

# Dateline

June 2024

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"Helping people to live, learn and work in our community"

## Program links male volunteers with early childhood centers

By his own description, Josh Komives is "a bigger guy," and there's usually no shortage of giggles as he takes part in cartoon-led yoga sessions with a classroom of preschoolers.

Both students and teachers "get the biggest kick out of me being silly," said Komives, a service coordinator at the Franklin County Board of Developmental Disabilities. "As for my own well-being and happiness, and satisfaction with the job, being able to do this for an hour or so each week means so much. It has really helped ground me and keep me positive."

Komives began volunteering earlier this year through the Beacon program, a pilot led by FCBDD Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Coordinator Sean Patterson to recruit male staff members to volunteer in the agency's Early Childhood Education centers.

Patterson sees it as a win on all sides: Children benefit from positive interaction with males; teachers get a helping hand from a caring colleague; volunteers receive a brief respite from their caseloads and learn more about early intervention services.

Comparatively few men work in the field of early childhood education. Most of the children seem to be thrilled to have the volunteers visit, said Patterson, who started stopping by ECE classrooms shortly after he began his new DEI position in January 2023. "There's real excitement on these kids' faces to see men walking in," he said.



Teresa Johnson, Associate Director in the Early Childhood Education program, spoke highly of the pilot effort. "The novelty of having a male in the classroom has proven to be just life-altering for some of these kiddos."

Komives traces some of his enthusiasm for the Beacon program to his father, who was a Columbus City Schools elementary teacher. "He had often mentioned that it's pretty amazing how some of the kids respond," Komives said.

Oftentimes, even before he gets inside a classroom at the FCBDD Early Childhood Learning Community, "I can hear this chorus of 'Mr. Josh is here! Mr. Josh is here!'" he said. "It's been a huge benefit for me, and if I can get others involved, that's great."

## Zoo hosts event for blind, deaf and deaf-blind people on June 9

The Columbus Zoo and Aquarium is hosting a special day of exploration, education and fun that offers increased access for people who are blind, deaf or deaf-blind. The event runs from 9 a.m. until 6 p.m. on Sunday, June 9.

Local community partners will be set up in the Zoo's Conservation Courtyard near Conservation Lake to offer fun and educational experiences, including opportunities to connect with wildlife, zookeepers and learn about conservation efforts. Columbus Speech and Hearing, Deaf Services Center, Good Sign Coffee Co., Helen Keller National Center, and Ohio EnCompass iCANCONNECT program are among the participating partners.

Columbus State Community College also is coordinating more than 50 ASL interpreting volunteers, including those from Access2Interpreting and Heritage Interpreting.

"Our commitment to accessibility and inclusivity is at the heart of our work and our mission of 'Empowering People. Saving Wildlife.' We are proud to offer events that embody those values," said Becky Nellis, Director of Curriculum and Partnerships at the Columbus Zoo.



The Zoo will remain open to other visitors that day. For more information and details, please visit <https://www.columbuszoo.org/events/blind-deaf-and-deafblind-accessibility-day>

## FCBDD launching new advocacy, community relations efforts

Advocacy efforts at the Franklin County Board of Developmental Disabilities now have a focal point under a restructuring initiative that creates a new Community Programs and Advocacy Department.

The department includes two main service areas: School and Transition Services, led by West Central Principal Rebecca Holthaus; and Communications, Advocacy and Community Relations, headed by Ryan Phillips. Phillips recently moved to the new position after 16 years as Director of Special Olympics, Community Recreation and Aquatics at FCBDD.

“Within Franklin County we have incredible self-advocates who not only know exactly what they want, but have a detailed pathway planned for how to get there,” he said. “As I have begun to immerse myself in these efforts, I am inspired by the sheer enthusiastic determination.”

Phillips will work with Communications Coordinator Rita Price to update and enhance the agency’s communication platforms. He also will oversee community relations and outreach, areas that were key to his Special Olympics leadership.

