

## Warren County Dreams

June 2021

### A Word from Our Superintendent



What a long 15 months it has been! I am thankful to see the number of COVID cases declining and the protections that have been put into place with the release of the vaccines. We have been following the guidance of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Ohio Department of Health, and the Warren County Health District. With all of the Ohio health orders being lifted as of June 2, 2021, we will follow that guidance as well, and we will no longer be mandating masks for staff and visitors in our buildings as of June 2<sup>nd</sup>. We will also be moving forward with what we are calling our “new normal” to be effective on July 6, 2021.

Like much of the world, for the past 15 months, we have operated in a very virtual way - people working from home, meetings held via Zoom, etc. The virtual platforms we have been using have provided some very beneficial efficiencies to our jobs, and we hope to continue to reap the benefit of those efficiencies moving forward, as appropriate. However, we are very much aware that there is no replacement for being physically present with someone in certain circumstances. Beginning on July 6<sup>th</sup>, we will be transitioning back to in-person services. Meetings that are held with individuals we serve and/or guardians will be held in person, depending upon the wishes of the individual and his/her guardian. If the person served or guardian prefers to maintain virtual meetings rather than in-person meetings, we will accommodate that. These meetings could include, but are not limited to: individual service plan meetings, behavior support meetings, monitoring, MUI investigations, intake meetings, employment meetings, other team meetings, etc.

For our early intervention (EI) program, which provides direct services to a child and his/her family in their ‘natural environment’, we will be following the guidance issued by the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities (DODD). This includes the following:

- If the Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) team, which includes the family receiving services, determines that an EI service should be provided in-person, we will accommodate this method of service delivery.
- Virtual EI service delivery will remain a viable option if the IFSP team, which includes the family receiving services, determines that a virtual method is appropriate.
- When a child is being assessed for intake into the early intervention program, if a family is not comfortable with in-person interactions, DODD will continue to allow virtual evaluations consistent with existing guidance through at least August 31, 2021.
- If a family asks our employee to wear a mask for in-person services, we will accommodate this request.
- We will not deny EI services to a family based on their decision not to receive a COVID-19 vaccination.
- We will comply with any relevant state and/or local public health orders.

If you have any questions about any of our changes, please do not hesitate to reach out to your Service Coordinator, Early Intervention Primary Service Provider, Transition Coordinator, or call (513) 228-6400.

Over the past 15 months, we have also had to cancel most of our annual agency events. I am excited to share that we are currently in the process of planning for two of our annual events to take place this year, *Things That Go* and *Family Fun Day*. Both of these events are outdoor events, and we intend to hold *Things That Go* at our Warren C. Young Center in August, and *Family Fun Day* at the Miracle Field in Springboro in September. Once dates and plans are finalized, we will share that information with you!

Thank you for all of your support and patience for the past 15 months, as we continued to operate services for the over 2,000 people we serve in Warren County, in the safest way possible for staff, people served, families and the public. Warren County is a great place to live and work!

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### WCBDD celebrates DD Awareness Month with “Eggstravaganza” Reverse Parade

On March 29<sup>th</sup>, 2021 the Warren County Board of Developmental Disabilities (WCBDD) hosted the “Extra Essential Eggstravaganza” reverse parade as a way to safely engage the community and celebrate Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month.

The event was enthusiastically attended and invited enrolled individuals and their families to receive a special goodie basket delivered directly to their vehicles, providing an opportunity to take selfies with two charismatic Easter bunnies. Upon receiving a goodie basket, vehicles drove through the parking lot of the Warren C. Young Center and participated in a “honk parade” as agency staff, providers, and enrolled individuals waved hand-made signs celebrating this year’s DD Awareness Month theme, “Essential: We Matter!”

The planning and coordination efforts of the “Eggstravaganza” were met with praise from many who expressed their gratitude and appreciation, including one family who referred to the event as “a bright light during this difficult COVID time.” Thanks to the time, dedication, and heart of agency staff, providers, and volunteers, approximately 203 goodie baskets were gifted.



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### Board of disabilities welcomes newest board member

Lebanon resident, Bryan Marsh is thrilled to be serving as the newest board member of the Warren County Board of Developmental Disabilities (WCBDD). Marsh was sworn in by Warren County Probate Judge Joseph Kirby and attended his first board meeting in March. “I am so appreciative of this opportunity to serve on the board and play a role in supporting the strategic plans of WCBDD to provide exceptional opportunities and support for those who are in need of our service,” said Marsh.

