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DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

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50 YEARS OHIO COUNTY BOARDS OF
DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES



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50 YEARS OHIO COUNTY BOARDS OF DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

By Kevin Davis
Superintendent, ACBDD

In 2017, County Boards of Developmental Disabilities across Ohio will be celebrating their 50th year anniversary of providing quality services and supports to individuals with developmental disabilities.

To help recognize and celebrate this anniversary, the theme “Always There” was developed. At the Athens County Board of Developmental Disabilities (ACBDD), “Always There” represents:

- The ever-present need in our community

for the ACBDD to support people with developmental disabilities and their families.

- The constant evolution within the developmental disabilities community and how the ACBDD has successfully navigated those changes throughout its history.

- The fact that, though services might look slightly different in some instances, the ACBDD is “always there” to support people, families and communities.

“Always There” stands for continuity, reliability and reassurance throughout the past, in the present, and in the future. It’s a bold statement that says the ACBDD is vital, valuable

and needed.

“Always There” also reassures that despite pending service changes, the ACBDD is now and will always be there to ensure that people with developmental disabilities and their families receive the ongoing quality care and support they need.

March has been designated Disability Awareness Month, which focuses on peoples’ abilities and similarities rather than differences, and encourages everyone to welcome people with developmental disabilities into their communities.

The ACBDD is hosting a Disabilities Awareness Festival on March 21 at the Athens Community Center from 6-8:30 p.m. This will be a “celebration and recognition of the stories regarding the 600 individuals throughout Athens County who receive services that help them make the most of their abilities, as well as to raise awareness about their challenges and barriers to success,” the release said.

Captions for cover photos...

Top left is Ethan Conover. Bottom left is Barb Ery (art teacher) and a Beacon School student. The photo at right is Pam Cline and Nancy Epling at a Passion Works art sale. All photos in this special section provided by ACBDD.



The Athens County Board of Developmental Disabilities and its superintendent. From left to right: Margaret Hutzel, board vice president; Rebecca Miller; Pam Bond, board secretary; Kevin Davis, superintendent; Margaret Demko, board president; Jason Jolley; and Leonard Allen. Absent: board member Jen Deforest.

What's the function of the Athens County Board of Developmental Disabilities?

A better question might be what doesn't this local board do? Its work reaches into every corner of the community

The Athens County Board of Developmental Disabilities (ACBDD) serves eligible Athens County children and adults who have developmental disabilities such as autism, intellectual disabilities, cerebral palsy, Down syndrome, epilepsy and other conditions that are manifested before the age of 22.

The ACBDD is legally mandated to assure the health, safety and welfare of eligible Athens County residents who have developmental disabilities. We are also obligated to provide an array of services necessary to meet individuals' needs by facilitating learning and growth. The mission of the ACBDD is to enhance the quality of life for individuals by encouraging integration and independence, fostering partnerships, and advocating for individual rights.

ACBDD programs:

- Early Intervention
- Beacon School
- ATCO Adult Services
- Passion Works Studio
- Transportation Services
- Service & Support Administration (case management, securing housing & in-home staffing)

The ACBDD also distributes funding to the following agencies and provides in-home staff-

ing, transportation and day-program services to individuals with developmental disabilities:

- Buckeye Community Services (BCS)
- Caregiver Homes of Ohio
- Echoing Meadows/Community Connections
- Expanding Your Horizons
- Goodwill
- Havar/Building Bridges
- Interim Health Care
- Radcliff Health Care Services
- ResCare
- RHDD/Alternatives
- Sech-Kar/Studio
- SOAR

In addition, funding is provided to more than 40 independent providers for in-home staff support.

ACBDD Services are provided through the following programs:

ACBDD Services are provided through the following programs:

- **Early Intervention.** 740-594-3539, www.athenscbdd.org
- **Beacon School.** 740-594-3539, www.athenscbdd.org
- **ATCO.** 740-592-6659, www.atcoinc.org
- **PersonnelPlus.** 740-592-3416, www.personnelplus.org
- **Passion Works Studio.** 740-592-3673, www.passionworks.org
- **Service and Support Administration, Case Management, housing, caregivers.** 740-592-6006

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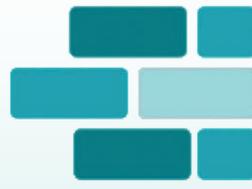
Twitter Facebook Instagram



EchoingCONNECTIONS a dayhab program that maximizes the independence of individuals with disabilities through skill development, vocational training and employment.

For more information contact
Rachel Ulbrich, Director of Adult Day Svcs.
rulbrich@ehvi.org
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Festival to celebrate and recognize local people with disabilities

Disability Awareness Month this month (March) encourages the Athens community to recognize the abilities and strengths of people and how they make a difference in the Athens community. By exploring and experiencing the amazing connections that can be made, the Athens community becomes that much stronger.

"Always There" is the theme of Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month 2017. The Athens County Board of Developmental Disabilities and all its public and private partners celebrate Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month each March and invite all to consider this year's theme, "Always There." The theme celebrates the 50th anniversary of the county board system in Ohio.

Statewide and across the country, organizations devoted to serving people with developmental disabilities are planning special events in March to raise public awareness for people with developmental disabilities. The Developmental Disabilities Awareness Festival is the Athens County Board of DD's special event aimed at achieving that public awareness.

During March, the board encourages the Athens County community to learn

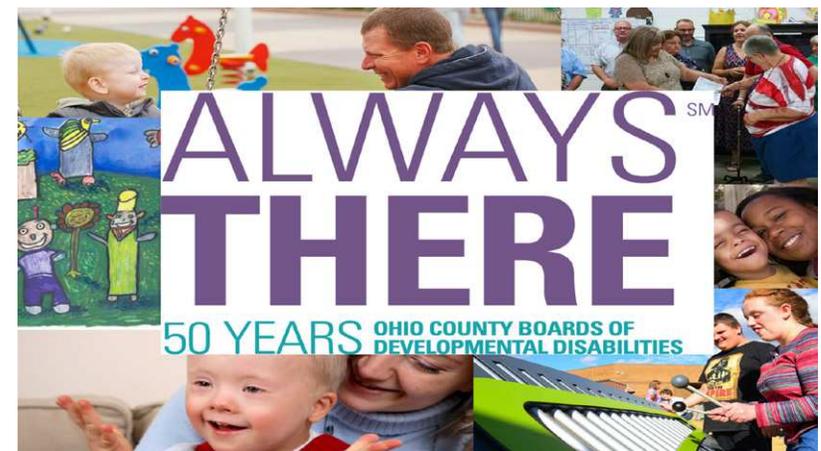
more about the more than 600 people in the county who have a developmental disability, by experiencing their many amazing stories. The theme "Always There" reinforces to everyone that the Athens County Board of Developmental Disabilities will "Always be There" to coordinate services for individuals in this county.

The Athens County Board of Developmental Disabilities is hosting the annual Developmental Disability Awareness Festival in celebration and recognition of the many individuals throughout the community and their many abilities and talents. This year's festival will be held on Tuesday, March 21 from 6-8:30 p.m. at the Athens Community Center.

The festival will include displays and presentations from a variety of organizations that provide services to people with disabilities in Athens County.

During Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month, we encourage everyone to get acquainted with someone who has a developmental disability and to remember that the Athens County Board of Developmental Disabilities will always be here to help everyone to make those connections.

2017 DISABILITIES AWARENESS FESTIVAL



Tuesday, March 21st 2017 6:00-8:30 PM

ATCO is 'Always There'

A progressive history of Adult Services in Athens County, Ohio

Ever since its humble beginnings, ATCO has been connecting with the Athens community and providing innovative services to people with developmental disabilities. In 1969 the ATCO workshop was started within the Sugar Creek Elementary School on Ohio Rt. 550 northeast of Athens. In 1970 ATCO moved to the McBee building on Shafer Street in Athens and then relocated to Campbell Street in 1982 where it currently resides.



The ATCO workshop on Campbell Street in Athens. It's been here since 1982.

