

Warren County Dreams

November 2020

A Word From Our Superintendent



I think we can all say this year has been unlike any other we have experienced. Many of the events that we had previously scheduled for this year have been cancelled or adjusted so they can be held outdoors. We have implemented virtual services in order to maintain safety for individuals served, their families, our employees and the community.

While the in-person contacts we have all grown accustomed to have seemed to vanish overnight, the pandemic has provided us with some efficiencies. While sitting in front of a computer for Zoom meetings isn't always the most fun thing to do, nor is it always the best way to provide services, it has allowed us to free up time that was spent getting to and from meetings. It has also allowed us the opportunity to maintain contact with our stakeholders and partners. I am so glad that these virtual options have been provided to us. I imagine that when we are able to return to in-person contact with each other, some of these efficiencies will remain.

Our employees at the Warren County Board of Developmental Disabilities have never stopped working during this pandemic. While the locations in which they were working may have changed from their offices to their homes, the work has never stopped. We were fortunate to have technology in place prior to the pandemic that allowed most of our staff to seamlessly continue their work from the safety of their homes. I am happy to say that the staff productivity we have experienced has not dropped, and in fact has increased in many situations.

We still don't know what the future holds with this pandemic. The numbers are spiking higher than ever, and with the holidays coming where people will likely be gathering together indoors, it may get worse. The good news is that there is talk of a vaccine coming out soon. However, it will still take time for everyone to have access to it.

We are committed to keeping our employees, individuals served, families and the community safe during this time. We will maintain a system of most employees working from home until it is safe for them to start coming back to the office on a more frequent basis.

As mentioned above, we continue to work. Therefore, if you need anything from us, please do not hesitate to reach out to your Service Coordinator, Early Childhood Primary Service Provider, Transition Coordinator, or call (513) 228-6400. In cases of emergencies, please call 1-800-800-6847. We have someone on call answering that number at all times, 24 hours a day. You can also check out our website at www.warrencountydd.org. Thank you for your patience and cooperation with the many changes we have had to make. Enjoy the holiday season, and please stay safe!

WCBDD recognizes and honors Direct Support Professionals

During the month of September, the Warren County Board of Developmental Disabilities (WCBDD) celebrated Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) Recognition Week, to honor and acknowledge the many contributions made by DSPs, towards enhancing the lives of individuals with developmental disabilities.

“Direct Support Professionals are an invaluable part of the Warren County workforce”, said WCBDD Support Services Manager, Melissa Stall. She added, “Especially this year, with COVID-19, they played a critical role in keeping the people we serve, healthy, safe, and active.”

Provider Development Coordinators, Angela Brinker and Katelyn Willoughby worked together, alongside Stall, in an effort to create a fun, but socially distant way to ensure that the DSPs in Warren County, knew they were appreciated. Taking drive-by birthday party parades as their inspiration, the team coordinated a drive-by DSP Recognition Parade.

The parade, consisting mostly of WCBDD staff, boasted decorated vehicles, supportive signs, and honking horns, proceeding down the streets of Lebanon. Included in the parade route were the following DSP businesses: Helping Hands for Others, Residential Community Care, Production Services Unlimited Inc., COI Connected, Highest Expectations, Coffee Caravan, Mothers & Sons, and Residential Group Homes Inc.

In addition to the parade, a 12-minute video montage of enrolled individuals and staff thanking DSPs was created and shared. Stall concluded, “We hope the DSPs and individuals who participated had as much fun as we did.”

In October, WCBDD hosted their 2nd Annual DSP Appreciation Event. Conducted similar to a “drive-in” movie, the event included a packaged dinner provided by Shoelaces Catering, and an awards ceremony. DSPs remained in their parked vehicles, as dinners were delivered directly to their window by WCBDD staff members.

WCBDD Superintendent, Megan Manuel opened the ceremony, emphasizing the important role the county board and provider partnership plays in supporting the lives of people with developmental disabilities. Following Manuel’s welcome, was CEO of Mothers and Sons Caregiving, and recipient of 2019’s “Employer of the Year”, Gayle Benton, who elaborated on the numerous responsibilities of a DSP.

