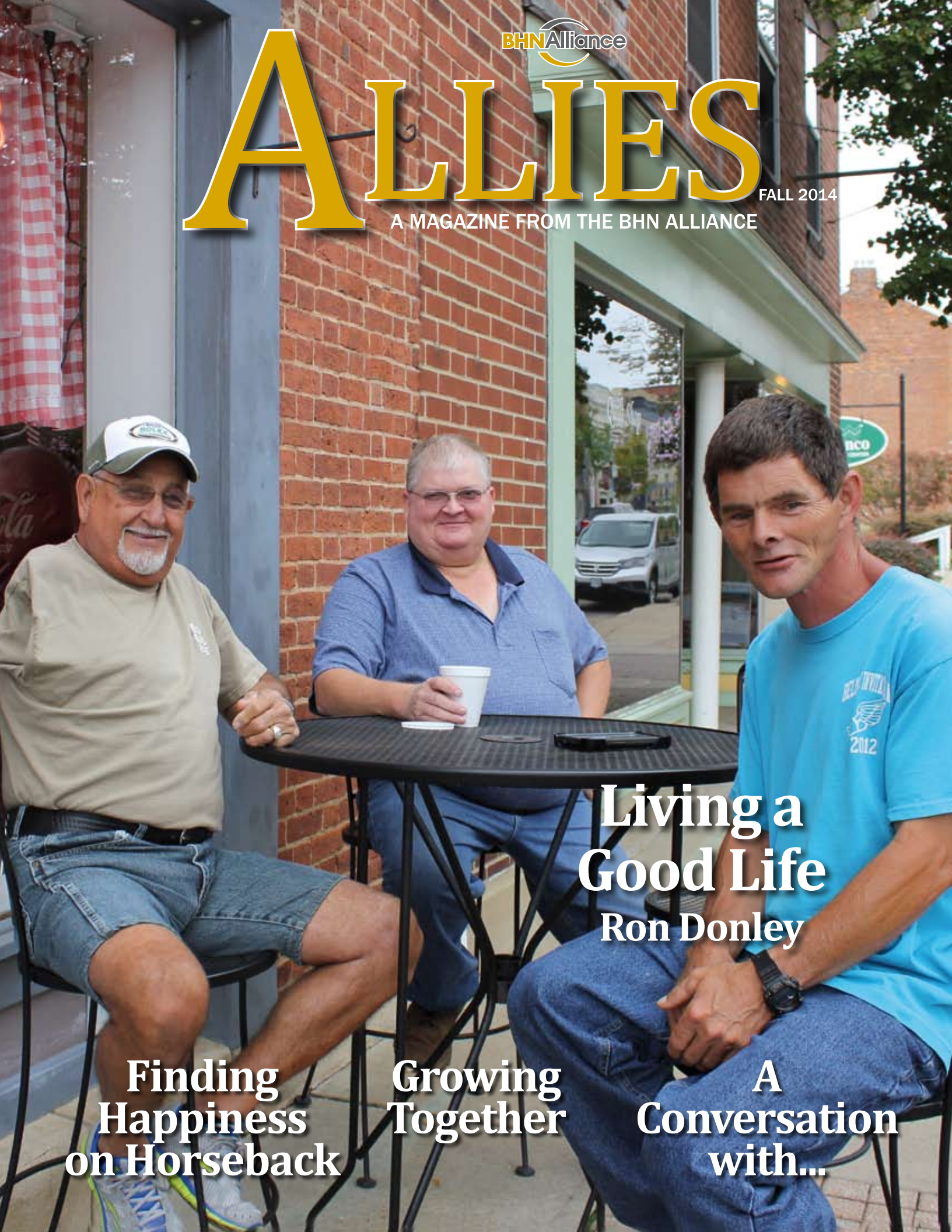


ALLIES

FALL 2014

A MAGAZINE FROM THE BHN ALLIANCE



**Living a
Good Life**
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MVP Potential

By Stephen L. Williams
BHN Alliance Superintendent



LeBron James is arguably the most talented basketball player in the world and his decision to return to Ohio to play in Cleveland is a big deal. The expectation is that a return of “King James” brings the potential for the Cavaliers to win a National Basketball championship. We shall see.

There were people around the young LeBron— his circle of support made up of family, friends, coaches, and the community—who recognized his potential and supported his efforts to become the best that he could be. Potential is a funny thing. It doesn’t take you anywhere. It is simply a possibility until it is developed into something else. Then it

can become almost anything, like a four-time NBA Most Valuable Player.