ATCO has always sought to be an innovator and valued connections within the Athens community. As early as 1983, ATCO established a community employment program with the initiative to find jobs for people in the community rather than the situation at the time, where the only employment options involved paid work within a workshop setting. That program has grown and blossomed into what is now the cutting-edge employment vendor known as PersonnelPlus.

During the 1980s and 1990s, ATCO became the number-one producer of writing pens for the State of Ohio government. It produced more than 300,000 pens a year with more than \$500,000 annual sales. These contracts provided work opportunities for people with disabilities in Athens County and an opportunity for them to learn work skills and contribute. In 1996 and 1997, the beginnings

of Passion Works Art Studio was founded as a small art grant from the Ohio Arts Council to shed light on the benefits of art in the lives of people with and without disabilities in Athens County.

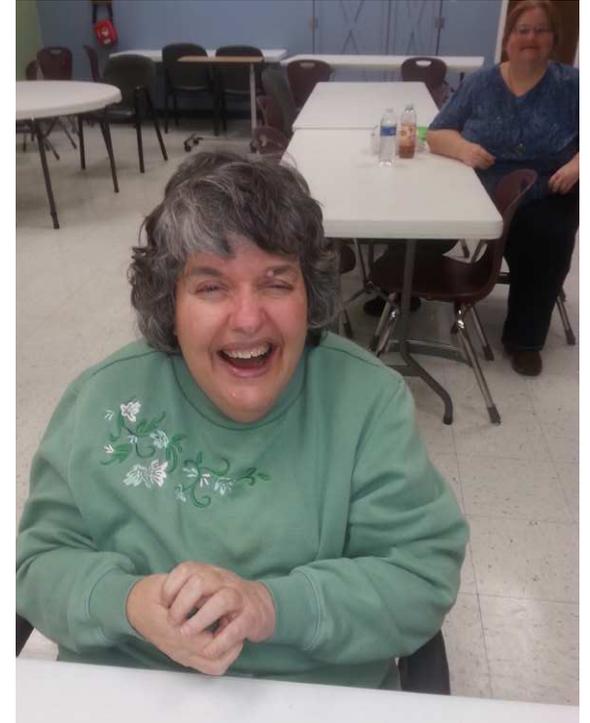
In 2013, ATCO transformed from the workshop model into focusing on services in a community based day service center. ATCO has established dozens of community partnerships which allow services to be provided out in the community away from the ATCO building. The community has been accessing ATCO as more as a community center for all rather than a program for only people with disabilities. Those community partnerships have enabled individuals served at ATCO to become more fully integrated in their community and prepare the Athens community for the next steps towards true integration.

In 2016, ATCO took a historic step to

complete its transformation away from the workshop model. ATCO eliminated its sub-minimum-wage certificate and began paying all workers no matter what ability, at minimum wage or above. ATCO is one of only a handful of programs in the state of Ohio to take this step.

One person who has attended ATCO during almost all of its historic past is Marcia Faires. She came to ATCO in 1980 after graduating from Beacon School, and early on participated in many different daily living activities, as well as being an employee with the pen production. Faires has been a part of the many years of the continually evolving programs offered to adults served in Athens County. Today Faires participates in the Atco Senior Program, mall-walking group, bell choir, and many other enrichment programs.

She is truly a delightful person with many friends that she has connected with over her many years at Atco. Her enthusiasm and kindness draw others in, and she often cheers others up with her happy disposition. ATCO has been a support to many individuals and their families over the years; for many people like Marcia it has connected them to the community, taught new skills, and fostered an opportunity to enjoy new experiences and meet new people.



Marcia enjoys services provided by the Athens County Board of Developmental Disabilities.

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ACBDD Transportation Dept. covers a lot of territory

The ACBDD Transportation Department operates five regular bus routes and two van routes throughout the 500,000 square miles of Athens County.

The fleet, which traveled approximately 210,409 miles in 2016, consists of seven buses, 10 vans, four cars and a pickup truck. The total mileage can be broken down to include: 8,972 miles for Community Inclusion; 46,746 miles for Community Employment; 15,402 miles for Service and Support Administration; and 15,000 miles for Facility/Transportation Supervision.

A total of 124,289 miles of bus and van transportation were delivered to transport 57 adults and 30 school-age individuals from all over Athens County to Beacon School, ATCO, Passion Works and Personnel Plus or to area job sites, allowing them to maintain successful employment within our community.

ACBDD continues to partner with Hocking, Athens, the Perry Community Action Program (HAPCAP), and Ohio DD Council to provide transportation through Athens On Demand Transit (AODT).

AODT provided 3,176 rides to the DD population in Athens County in 2016. Athens On Demand Transit provided a total of 12,103 rides to individuals in Athens County in 2016.

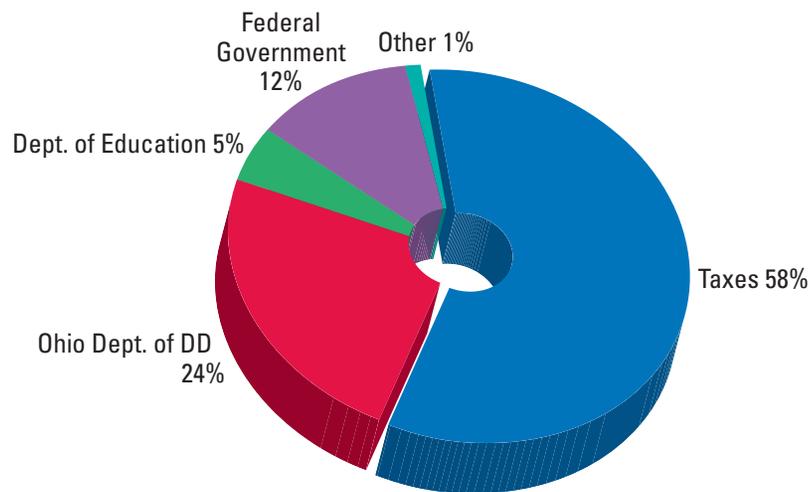


Transportation team



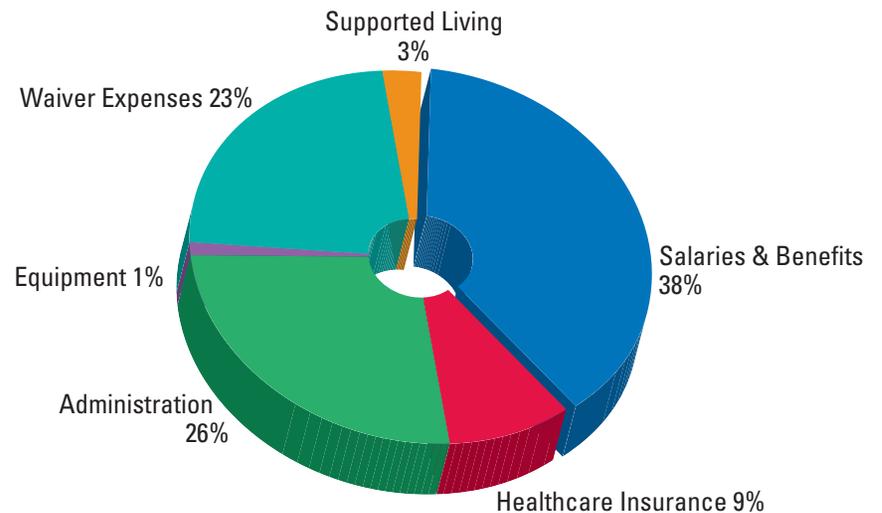
ACBDD serving more and more citizens in Athens Co.

Revenue Sources 2016



Total Revenue = \$11,884,695

Expenditures for 2016



Total Expenses = \$10,940,847

The Athens County Board of Developmental Disabilities continues to increase the number of individuals served by waivers in the Athens County area.

At the same time, the board is carefully managing its re-

sources while moving forward with the transition of a service model in compliance with statutory requirements.

