Superintendent’s Message:
Changing lives by connecting with one another

As we begin the New Year, please enjoy this story of friendship, commitment, and transformation. My only hope is that I have done it the justice it deserves.

Brian Puntenney cannot recall a time when his mother and father were healthy. “Mom had a bad heart and breathing issues. Dad had Parkinson’s so bad that my mom could not care for him.” This is when his father moved to a nursing home. Brian shared he had an incredibly loving family with two brothers, but they were out of the house which left him and his mother to live their lives. Brian and his mom made the best of the situation and spent most nights at home. During the day, Brian went to school and graduated from Timken. He later went on to the Cohen-Joliet and then Whipple-Dale workshops.

It starts with a conversation
It was at Whipple-Dale in the summer of 2012 that changed Brian’s life forever. He was waiting for his bus and Tom Rieger, support specialist, struck up a conversation with him. The conversation was so simple, but it was an instant connection. Brian worked on the workshop floor and would visit Tom in his classroom and would be allotted an hour a day from his work routine to visit Tom and the people Tom supported. Brian wanted to get out of the house more, but was unable to given his mother’s failing health. Tom would assist by picking him up in the evening and

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During her stay. She was admitted to Aultman Hospital on September 19th, but never made it home. She passed away on September 21, 2016, at the age of 59. A day forever burned on Brian’s heart and soul.

At the funeral, Brian’s family (his brothers, their wives, two nieces and a nephew) looked to Tom for where Brian could live. They were at a loss and lived out of the county. Tom said, “How about he continues to live with me?” Brian’s family was awestruck at the offer. The brothers did take him up on it. Brian lives with Tom to this day. I had the opportunity to sit down with Tom and Brian to see how things were going. What I found was a story of transformation and redemption.

Taking a chance
Brian has come out of his shell. He is talkative, funny, and has someone he relies on. Actually, they rely on each other. Tom says, “Brian has become the son I never had and I do not know what I would do without him. I have credited Brian with saving my life. Since taking responsibility for him, I am now sober and have even quit smoking.” Brian gave his life a deeper sense of purpose and meaning.

Tom shared a moment that he will remember for the rest of his life. They were at the circus and Brian wanted to ride an elephant and Tom was apprehensive. Brian said to him, “Tom, you have got to stop being afraid of everything. You’ve got to take a chance.” The words struck Tom’s heart like the piercing of an arrow. Brian spoke a truth that Tom failed to see. It was an “aha” moment that continues Tom’s life changing experience.

On June 20, 2017, Brian’s father passed away. Another sad moment in Brian’s life, but he knew his dad had suffered long and was in no more pain. Brian and Tom miss visiting him. Brian did receive a small inheritance from his father and Brian was clear what he wanted done with the money. “Tom, I would like to use the money to buy a headstone for my mother’s grave. I am sad there is nothing there.” Brian’s mother now has a headstone that marks her location in the cemetery. Tom relates, “This expression shows Brian’s heart and how deeply he cares for his mother and also shows the kind of man he is.”

“We couldn’t be happier.”
These days Brian runs the social calendar for him and Tom. Tom quips, “I really would like to take his phone away because daily he is coming up with more and more things for us to do.” They never miss a “First Friday” in downtown Canton, they catch movies galore, WRE wrestling, concerts that included Kid Rock, Justin Timberlake, Pentatonix, Maroon 5, Tim McGraw, and Cool and the Gang; just to name a few of the bands they have seen. On their upcoming agenda, they plan to see the Harlem Globetrotters and the band KISS – got to love the 80s.

Now when Brian’s family visits, Brian is a different person. He shares with them all of what he has been doing and plans to do. Tom is now a part of their family as well. Brian and Tom just hosted Thanksgiving for Brian’s brothers, their wives, and his nieces and nephews, and went to his brother’s homes for Christmas and New Year’s. These visits are no longer sitting around the table laughing, telling stories, and enjoying great food.

