



MESSAGE FROM SUPERINTENDENT

BRIAN W. GREEN

Superintendent Brian Green shares exciting news about Riverside's plans to begin returning to in-person meetings, visits, trainings and activities as COVID-19 restrictions begin to lift.

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Superintendent's Corner

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Our Mission is to empower people with developmental disabilities to live, work and play as full members of our community.

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Article suggestions and address changes should be submitted to:

Miami County Board of Developmental Disabilities (Riverside)
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I am pleased to share some good news with everyone. This spring we are taking steps to ease back into some in-person meetings, visits, trainings and activities after more than a year of doing so remotely due to COVID-19.

Beginning May 17, our employees will have the option to work in the building, within guidelines set forth by Governor DeWine and the Ohio Department of Health. Our front door will once again be open with our friendly receptionist, Linda Hinger, there to greet you. As long as statistics hold steady and improve, we will continue moving forward with in-person options for those who prefer them, while also continuing to offer virtual options for those who need or prefer that as well. Until all restrictions are lifted, we will need to continue to wear masks, distance ourselves more than six feet and avoid large gatherings.

As we take these steps back toward normalcy, I want to acknowledge the tremendous effort and steadfast dedication of so many people. From the direct care service providers who worked countless overtime hours to ensure health and safety of those we serve, to Miami County Public Health who hosted so many vaccine clinics at our building, to our employees who took on many roles and pitched in where needed to get the job done, to the individuals and families we serve who exercised great patience and resilience during a time of uncertainty, fear and isolation, I find it amazing and humbling to work with every one of you.

Returning to the office is a welcome shift for many, yet I realize the toll this year took on all of us. We are committed to moving forward with patience and compassion, knowing that it might take longer for some to adjust more than others. I personally look forward to seeing everyone in person once again, especially once we can safely see each other's smiling faces.

If you are a person or family supported by Riverside and have questions about in-person meetings, please reach out to your SSA or Early Intervention Service Coordinator. If you are not sure whom to contact, you may always reach us at 937-440-3000. We look forward to seeing everyone in-person again very soon.

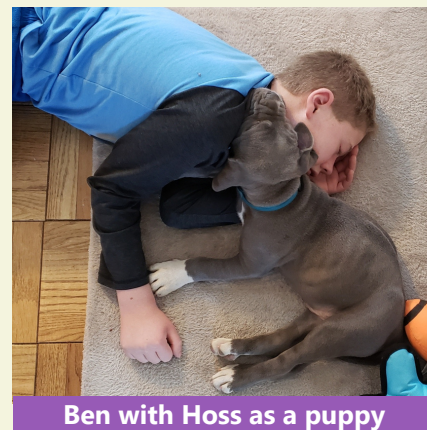


Brian W. Green
Superintendent

A Small Act of Kindness Makes a Big Impact

COVID-19 has given the world much to grieve. Yet, despite the sadness and challenges, it has brought to light some beautiful things to celebrate, especially in Tipp City.

Ben Watts is an 8th grader at Bethel Middle School. He happens to have many significant medical issues including a degenerative disorder, a pacemaker, lung issues, diabetes, and is legally blind, being only able to see stark contrasts of very brightly lit items in dark surroundings. Through school, he works closely with Certified Orientation and Mobility (O&M) Specialist Abby Naske who visits him from the Montgomery County Educational Services Center. "Ms. Abby," as he calls her, assists him with learning to navigate the world, whether that is physical navigation with a cane and increased listening skills, or determining when and how to ask for help from others around him. His classroom is sometimes inside his school, but for Ben, most of his learning with Ms. Abby takes place in the local community.



Ben with Hoss as a puppy



Abby Naske with Ben

Knowing how much Ben loves animals, Ms. Abby started taking Ben to RPets, a local pet store in downtown Tipp City in 2019. There, she would help him learn to enter and navigate the store, interact with the sales staff and ask questions about products he was interested in buying.

"Ben loves shopping, and he loves his pets, so his favorite stop is always RPets," said Ms. Abby. "I'm always looking for ways to keep students motivated with their lessons, and RPets is a great place to work with Ben because he is so interested in everything." Through their visits, Ben gained a friend in store

owner Jonanne Riley, who often participated in his lessons.

However, once COVID-19 came along, Ben had to stop leaving his home aside from a few healthcare visits due to his compromised immune system. Since last year, most of Ben's learning has been taking place remotely like it has for many children. Knowing he could use something to cheer him on, Ms. Abby reached out to Jonanne to ask about recording an encouraging message for Ben. Jonanne wanted to do more than that. Upon learning about how homebound he was, Jonanne offered to close her store for an hour whenever it was convenient for Ben, so he could visit and complete a lesson like he had done before. She would ensure the store was disinfected and no other employees or shoppers were present.



Jonanne Riley

Continued from previous page

An enthusiastic customer

"Ben is such an enthusiastic customer!" said Jonanne. "I definitely missed his visits and wanted to find a way to support him. He is such a brave, outgoing and motivated kid."