The board has several capital expenditures planned for the upcoming year that include the completion of the new entrance

to Beacon School as well as the purchase of a new school bus. ACBDD's commitment to the community remains the same – assuring the health and safety of individuals with disabilities while maximizing the funding provided by local tax dollars.

Facilities Dept. has a big job

The Facilities Department for the ACBDD operates and maintains 62,316 square feet of buildings, plus the grounds.

The largest facility is the Beacon School, which was constructed in 1979 and contains 30,000 square feet of space. The second largest facility is Atco, which was constructed in the '60s and renovated for the Atco workshop in the late '70s, encompassing 19,000 square feet.

The current Bus Garage was constructed in 2001 and altered to include the SSA Department in 2003, containing 6,200 square feet.

The Personnel Plus office comprises of 4,416 square feet, and the Passion Works location contains 2,700 square feet, which is leased.

As well as operations and maintenance of the facilities, the Facilities Department maintains the grounds at each location. This involves clearing snow and ice from the sidewalks and parking lots, along with grooming the lawns around these facilities.

Not only do we provide for the physical needs of the facilities; we also are responsible for providing security lockdown capabilities in each location. Especially in light of the recent

violence occurring in public places, it's a huge task to secure public facilities.

ACBDD's Facilities serve many individuals who use mobility devices. The use of these devices slows the lock-down process and makes evacuation very challenging. Employees are working diligently to develop safety procedures to aid in this task.

As mentioned already, the Facilities Department has to secure and provide security for five locations. It has developed safety lock-

down procedures and are starting to perform drills in all facilities. The evacuation procedure is more complex given the individuals served.

The agency has installed video surveillance and two remote-operated doors at Beacon, Atco and the Bus Garage/SSA, but even with these improvements, the task of securing these facilities is difficult.

ACBDD is confident it will keep its clients and staff safe as it continues to evaluate and improve systems and procedures.



At left, the ACBDD bus garage; above, PersonnelPlus/ Employment Opportunites building.

Partners making a difference



Corey Black



Josh Boyer



Paul Coe



Tracy Davidson



John Hedges



Andy Holley



Alan Robinson



PersonnelPlus is a professional and logical solution to your employment needs.

ACBDD establishes new 'Employment Options Division'

According to state law in Ohio, employment services for people with developmental disabilities shall be directed at community employment, and all people with developmental disabilities are presumed capable of community employment.

For years, the Athens County Board of DD has been a leader in supportive employment services in much of the state. For more than three decades, the Board's employment service, PersonnelPlus, has played an integral part in advancing employment and career options in Athens County for individuals with disabilities, by matching their skills and abilities with the employment needs of area businesses.

In 2016, the board and their superintendent continued to advance employment options by establishing the Athens County Board of DD's Employment Options Division. The Employment Options Division serves as the single point of contact for the coordination of employment services. The Division is responsible for having oversight on all employment-related activities administered by the county Board. The Division specializes in knowledge about specific employment-related supports and services such as Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities (OOD), transition with school districts, benefits analysis, day program/vocational-rehabilitation services, connections to Ohio Means Jobs and much more.

The staff includes:

Vocational Coordinator. The Vocational Coordinator of the Athens and Washington County Board of DD Partnership with Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities (OOD). This contract originated around 2009 for the purpose of expanding employment options for transition age youth and individuals with developmental disabilities. Referrals may be submitted to OOD's contract office with the Athens and Washington County Board of DD at Theresa.Skinner@ood.ohio.gov. Referrals do not prevent individuals from free choice of provider. As long as individuals applying for services meet OOD Eligibility Requirements, they do not need to be an enrollee of the Athens County Board of DD.

Transition Coordinator Brooke Schroeder – Schroeder assists students in developing working skills through internships, volunteer opportunities, assistance finding paid work experience and future planning. bschroeder@athenscbdd.org

PersonnelPlus

PersonnelPlus is the employment service of the Athens County Board of DD. PersonnelPlus has matched the skills and abilities of workers with disabilities with the need of area businesses for well of 30 years. PersonnelPlus placed 22 workers in Athens County businesses in 2016. 740-592-3416.



Shawn Patterson Bellar

Benefits Analysis

The Athens County Board of DD currently contracts with Tanya R. Chiles, benefits specialist for the Center of Vocational Alternatives (COVA), to assist individuals with Benefit Analysis and related questions. Additionally, Julie Jones, employment support coordinator for the county Board of DD, has recently completed the work incentive practitioner online class to become a credentialed Work Incentive Practitioner through Cornell University's Employment and Disability Institute. Upon completing the case study, Jones will receive her credentials as a Work Incentive Practitioner which will equip her to provide Benefits and Work Incentives Planning to individuals with disabilities in Athens County.

Employment Resource

The Employment Options division also will serve as a resource to other employment providers in Athens County by offering a variety of trainings and resources.

For more information on the Athens County Board of DD Employment Options Division or how it can help workers with disabilities contact 740-592-3416.

PersonnelPlus Celebrating 22 Hires in 2016

The year 2016 was a great year for the Athens County Board of DD's Employment Service, PersonnelPlus. During the early part of 2016, PersonnelPlus began to restructure their staff to better serve their business customers and job seekers alike. PersonnelPlus staff focused on reconnecting and developing new business partnerships. This effort brought about great dividends. On October 26, 2016, the Athens County Board of DD held its 2016 Employer/Employee Recognition Gala at Ohio University. The event was designed to celebrate the business partnerships that PersonnelPlus has developed for over 30 years as well as the qualified and reliable workers that meet the business's needs.

Approximately 350 businesses, employees, families, community members and state employment staff attended the event that featured videos and presentations that highlighted Athens County employer/employee successes.

On Dec. 22, 2016, the Athens County Board of DD/PersonnelPlus finished out the year supporting, training and assisting 22 of the job-seekers in gaining employment in a variety of businesses in Athens County with the support of its partner, Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities (OOD).

PersonnelPlus provided 57 assessments throughout the year in order to measure the skills and abilities of the people we serve. Thirty-five different job-seekers had the opportunity to participate in job tryouts in order to determine if their abilities and skills matched with the employment opportunities they were presented with.

Congratulations to all the workers who are currently employed in the Athens area.

A special thanks is extended to Misty Millstead, vocational rehabilitation supervisor and her staff at the local OOD office for their support and vocational guidance.

PersonnelPlus' goal for hires in 2017 is 36.

PersonnelPlus Employment Services: Providing Area Youth Summer Employment Training & Income

In 2016, PersonnelPlus, in conjunction with the Athens office Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities (OOD), provided Summer Youth Work Experience to 23 students between June and August at a variety of area business partners.

An additional program supported by OOD is called Career Exploration. (Career Exploration is provided to youth typically ages 14-15 years old who are just getting started on their path to employment opportunities to travel to various businesses and learn what they do.) Participants visited businesses that are of interest to them and observe, ask questions and take tours and talk with staff. While the participants do not earn a salary for this program, it helps prepare them for the next step which typically is participating in the Work Experience program.

We would again like to thank all the businesses who helped make our programs a huge success by providing a work site or taking time to meet with our Career Exploration youth. These opportunities expose the participants to a variety of vocational interests that will help them when they do decide on a career path.

PersonnelPlus, in conjunction with OOD, will again provide Summer Youth Training Programs in 2017. If you are interested in partnering as a host job site or want to inquire how a student may participate, please contact the PersonnelPlus office at 740-592-3416.

Early Intervention Program

A partnership with Hopewell Health Center

The Athens County Early Intervention Team provides services to children from birth through the age of 2 years, who are experiencing a delay in development or have a diagnosed handicapping condition.

Their multidisciplinary team includes service coordinators, developmental specialists, a physical therapist, an occupational therapist, a speech and language pathologist, and early childhood mental-health professionals.

The Early Intervention Team follows a Primary Service Provider (PSP) approach, which is a family-centered process where one member of the team is selected as the PSP to build the capacity of parents, caregivers and/or other care providers to use every day routines in promoting child development.