When asked the question, how is it going today? Brian and Tom respond in unison, “We could not be happier.” Tom chokes up and tears come to his eyes. Brian says, “Tom, you’re a mess.” Brian said this with a mischievous grin. Behind Brian’s words are an intense respect and admiration of Tom being there for him.

Two lives changed forever.

What is Shared Living?
Ohio Shared Living is a service under the Individual Options (IO) waiver for people like Brian to get help with personal care and the activities of daily living in the home of a live-in caregiver, such as Tom.

The purpose of Ohio Shared Living (OSL) is for people served to live with their family, a friend (like Tom), roommates, or a staff who may work for a provider. OSL providers are paid to provide supports like assistance with personal care, supervision, support services, housekeeping, involvement in community activities, and any other services outlined in a service plan.

Although being a caregiver is a full-time commitment, working outside the home is possible having planned for supports that align with the service plan. During a short-term absence, respite services can be accessed by those providing OSL services. People can also receive support through homemaker/personal care (HPC) services on days that OSL services are not provided. If you are interested in providing a home for a person with an intellectual disability and would like to know more about Ohio Shared Living, please call us at 330-477-5200 and we can provide you more information on the program.

Honorable Judge Park, Stark County Probate Court reappoints Smith to serve on Stark DD board

The Honorable Judge Dixie Park has reappointed Carmelita Smith to the governing board for Stark DD beginning in January 2019. Smith, who joined the board in October of 2017, begins her first full term. Rebecca Stallman, previously appointed to the board by Judge Park, didn’t seek another term. Judge Park will announce her replacement at a future date.

The governing board is made up of seven community members and oversees the services provided by Stark DD. The board members receive no compensation and volunteer their time. Board members are appointed to four-year terms by the Stark County Commissioners and the Stark County Probate Judge. Learn more about the Stark DD governing board on our website.

Stark DD announces ten year financial plan

Stark DD Superintendent Bill Green and Leigh Page, Chief Financial Officer, met with the Stark County commissioners in late October to review the five and ten year financial projections for the Stark County Board of Developmental Disabilities.

Even though the agency’s projected revenue goes down slightly each year, Green indicated that Stark DD plans to increase its local contribution towards Medicaid waiver program by $1.1 million per year. This increase, matched with federal Medicaid dollars, will mean more people with developmental disabilities can be enrolled in the Medicaid waiver program in the future.

To make up for the increased costs for the Medicaid waiver program and other projected loss in revenue, the board has come up with a ten year financial plan: Stark DD will annually cut its budget little by little, while also continuing to draw from its current cash carried over from year to year.

During the meeting, Green also told the commissioners that Stark DD will request a five-year renewal without a tax increase in 2023, when two currently approved levies are set to expire.

Family Engagement Series helps you Unlock your strength, Live your Potential

The Family Engagement Series, created in partnership with the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities, is designed to unlock your strength, build a foundation, and learn skills and strategies to manage family stressors.

These hands-on sessions will teach you practical ways to manage pressure, patience, and learn creative ways to modify your existing methods of coping and caring for those you love. We must care for ourselves first in order to care for others in our family.

The Family Engagement Series will be an opportunity for families to get personal and work together to solve common — and uncommon — family stressors. Moderators will work with each group’s real-life obstacles to find solutions that work for your entire family. Your presence is important because we cannot have these conversations without you.

Sarah Buffie of Soul Bird Consulting and Claudia López of Profluence will lead the Family Engagement Series in partnership with the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities.

Ohio Governor-Elect Mike DeWine names OPRA’s Jeff Davis as next DODD Director

By Erich Hiner, OACB

Ohio Governor-Elect Mike DeWine announced Thursday, January 10, that Jeff Davis, executive director of the Ohio Provider Resource Association (OPRA), will be the next director of the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities (DODD).

