’d see what’s out there,” she said.

Holthaus is admittedly surprised at how easily she fell in love with the job opportunity that popped up at the Franklin County Board of Developmental Disabilities, which had just begun its search to replace Dr. Maryalice Turner as principal of West Central School and Transition Services. Turner retired in July.

“I felt like I had fun in my interview, which just doesn’t happen,” Holthaus said. “You can tell that the whole staff is invested in the program, and they want someone to come in who is as energized as they are. It’s great to be in a place where there’s synergy and everyone wants to roll up their sleeves because they believe in the mission.”

Holthaus started at West Central on Aug. 1 and recently welcomed students back for the 2022-2023 school year. A Youngstown native, she has worked in public education for nearly 30 years, most recently as principal of School Age Programs at the Stark County Board of Developmental Disabilities in northeast Ohio. Holthaus also has served as a teacher and principal in other school districts, including classes for students with emotional and behavioral disturbances.

“We are thrilled to have someone with experience as a principal available to us to help our veteran staff at West Central School,” said Jack Brownley, FCBDD director of schools and special services. “Staff were involved in the interview selection process and were overwhelmingly supportive of Rebecca.”

Though Holthaus is an outdoor enthusiast, she’s been trying to quickly find and move into a house in the Columbus area so that she doesn’t have to live temporarily in her camper. “I have three dogs and two cats, all rescues. Which is pretty much why I can’t have an apartment,” she said, laughing. “My cats run the house, and now I have a special-needs puppy, too.”

Spotlight on summer jobs

Teen finds meaningful work helping students with disabilities

During the early days of the pandemic, with most schoolwork and socializing taking place on a screen, Sierra Olsen came to an important realization about her future. “I decided that I didn’t want a job where I just sat in front of a computer,” she said.

That knowledge eventually led to a summer position with Transition to Work (TTW), an employment exploration program for teens and young adults served by the Franklin County Board of Developmental Disabilities. Olsen worked this summer as a “discovery specialist,” helping students try out a variety of community job settings, including the NNEMAP food pantry.

“Sierra is awesome,” said Dave Cosart, employment services manager at Hattie Larlham, the disability-services nonprofit that administers the TTW program. “We had such a great group of staff this year – a good mix of college students and veterans.”



Sierra Olsen

Olsen, 19, attends Ohio Dominican University and is studying to be a K-12 intervention specialist. She counts the TTW position as the best job experience she’s had so far:

No offense to Panera, but you say TTW is a lot more fun.

I enjoy this job way more than the others I’ve had. I like working with students with disabilities – in school, I was friends with kids, and I really enjoyed helping them with homework, that sort of thing. I thought this would be a great experience.

Why do you think you find the field so appealing?

I’m an optimist. I always try to aim for the positive, and look at people’s strengths, while still trying to understand their challenges.

You do have a fair amount of responsibility as a discovery specialist. That’s probably not always easy, right?

It can be a little bit intimidating at first, but once you start and get to know the students, it’s great. You see a lot of growth.

It must feel good to play a part in that growth.

It’s really rewarding. But it’s not because of me! My students were great even before I knew them. They just are.

Connector program draws hundreds of providers, families

A year after its launch as a pilot program, an effort to link people looking for services and providers who can meet their needs continues to grow.

More than 600 families and service providers have sought information through The Connector, a program started by the Franklin County Board of Developmental Disabilities last year. “The nice thing is that it’s giving independent providers a chance to get their foot in the door,” said FCBDD administrative assistant Joni Sparks, who helps manage the program.

“Many of them have a difficult time,” she said. “Even some agency providers are using this as a different kind of opportunity to promote themselves.”

Finding service providers has been a consistent problem for many people with developmental disabilities, and the situation has worsened in recent years due to worker shortages and the COVID-19 pandemic. Though federal conflict-of-interest rules prohibit FCBDD from telling families which providers to choose, the county board can help people connect with agencies or independent providers best able to serve them.

