Ohio is one of 26 states in the nation that has an official Employment First policy or legislation. Ohio’s Employment First Executive Order focuses on the goal that competitive employment in an integrated setting be the priority outcome for people with disabilities. A policy sets the direction, but successful implementation of Employment First requires a multi-pronged approach to achieve community employment for people with disabilities.

Historically, people with developmental disabilities have experienced unemployment, underemployment, and poverty rates that far exceed their peers without disabilities. In addition, people with disabilities are less likely to find steady or satisfying employment.

Meaningful work has significant benefits for all adults, including people with developmental disabilities. At the Warren County Board of Developmental Disabilities, we are helping the people to whom we provide services make informed decisions about where they work. We continue to seek out opportunities for them to obtain community jobs that result in greater earnings, better benefits, improved health and an enhanced quality of life.

Some of the key steps we are taking to help people who have developmental disabilities obtain community employment include:

- Focusing on person-centered planning to discover an individual's interests and talents to identify vocational goals.
- Improving the preparation of youth and adults to include employability skill development, and
- Engaging with businesses, and strengthening awareness of community members about the capabilities of workers with disabilities.

In this newsletter you will find stories about some of the people to whom we provide services who are exploring community employment options, or are finding success in obtaining jobs. It is such a pleasure to help people who have developmental disabilities discover their full potential in such a meaningful way.

Carla Cox was featured in our billboard awareness campaign in March, 2015.

Carla has a job she loves at AMC Movie Theatres!

Celebrating Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month

County Boards of Developmental Disabilities in BUTLER, CLERMONT, HAMILTON & WARREN COUNTIES
Rachel Rice is a member of Self Advocacy Group, Voices Speaking Out

Voices Speaking Out is the Self Advocacy Group sponsored by the Warren County Board of Developmental Disabilities. The group is comprised of adults receiving services from the WCBDD. Members meet to advocate for independence. They are provided guidance, leadership and training opportunities to help them reach their goals of independence, and advocating for themselves.

We interviewed Rachel Rice, who has belonged to Voices Speaking Out for about a year, and she shared the following with us:

What does self advocacy mean to you?
It means a lot to me. It has helped me see “who I am.” It has helped me find my voice.

What is your personal involvement in self-advocacy?
Over the course of being involved in the advocacy group, it has really helped me see who I am and what I am capable of doing by myself. Since I have been in the group, I have been able to speak up to my team, my family, and others, about things that I like or want to do. It has helped me speak up for things that I want for the rest of my life such as move out on my own, work in the community, and try new things.

How did you become a self advocate?
From talking to some of my friends about the group, and that I should join the group.

What are some of the barriers that you’ve had to deal with throughout the past year?
I’ve had a lot of barriers to overcome such as transportation, certain community jobs, and getting my family on board that “I can do this.” I overcame the transportation barrier by talking to my parents when I didn’t like being on a particular bus. After several weeks, I was finally able to convince them that I would like to try another service provider, and now I really like it. I overcame certain community job barriers by speaking up about accommodations and trying to get them to work with me to help me find success. I overcame getting my family on board by getting them to realize the I could do it, and having faith in myself.

Rachel Rice was the featured speaker at our Open House in March.

Jami Patrick (left) learned from Sam’s Club employee Raven Frazier how to work in the bakery.

Sam’s Club provided Job Shadowing opportunities to WCBDD in May

Sam’s Club employee Diana Dulle (left), worked with Amanda Bragg to greet shoppers at the entrance and check member I.D.s

Steven Muck (left) worked with Sam’s Club employee Nicki Kirby to pick up empty boxes from the aisles and deliver to check-out.
Young man overcomes obstacles to become more independent

Chris Thorpe, age 22, is happy to tell his story of success and triumph, and how he overcame a rough upbringing to look forward to his future.

“I went through a really bad time as a teenager,” he says. “I made some really bad choices and ended up having to go to a group home to spend some time.”