Davis previously served as a deputy director at DODD from 1991 to 2007 and oversaw legislative and rule-making activities. During his previous tenure at the department, Davis also oversaw public information and parent and self-advocacy initiatives. Davis has also served as director of integrated health services for Buckeye Community Health Plan, a managed care plan that contracts with the State of Ohio to provide services for Medicaid recipients. Find the complete release at http://www.oacbdd.org/news/2019/01/10/releases/ohio-governor-elect-mike-dewine-names-opra-s-jeff-davis-as-next-dodd-director/
Early childhood, school programs undergo building updates to secure learning environments for students

Throughout the summer and fall, Stark DD enhanced security at both Rebecca Stallman Southgate School (RSSS) and Eastgate Early Childhood and Family Center.

Enhancements at RSSS included adding security decals to all windows and doors, as well as creating a secure entrance vestibule. Additional security cameras were also added inside the building.

“Most of the other area schools districts have made their entrances more secure and added the security decals,” said Myrna Blosser, principal, RSSS. “These additions also minimize distractions in the classrooms.”

Changes at Eastgate Early Childhood and Family Center did not begin until the fall. Security decals were added to the lunchroom windows and all the building doors, as well as building the new, secured entrance. Additionally, new flooring and more lighting was installed.

“Safety is the number one priority in taking care of our preschoolers each day,” said Tammy Maney, director, Eastgate Early Childhood and Family Center. “We feel very good about the increased security and protection the renovations to our entrance ways have given us.”

With the updates, all visitors to both schools have had to learn new building access procedures, either waiting in the indoor vestibules or get permission from staff personnel to enter the main part of the building.

The students from the Stark DD preschool and school age programs celebrated the holidays with performances on December 20th and 21st. Elementary students at RS Southgate School presented “The Polar Express” musical, while preschoolers at Taft Elementary and Eastgate Early Childhood and Family Center sang and danced to holiday music.

Are you signed up?

Individuals at any age who are non-verbal, tend to wander or are prone to becoming disoriented or lost, are among our most vulnerable citizens. Help us reconnect you with lost family members who have communication challenges.

The Take Me Home Program is free and completely voluntary. Learn more at: https://cantonohio.gov/takemehome/
In collaboration with the Stark County Board of Developmental Disabilities, The Family Mentor Program has a varied group of mentors that are ready to connect with you!

What is your connection to the disability community?
My husband and I are foster parents for Stark County, and I am a Surrogate Parent for Education in the state of Ohio. We have two sons (ages 14 and 19) that have cognitive developmental disabilities and are on IEPs. We also have a 2nd grader who is on a 504 plan.

Why did you want to become a Family Mentor?
Having a special needs child/children means learning to be an effective advocate for that child. I know first-hand how overwhelming and intimidating navigating through the special education program can be. I would love to help other families who may be struggling with the system or just need a little extra support.

What area/topics of disability services are you interested in helping with?
I can help in the areas of school and other family services you are interested in helping with?

for someone who needs to talk through things.

Advocating for a loved one with a disability can be challenging. Do you have a success story you would like to share? My family and I went through a hard time with the school system and the lack of progress that one of our son’s was making in 3rd grade. This led to mediation through the state of Ohio. Throughout the school year, my son’s progress reports state that he was “making adequate progress” – only to find out near the end of the school year that he had actually not made any progress in reading or math. We successfully fought to get his ESY services to compensate for the lack of progress made during the school year.

How does the Family Mentor Program work?
The Family Mentor Program is open to any Stark County resident that is a caregiver or loved one of a person with an intellectual or developmental disability. Once a family calls The Arc of Ohio to request a Family Mentor, they will be matched with someone who has had similar or shared experiences. From there, the participant and the Mentor are able to define how their relationship works best.

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In April 2018, Stark DD was awarded a $250,000 grant through the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities (DODD) with the goal of providing respite and in-home support for underserved children/youth in our community.

The one-year grant helped establish the Multi-System Family Stabilization Program to specifically address children birth – age 21 who are involved in multiple child service systems, such as DD, behavioral health, juvenile court, specialized educational services or child protective services. Stark County was one of eight collaborative projects chosen by DODD.

Prior to the grant, members from Family Council, WrapAround, Juvenile Court, Child Protective Services, the Educational Service Center, Stark Mental Health Addiction Recovery Board and Stark DD would work together to literally wrap help around a youth in crisis and their family. However, even with the best of resources involved, some families remain in crisis and literally needed a break.