With a background in business, Marsh has served in a variety of sales and sales management roles over the course of his career. While attending Miami University, Marsh met his wife Jennifer, who teaches French at Lebanon Junior High and High School. They have been residents of Lebanon for 25 years, and have two children.

“We live in a vibrant and caring community. Our family feels fortunate to be surrounded by so many incredible members of this organization who have helped our family over the years,” expressed Marsh.

“I have been so impressed with everyone that I have met in this organization. It is evident that there is a great deal of passion and commitment to helping and serving others, which is inspiring to me,” Marsh added. “This is my chance to serve as an advocate for many individuals and their families who rely on the many programs we offer. I look forward to learning quickly and helping in any way I can to continue building upon the excellent foundation that is in place.”

Board members of the Warren County Board of Developmental Disabilities serve four-year terms, and may serve no more than three consecutive terms. Board meetings take place at 6:00 p.m. on the third Monday of every month and are open to the public.



Pictured: New WCBDD Board member, Bryan Marsh



Pictured: Bryan Marsh (left) was sworn in to WCBDD by WC Probate Judge Joseph Kirby

### Enrolled individual's perseverance gets recognized by Goodwill Easterseals



Rick Nunamaker receives services from the Warren County Board of Developmental Disabilities (WCBDD). He is employed at the Lebanon Goodwill Store with Miami Valley Goodwill Easterseals, where he assists with donations and processing items for the sales floor. In March, Rick was featured on the Goodwill Easterseals website where he was praised for his customer service skills and recognized for his life-long perseverance.

“He would always come to the store as a customer and brighten everyone’s day,” said Lebanon Goodwill Store Manager, Tracy Wright. “Now he is an employee, and we can’t imagine a day without him. He scans all our books and CDs that come in for donations. He enjoys interacting with customers and employees. Everyone that donates really enjoys it when he comes out to unload their donations because he greets our customers with such excitement. Rick wants to make sure they have such a pleasant experience.”

Rick was introduced to the Goodwill Store through the Job and Community Program, also known as JobComm. The JobComm Program provides support to individuals with disabilities through use of

employment coaches who are responsible for providing work experience, job discovery, and development, as well as promoting and encouraging independence.

Throughout his life, Rick has strived for independence and inclusion, though it hasn't always been easy. Up until high school, Rick attended all mainstream classes; it was important to him to be able to attend "regular" classes. Freshman year, however, was a different story. "No one with a disability was allowed in regular classes, but I wanted to be in classes with all the other students," Rick explained. "The assistant principal of our junior high was transferred to the high school, so he helped advocate for me to the High School, but the principal was not easily convinced."

Asserting his perseverance, Rick negotiated with the principal. The two agreed that in order for Rick to remain in mainstream classes, he must achieve a "C" average for at least 2 quarters. Rick not only met this expectation, but exceeded it each quarter by making the honor roll.

Rick continues to persevere by setting goals for himself. "It is my desire to use the perseverance I learned in life to help learn about the retail store and eventually become a manager," Rick vowed. "I overcame so many challenges to even get the chance to be viewed like everyone else. Just because I have a disability, doesn't mean I am not able to do things like everyone else. It just means I must approach things in a different way!"

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### **Eligible individuals and families receive technology assistance through initiative**

Individuals and families in need of technology to access supports and services during the COVID-19 pandemic, were able to receive assistance due to the collaborative efforts of the Warren County Board of Developmental Disabilities (WCBDD) Community Resources Division, Warren County Community Services, Inc. (WCCS), United Way of Warren County (UWWC), and T-Mobile of Mason. The initiative, supported by the Warren County Board of Commissioners, equipped those eligible with a new tablet and WIFI access through the end of 2021.

Upon receiving grant funds to purchase tablets and WIFI services, WCCS and UWWC partnered with WCBDD and other agencies to locate applicable families, submit applications, distribute the tablets and maintain tracking of how they were being used. The WCBDD Community Resources Division worked diligently with all agency departments to identify individuals who would most benefit.