The offer from Jonanne warmed Ben's family's hearts. "It so touched me that she would close her store so he could come in," said Melissa Watts, Ben's mother. "You sometimes wonder if there are still nice people out there in the world. To take time out of her busy day and offer to close her store when so many small businesses are struggling was such a gift."

After that, Abby, Jonanne and Melissa worked it all out to have Ben visit the store on a Wednesday at 10 a.m., before the store opened. "It was great to see Ben and Abby again," said Jonanne. "It was the first time I got to meet Ben's mom, too. He seemed to have fun doing his lesson and shopping for his pets. I look forward to setting something up with them again, whether in Tipp City or my Piqua store where I have a few live-in pets."

Ben enjoyed the lesson/shopping trip, too.

"It made me really happy because the only other place I get to go is acupuncture and my breathing doctor," Ben said. "I had one hour to shop by myself. I bought stuff for my dog, Hoss, my cat, and my friend's dog."

Melissa was so moved by Jonanne's gesture and Ms. Abby's extra efforts that she wanted to shine a light on the joy they brought to Ben's life.

"I really want to share how the community - specifically RPets - has supported my son through his difficult journey. I want people to patronize that store because of the person she (Jonanne) is. I want positive things to come to her," Melissa said.

She shares her praise for Ms. Abby as well. "Ms. Abby would come over and do his O&M lesson on our back porch. Even in the winter, she would come to our house bundled up and do a lesson outside. Ms. Abby wasn't going to let a little cold weather stop her from teaching Ben."

I am 14. I am nice.

The kindness and dedication of a few have made such an impact on Ben that he is opening up and connecting with others more. When asked what he would like others to know about him, he quickly replied, saying, "I love animals, old cars and old stuff. I am 14. I am nice. I have a younger sister. I love building Legos, and I like to play basketball."

Hopefully soon, Ben can return to many of those and many other activities in the community, especially returning to Bethel Middle School and his favorite store, RPets.



Jonanne Riley at RPets

Direct Support Professional (DSP) Spotlights

Melynda Moore

Melynda Moore has worked with Unity Care Group for five years. "I love working for them. I don't feel like this is a job. I feel it's my calling from God. All my life I've wanted to work with people with disabilities," she states. "I found out about DSP jobs while working at Goodwill. They had an enclave there, and the director at PCS talked to me about coming to work for them. I became a provider in 2015."

Mel, as she is known, was nominated by Riverside SSA Nicole Adkins for going above and beyond the call of duty, "Mel is available to Roxanne (for whom Mel provides care) any hour of the day. She is proactive in scheduling appointments and making sure Roxanne's needs are met," Adkins states.



Mel (center) with her "work family"

Mel not only helps the people she serves with daily tasks, she also helps them to grow. "This job is so rewarding! When I'm working, I give 100 percent. I help them reach their goals. I helped one of my clients to reach his goals and now he lives independently," Mel said. "My goal each day is to put a smile on the faces of the people I work with, and to help them do what needs to be done that day. They are family to me."

One of her personal goals is to make a change in this world with a smile on her face. She believes in being kind to others, and treating people like she would like to be treated. Mel is a proud Army mom with three grown children and a grandson of her own. She enjoys time with family and friends.

Kyle Casey

Although his love of animals nearly led him to become a veterinarian, life events led Kyle to try being a DSP at the suggestion of his mother, who is a DSP and felt it would be a good fit for Kyle. The rest, as they say, is history. Independently certified through the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities, Kyle has been a DSP for about four years. Kyle says the work is challenging but rewarding in so many ways. "I love getting to know each of the individuals I work with and seeing their exceptional uniqueness. It really helps you learn that despite a person's different abilities and challenges, we are all human beings with the same struggles and same desires. We all want to make an impact in some way. I suppose the fulfilling part of the job is helping to facilitate that in others while at the same time finding it in myself," Kyle said.

Kyle was nominated for the DSP Spotlight by Brenda Miller, Behavior Support Coordinator at Riverside. "I have had phone conferences with Kyle and have known of him by reputation for some time. During a home visit, I got to meet Kyle and observe him working. He truly is a rockstar. The person he was working with was escalated. Kyle redirected him like a pro - I could not have scripted it better. He presented as very respectful and upbeat. I was impressed. If only we could clone him," Brenda said.

When he is not working, Kyle loves to spend time with his wife and children. He also likes to play guitar and sing. He is an avid bodybuilder, and loves nature and gardening.



Kyle Casey

Many more DSPs like Mel and Kyle are needed. If you or someone you know is looking for a job change and would like to learn more about becoming a DSP, please contact Jan Wintrow at 937-440-3090 or jan.wintrow@riversidedd.org.

Breaking Ground, Building for the Future



Michael Richards

In March 2021, Riverside hosted a virtual monthly training for the Regional Advocacy group in which we participate with Auglaize, Champaign, Darke, Logan, Preble and Shelby County Boards of Developmental Disabilities. Our special guest speaker was Michael Richards from Highland County. With him was Kraig Walker, who works at Highland County Board of DD and is a People First of Ohio Coordinator. The story they told is inspirational and heart-warming, though they added a cautionary tale.