Nine DSPs were awarded for providing outstanding services. Award winners included: *Employer of the Year*: Residential Group Homes Inc., *Creativity Award*: Tangie Robertson, *Above and Beyond*: Loveness Nderbele, *Working Supervisor*: Jessica Webster, *Hero of the Year*: Danette Shimer, *Meaningful Mentor*: Jeff Rodgers, *All-Star Advocate*: Chris Benton, *Rock Star Rookie*: Kathy Morgan, and *DSP of the Year*: Hillary Hobbs.

Presenting the awards were the WCBDD Provider Development team of Brinker and Willoughby. Both ladies, in partnership with Stall, are responsible for the planning and execution of this annual event. Willoughby commented, “Our Annual DSP Appreciation Event is a great opportunity for us to show providers how much we appreciate the work they do each and every day.” As an additional token of appreciation, each DSP went home with a customized sweatshirt commemorating the evening’s event with a simple, but powerful reminder, “We are stronger together”.

Warren County “DSP” wins prize for Outstanding Service

A Warren County Direct Support Professional (DSP), was recently recognized for providing exemplary services to individuals with developmental disabilities during COVID-19. Direct Support Professional, Carol Schmitz, was awarded \$300 by MITC Agency Workforce Solutions for her outstanding dedication and service. She is currently the only representative of Ohio to receive this national accolade.

Nominated by her employer, Mothers & Sons Caregiving, Schmitz was praised for her creative alternatives in keeping two ladies to whom she was providing services, active and engaged during the pandemic. Such alternatives included attending a virtual church, daily “Face-Time” with family and friends, and plenty of arts and crafts. On one occasion, Schmitz assisted the ladies in creating Mother’s Day wreaths. Though they were unable to visit their mothers, the activity provided the ladies comfort, knowing they were able to show love for their mothers.

“Carol has been a huge asset to our company since she was hired at Mothers & Sons Caregiving”, owner, Gayle Benton comments. “She jumped right into her role as a Direct Support Professional with much ease, grace, and a willingness to tackle any challenges that came her way. It wasn’t long before we knew we had a shining star.” Benton adds, “Carol’s nurturing and compassionate mannerism follows her in whatever individual she is providing care to. We can always count on her to treat everyone like family, which is the goal behind our company’s motto. We are proud of Carol and blessed to have her on our team!”

Annual Agency In-service goes virtual

On October 16th, The Warren County Board of Developmental Disabilities (WCBDD) annual Agency In-Service made its virtual debut via Zoom, as a safer alternative to meeting in person during the pandemic. A total of 119 employees participated in the Zoom call, consisting of agency updates presented by Superintendent, Megan Manuel, team building breakout groups, and an awards ceremony.

In addition to celebrating employee work anniversary milestones, and employees with perfect attendance, the ceremony recognized and awarded staff and community members who have demonstrated exemplary services to the agency. Congratulations to the following award recipients:

- *Green Hat Award* – Linda Barnhart, Support Services Division Secretary
- *Extraordinary Employer Award* – Walmart (Lebanon Location)
- *Friends of DD Award* – Chris Benton of Mothers & Sons Caregiving, LIFEHOUSE Church, The Lebanon Public Library, and Kevin Schwieger of Luke 5 Adventures
- *The Dave Farmer Award* – Sharon Werner
- *Creativity Award* – Whitney McHue, Early Intervention Developmental Specialist
- *Above & Beyond Award* – Kira Armstrong, Sheryl Byrd, Peggy Davy, Christina Horton, Jill Rasnic, Jenna Sanders, Sarah Steele, and Leslie Thompson, Community Connections Job Coaching Team

- *Superintendent Award* – Melissa Hefelfinger, Investigative Agent and Brenda Perrin, Service Coordinator



Pictured: Superintendent Megan Manuel, with Friends of DD Award recipients Luke 5 Adventures



Pictured: Superintendent Megan Manuel and Superintendent Award recipients Brenda Perrin (left) and Melissa Hefelfinger (right)

WCBDD celebrates 5th Annual Trunk or Treat “drive-thru” style

The Warren County Board of Developmental Disabilities (WCBDD) held its 5th Annual Trunk-or-Treat on October 26th, 2020. Celebrated as a drive-thru event, enrolled individuals and their families drove safely through the Warren C. Young Center parking lot to observe dozens of trunks creatively decorated by agency staff, local providers, and members of the community.