The intent of this initiative is outlined below:

#### **Community Problems to Solve**

- Lack of access to reliable internet and devices for residents
- Short-term support for hard-working people struggling because of COVID

#### **Solution -Technology Access**

- Quality virtual technology environments for kids doing remote education
- Capability to productively work at home and/or handle household business
- Engaging with homebound senior citizens to maintain physical/mental health

#### **Program Involved**

- Providing tablets & data for residents impacted by COVID-19 who need access to better technology
- Purposes are remote school/work, basic needs, homebound seniors and other allowable under CARES Act
- This was not a free tablet giveaway and specific actions are required for eligibility as required by law
- Recipient communication and accountability for action plan and usage is assumed during the period
- Tablet becomes the property of the recipient and customer service and troubleshooting guides are provided

The tablet distribution was met with appreciation by the individuals and families eligible, and empowered many to share how they were putting their devices to good use. One family excitedly shared that they used their device to participate in yoga, a dance along, independent homeschool resources, and even followed the landing of the Mars rover Perseverance. Another family provided a picture of their son working on his tablet. A member of the Voices Speaking Out advocacy group shared that the tablet has enabled her to stay connected and involved with advocacy group meetings.

The Warren County Board of Developmental Disabilities is pleased and honored to have participated in this initiative in an effort to connect individuals and families to such valuable resources.



Pictured: Son of Early Childhood family using his tablet.

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### Early Childhood News

The Early Childhood Team at the Warren County Board of Developmental Disabilities (WCBDD) provides support and services to families and their children under age six who are enrolled in services through WCBDD. The employees of WCBDD Early Childhood Programs have spent the last year expanding their skill set in coaching families through technology by use of Zoom, video sharing, Face Time, increased contact via phone calls, and more.

During the first quarter of 2021 (January-March), our collaborative team, which includes providers from WCBDD and Early Intervention Service Coordinators from the Warren County Educational Service Center, provided 116 developmental evaluations and/or assessments and developed Individualized Family Service Plans for qualifying children. Our Developmental Specialists, Occupational Therapists, Physical Therapist, Speech and Language Pathologists and PLAY Project Consultants for our PLAY 3-6 program delivered **1,002** virtual home visits during this period through virtual platforms such as Zoom, Face Time, and phone calls. They have also supported families by sharing videos, handouts, website links, and more! We continue to have our weekly Early Intervention team meetings via Zoom with all providers and Service Coordinators. This virtual platform has made it more efficient to implement the consultation and support of other Early Intervention service providers through the EI system, which include Early Childhood Mental Health Consultant, Vision Services and Hearing Services.

Our team is proud to announce and congratulate Whitney McHue, MS, Developmental Specialist on the accomplishment of completing the requirements to obtain the Ohio Infant Mental Health Credential, Level III. The Ohio Infant Mental Health Practitioner Level III (OIMGP-III) focus of practice is on the infant's mental health, relational health of the infant caregiver attachment and attunement, and infant and family assessment. The Ohio Infant Mental Health Practitioner Level III will develop or review individual, educational, or family service plans, or provide mentoring and guidance to a practitioner or interdisciplinary team.

The Early Childhood team has continued to provide various supports using technology: On April 29<sup>th</sup> we once again, hosted a Toileting 101 virtual parent information session presented by Envision. Our virtual playgroups also continued weekly and have been well-attended. This quarter, we began mailing themed craft packets to families who are signed up to attend virtual playgroup. Families then share their works of art during virtual playgroup. Continue to be on the lookout for emails and follow us on Facebook for daily information on what is coming up next!



Pictured: WCBDD  
Developmental Specialist,  
Whitney McHue



**Here are a few websites and resources we encourage you to check out!**

- **Ohio Early Intervention** - <https://ohioearlyintervention.org/> (Information about Ohio's Early Intervention System.)
- **Zero to Three** - <https://www.zerotothree.org/> (Information and resources on child development from birth to age three.)
- **The Inspired Tree House** - <https://theinspiredtreehouse.com/> (Child development resources and creative ideas to promote child developmental skills.)
- **Imagination Library** – [OhioImaginationLibrary.org](http://OhioImaginationLibrary.org) (Sign up to have free children's books delivered to your home every month.)
- **Sesame Street** - <https://www.sesamestreet.org/> (Games, videos, art ideas and resource information for children and families)
- **OCALI** - <https://www.ocali.org/> (Information and resources to inspire change and promote access to opportunities for people with disabilities.)