Services can take place in the home, at daycare or other community settings. The team relies on evidence-based strategies that are backed by research to provide the best services for the child and family.

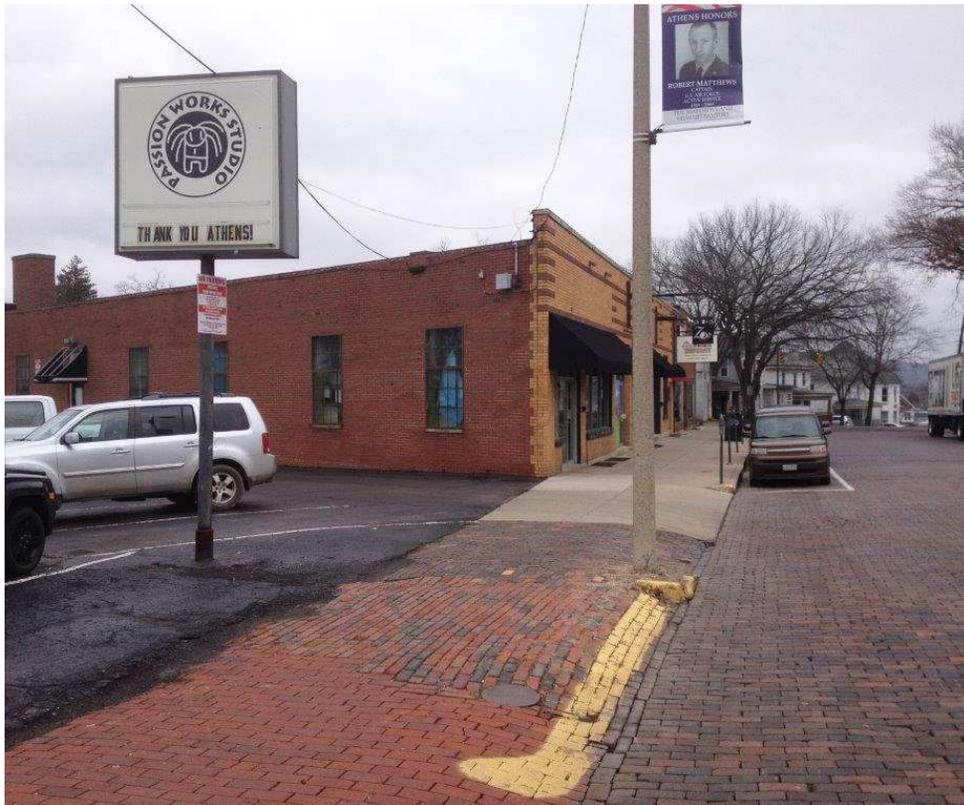
If a family member or a care provider has any concerns about an infant or toddler's development, they may call Early Intervention Central Intake at 740-589-5132; extension 221.

Athens County Board of DD School To Work Transition Services, A Valuable Resource To Area Schools

Since the 1990s, the Athens County Board of Developmental Disabilities has provided transition services in many different formats. With the addition of the Employment Options Division, hands-on training and employment opportunities are offered in all seven Athens County schools for students with disabilities.

Transition Coordinator Brooke Schroeder assists students in developing work skills through internships, volunteer opportunities, assistance finding paid work experience, and planning.

Transition services are being planned for Tri County Career Center, Athens City and Federal Hocking schools in addition to Beacon School. These services will include field trips into the community to job shadow and intern, classroom curriculum to develop resume writing and job interview skills as well as one-on-one training with students.



Passion Works Studio, for now.

Passion Works Studio looks to the future

As Passion Works celebrates its 20th year in the Athens community, a screening committee is working to identify key components that will assist Passion Works in continuing to provide art opportunities to people with developmental disabilities long into the future.

The Passion Works Art Studio is currently in the process of reviewing proposals for the next host agency or leadership, as part of the transition process to move services currently provided by the county DD Board to other private entities that will take over the studio and continue to carry on the mission and vision of collaborative art for people with and without disabilities in the Athens community.

This past year Passion Works has had many successes. For example, winning the annual OU Homecoming float competition was a high point after many weeks of creating and planning. This was a fun day to enjoy the community and share the love of art.

Three Passion Works artists were selected to show their work at the Governors Art show highlighting the work of people with disabilities. There were numerous shows and partnerships throughout the year, including, Fluff Bakery, The Athens NEWS, Wells Public

Library, the OU Airport, Purple Chopstix, Jackie O's Brewery, the Athens Public Library, the OU Credit Union and the Big Brothers/Big Sisters Art day in the studio.

As the proposal process unfolds, Transition Manager Autumn Brown will be helping the Screening Committee and the ATCO Inc. Board that operates Passion Works in identifying and selecting the future leadership for the studio. Brown will then work with the new leadership to develop a plan to transition Passion Works management, identifying timelines, changes that need to occur, and a method that supports the staff, individuals and our community in being a part of the process.

The hope is to support the new management team in a smooth transition that creates more art opportunities for current artists at the studio and develops a more inclusive program to draw new artists to enroll in the Passion Works Art Studio.

An important part of this transition will be to hand off our current connections with the community and help them foster new ones. The Athens community has long supported Passion Works, and it's an exciting time for the community to reconnect as we work through this process together.

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THANKS

Jeremy Allman	Pat Fraley	Shawn Patterson
Benji Coen	Josh Johnson	John Wallisch
Mary Dollison	Corey Kerr	Marsha Washburn
Deana Green	Kelly King	Matt Wible
	Laura Olinger	

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The **Athens Area Chamber of Commerce** celebrates *Disabilities Awareness Month* and applauds our area businesses that realize the merit of hiring dependable employees through partnerships with **PersonnelPlus**. We are proud of our business community's inclusive workforce because gainful employment is a rite of passage for all.

At Beacon School, striving to be the very best

Beacon School works in cooperation with the five Athens County school districts to provide specialized services to children and adults with developmental disabilities or a medical diagnosis such as autism, Down syndrome, cerebral palsy or multiple disabilities. Students who qualify are referred from their local districts.

Beacon's Early Intervention program serves children who are eligible from birth through age 2. These services are delivered by the school's developmental specialists and offered to children and families in their homes, or an agreed-upon location. At age 3, if the children remain eligible, they are referred to the Integrated Preschool program at Beacon School.

Students with special needs are combined with typically developing peers who act as models for children with speech-language delays, or delays in behavior or motor skills. Children transition to the school age program at age 5 and can continue in the program through age 21 or as long as they remain eligible.

Beacon School offers a behavior support specialist, who works in cooperation with classroom teachers to develop behavior plans for students with special needs. These plans are developed on an individual basis and allow students to experience success while at school. Students also receive support from a speech language therapist, occupational therapist and physical therapist.

Our speech therapist uses assistive technology such as the LAMP communication approach on devices and iPads for students who are non-verbal. The LAMP approach uses a series of pictures that allow students to communicate. As the students become more familiar with the device, the number of pictures is increased and the student is able to "talk" in sentences to participate in class activities or to express their wants and needs.

Our occupational therapist provides direct therapy to increase fine motor skills and self-help skills as well as providing sensory evaluations for students. The physical therapist

delivers therapy that enhances students' mobility and gross motor development.

The occupational and physical therapist both consult with families and classroom teachers on a regular basis, as well.

Beacon School is fortunate to have one full-time and one part-time nurse, who collaborate with the child's medical professional to provide important medications to students throughout the day as prescribed and tend to any medical issues that may occur through a normal operating day.

The school offers an adapted physical education teacher dedicated to promoting strength and agility through specially designed activities, as well as providing therapeutic and recreational swimming in the indoor pool.

Students in the Intermediate II and Young Adult classrooms are provided additional services of a transition coordinator to develop the functional and social skills necessary to be successful on the job as they enter the workforce.

Beacon School collaborates with a number of agencies that provide specialty services to our students. OU students provide music therapy to each of our classrooms, engaging students in singing, dancing, and drumming. In return, our school is a placement for practicing music therapists, as well as intervention specialists attending the university.