“The Franklin County Board of DD does absolutely incredible work. I look forward to helping share those stories while empowering others to write their own stories,” he said. “The bonus for me is when the people we serve positively impact the citizens of Franklin County. It’s a full circle moment, and I am proud of our part in that success.”

Megan Bender, formerly a Special Olympics specialist and social media manager for the Franklin County Flyers Special Olympics program, was named to replace Phillips as manager of Franklin County Special Olympics. The agency is in the process of hiring a director to oversee the Community Programs and Advocacy Department.

Phillips welcomes thoughts, suggestions and new ideas. He can be reached at [ryan.phillips@fcbdd.org](mailto:ryan.phillips@fcbdd.org) or 614-342-5984.

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## Family support program helps with extra expenses

From respite care and swim lessons to dietary supplements and diapers, the Family Support Services program helps families pay for needs that aren’t covered by Medicaid waivers or insurance.

Boundless administers the effort, which is funded through the Franklin County Board of Developmental Disabilities. Hundreds of families apply for a share of what is typically more than \$100,000 distributed each quarter.

In 2023, many of the year-round applicants received a total of about \$800. “Families are so appreciative,” said Boundless Family Support Specialist Jackie Bell. “It’s not a lot of funding, but it really helps. Just being able to use the money for someone to watch their child while they run out means a lot.”

Boundless tries to make the process easy, with minimal documentation required. At the end of the year, depending on how much money is left in the fund, families often are surprised with a larger-than-expected payment. “We don’t tell them; we just send it,” Bell said. “They break into tears.”

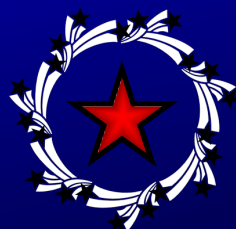
Bree Machiyashiki said the program has been a “godsend.” Her older son’s disabilities include a rare chromosome disorder, and she has to purchase expensive dietary supplements to help him stay healthy.

“I know it may not seem like much, but when you’re running low, at the end of the day, it’s huge,” said Machiyashiki, whose family joined relatives in the Columbus area after living in Japan. Though Japan is “a very advanced country,” there are more services, supports and inclusion opportunities for people with developmental disabilities in central Ohio, she said. “I feel fortunate. He’s part of such a great community.”



For more information about Family Support Services, visit:

<https://iamboundless.org/whole-person-care/residential-family/family-support-services>



**\*\* SAVE THE DATE \*\***  
**2024 Community Star Awards**  
**at a new venue this year!**  
**October 16, 2023 - 6:30 p.m. at the Hilton Polaris**  
*(more details to be announced soon)*

# West Central families, staff celebrate the Class of 2024

After she came into the world weighing less than a pound, Briana Porter's family was told about all the things – so many things – that she likely would never do. But Briana seemed to have her own plans.

"This graduation was just the icing on the cake to all she's accomplished," said her mom, Shannon Thomas. "To see her walk across that aisle and get her diploma? I can't tell you how it filled my heart."

Briana's family was part of a jubilant, teary-eyed crowd cheering on the West Central Class of 2024 during the school's 46<sup>th</sup> annual graduation ceremony on May 29. "We know that they are ready to fly," Principal Rebecca Holthaus said of the students. "We'll miss them. We are such better people because we have known them."

Commencement was dedicated to Jack Brownley, who passed away in March. Brownley had been Director of Schools and Special Services at the Franklin County Board of Developmental Disabilities, and he was devoted to West Central, Holthaus said.

FCBDD Superintendent/CEO Dot Yeager served as master of ceremonies and board President Marie Crawford, the parent of two adult sons with developmental disabilities, was the featured speaker. She advised parents and caregivers to take "deep breaths and small steps" as they go about the hard work of helping the graduates transition to adulthood.

"Keep it simple," said Crawford, whose son Pat graduated from West Central nine years ago. "And just like Dory, keep swimming."