As spooky music set the scene, (compliments of DJ Phil), incoming vehicles were heartily greeted by Community Integration Coordinator, Rhonda Schutte. Clad in a hot dog costume, Schutte, gifted each attendee a massive goody bag, with the assistance of agency staff members, Ellen Hudson and LaTosha Olinger. Thanks to the large assortment of donated candies, treats, and novelty items, a total of 200 goody bags were coordinated and assembled by community volunteer, Joe Koehl, and members of the Knights of Columbus. Of the 200 bags, 180 bags were distributed.

Throughout the evening, participating attendees had their picture taken to compete in this year’s first virtual costume contest. Photos were collected and organized into 6 different categories that included Best Mask, Best King, Favorite Hero, Favorite Villain, Most Creative, and Most Charismatic. Category winners were awarded with a prize sponsored by Production Services Unlimited Inc.

Concluding the evening’s festivities, was the announcement of the “best” decorated trunk. Production Services Unlimited Inc. was announced the “best” decorated trunk for its colorfully crafted Candyland display.

The award was an appropriate, and rather, timely goody basket, consisting of toilet paper, disinfectant, movies, activities, and of course, candy.



Early Childhood News

The Early Childhood Team at the Warren County Board of Developmental Disabilities (WCBDD) continues to provide support and services to children under age six, enrolled in services. The employees of WCBDD Early Childhood Programs have grown their skill set in coaching families through technology by use of Zoom, video sharing, Face-Time, increased phone calls, and more. Through collaboration with the (EI) Service Coordination contract agency, and the Warren County Educational Service Center, we provided 81 developmental evaluations and/or assessments, and developed Individualized Family Service Plans for qualifying children. Our Developmental Specialists, Occupational Therapists, Physical Therapists, Speech and Language Pathologists, and PLAY Project Consultants for our 3-6 program, delivered 967 virtual home visits during this period, completely through virtual platforms! We continue to have our weekly Early Intervention team meetings via Zoom with all the 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.

Additionally, we continue to provide various supports using technology: In June, we hosted two virtual parent information sessions titled: **Communication Skills in Early Childhood**, and **Play, Books, Music, and Communication**. In August, a third parent information session was provided on joint attention titled: **Using Interaction to Build the Foundation of Communication**. Our virtual playgroups also continued weekly. Featured below are pictures of a few crafts inspired by virtual playgroups shared by one family. Continue to be on the lookout for emails, and follow us on Facebook for daily information on what is coming up next!

Upcoming Virtual Opportunities:

Check out our virtual playgroups: (attach flyer here)

Check out “Gingerbread Friends Drive-Thru”: (attach flyer here)

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** - <https://imaginationlibrary.com/> (Sign up to have free children’s books delivered to your home every month. It is now available in Warren County)
- **JBrary-** <https://jbrary.com/> (Songs, stories, and many fun things for little kids, compiled by 2 children’s librarians.)

We look forward to providing continued support to children and families of Warren County in the safest way possible. WCBDD will continue to strive to phase in home and community visits as a part of service delivery options in the future. We will keep you informed of changes and options as they become available. Stay safe and well!

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

Kelly Brooks, MS

Early Childhood Manager

Kelly.brooks@warrencountdd.org or 513-228-6520

Early Childhood Family Success Story

Referred to the Warren County Board of Developmental Disabilities (WCBDD) Early Intervention services in April 2019, the parents of a young boy named Anthony expressed their concerns during his evaluation, because he was not pointing or using any words to communicate. When Early Intervention began for Anthony, he received home visits, where service providers utilized coaching to support his parents with strategies to increase his engagement, play, and language. Shortly after enrolling in Early Intervention services, his family began to take part in other opportunities offered by the WCBDD, to help Anthony develop his communication skills, including a playgroup, Social Saturday, and the “It Takes Two to Talk” program. They enjoyed family events offered by the Early Childhood Division such as the Annual Train Ride and Breakfast with Santa. Anthony’s family has also accessed the WCBDD Family Supports program to obtain adaptive equipment for sensory input, such as a mini-trampoline and tunnel, to help regulate his body and help him learn.