Beacon School was very fortunate to be awarded the VSA Ohio & Ohio Arts Council Grant for the current school year. This grant provides the school with a resident artist to work with our students to express themselves through projects and illustrations and to expose them to different art mediums. The resident artist was instrumental in creating "Pete the Cat," who travels to elementary schools and local businesses all over the county to instill a love for reading.

Beacon students also participate in preparing and cooking healthy meals through the Live Healthy Appalachia grant.

And finally, the school has its own Beacon



Above, the Jolley family. At left, the school.



Singers who practice very hard on a weekly basis with the purpose of providing concerts twice a year to students, parents and members of the community. Beacon School is thankful its students have the opportunity to develop a

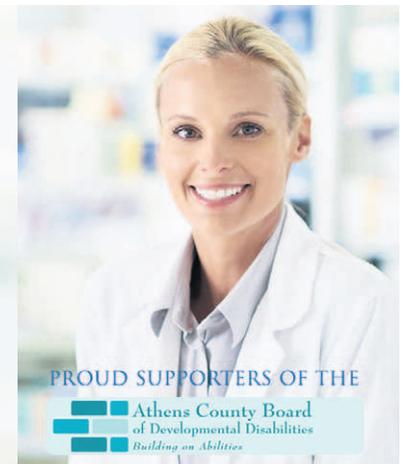
love for music and performance. Beacon School has a devoted staff of administrators, teachers, teacher's assistants and paraprofessionals who love what they do. Working with the school's 44 families, the Beacon staff strives to provide the best educational experience for children and adults who require an adapted curriculum and specialized instruction, enhancing their quality of life.

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SSA – Building lives one person at a time

The Service and Support Administration Department of the Athens County Board of Developmental Disabilities quietly goes about the business of helping individuals build a life that is meaningful to them.

Over the years, the focus of services has made a dramatic shift from “old” thinking about what was “wrong” with a person with developmental disabilities and how to “fix” them – to a positive approach that focuses on strengths, interests and goals to develop a life of meaning.

In addition, the staff has been trained to recognize the occurrence of trauma in people’s history and to develop plans of care that are sensitive to those traumatic events. Taking a person-centered approach, the department works with individuals and their families to discover what is important to the person as well as what is important for the person.

Through this process, each individual and their team of support develop a plan that is unique to that individual and focused on how to help them achieve their special goals and dreams, while assuring that the individual stays safe and healthy.

Their Service and Support Specialist (SSS) is actively involved in the process and assists to develop and monitor their Individualized Service Plan (ISP), which is tailored to assure that their needs are being met. Plans are developed to assure the individual is getting the opportunity to enhance their life and to have control over decisions that affect them. Through the process of discovery, the SSS will meet with the individual and their circle of support.

These are the people who know the individual best and can help develop the appropriate



Brandi

support that promotes their rights, choices, opportunities and self-advocacy; their physical well-being, including routine and preventative healthcare and daily living skills; their emotional well-being, including their self-esteem and satisfaction with their life; their material well-being, including employment, money, education and housing; their personal development, including achievements, successes and personal competence; their interpersonal relationships including social contacts, relationships and emotional supports; and social inclusion, including participating in their community and social supports.

The SSS works with the individual and their team to help identify supports for them. Sometimes community supports are identified who connect the individual to services, organizations or individuals in the community who can help support the individual at little or no cost.

At other times, the team will work to identify a paid provider who is chosen by the individual to support them in ways to assure that they have full access to the community. Individuals enjoy a variety of opportunities for community participation, including employment, recreation, worship, shopping, and dining.

ONE YOUNG MAN who has benefitted from this process is Justin, 20, of Athens. Justin loved riding the adaptive bikes at Beacon School. He really wanted to be able to ride a bike with the kids in his community at home. Adaptive bikes can be very expensive, and because of this, Justin did not have his own bike.

After talking with Justin and his guardian,

his team decided to use his Family Service and Support Funds to purchase him a three-wheeled bike. He picked out the color he liked best, and then the bike was approved and ordered. Once it arrived, the wonderful workers of the Athens County Board of DD Bus Garage even helped to assemble it during their own free time.

The bike was brought to Justin’s house, and his face lighted up with joy. He is now able to ride his bike with the neighborhood kids and spend more time out on his bike in the community. Justin loves the exercise and the fresh air, and he really likes showing off his cool basket on the back.

Thanks to Family Service and Support Funds, Justin gets to do something he loves at home now, and not just at school.

Then there’s 24-year-old Brandi of Millfield, who is more than a triple threat: She’s an actor, singer, dancer, equestrian, hard worker and all-around cool person. Brandi graduated from high school a few years ago but always wanted to find a platform to show off her musical and acting talents.

This was discovered through a person-centered planning process of helping people the Athens County Board of Developmental Disabilities serves to focus on identifying and achieving outcomes. This often leads us to look outside the County Board service system. Her team split up the work, and found the ABC Players, who often perform at Stuart’s Opera House.

Brandi auditioned and got a part in “Pinocchio.” Since then, she’s played many roles and has been a part of the acting group, getting regular positive feedback from her fellow actors, crew and the audience. She’s been in “Stuart Little,” “The Little Mermaid,” and “1776.” You can go to stuartoperahouse.org/events to learn about upcoming musicals.

Brandi also enters community equestrian events, placing first and third in trot and walk and trail-riding this past summer. She and her horse, Retto, ride often.

Brandi’s goal this year is to find a job, as she worked so hard at her last job at Beacon School scanning files that she worked herself out of a job. County Board of DD staff will continue to help her achieve her goals and make connections in the community.

Lastly, Noah is a 39-year-old man who is well known throughout the Athens community. Noah is an avid community member and advocate for himself and those with developmental disabilities. He currently has three different jobs that advocate for individuals with disabilities in various ways.

His first job is as an outreach coordinator for OU. As an outreach coordinator, he guest lectures to various classes across different departments as well as serves on a couple of com-



Noah

mittees related to accessibility and inclusion at OU. Noah also started his own consulting firm to assist and advocate for those with developmental disabilities. More recently, he has been partnering with the Prentke Romich Company on a very special project – ask him about it!

Noah serves on a number of committees within the local government community and at his workplace that directly relate to accessibility and inclusion for those with disabilities. He has traveled the United States and Canada to speak at conferences such as the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, the Ohio Speech-Language-Hearing Association, and the International Society for Augmentative and Alternative Communication.

His interests aren’t just limited to serving the community with disabilities; he can also be found at any one of his favorite spots in the community, such as the bike path, Tony’s Tavern, and various art and music events hanging out with friends and doing the other fun activities he likes to do.

Noah has helped many individuals over the course of his time working and serving the community. He is passionate about ensuring those with disabilities receive equal access and opportunities.

His achievements in life should serve as a reminder that anyone can do anything as long as they are determined and set their mind to it. His passion should serve as inspiration to continue supporting those with developmental disabilities in the Athens community.

Individuals with developmental disabilities who need services can apply by contacting the Service and Support offices at 740-592-6006.



Justin

Sarina dreams of a job in the community

Sarina Winner story shared by her Integrated Outcome Coordinator Tina Wilson

Born in Florida and moving to Ohio at a young age, Sarina Winner thought about what her life might be like in the future, what her dreams would entail. With a diagnosis of cerebral palsy, a non-progressive diagnosis that primarily affects body movement and muscle coordination, she has had a life-long struggle wanting people to see her as a person rather than constantly limiting her because they choose to only see her disability.

Sarina loves being surrounded by people. She's a voracious reader as you'll often see her holding a "steamy" paperback novel. Sarina said she dreamed of going to prom someday, and later in life, getting married. Sarina also thought about her future, being a young woman with a keen intellect and a desire to contribute to the world.

Sarina's young life was filled with supportive parents and excellent schooling. She spent part of her education at Beacon School, also attended Federal Hocking High School, where

she was a member of the National Honor Society, and her afternoons were spent at the ATCO Adult Program. During those days of youth, Sarina dreamed of being a teacher or a librarian, working with children, primarily special-needs children.