When Chris was in 9th grade, he got into legal troubles and was sent to Mid-Western Children’s Home, which is licensed by the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services as a group home to serve the needs of children in crisis. Residential Centers and Group Homes are facilities where children reside for short or longer periods of time to receive care and supervision 24-hours per day for two or more consecutive weeks. Most children in these settings have emotional or behavioral challenges, are medically fragile and/or require special medical treatments due to physical conditions, or have developmental disabilities.

Chris was diagnosed with developmental disabilities and cognitive learning disorders. “I didn’t like it at Mid-Western, and I didn’t do very well there. I was then sent to a home in Columbus, then one in Toledo, and then I ended up in one here in Lebanon.” By then, Chris was an adult and enrolled in services of the Warren County Board of Developmental Disabilities (WCBDD).

“I had some really rough roommates throughout those years. I saw some of the bad stuff they were doing and it scared me. I didn’t want to end up like any of them.”

Chris began to make changes in his life.

“I was really into computers. I wanted to spend more time on the computer, so I had to follow lots of rules and guidelines.”

Katrina Reese, staffmember at WCBDD set goals for him to reach. “We saw his potential and helped him craft a plan of success.”

Chris got a job at Easter Seals where he flourished. In 2013 the WCBDD assisted him to move into a home owned by the Community Housing Assistance Program, where he has one roommate and staff assistance.

He now has a job he loves at Kaivac Vacuum where he works five days a week. He uses power tools to drill holes and put pop rivets in vacuum wands. In addition, he has another duty there, and his eyes light up when he explains, “I fill bottles with chemicals that could burn your hand off. It’s a lot of responsibility. Only two people there know how to work the machine that does that.”

As a result of his progress at Easter Seals, Chris was recently referred to the Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation (BVR) who arranged job trials for him at Fricker’s and Save-A-Lot. The BVR is a state program housed within Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities to help people with developmental disabilities attain and maintain employment. Job trials are work experiences for individuals to try out various jobs in part time roles for three-day periods. “I really liked working at Fricker’s,” said Chris.

A long-range future goal that Chris has is to go to college and earn a degree in computers. “I want to help the government catch terrorists, kidnappers and hackers. I could work for the FBI and help them track the IP addresses of bad guys.”

Reese said, “Chris has progressed from having one of the most restrictive behavior plans that we write, to now having a significant amount of alone time. It’s been so exciting for all of us to see him achieve his goals, and we’re all extremely proud of him. The best part is seeing how happy he is. He definitely has a bright future.”

Chris agreed to be interviewed for this article because he felt his story could help others. “If I can help someone else, I want to save them from going through what I did,” he said.

When asked how he’s been able to make so many good changes in his life, Chris responds, “It’s thanks to my team and to my staff.” Reese asks, “And who else, Chris?”

Chris gets a little choked up, wipes a tear from his eye, and says proudly, “Me.”
Warren County Probate/Juvenile Division Judge Joseph Kirby (left) poses with Megan Mahoney and Tony Brigano, Court Administrator (right). Megan, who receives services from WCBDD, works part time as a file clerk, pulling the next day’s docket, filing old files, scanning and routing documents, and delivers intra-office mail to others in the Probate/Juvenile Division.

**2015 Summer Youth Employment Program**

Would you be interested in employing youth ages 16 to 24? Ohio Means Jobs Warren County runs a summer employment program for eligible youth to connect to the workforce, while developing work skills. These skills will assist youth in understanding the value of work, and the ability to apply these skills as working adults in the future.

The program runs until October 31, 2015, and the youth work at no cost to you. Youth can work up to 40 hours a week. Pre-employment paperwork, pre-screening and interviewing is completed by Warren County Department of Job and Family Services. Wages, workman’s comp, and payroll provided by Warren County Educational Service Center.

If you are interested in becoming a worksite for the 2015 Summer Youth Employment Program, please contact Matt Fetty, Ohio Means Jobs of Warren County at 300 East Silver Street, Lebanon, Ohio 45036. Telephone (513) 695-3032 or e-mail fettmb@ohioworkforce.com.

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