In many ways, developing potential is what is happening in Ohio through *Employment First*. This initiative is about recognizing the talents within every person with a disability; putting supports in place that develop his or her skills; discovering opportunities in the community, and expecting success.

In July, President Obama signed a new federal bill into law. In it, young people with disabilities can no longer go directly into a sheltered workshop from high school. Instead, they must be given what they need to develop their interests and abilities and then assisted in trying a job in the community. This is exciting for some parents and guardians and uncomfortable for others, whose loved ones have been in sheltered work settings for years. It can be difficult to see how *Employment First* will work for them. We understand. It is important to remember that this is a process. The day service providers you have come to know and trust are thoughtfully developing plans to provide community options.

The law also requires that county boards, public schools, vocational rehabilitation providers and others work together to identify potential and grow talents. The Belmont, Harrison and Noble county boards have been identifying potential and developing abilities for some time now. Since 2010 we have helped young people with disabilities, ages 14 to 25, explore careers and sample jobs while still in school through our *Bridges to Transition* initiative. We have seen remarkable success as these young adults are now on the job making real wages in the community.

As we move forward, the BHN Alliance and its provider partners will be the “shoulders” upon which people with disabilities can stand as they develop their skills and are given opportunities to work, learn, live and contribute in the community. We believe this is the right thing to do, because we see MVP potential in every person we support.

Just like LeBron.

BHN Alliance ALLIES

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Living a Good Life

Everybody knows Ron Donley. Maybe that's because Ron is the kind of person who is easy to get to know. From work on Monday afternoon to Red Devil Stadium Friday night, Ron is living life like everyone else in the community.

Ron's life contains the things that matter the most to him: a home to live in, work to do, opportunities to help others, fun times and friends to share them with. Those things make up a good life and Ron's life is of his making.

When Ron isn't on the job at Applebee's, where he has been employed for three years, he is busy mowing lawns or shoveling snow for his neighbors. Ron also fishes, bowls, plays basketball and attends sporting events. A recent summer evening found him and four friends at a Pirates game in Pittsburgh.

A frequent stop for Ron is the Newellstown diner in St. Clairsville, where he makes time to talk about what's happening around town with the wait staff and fellow patrons. When an errand needs done for the restaurant, Ron helps out and they're grateful he does.

The Belmont County Board of Developmental Disabilities pays for the supports Ron receives from Paramount Support Services. Charlie Stopski is his personal advocate who works for Paramount, and he points out how connected Ron is to the community.

"He talks to everybody," Charlie said. "Ron is the friendliest person you'll ever meet."

One of Ron's friends is Perry Jones, who met him when he was looking for someone to mow his lawn. Perry's sister-in-law recommended Ron and he was hired.

"Ron does a wonderful job at everything he tries and he's willing to help anyone do anything," Perry said. "When Ron works, he does the job."

Ron is an avid football fan and he shares that interest with Perry, who keeps statistics for the St. Clairsville High School team. Perry and Ron travel together to the away games and have done so for 10 years. Perry is also the Assistant Operations Director for Jamboree In The Hills and he brought Ron on board to help out with grounds keeping in the venue after the shows.



When one looks at Ron's life, it's obvious that the people he knows and the people who know him are more important than the supports he receives from the system. He is connected to his community and all it has to offer and that's the key to living a good life for him, and for us all.

ON THE COVER: Tom Majzun, Keith Henderson and Ron Donley enjoy a warm fall day at Newellstown Diner in St. Clairsville.



Finding Happiness on Horseback

There is just something about a horse. Look at Kristen Shunk when she's around them and you'll see it. Awe. Excitement. Joy. Horses matter to Kristen and people in her life are connecting her to them through therapeutic horseback riding.



Obstacles in Kristen's life presented themselves early. She endured three surgeries, including heart surgery, as an infant. As she grew, she would get out of breath easily, making physical activity difficult. Ten years ago she was diagnosed with Pulmonary Arterial Hypertension and heart failure. The treatment made life even more difficult. Kristen wore a pump 24 hours a day that administered medication that kept her alive, yet there was a physical and emotional cost. The pump restricted her from activities she wanted to do.

Lynn Prager, the registered nurse for the Belmont County Board of Developmental Disabilities, became acquainted with Kristen during that time.

"The medication she took often made her feel ill and she would spend many hours with me in the clinic at her day program as I monitored her vital signs," Lynn said.

It was during those times they talked about many things, including a shared love of horses. Lynn learned that the famed racehorse, Secretariat, was Kristen's favorite.