Allison Carlisle, a former aide at West Central, said the staff has always been like family to her and her son Michael Harbert. She found her emotions flowing along with the ceremony. "I cried when Michael did the Pledge of Allegiance, I cried when they called his name, I cried when we saw the photos," Carlisle said. "And I giggled during the video."

Graduate Isabella Richard, who colored her hair bright pink for the occasion, inspired plenty of smiles as she hoisted her certificate in the air and celebrated. "West Central is a wonderful program where they understand," her mom, Belinda Richard, said. "They understand your child, the trials, the system – all of it. Everyone is here for the right reasons."

Briana, 21, began attending West Central at age 6. "It's been paramount in her development," Thomas said. "She's still non-verbal, but she has her iPad and she can communicate. West Central has been amazing, and Briana has come such a long way."

## FCBDD salutes the graduates and families:

David Aracen-Gonzalez

Natalyah Copeland

Michael Harbert

Elolo Heh

Bryce Henderson

Aidan Hughes

Jerry Jones

Anna Karakay

Briana Porter

Jonathan Ramirez-Randolph

Julian Ramsey

Isabella Richard

Alexis Roush

Devon Sharpe

Sean Winchell

Fiona Wolday

Noah Yates



## Food assistance won't count against SSI benefits

The Social Security Administration says that, starting this fall, it will no longer count the value of food assistance when calculating Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits for people with disabilities.

Under current rules, SSI can be reduced – sometimes significantly – when beneficiaries receive groceries or meals from someone else, such as friends or family or community networks of support.

The change means that food won't be considered as "in-kind support and maintenance" when benefits are determined.

"A vital part of our mission is helping people access crucial benefits, including SSI," Martin O'Malley, Commissioner of Social Security, said in a news release. "Simplifying our policies is a common-sense solution that reduces the burden on the public and agency staff and helps promote equity by removing barriers to accessing payments."

Many disability advocates praised the new rule, which takes effect Sept. 30. It's one of several potential updates that Social Security says are planned for SSI regulations, including others that are expected to lead to increased monthly payments in coming years.

SSI provides monthly payments to adults and children with a disability, and to adults 65 and older, who have limited income and resources. SSI benefits help pay for basic needs such as rent, food, clothing and medicine.

## Grant funds available for changing tables

Businesses, public agencies and nonprofit organizations still can apply for grant funding from the Franklin County Board of Developmental Disabilities to assist with the cost of installing universal changing tables.

Grants of up to \$15,000 are available to public or private entities with facilities open to the public. Money must be expended in 2024.

People whose disabilities make it impossible for them to use toilets in standard or even ADA-compliant restrooms need access to height-adjustable, universal changing tables to ensure safety, privacy and hygiene. "Public venues that provide this option help to make our community more inclusive for all," FCBDD Superintendent/CEO Dot Yeager said.

The FCBDD funds are part of \$14.9 million in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) money that is being distributed across dozens of counties to invest in projects that support Ohioans with developmental disabilities and their families.

To apply for a changing table grant in Franklin County, go to <https://fcbdd.org/changing-table-grant-opportunity>

## Staff, community encouraged to support Operation Feed



There's still time to support Operation Feed during its spring campaign, which wraps up in mid-June. The Franklin County Board of Developmental Disabilities is encouraging everyone to give what they can to help community members in need.

Operation Feed is the Mid-Ohio Food Collective's biggest annual fundraiser, with contributions stocking the shelves of hundreds of food pantries, soup kitchens and emergency shelters in central and eastern Ohio. During the 2023 fiscal year, Mid-Ohio distributed nearly 80 million pounds of food – enough to provide nearly 182,000 meals.

Mid-Ohio also supplies the fresh vegetables and fruit distributed each month during the free, drive-through produce pantry at FCBDD.

To donate through the FCBDD team, go to <https://give.mofc.org/FranklinCounty> and select Franklin County Board of DD as your team.

## FCBDD produce pantry to continue during summer

Led by staff volunteers in the Early Childhood Education Partnership, a free drive-through produce pantry at the Franklin County Board of Developmental Disabilities will continue to operate during summer months.