This is where the new Multi-System Stabilization Program filled a need offering in-home or out of home respite for both the youth and family members.

The program team brings together the multi-system partners as well as HCBS waiver provider Siffrin Inc. for the respite staffing, and Soul Bird Consulting to provide trauma training for all staff.

In Crisis

“This program is about stabilizing families.”
Paula Kovach,
Asst. Director Service and Support Administration

Prior to starting the respite services, all partner staff participated in three all-day trainings with Soul Bird Consulting.

“The trainings were invaluable,” said Kim Larson-Phillips, COO, Siffrin. “Linking the way a child develops, and how trauma can disrupt it, then how to work around that programmatically, has been very helpful.”

Since beginning the respite services in September, the program has received five referrals: one for out of home respite, and four for in-home respite.

Out-of-home respite allows the child to temporarily stay in a Siffrin home with trauma trained staff to provide support. In-home respite occurs in the family home, with the youth and trained staff spending one-on-one time together.

“Both the youth and the family are able to take a short break from, at times, complicated and intense interactions,” said Linda Adams, WrapAround Supervisor/Clinical Reviewer, Stark County Family Council.

Going forward, all of the partners would like to see the trainings continue as well as the sustainability of the program once the grant is over. “The question remains how can we help our system develop new ways moving forward to ensure families have the supports they need, and children with challenging needs get the services they need the most,” said Larson-Phillips.
Calendar

Find more events www.starkdd.org/calendar

Education

Family Information Series
February 11, 5:30 p.m. in the Cohen Room at Whipple-Dale Centre, 2950 Whipple Ave. NW. “What is a Family Mentor?” with Chelsea Dietle and Brittany Kuhn, The Arc of Ohio; “How STABLE Accounts Can Help.” Contact Misty McGirr at 330-479-3632.

Guardianship Training Session
March 28, 9 a.m. - 12 p.m. at the Goodwill Campus, 408 Ninth St. SW, Canton. Speakers will include representatives from Guardian Support Services and Stark County Board of DD. This free training is hosted by Guardian Support Services. Reservations are required. Call 330-437-3720 or e-mail volunteerguardians@gmail.com

OSDA NE Ohio Region Network Meeting
March 21, 9:30 a.m. - 1:30 p.m. at the Elka Lodge, 776 N. Freedom St., Ravenna Ohio 44266. RSVP by March 15th to colleenb@portagedd.org or call Colleen Brown at 330-297-4187.

Social

Toddler Playgroup
Each Friday, 10 a.m. - 11:30 a.m. at Eastgate Early Childhood and Family Center. Play groups are intended for children, birth through 5 years old. For a complete list of activities go to www.starkdd.org/calendar.

Adult Social Night
April 18, 7 p.m. - 9 p.m. at the St. George Cultural Center, 364 First St. SE, Massillon. Must be 18 years of age and over to attend.

Community

Annual Organizational Board Meeting and Monthly Board Meeting
Stark County Board of Developmental Disabilities; January 22, 6 p.m. at 2950 Whipple Ave. NW, Canton.

Grape Possibilities Wine Tasting & Auction
March 8, 6 p.m. at The Historic Onesto. Presented by the Arc of Ohio - Stark County. Call 234-571-5689 for ticket information.

DODD Health and Safety Alerts
Did you know the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities (DODD) publishes Health and Safety Alerts on a variety of topics to provide data, additional resources, and guidance on what can be done to avoid or minimize risk?

Read the latest on Preventing Flu, Pneumonia #31-12-18 as well as other Health and Safety Alerts at http://dodd.ohio.gov/HealthandSafety.

Recreation

Special Olympics State Team and Individual Skills Basketball
February 22 - 23 at The Ohio State University.

Recreational Bowling League Sign-Up
April 13, 10 a.m. - 12 Noon at the Whipple-Dale Centre. Season runs May 14 - June 18. Cost: $12 to cover six weeks of bowling. For more information, contact Paulia Gardner, 330-479-3750.

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