Sarina prefers using her mind; she loves having thoughtful conversations with people. Sarina enjoyed studying in school very much; she worked hard on her studies. Sarina found a passion for working with children when she volunteered with students in younger classrooms. Those experiences fueled Sarina's desire to work with children.

As learning has always been important, Sarina participated in many classes and trainings including Death and Dying, Relationship Classes, Getting Along With Your Peers, and Self-Advocacy. These are some examples of classes that piqued Sarina's interest in her quest for further knowledge.

In 1997, Sarina began attending and creating art at Passion Works Studio, another venue for Sarina to use her mind in a creative meaningful way, along with being surrounded by

members of the community and her peers.

Sarina's background, advocacy, perseverance and intelligence led her to requesting assistance from PersonnelPlus employment services to achieve her dream of obtaining a job. Sarina is now going through the process of employment exploration. She has met with an employment counselor and PersonnelPlus staff. She completed an assessment and recently went to "job sampling," which guides an individual along with his or her job coach, trying a job that has the perfect fit for each person.

Sarina was able to work in a school and a church setting, which gave her the opportunity to help people and work in a community setting. Sarina greatly enjoyed her job sampling experiences; she took great pride in her daily work, her appearance, and the overall feeling



Sarina Winner.

she was helping other people, too. Sarina will continue seeking her dream with this path to employment as she seeks a job that emphasizes her abilities, skill sets, personality and preferences.

ATCO will see evolution

Many articles in the local newspapers over the past year have detailed the three-year plan to transition ATCO Services to other private day hubs, as well as to support those served in identifying community employment and community engagement opportunities.

We are now beginning the second year focusing on resolving the federal mandate in which the county board can no longer provide services billed through Medicaid, a key funding source that sustains many services and programs supporting our citizens with developmental disabilities.

For many years, ATCO was the only option for adults with developmental disabilities. In recent years, Employment First was launched, many new day hubs opened in the county, and the county DD Board focused on working hard to provide good inclusive opportunities.

This is a difficult time for some people in the Athens County community as so many people have been a part of ATCO and know the valuable resource it has been. There are many community members who have become a part of ATCO as we have developed a more inclusive program that invites and connects so many community members as well as community agency partners.

An exciting opportunity has surfaced, however, and is before us due to this transition – for the Athens area to become a truly and fully inclusive community. In the past, places such as ATCO were very important as they provided learning opportunities, paid work, and an opportunity to form friendships with people possessing intellectual disabilities who

had no other way for those connections to develop. The Athens County Board of Developmental Disabilities and many community agencies, partners and advocates for people who support individuals with developmental disabilities, are putting great efforts into helping the community grow and embrace inclusion like never before.

As part of the transition, the staff at ATCO, along with its service and supports specialist staff, supports individuals served by educating them on all of their available options, offering a path to employment as their first available option, along with having an outcome that focuses on being a part of the community in their own way. Each individual is being offered the opportunity to learn about, visit and experience the many day hubs that are available. Also, a transition portfolio is created to help the individual and his or her family, with a support team to track the details of the individual's experiences and choices.

As this transition moves forward, it will be important for the community to be kept informed on how, together, we can make great new opportunities available.

Autumn Brown, ATCO transition manager, stated, "An important thing we can all do is remember that there are many people with disabilities who live in, work in, and enjoy the community. Just like everyone else, they want to feel a sense of belonging, acceptance, and have things accessible to them. Together we as a community can eliminate the many barriers they have experienced. We can offer them a new sense of belonging as they deserve to feel valued as a contributing member of our society."

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ABCDD has long & interesting history

In 2017, county boards of developmental disabilities across Ohio are celebrating their 50th anniversary of providing quality services and supports to individuals with developmental disabilities. To help recognize and celebrate this anniversary, the theme "Always There" was developed.

Highlights of the Athens County Board of Developmental Disabilities' history include:

1950 – Parents began meeting at the Richland Avenue Methodist Church to provide socialization and play time for their children with disabilities.

1956 – A \$25 ad was placed in The Athens Messenger urging other parents and concerned citizens to join their group. Eventually eight families, the Athens County Child Welfare Board and Ohio University Education Department became involved.

1957 – The Child Welfare Board offered space at the Children's Home for a classroom. March classes began with three students ages 7 to 10. Their teacher was Marjorie Sherow. By the end of the year, there were eight students. In May the Council for Handicapped or Retarded Children was incorporated and the school became funded through donations. Alpha Xi Delta Sorority recommended the name "Beacon School."

1958 – The first state state funding was received for the program.

1963 – The first county levy was passed for Beacon School. The school moved to a house on Terrace Avenue in Athens, off of Columbus Road.

1966 – Beacon School was relocated to the vacated Sugar Creek Elementary School on Ohio Rt. 550. At this time there were 38 students and four teachers. It began providing residential services through HAVAR, Inc.

1967 – Opened pre-school class in the basement of the Church of the Good Shepherd's Leete House. Passage of Senate Bill 169 transferred the school to county boards of mental retardation and developmental disabilities.

1968 – Transferred the operation of Beacon School from Child Welfare to the Athens County Board of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities.

1969 – Opened ATCO sheltered workshop at the Sugar Creek Elementary School.

1970 – September moved school to the Berry Cottage on what is now known as The Ridges. In October moved ATCO to the McBee Building on North Shafer Street.

1975 – Passage of Public Law 94-142, the Education of All Handicapped Children Act.

1981 – Beacon School moved to its current location at 801 W. Union St. (Rt. 56).

1982 – ATCO moved to 21 S. Campbell, its current location.

1983 – Began the supported employment program, ATCO Job Placement Services, which is now known as PersonnelPlus.

2007 – PersonnelPlus moved to its own location at 20 Kern St., the former Athens County Senior Citizen building.

2009 – Passion Works Studio moved to its own location at 20 E. State St. in Athens.

2009 – Self advocates lobby the Athens County Board of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities to remove the term "mental retardation" from their title due to the negative and hurtful effect this phrase has on their lives. The ACBDD passed a resolution to do so. The self-advocates then joined forces with others throughout Ohio to petition the state Legislature to do the same, and this was accomplished in early 2010.

2014 – PersonnelPlus moved to Harper Street in The Plains.

2016 – The ACBDD announced transition plans to come into compliance with Conflict Free Case Management. These plans include transitioning Passion Works to another agency, and the planned 2018 closing of ATCO.

2016 – The property in front of Beacon School is acquired and plans are announced to construct a new entryway and additional parking into Beacon School.

2017 – Plans are announced for PersonnelPlus to move to The Market on State Mall and for the SSA Department to move to the Harper Street address in The Plains.

We have tried to capture the highlights of our history and provide a brief overview of our current services. Any omission of information is not intentional. The information provided was compiled by Teresa Faulk and others through interviews with families and from "Athens County Family History – 1987" by Beverly Schumacher and Mary L. Bowman.

RHDD provides essential services for people with disabilities

RHDD is a non-profit provider for individuals who have a developmental disability. It's been in business for more than 40 years throughout southeast Ohio, including in Athens, Meigs, Morgan and Washington counties.

RHDD provides a wide range of services including residential services, adult day services, transportation, respite, home modifications and much more. RHDD also offers employment supports through its sister agency, Creative Employment Solutions, or CES.

As a CARF-accredited provider, RHDD and CES are certified to provide employment supports through both DODD Employment First and OOD Traditional Vendor services. CES makes it possible for a person to take his



or her first step on a path toward employment with resources such as community-based assessments, job development, job coaching, retention services and much more.

For more information about how RHDD can help you start your job search, contact

Nicole Smith at nsmith@rhdd.org.

RHDD Residential Services makes it possible for many people with a developmental disability to live and thrive in their communities. The non-profit's caring and committed staff members work closely with people to determine what their wants and needs are so that they can help create a home that is safe and inviting. RHDD staff assist with a wide variety of supports including bathing, grocery shopping, medical appointments, transportation, budgeting and more. For more information on Residential Services, contact Amy Thompson at athompson@rhdd.org.