Anthony recently celebrated his third birthday and ended Early Intervention services. He is now speaking in short sentences, answering questions, and playing with friends at childcare. Recently, his mother shared a conversation they had:

“Anthony asked me today if I had a boo-boo on my arm. When I said yes, he asked, “Boo-boo hurt? “I said “Yes”. He replied, “Feel better, Mommy!” In addition, here’s another: I asked him tonight where Daddy was. He said, “Maybe he’s outside.” I couldn’t believe he threw the “maybe” in there.”

His mother added: “He has come so far in the last year and a half. I am so thankful for you, Margaret, Pennie, and the Early Intervention



program. You helped Bob and I learn so many skills and ways to communicate better with Anthony. We were both so worried early on. Now we can see him interacting, socializing and communicating so much better. We can never thank you enough for all you've done."

Voices Speaking Out self-advocacy group to host Virtual Open Mic Night on November 30th



The Voices Speaking Out will host their first virtual Open Mic Night on Monday, November 30th at 6:00 p.m. via Zoom. Voices Speaking Out is a self-advocacy group comprised of adults receiving services from the Warren County Board of Developmental Disabilities. Members meet monthly with the purpose of advocating independence and inclusion for those with disabilities in the community.

Each quarter, the members coordinate a community service project. This year presented many unique challenges brought on by the pandemic, however, Voices Speaking Out seized the opportunity to rejuvenate their community by spreading love and kindness. From safely distanced nursing home visits, to distributing goody bags to essential workers, to now hosting a virtual Open Mic Night, the advocates remain vigilant in lifting the spirits of those around them. Last year's Open Mic Night boasted 13 acts and showcased a variety of different talents including singing, dancing, guitar-playing, stand-up comedy, and even puppetry.

To perform in this year's Open Mic night, participants should be registered by November 20th to schedule a performance time. A prize will be awarded to the contestant with the "best" talent. Contact Ellen Hudson at (513) 806-3778 or email Ellen.Hudson@warrencountydd.org to register or Rachel Rice at (513)-401-4107 or email Rachel.Rice@warrencountydd.org

Preparing for adulthood in the age of COVID-19

During the age of COVID-19, preparing individuals with developmental disabilities for adulthood, continues to be a priority of the Warren County Board of Developmental Disabilities (WCBDD). As community employment is the preferred path for working-age adults with developmental disabilities, the WCBDD Community Connections division is committed to ensuring quality services during a challenging time.

Since March, WCBDD Employment Developers have worked with businesses to identify their staffing needs, resulting in 15 employment placements.

WCBDD Job Coaches have provided intensive job coaching supports to 49 individuals in the community. Additionally, they have taken on a higher volume of job coaching referrals, due to a lack of capacity in other agencies, or the agency's ability to provide in-person services.

The WCBDD Work Incentives Coordinator has provided support to numerous individuals seeking assistance with unemployment benefits, as well as assisting them with enrolling in benefit programs that fit their current needs. The Work Incentives Coordinator also continues to provide work incentives planning for job seekers.

Careers with Peers Council, a professional networking group, has moved to an interactive Zoom format that has gained participation from individuals and professionals alike in Clinton, Butler, Ottawa, and Erie Counties.

Job Development Services, Community Life Skills (CLS), and Job Class, have all been reformatted to a virtual setting using new technology to engage and interact with individuals participating in those services. Warren County school districts and eligible students now have the opportunity to access the virtual CLS and Job Class Classrooms as well as the interactive materials. Participation is open to students in both traditional classroom settings and remote learning environments.

Supports for Transition students have also been modified to enable WCBDD Transition Coordinators to support students on their caseloads, and work with schools in the safest settings for each individual situation.

All programs offered by the WCBDD Community Connections team continue their impact, regardless of modifications. Recently, the team celebrated 4 individuals who successfully obtained their driver's licenses, thanks to the WCBDD partnership with the Capabilities Driving Program.