Michael was born in Greenfield, Ohio, and lives there still. A 1992 graduate of Greenfield McClain High School, Michael tried for years to find the right career fit, and then he discovered a passion for working with small engines. "After contacting his SSA in Highland County and Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities (OOD)," Kraig said. The team worked on a business plan for small engine repair. Michael completed training with Central Power Distributors in

Columbus and received his initial certification for factory warranty repairs. He has obtained multiple certifications, including a Master Tech Certification through Briggs and Stratton. He and his wife April started M & A Small Engine repair in Greenfield in 2006.

Michael has had a lot of ups and downs and obstacles along the way, including the pandemic, but has never taken "no" for an answer, and he has never let anything stop him from his dream. Of his steadfastness Michael says, "Owning a business is not for the faint of heart, it's not easy, you have to be willing to work hard!"

Michael also works hard as an advocate for people with developmental disabilities. In addition to talks like the one he gave the Regional Advocacy group, he serves as a Board Member at the Highland County Board of DD, is a member of the Ohio DD Council, is an Ohio Advocacy Task Force Chairperson, and is the Chapter Coordinator for People First of Ohio.



Michael's swearing in

Despite Michael's successes, there is much to be done in the advocacy arena. According to Kraig, People First of Ohio is working with other advocacy groups and Rep. Jarrells (Columbus) on the Derogatory Language Bill in Ohio. Many instances of Ohio Public Law continue to refer to individuals with disabilities with terms that are considered outdated and in some cases offensive. The bill will remove antiquated language and replace those terms with culturally and medically acceptable terms and phrases.

"Other areas of advocacy for equality for Ohioans with developmental disabilities include equal pay for completed work, instead of working for less than half of minimum wage," Kraig went on to share. "People First is committed to advocating for the rights of all Ohioans with DD, as well as teaching responsibilities. People First of Ohio consists of 41 local advocacy chapters throughout the state. We started a People First chapter probably 20 years ago and I used to serve as a state advisor. We have had a great time and have met some very interesting people! We presented at the CARF International Conference in Arizona, have traveled to DC a couple times, and have been all over the state. Lots of time at the state Capitol!" he said.

Riverside joins the virtual People First of Ohio Monthly Chat, held the Friday of each month at 10am. You are welcome to join us! For the Zoom link or for information about other Riverside advocacy programs, contact Amy Shank at 937-440-3051 or amy.shank@riversidedd.org.

Community Connections Updates

-- A Look Back at Our First 5 Years

According to their website, "Aktion Club is the only service club for adults with disabilities, with more than 12,000 members worldwide." Aktion Club of Miami County was formed in 2016 when the Kiwanis Club of Troy approached Riverside with the idea of their club sponsoring a local Aktion Club. It was determined it would be a great partnership to offer people served by the Riverside an opportunity to learn how to give back to their communities through service and leadership projects.

An open house was held January 20, 2016, with more than 50 people in attendance. The first meeting was held February 2 and the first service project commenced as they made Valentine's Day cards for a local senior care center in time for the holiday. The new Aktion Club members delivered the cards and visited with the residents. Since then, the club has completed dozens of service projects including fundraisers for the March of Dimes, food drives for local food pantries, clean up on the Troy Community Park bike path, making tie blankets for patients at Dayton Children's Hospital and We Love Birthday Parties, donating to local families affected by the May 2019 tornadoes, and partnering with FAN and local seamstress, Morgan Wellspring, to create seat cushions for local dialysis patients.

The club's members are passionate about giving back and are always looking for new projects. If you are interested in joining Aktion Club, or are a community member seeking help with a project for a non-profit organization, contact us! We welcome new members and are always eager to partner with organizations in our wonderful Miami County community!

For more information on membership or community partnerships, contact Amy Shank at 937-440-3051 or amy.shank@riversidedd.org.



Aktion Club of Miami County members hold gift cards they purchased and donated to victims of the May 2019 tornadoes.

Community Connections In-Person Activities Returning!

As Superintendent Brian Green mentioned in his Superintendent's Corner (page 2), we are easing back into in-person activities starting May 17! The Community Connections Department will start with individual and small groups activities - mostly outside - and we also plan to keep some Zoom events on the calendar as well.

Here's what to expect:

- Mid-June: A NEW and IMPROVED Community Connections Newsletter will be mailed and posted on our website for activities scheduled in July and August.
- The newsletter will feature a new, EASIER-TO-READ layout!
- Introducing a NEW SERVICE of the Community Connections Team called the "Community Connections Planning Center," aimed at helping you schedule and plan activities to do on your own, or with family, friends or your provider. See the newsletter in mid-June for details.

Community Connections



Coming mid-June!

We can't wait to see you again live and in person!



Inside this Issue

Spring 2021

A Small Act of Kindness Makes a Big Impact! Read about the amazing people who did something special for Ben on Pages 3 & 4!

Also check out our DSP Spotlights on Page 5, featuring Melynda Moore and Kyle Casey.