RHDD's Adult Day Services program, called Alternatives, has been providing community inclusion opportunities and recreation activities

in the Athens area since 2012. Alternatives is based solely on the interests and ideas of the people it serves. The program provides creative outlets for community involvement, pre-employment training, artistic expression, and more. All of this is driven by the person, for the person, and with the person.

RHDD also provides transportation services for those who need help getting around in their community. Anyone with questions about Alternatives or transportation services should contact Amanda Cox at acox@rhdd.org.

RHDD is a very close family of people who share a common goal: to provide only the highest-quality services for people who have a developmental disability. For more information, visit www.rhdd.org.

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(Athens County Board of Developmental Disabilities motto)

Thanks to The Athens County Board of Developmental Disabilities for all your caring and hard work in Athens County.

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Employment & Volunteer opportunities available

Beacon School, other programs work wonders for little boy with autism

By Jessica Lee (Liam's mom)

I am the mother of a beautiful 4-year-old who loves swimming, cuddles and Thomas the Train. His name is Liam, and he also happens to be nonverbal and autistic. My son is considered to be a level three on the spectrum, which basically means he needs a lot of support to help him get through various things in his daily life.

Liam didn't start off in the best situation. You know how some parents joke about their kids being a surprise. Well, he actually was one. I found out I was pregnant with Liam about six months along (give or take a week) of my pregnancy, which wasn't the only shock. At 38 weeks, I started to feel really sick. I went to the doctor where I was diagnosed with preeclampsia and was brought into the hospital where I was induced. Liam was born less than a day later. He was born with pneumonia and underdeveloped lungs, and that meant he had to be sent to the NICU at Children's Hospital in Columbus. He stayed for 18 long days until he finally got home just before Christmas.

Everything seemed to be perfect from then on out because he just seemed like the perfect little baby. I know all parents think their child or children are the best and are little angels but mine actually was. He didn't cry or fuss, and once he was asleep he stayed asleep all through the night. He started to eat solid food on time, and he walked early, which filled me with joy.

Yet when he was around 2 and a half years old, I met up with an old friend to have a play date with her daughter and Liam; they just happened to be the same age, and I thought it would be good for him. Liam doesn't have any siblings or cousins his age so the only kids he ever sees are at daycare. Being around my friend's daughter made me realize all the things Liam wasn't doing. Obviously, he wasn't talking (since he is nonverbal), he couldn't make eye contact with anyone, and he would not play with her. He just seemed to want to sit alone and be in his own world.

This scared me just as it would any mother, and as worried mothers do, I went looking for answers. My Internet searches lead me to this "scary" word called Autism and that's what it was at the time... a big scary unknown. It upset me a lot at first because no one wants his or her children to be different, but after I had a good cry, I got back up on my feet and went looking for local help.

This is when I found Help Me Grow. They are a local organization that works in early intervention. They personally helped us put our feet into the door of services Liam still uses to this day. Immediately, they got Liam signed up for speech regularly at Ohio University Hearing and Speech and set him up for an assessment for proper diagnoses. Help Me Grow also had different services come to our house to provide therapies in a place that made Liam feel safe. After only working with them for four months in November, we had meeting with Beacon School to enroll him early in developmental preschool, which was one of the best choices ever made for him!

Beacon allowed him to flourish, and the amount of progress he showed by the end of that first school year amazed me! He had huge gains in his social and cognitive abilities and progressed with various things like drinking from a straw or learning to swim, but the one thing that amazed me the most was his art. When I found out his true diagnoses, I sadly only thought of all the negative things that could come. I never thought I would have things that he made to put on my fridge



"Though Liam (shown above) can't communicate with words, he makes his presence known and forces his way into being the center of attention. He especially loves to make you laugh by doing something silly and laughing with that cute giggle of his."

because he never showed interest at home. Yet during those first few weeks of school I got so many little things that he had made, and that really touched my heart.

Beacon also allowed us to have access to all kinds of therapies and experiences for him. Liam receives Speech, Physical and Occupation therapy throughout his school week at Beacon. They also allow him one day a week of swimming and a gym class, which honestly helped with all the energy the boy has.

Now at age 4, a year and a half after our journey started, you would never have guessed this little boy had severe social problems and delays. Though he can't communicate with words, he makes his presence known and forces his way into being the center of attention. He especially loves to make you laugh by doing something silly and laughing with that cute giggle of his. He also now plays with others his age (though in his own way), and he has a few friends now and I think a "girlfriend," too.

Though his journey is definitely far from over I'm confident, thanks to the people we have met and the services we are provided, that Liam will be okay, which is all a mom wants to hear.

Willow: Inspiring example of the magic of ACBDD services

By Rachel Blatt (Willow's mom)

Willow is 20 years old, and this is her last year at Beacon School. In the winter of 1997, we lived in a very rural area in northeast Utah, Flaming Gorge National Recreation Area, since Willow's father and I both worked for the U.S. Forest Service. Around Jan. 20, when Willow was 20 months of age, she came down with the flu. I took her to her pediatrician in Vernal, Utah, and was sent home with the flu diagnosis.

At the time, it was standard to prescribe an antibiotic to take care of any secondary infections that may develop from the flu. I was not feeling well that night either, and decided I would sleep on the futon in the same bedroom with Willow while I ran the humidifier. Her father came in to administer her midnight dose of antibiotics while I slept. Upon his exit, I was awakened with a thump sound that got my immediate attention. I checked Willow to find that she was non-responsive, yet had her eyes wide open, and her body was stiff all over with the clenching of her muscles. I called for Steve to come right away, and together we assessed that it was necessary to call for emergency help.

A county ambulance came and Willow was taken to the nearest hospital in Rock Springs, Wyoming, over an hour away. This was the longest ride of my life because no one had a clue what had happened to Willow. She continued to remain unresponsive. Her breathing had become very shallow to the point where she barely seemed to be breathing at all. There was no intubation equipment in the ambulance, but I could see small evidence of her breath on the oxygen mask that she wore. Upon arrival at the hospital, she was taken into the ER, and the physicians there intubated her, and tried to determine what was happening. They decided she was critical and she should be transferred to the Children's Primary Hospital in Salt Lake City, four hours away. Needless to say, she was Life Flighted that morning.

During her first week, she was in a coma and had several tests. An MRI and a seizure monitor were used to determine that Willow had Encephalitis that was caused by the influenza, a virus that she had contracted a few days earlier. The virus caused inflammation of her brain, which in turn caused her seizures, which in turn severely limited her breathing, thus causing global anoxia to her brain.

After 10 days, Willow came out of her coma, but had the functional ability of an infant. During the next three month stay at Children's Primary Hospital, Willow regained her ability to drink from a bottle, and sit up before she was released to go back home with us. During this time, my husband continued to work, while I was able to stay at the Ronald McDonald House and be with Willow most every hour of the day. Upon arrival at our home, Willow received daily therapy by me taking her to Rock Springs on some days, and Vernal on alternate days. By the time she was preschool age, it was apparent that the tiny-population Uintah County was not able to meet Willow's intensive needs, so we relocated to Logan, Utah. There she received Early Intervention services, as well as the

Continued on next page

Willow...

Continued from page 14

occupational, physical and speech therapies she so desperately needed.

We lived in Logan, Utah for the next 10 years where Willow continued to receive daily, year-round services. Then my husband obtained a position with the Wayne National Forest as the Supervisor office's wildlife biologist, and thus we ended up in Athens, Ohio.

My first interaction with the Athens County Board of Developmental Disabilities was the knowledge of a summer camp for children with special needs. I was given the phone number and talked to parents of special-needs children who already were receiving services from ACBDD, Margaret Hutzel, and Janet Kloiber Wallisch. Both were very helpful and informative, and helped me enroll Willow in the summer camp that was established by Noriko Kantake.