To use The Connector, both providers and people in need of services (or their representatives) fill out profiles. Sparks sends the profile of the person looking for help to the providers, who have about a week to express interest. The person or family seeking services then receives a list of interested providers – including their profiles – and can arrange interviews.

“Some people don’t know what to do or where to turn,” Sparks said. “It’s nice to be able to help. That’s why I love this – it’s the human contact. I’m there to answer questions, talk, or sometimes, just be a shoulder.”

FCBDD Superintendent/CEO Jed Morison said Sparks’ effort is a big reason for program’s success so far. “We’re glad to learn there is such interest,” he said. “This is just one of many ways we’re trying to help address the workforce crisis.”

For more information about The Connector, email Joni Sparks at joni.sparks@fcbdd.org



Providers can keep hiring 16 and 17 year old DSP assistants

The Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities has extended waivers allowing providers to hire people ages 16 and 17, as well as applicants who do not have a high school diploma or GED. Instead of expiring this month, the waivers are to remain in effect for another year, through September 2023.

According to the state, the change has helped to increase the DSP applicant pool at a time when providers are struggling to recruit and retain sufficient numbers of employees. The younger teens – who work as DSP assistants -- cannot provide intimate personal care or administer medications, and they are required to work with a DSP who meets state requirements.

Becky Sharp, chief executive director of the nonprofit disability-services provider Open Door Columbus, has hired a few young DSP assistants and said they have been a big help to veteran DSPs and people with disabilities during activities, outings and in other situations.

Supporters are hopeful that the DSP assistants will enter the workforce as adults with the knowledge, skills and experience necessary to keep providing good support to people with developmental disabilities. DODD plans to collect information on the effect of the waiver changes.

Quarterly payments approved to help retain DSPs

The Franklin County Board of Developmental Disabilities expects to contribute an estimated \$8 million a year as part of a statewide effort to boost pay for the direct-support professional (DSP) workforce.

The funding is made possible because of Board support and Enhanced FMAP (Federal Medical Assistance Percentage) that began during the pandemic, FCBDD Superintendent/CEO Jed Morison said.

County boards across Ohio, with a federal match, are generating approximately \$143 million annually for “retention payments” aimed at keeping more DSPs on the job.

The Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities said it is distributing the payments to participating providers on a quarterly basis; providers are to send the money to each eligible DSP. Independent providers also are eligible for the payments, which will reflect about 6.5 percent of provider claims during the quarter.

“The payments have to go to direct-service staff and their frontline supervisors,” said Larry Macintosh, FCBDD director of administrative and support services. He said the first round likely will go to DSPs at the end of the year and will be based on the billing from April-June and July-September.

State officials say providers are being required to report data and attest that the funding was used according to requirements.

Long-running problems with turnover and low wages in the direct-support industry have worsened in recent years, with providers struggling to keep DSPs during the COVID-19 pandemic. Recent surges in inflation have further eroded pay.

Late autism diagnosis answers a lifetime of questions

For almost all of his life, through childhood and adolescence and well into middle age, Tom Gisler had no way to understand why he felt so different. When he finally was diagnosed with autism, he was 59 years old.

“Turns out I wasn’t lazy, I wasn’t stupid,” Gisler, who’s now 63, said with a smile. “My brain works differently. Knowing that is very freeing.”

Though the discovery came late, it also was a vindication, allowing him to believe he had done his best and had no reason for shame or guilt. Gisler now serves as a board member for the Autism Society Central Ohio, “and he’s amazing,” said Kathi Machle, the organization’s managing director.

“The autism community can’t be wholly run by adults who want things for their children. They’re only part of the story,” she said. “I have learned so much from Tom about what it’s like from the inside out. Living with my son, I mainly know it from the outside in.”

Services and resources for people who are older at diagnosis are scarce, Gisler said. That makes it especially important for them to be able to connect with each other. “Kids and adults need some contact with other autistic people,” he said. “What is normal? Normal is what you have in common with other people.”

He primarily connects with others online, in forums, on social media and through his YouTube page, My ASD Journey. “It is when we talk with others about these life experiences that we find something to compare our own experiences with,” Gisler said. “We just can’t talk with neurotypical people on the same level.”