As we progress through the remainder of this year, WCBDD Early Childhood programs will continue to utilize technology as a part of service delivery methods. We are currently making plans to return to providing in-person evaluation and assessments in the safest manner for children, families and the services providers. It is our goal to begin to implement a process that utilizes both technology and in-person service delivery methods that take place in family's homes and communities. These service delivery methods will be determined individually through each child and family's Individualized Family Service Plan process. It is our goal to merge the skills we have learned throughout the pandemic to continue to offer thorough evaluation and assessment, research-based practices and interventions, and family-focused coaching to support the enhancement of child development and quality family daily routines.

For any questions or additional information regarding Early Childhood Services, please contact:

Kelly Brooks, MS

Early Childhood Manager

[Kelly.brooks@warrencountydd.org](mailto:Kelly.brooks@warrencountydd.org) or 513-228-6520

### **“Take a book, leave a book” with the Little Free Library**

A free book-exchange library is now open in downtown Lebanon thanks to the partnership of Production Services Unlimited, Inc (PSU, Inc.) and Residential Community Care (Skidz Reimagined.) Chartered by PSU, Inc. and built by Skidz Reimagined, the Little Free Library (LFL) is located in Cedar City Park with the purpose of promoting kindness, connection, and partnership in the community.

The Little Free Library is a nonprofit organization that inspires a love of reading, builds community, and improves book access by fostering neighborhood book-exchange boxes around the world. LFL received the 2020 World Literacy Award and has been recognized by the Library of Congress, the National Book Foundation, and others for its dedication to expanding book access for all.

To contribute to the Little Free Library, Productions Services Unlimited, Inc is accepting book donations Monday through Friday between the hours of 8AM and 4PM at 575 Columbus Avenue, Lebanon. You may also contact Jill Mays at [jmays@psuinc.org](mailto:jmays@psuinc.org) for local pick-up. Smaller book donations may be left inside the library located at 200 S. Broadway, Lebanon.



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### **New website helps Warren County adolescents with disabilities prepare for adulthood**

Since 2017, the Warren County Board of Developmental Disabilities (WCBDD), Warren County Educational Service Center (WCESC), Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities (OOD), and the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities (DODD), have worked together to provide families, agencies, educators, and businesses with transition tools to better prepare and support individuals with disabilities. Recently, the team was pleased to announce the launch of the Warren County Transition Network website, intended to help Warren County adolescents navigate their transition to adulthood.

Utilizing grant monies through the Ohio Center for Autism and Low Incidence (OCALI), the website is the product of Multi Agency Planning (MAP), a collaborative process through Employment First. After hours of planning and consulting with educators, parents, agency personnel, and community businesses, the team is hopeful the website's resources will provide students and families with an accessible way to identify their needs and set goals towards a brighter future.

The main objective when creating the website, was to ensure it was accessible and easy to navigate. "We wanted to make it user-friendly," said Brittany Conner, Transition Manager for WCBDD. "Some students really are doing this on their own."

To create a user-friendly navigational experience, the website incorporates four different visual icons to assist users in identifying with what topics the website links can help. Topics include: Community, Education, Employment, and Living. By clicking each icon, users are directed to a variety of links that provide information pertaining to the corresponding icon topic.

Another helpful feature of the website is a series of checklists for parents and students to follow depending on age level. "At school meetings, there is a lot of stuff to remember. We wanted to provide checklists so they could make sure they were on track," added Conner. By selecting the student's age, the user is provided with a list of suggested activities to consider completing as they transition into adulthood.

“This is an overwhelming process for parents, and it can be scary,” said Amanda Pennix, Transition Supervisor for Warren County ESC. “When school services end, it’s a huge change for everyone involved. Our hope with this website is to make this a smoother transition for everyone.” Pennix, Conner, and the rest of the collaborative team are optimistic the website resources will empower families, and remind them that they are not alone.

The Warren County Transition Network website is a live document and will be updated as new information is received. For more information, visit <https://www.warrencountytransitionnetwork.com/> or contact Amanda Pennix, Transition Supervisor for the Warren County Educational Service Center at [Amanda.pennix@warrencountyesc.com](mailto:Amanda.pennix@warrencountyesc.com)