Things changed for both of them and they did not see one another regularly for several years. In March of 2014 Kristen called to tell Lynn her medicine was being administered differently and that she was "free" of the pump. She couldn't wait to participate in life more fully.

Lynn had been volunteering with the Easter Seals equine therapy program and was providing opportunities for others with disabilities to ride apart from that program. She came to the conclusion that therapeutic horseback riding could provide what was important to Kristen, which was being around horses, and what was important for her - gaining strength.

Unlike exercise machines, riding a horse requires use of the entire body. Mounting and dismounting a horse improves strength and agility while sitting on a horse improves posture and muscle tone. The bond between horse and rider enhances emotional stability and can improve social skills as well.

Armed with approval from her physician, Lynn took Kristen for her first ride on a mare named Patience that was descended from Secretariat. When Patience wasn't available for the second session, Kristen was introduced to Herbie, a show pony that stole her heart.

A therapeutic horseback riding session usually includes two side walkers and a leader for each horse along with the instructor. Kristen's strength and confidence improved quickly. She no longer requires side walkers and takes complete control of Herbie using the reins with the leader nearby. With the lead rope detached, the relationship between horse and rider becomes real.

Stable owner and instructor, Lori Ulman, issues commands for Kristen to follow, like standing in the stirrups and trotting the horse. Lori noted that Kristen's physical strength has grown by leaps and bounds since her first session. Her self-confidence has, too.

"Kristen has gained confidence in her abilities and developed several relationships with folks from the stable," Lynn said. "She is blossoming before our very eyes."

As for Kristen, she eagerly anticipates the time she spends with Herbie.

"Before riding, I would feel sad and anxious much of the time," Kristen said. "I am so happy and stay happy now that I'm riding every week."

Meet William Sutton

Works at
**McDonald's
Cadiz**



as a
janitor,
dishwasher,
and box folder

What Ed, William's employer
says about him:

“He’s highly energetic and he’s very conscientious. William has been a big, welcome addition to our family.”

How William describes himself:

“I’m open-minded to things.”

How others describe William:

“Laid-back, easygoing, and friendly!”

Volunteers Make a Difference

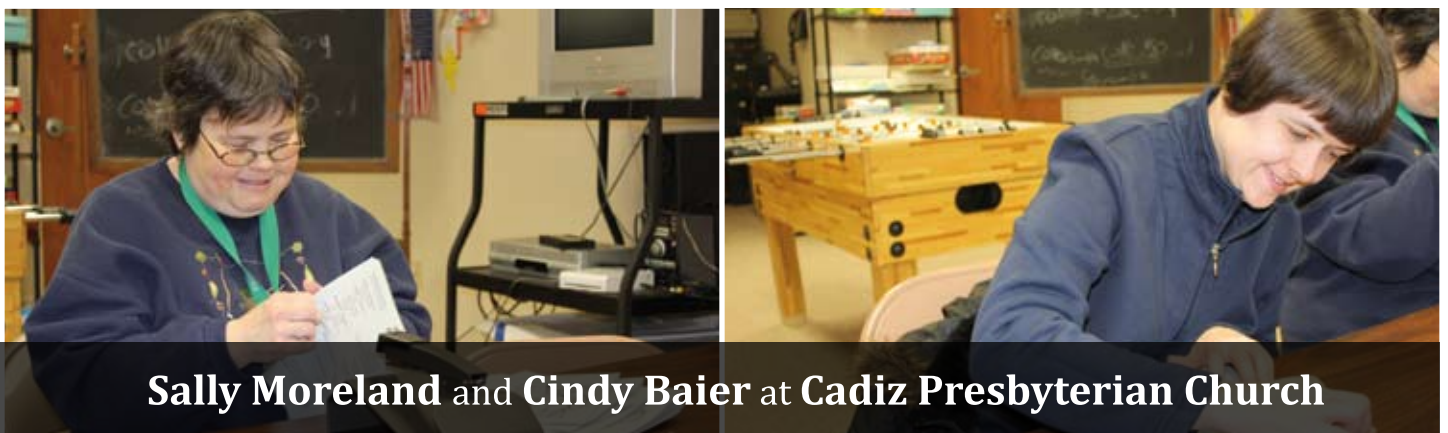
Every person has the ability to help someone else and in doing so, gains the satisfaction of knowing that a person, cause, or community is better because of the effort. People supported by the BHN Alliance are making a difference by volunteering across Belmont, Harrison and Noble counties.