Gisler encourages families to empower loved ones with autism instead of merely seeking to change behaviors. “Work with their minds, not against them,” he said. “If we are trying to regulate stimuli, or focus attention, and someone tries to change what works for us, how do you think that makes us feel?”

He didn’t benefit from such insights as he was growing up. “I just wanted to get through the day,” Gisler said. “What was a close friend? To me, it might have been someone who said hi to me. I don’t think I had much of a sense of self.”

After so many years of struggle, receiving a diagnosis was profound – and in many ways, a relief. “After finding this out, I feel like I can die in peace,” he said. “I didn’t give up. I stayed the course, and I have an answer.”



Tom Gisler

People with autism, other disabilities invited to open mic nights

Advocates in the central Ohio autism community are hosting a series of open mic nights for people with disabilities to share their talents. Most any creative pursuit is welcome, from music to poetry to comedy.

“The ultimate goal is social connections in a safe space,” organizer Gwen Harshaw said. “There’s no pressure. We want it to be kind, warm and engaging.”

Harshaw, whose son Zayne has both autism and a successful musical career with the band Blue Spectrum, said “Band Together Central Ohio” is modeled after Band Together Pittsburgh. “They’ve been so wonderful,” said Harshaw, program director of the OCALI Family and Community Outreach Center. “They let us use the logo and have helped us all along.”

Sponsored by the Autism Society Central Ohio, OCALI and The Gahanna Foundation, the next four sessions are set for 2 to 5 p.m. on Sept. 11, Oct. 9, Nov. 13 and Dec. 11 at the Gahanna Sanctuary, 82 N. High St., Gahanna. Registration is recommended at www.autismcentralohio.org

Harshaw expects that some people might just watch at first, and that’s fine. The hope is that the on-stage and audience opportunities will help people with autism and other disabilities support each other and have fun. She said social interactions still don’t always come easily for Zayne, even though he is 27 and an accomplished guitarist.

“It’s not all about playing,” Harshaw said. “To this day, we’re more impressed when, after the show, he’s talking to people – and happy.”

Good For You

Notable achievements in the FCBDD community

Thanks to Jeff Marinko-Shrivers, psychology supervisor, for leading development of the Guardianship Restoration Class workbook that helps so many as they pursue alternatives to guardianship. The guide, written with input from other FCBDD staff and local advocates, is updated and revised and available for use by organizations and people seeking guardianship restoration. We appreciate all the work on this, Jeff!

Our Superintendent/CEO Jed Morison appreciated the opportunity to attend the recent dedication of the new James A. Karnes Corrections Center on Fisher Road Named for Franklin County's longest-serving sheriff, the building is designed to support a progressive approach to incarceration and reform. Sheriff Karnes died in 2011. Congratulations to his family for the naming honor.



Thanks to Franklin County Treasurer Cheryl Brooks Sullivan for helping to showcase the work of local artists and musicians, including violinist Stephen Spottswood. We were happy to attend the closing reception for "Art Heals," and look forward to the next exhibit in the Treasurer's Office Art Series.

We're fortunate to have kind, caring and community-minded staff members here at FCBDD, and many of you turned out to make life-saving donations during the recent Red Cross Blood Drive at our Johnstown Road building. Thanks to Mary Martin (ECE) and Jeff Baird (IT) for coordinating the return of the drive after a pandemic hiatus.

Career Milestones

30 Years

Julie McKnight

20 Years

Nanette Mattern

10 Years

Jill Hicks
Amy Nader

5 Years

Wendy Abel
Shalonda Anderson
Janine Woodson

Our trip to New Orleans *written by Jennifer (Fox) Cunningham*

The National Down Syndrome Congress convention was held at the Hyatt Regency hotel in New Orleans from June 23 to 26.

We went to the kickoff party, and it was so nice to be able to meet with our friends and close friends in person this year.

It had been a while since we had seen each other, and we were really glad to be together.