We moved here in June 2009, and Willow attended the camp at Beacon School that summer. This was our first experience with the wonderful people who serve children with disabilities here in Athens County. Willow was not eligible to attend Beacon School that year due to space limitations, but she did attend the Special Needs class at Athens Middle School under the supervision of a most wonderful teacher, Deborah Anderson. That first year was very

successful for Willow and that's when she met two friends who to this day, remain her very dear friends, Gabe Hutzel, and John Wallisch.

The following year, Willow was able to attend Beacon School and has flourished and thrived under the love, attention and guidance of the staff and administration. Her current teacher, Sam Dunlap, is one of Willow's all-time favorite teachers, and it's not unusual to see Willow follow her around when she attends special events at the school.

During the past seven years, Willow has attended every summer day camp at Beacon, which has included music activities, swimming, movies, and the infamous end-of-camp picnic for which all of the volunteers, staff, participants and their families are invited. During the last several years, we have seen positive changes in the amount of care that Willow receives. She was able to obtain an iPad through the ACBDD, which has enhanced her life a great deal. While Willow is unable to speak, this device has made great strides in her communication abilities, as well as her ability to select her own entertainment options. Willow's curriculum has focused more on learning self-care and life skills. She enjoys the pool at Beacon a few times a week, and Beacon has several events including holiday dances, Special Olympics, movie night, and field trips that Willow has participated in over the years.

The school has been instrumental in help-



Willow relaxes outside.

ing Willow obtain summer employment with PersonnelPlus, and the program is currently assisting me in finding a day program and some work programs for Willow once she graduates this spring.

The past year or two has been especially positive for Willow because ACBDD has a new director, Kevin Davis. I cannot say how much I respect him and his wife, Leslie, for their bottomless commitment, love and compassion for

the kids of Athens County.

I have noticed a great deal of positive improvements in the morale of the employees and volunteers who work to make the ACBDD successful. Although Willow has been on the county waiver list for seven years, I feel that she will get a waiver soon, which will make her even more eligible for the services which she so desperately needs. The ACBDD has been a very valuable part of our lives here in Athens County.



The Sech-Kar Co. provides residential and transportation services for people with varied abilities throughout Athens County and Southeast Ohio. The Sech-Kar Co. also operates two Adult Day Programs in Athens County – The Doanville Group located in Doanville and The Elm Rock Group in Nelsonville – as well as similar programs in Hocking, Perry, and Morgan Counties.

We support and appreciate the services the Athens County Board of Developmental Disabilities has provided in Athens County since 1957.

The Sech-Kar Co. works with the ACBDD providing opportunities for everyone to enjoy the many wonderful events and activities available in Athens County.

The Doanville Group specializes in exploring and accessing community businesses and activities in small groups of five or fewer. Current activities include participating in a book club through the Athens County Library System, swimming at Hocking College, and exploring healthy food preparation with an OU graduate student.

The Elm Rock Group operates a rabbit adoption center in partnership with River Road Rabbit Rescue to foster and socialize surrendered and rescued pet rabbits until they can be adopted into new homes. Participants and volunteers with The Elm Rock Group provide care for the rabbits and help with introducing the rabbits to the general public in addition to pursuing a variety of other activities.



Robert at the Ohio State Fair



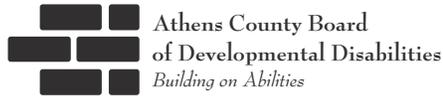
Irene holding Khaleesi



Mary and Annetra at the Nelsonville Public Library

For information about job opportunities or any services provided by The Sech-Kar Co., please visit www.ts-kc.com or call 740-753-9993.

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Building on Abilities



Mike Downard, Elaine Inlow, and Jon Downard

For 30 Years, Elaine Inlow, a Personnel Plus Employee, has been a valued part of the Downard's Ambassador Laundry team. Retiring earlier this year, her constant smile, pleasant attitude, and dependability has set the standard for excellence for the past three decades. Downard's Ambassador Laundry proudly supports Personnel Plus and encourages other local businesses to become involved in Personnel Plus and other ACBDD programs.

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An Early Intervention family's story

An open letter to my daughter's epilepsy

By Chelsea Whincell (Raven's mom)

Dear Epilepsy,

I hate to break it to you but I think it's about time we've had ourselves a talk. You've been in our lives a whole year now. Hard to believe, right? This year has gone by so slowly but at the same time ridiculously fast. This year you have really taken quite a toll on my family, especially Raven.

There are times when you completely outshine her body and personality with your own. The hours and days when my full-of-smiles, playful, outgoing and courageous little girl is replaced with a scared, tired and sad-eyed baby who sometimes doesn't even have the strength to stand. Well, those are the worst.

Epilepsy, I hate that I don't know where you came from. Are you the result of something I did or ate during pregnancy? Or maybe from Raven's traumatic, premature birth? Maybe you come from good ole genetics or pure dumb luck. The simple fact is, we may never know why you chose our daughter. I guess in a way I'm okay with that. Only because I know that if I am the cause of your existence inside of her, I would never be able to forgive myself.

It makes me sad that friends and family have been keeping their distance and excluding us from activities that we once were able to do without your added stress and tension. It is painful to think about all of the people who no longer drop by to visit or even call just to check in. No matter the circumstances, my mind will always point its fingers in your direction, Epilepsy. I'm fearful people feel the need to distance themselves because they are afraid to see you in full swing.

You see Epilepsy, those who don't know you, who have never had to comfort a loved one before, during and after one of your visits, they are fearful of the uncertainty you bring. And that's okay! Even if you have seen a seizure once, 100 or 1,000 times, it is still scary. The fear and intimidation you carry about you is surreal. As you know, there are nights here in our home when your presence hangs so heavily that it's physically hard to breathe. Those are the nights when everyone is so on edge that there is very little sleep going on from anyone.

Fortunately for you, my dearest Epilepsy, this letter isn't completely fueled by fear, sadness and hard feelings. I actually wanted to thank you. I am now a more understanding, caring and educated woman. I am no longer afraid to stand up and advocate for those who do not have a voice. I will always go out



Raven's parents read to her.

On Nov. 14, 2015, Raven was hospitalized for her first seizure.

of my way in hopes of helping someone in need. Most importantly, Epilepsy, I wanted to thank you for allowing Raven to grow and to continue to make progress every single day. Keep her safe!

They say that it takes a village to raise a special-needs child. I want to give my village a very big shout-out! A very big thank you to our friends and family who are supporting and praying for us every single day. Thank you to all of Raven's medical professionals at Holzer Clinic of Athens and Nationwide Children's Hospital. And of course, my biggest thank you goes out to the wonderful ladies – Mary Ann, Adrienne, Jennifer and Anna at Athens County Help Me Grow. You ladies have brought so many fun and exciting ideas with you for each visit. Thank you for not only supporting Raven but myself as well. Awesome job guys!

Raven, I hope that you always know that everything I have done and will always do is

what I believe to be in your best interest. There may be times when I am so overprotective that it's annoying but I promise it comes from a place of pure love. I want you to know that your strength, willpower and determination is inspirational. I hope that you never let epilepsy define who you are. I hope that you seize each and every day. I know that you will change the world! I love you so much. Thank you for being my hero!

Raven was recently diagnosed with Blount Disease, which is considered a very rare disease – only about 200,000 cases in the US. Our family feels blessed that Mary Ann and Adrienne both have experience with this disease and are able to give suggestions that they have actually seen for themselves to be helpful!

We love that everything we work toward in the program is focused on our everyday life as a family. Instead of having to set aside time specifically toward working on goals, our team is able to come up with exciting and fun suggestions that ensure every moment is beneficial. The support we receive from Help Me Grow Early Intervention is exceptional! Whether it's to vent about things we are struggling with, expressing concerns or to share our excitement over reaching milestones, someone is always there for us. Someone always cares and understands that even the smallest things some people take for granted can be a huge deal to a special-needs family!

As always, I encourage you to go out and make a difference! Even if it's just spreading one epilepsy fact to five people every day. We really need a cure or awareness! There's not much information about Epilepsy and it's kind of crazy because epilepsy is very common.