Zac Ferguson at HARP Mission in Caldwell



Pam Fabry and Paula Bruney at Cumberland Pointe, St. Clairsville



Sally Moreland and Cindy Baier at Cadiz Presbyterian Church



Jason Dudley shows a tomato plant he nurtured into a productive vine in his Growing Together garden.

Growing Together

Learning how to garden resulted in better understanding and better health for Wendy Wells and Jason Dudley, thanks to a community connection the Noble County Board of Developmental Disabilities made for the two.

The opportunity was *Growing Together*, a pilot project of the OSU Extension Office in Noble County. It gave local residents an opportunity to learn about the health benefits of eating fresh, whole foods by showing them how to grow their own vegetables. Wendy and Jason were two of the four people chosen to participate.

Access to fresh fruits and vegetables is limited in Noble County and what is available in nearby

communities is expensive. Consequently, people tend to eat fast or processed foods with little nutritional value. That was the reason the pilot project was created.

Tabitha Weisend, who coordinates supports for Wendy and Jason through the Noble County Board of DD, learned about *Growing Together* while seeking nutritional information from Breanna Pye, the Extension Educator.

Wendy's poor eating habits were affecting her health and Tabitha was concerned. She thought the project would be a way for her to learn how to make better food choices. Jason asked to be in the project after seeing the garden of his friend, who was participating.

"He told me he wanted a garden of his own so he could eat healthier," Tabitha said.

Wendy and Jason joined the pilot in late 2013. Breanna said she didn't know what to expect from the two, but soon realized they were ideal participants.

"Both were enthusiastic, willing to learn new things and anxious for their gardens to produce," Breanna said.

Breanna helped them create the raised beds. Wendy's garden was outside her kitchen door while Jason's was in his backyard. During the winter months, the two learned how to compost with dirt and leaves. They also spent time looking at seed catalogs and selecting the vegetables to grow. In the spring, Wendy planted tomatoes and peppers while Jason's garden had strawberries, cabbage, tomatoes and onions.

By midsummer, their efforts were rewarded. Wendy and her husband, Rauleigh, were reaping an abundant harvest, enough to share with their neighbor. When asked what her secret was, Wendy said, "You got to know when to water it and you have to just let it grow."

Wendy eats more salads now because they include vegetables grown from her own garden.

"These tomatoes taste better than the store," she said.

Jason's sister, Carrie, helped him plant the garden and his results were equally impressive.

"I care about my garden and was glad to see it growing," Jason said. "I know vegetables are healthier so I make salad with lettuce from my garden now."

Jason's mom, Becky, admitted to being skeptical about how well strawberry plants would grow, until small fruit appeared on them.

"I think he was surprised at how well the garden did," she said.

Breanna noted that the project gave participants a sense of responsibility in foods they eat.

"There really is nothing better than home grown produce and hopefully this will encourage them to include more fresh foods in their diet," Breanna said.

The value-added part of the project was the opportunity Wendy and Jason were given to make a new friend in Breanna. Breanna said the experience was gratifying for her, too.

"It was refreshing to work with someone with no previous experience and teach them everything you know," Breanna said. "Wendy and Jason also taught me to be open-minded when approaching a situation and to remember that certain people learn in different ways and different approaches," Breanna added. "The enthusiasm from both Wendy and Jason definitely made the project even more rewarding."



Wendy and Rauleigh Wells are shown with the garden she planted as a participant of the Growing Together project. Wendy also grew the sunflower she is holding.

Jason is already planning next year's garden and has decided to plant blueberries. This experience has also made him think about what he might want to do in the future.

"I'm thinking about going to college for gardening now," Jason said.

A Conversation with...

Lisa Kazmirski of Tomorrow's Corner



Lisa Kazmirski

Editor's Note: This is the first in a series where we will give local providers an opportunity to talk about the supports they offer to people with disabilities in Belmont, Harrison and Noble counties. Our first conversation was with Lisa Kazmirski, founder and CEO of Tomorrow's Corner LLC, a day service provider in St. Clairsville.

Before launching Tomorrow's Corner, Lisa was employed by the Belmont County Board of Developmental Disabilities in several capacities, including Director of Service and Support. During that time, she noticed a lack of options for people with significant disabilities. Inspired by the sensory therapy known as Snoezelen, she created a multi-sensory environment where people could "enjoy their day" via experiences in art, music, nature, exercise and relaxation. Since opening in 2008, Lisa and her husband, Greg, General Manager of Operations, continue to evolve the supports they offer at Tomorrow's Corner. We asked Lisa to talk about that and the future of supports.