We supported Tracy Hile by attending the plenary session for the Self-Advocate Book Project. Tracy first put together the project 20 years ago to raise money to purchase books that show people with Down syndrome in a positive way. It has helped NDSC donate thousands of books to many libraries across the nation.

We are looking forward to the convention next year, which will be July 20 to 23 in Orlando.



FCBDD staff member *Jenny Cunningham* (center in pink) with friends *Melissa Silverman, Jeff Mattson and Stephanie Leppert* (seated, front).

Jennifer (Fox) Cunningham, a staff member in the Franklin County Board of Developmental Disabilities HR Department, is a former board member of the National Down Syndrome Congress.

County DD association names new leader

The Ohio Association of County Boards of Developmental Disabilities (OACB) has chosen Adam Herman, the organization's former chief operating officer, to serve as its next CEO.

Herman first joined OACB in 2011 as communications director and in 2021 became chief operating officer. He replaces Bridget Gargan, who retired earlier this year.

"During this pivotal time in our system's history, we knew that our next chief executive must have a strong working knowledge of county board operations as well as deep, meaningful relationships with the association's members, state policymakers, and other DD stakeholders across Ohio," said Steven M. Licciardi, the association's board president. "Fortunately, we did not have to look far to find the right person for the job, and we are excited to see the association thrive under Adam's leadership."

Securing additional state funding to increase wages for direct-support professionals, boosting the use of technology solutions and implementing regulatory reforms are among the many challenges facing county boards as they strive to serve people with developmental disabilities, Herman said.

Herman was chosen after a national search that drew 85 applicants, OACB said. He is a Canton native and Kent State University graduate who lives in Columbus' Franklinton neighborhood.



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.

September, 2022

- 5 Labor Day – Early Childhood, School classes and offices of the Franklin County Board of Developmental Disabilities closed.
- 8 Self-Advocate Advisory Council via Zoom, 10 a.m.
- 21 Family Support meeting, via Zoom, 10:00 a.m. Meeting is open to all family members.
[Family Support Meeting Link \(Zoom\)](#)
- 22 Franklin County Board of Developmental Disabilities Board In-Service, Finance and Human Resources & Ethics Committees meeting, 2879 Johnstown Rd., 4 p.m.
- 22 Franklin County Board of Developmental Disabilities Board meeting at 5:00 p.m., 2879 Johnstown Road, Columbus, Ohio, via Zoom for the public. Please contact Amy Magginis at 614-342-5950 for details or click on the following link to connect:

[FCBDD Board Meeting Link \(Zoom\)](#)

Dateline

The Franklin County Board of Developmental Disabilities

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www.fcbdd.org

Couple makes toy carts to help kids walk

A Marysville couple has crafted and donated several wooden carts – filled with teddy bears and hand-knitted blankets – for use by young children with disabilities who need extra support while taking steps.

The toddler-sized carts have wheels and a steady handle so that kids can push them. Robert Annan, a semi-retired mechanical engineer, and his wife, Anne, a longtime special-needs teacher, recently dropped off eight carts at the Early Childhood Education and Family Center.

“The story behind my husband’s wanting to make more carts is that one of his employees has a son with a lot of medical issues, and that cart actually helped him learn to walk,” Anne said. “My husband likes woodworking. He especially likes it for a purpose.”

Anne supplies the stuffed bears and makes the blankets that line the cradle part of the carts. “We do it together,” she said. “It was really fun to see the first cart introduced to his friend’s son – he took right off.”

Becky Love, ECE director at the Franklin County Board of Developmental Disabilities, said a few carts will be kept at the center and others will be given to families so that children have them at home.



Robert and Anne Annan delivered eight of their handcrafted carts for use by young children in the ECE program.

FCBDD preparing for Combined Charitable Campaign

Jack Brownley, director of schools and special services, will head up the Combined Charitable Campaign for the Franklin County Board of Developmental Disabilities.

This year’s goal is again \$57,200 for the charity fundraiser that runs Sept. 12 to Nov. 4.

FCBDD staff will soon receive information on how to help. Last year, the agency topped its goal and raised \$60,513.