ALLIES: What is the model on which Tomorrow's Corner was created and what are its guiding principles?

L.K.: Tomorrow's Corner was created to be an alternative to workshops and employment for people who wanted another option. Our commitments were, and still are, to deliver fun and engaging services in a warm and caring atmosphere; to recognize and respect abilities and potential; to keep people healthy and safe; and to adapt quickly to accommodate changing needs and preferences while remaining flexible, creative, and customer-satisfaction focused. Our mission has always been to help people "enjoy their day."

ALLIES: It seems like things are constantly changing in the world. Talk a little about where you started and how Tomorrow's Corner has changed yet held true to its mission.

L.K.: We have continuously changed based on what our members tell us, or show us. If we see an interest in a certain area, we expand it. If we see boredom – we change what we're doing. Concrete examples of change over the six years we have operated are the addition of a small wood-working area after a few people expressed interest in creating pieces they had seen elsewhere; expanding from a small art room to a very large room with additional places to create within the building and in the community; creation



Photo Provided

Patrick working at The Paisley Umbrella

of a gift shop in town (St. Clairsville) to showcase and sell some of our creations; and an increase in community outings based on curiosities people have expressed to us.

ALLIES: Over the last few years, the developmental disabilities system has also changed. Instead of making assumptions based on a person's diagnosis, it now seeks to identify the talents and abilities of people and provide choices and opportunities where they can use them. How is Tomorrow's Corner evolving toward the goal of identifying what people with disabilities can do and then locating places in the community where they can do it?

L.K.: At Tomorrow's Corner, we have never based services on diagnosis. As a matter-of-fact, a new hire once asked me, 'What is her diagnosis?' My answer to her was 'Her name is Mary' (*name changed to protect identity*). Some people may find this corny, but it doesn't matter to us at Tomorrow's Corner. We work with people, not labels. We simply see what people want and try to provide it. We expose people to new things gradually and in comfortable settings to gauge interest.

For example, we might take someone with us to purchase supplies because we have found out that he loves to shop. Through something like this, we can teach several skills – making lists, adding up costs to stay within an allowance or budget, packing the cart and vehicle, etc.

For someone else we might set up an easel with supplies and her choice of music playing so that she can create something that she later sells. We create a comfortable environment because we have identified that public settings overwhelm her and her shyness causes anxiety in group settings. Occasionally we take a quiet trip to our gift shop* with her and see if she can tolerate painting in a quaint shop on Main Street, away from Tomorrow's Corner. She may be able to stay 10 minutes before anxiety takes over and we return to TC, but next month, we might make it for 15 minutes.

ALLIES: Families, guardians and other advocates have worked to put rules and policies in place across the state and nation to make sure people with disabilities are not segregated. What are you doing to get the people you support actively engaged with people who do not have disabilities in their community?

L.K.: We help people explore options in the community and meet others by going on outings simply for enjoyment; trips with a purpose like

purchasing lunch or supplies; and situations where we volunteer and showcase our talents and abilities. We do things gradually so as not to overwhelm people who are accustomed to protected environments, and to not overwhelm our community members whose lack of understanding may create fear. We do things individually or in very small groups so that we all benefit from the experience.

ALLIES: What have you learned from your experiences and what can the community at large learn by welcoming people of all abilities?

L.K.: I have learned most of all that 'we' do not 'know best' for anyone. It is our job to simply supply as many options as we can and allow people to truly choose what they want. One size doesn't fit all – and it never will. People need to be given options and then be respected for the choice they make. They also need respected when they change their mind later and want to try something else.

And we have learned that what may appear as an 'unwelcoming' situation in the community may simply be a lack of understanding and it's our job to help people understand through pleasant experiences. Experiences speak louder than a narrative.

We have learned that we cannot change the way people feel about a certain subject matter or the way they react to a given situation overnight – but gradually everyone can change.

As we adapt to the new rules, we have asked ourselves: 'What do we do first?' We ask the person what he wants and we listen to his answer. If we can, we try to make the situation happen – if we can't, we ask for help from another entity, or make a referral to another option. No two people have ever given the same answer. It's our job to keep creating the opportunities and positive experiences and supporting the choices people make.

** The Paisley Umbrella is a gift shop in downtown St. Clairsville where artists sell their work on commission and some are employed.*



Steve volunteering at the National Road Bike Trail in St. Clairsville



Pictured: Gary Holubeck and Jamie DeVault



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