FCBDD partners with the Mid-Ohio Food Collective to host the produce giveaways at 5:30 p.m. on the third Thursday of each month. Food is distributed in the bus lane off of Marilyn Lane at the agency's Early Childhood Education and Family Center, 2879 Johnstown Rd.

Income verification is not required; participants just need to show photo identification. The drive-through pantry distributed food to 4,450 people in need last year and serves hundreds each month. For more information, email [sarah.gillilan@fcbdd.org](mailto:sarah.gillilan@fcbdd.org)



Photo courtesy of Mid-Ohio Food Collective

# Good For You

*Notable achievements in the FCBDD community*

We send our heartiest thanks and best wishes to all the staff members retiring this spring and summer. They represent many, many years of service to the agency and to people with developmental disabilities. Happy trails to: Joe Becker, Lynn Watkins and Debbie Charles (West Central); Beth Gibson and Sally Robinson (Early Childhood); Cathy Miller (administration); and Scott Vawter (Transportation).

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Congratulations to Debbie New, Early Childhood Education Associate Director, who received the 2023-2024 Partner of the Year Award from the YMCA of Central Ohio. Debbie was praised for her steadfast support, willingness to listen and skill in troubleshooting challenges. Thanks, Debbie, for all you do to ensure smooth operations, high-quality services and inclusiveness for staff, families and children.



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Thanks to all the remote-support and assistive technology providers who visited our Service Coordination office to present updates on all the great services and devices available to help people live more independently. People served by FCBDD can email [remotesupport@fcbdd.org](mailto:remotesupport@fcbdd.org) any time to learn more.

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We so appreciate all the staff members, families and especially the students who come together each year to make the annual Art Show at the Early Childhood Learning Community something special! With hundreds of works on display, and lots of proud smiles filling the halls, the evening is a wonderful showcase of creativity and expression.



# Career Milestones

**15 Years**  
Aziza Long

**10 Years**  
Aprill Jamison

**5 Years**  
Liam Curran  
Gabriela Leon  
Rose Odemba



Kudos to the Ohio Association of County Boards of Developmental Disabilities for hosting a great spring conference at the Hilton Columbus Downtown.

And a shout out to our awesome FCBDD facilities staff for delivering a mobile changing table to the event so that restroom options were truly accessible for all.

**FRANKLIN COUNTY BOARD OF Developmental Disabilities**

You're invited to a special presentation on

# PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

GUARDIANSHIP · SUPPORTED DECISION MAKING · SPECIAL NEEDS TRUSTS  
STABLE ACCOUNTS · BENEFITS & WAIVERS

**JUNE 24  
6:00 PM**

**LOCATION:  
1600 Watermark Drive  
Columbus, Ohio 43215**

Registration is required.  
Please email Nicholas Smith [nicholas.smith@fcbdd.org](mailto:nicholas.smith@fcbdd.org) if you are interested in attending.

# FCBDD Psychology Department plans farewell celebration

The Psychology Department of the Franklin County Board of Developmental Disabilities, which will transfer in July to ARC Industries, is hosting a farewell gathering from 1 to 3 p.m. June 26 in the agency board room.

ARC is working to establish behavioral health services as part of its emphasis on serving the "whole person," officials say. People currently receiving counseling services through FCBDD will be able to continue at ARC.

The FCBDD board approved the move during its March meeting. FCBDD Superintendent/CEO Dot Yeager has said the change will best sustain the current counseling services while growing the capacity for delivery of behavioral health services to the local developmental disabilities community.

The gathering in June will celebrate the department's many decades of service.

# Calendar

## June, 2024

- 19 Juneteenth - FCBDD facilities closed
- 20 Self-Advocate Advisory Council meeting, 2879 Johnstown Road.
- 20 FCBDD Early Childhood Education and the Mid-Ohio Food Collective Produce Drive Through from 5:30-7:30 p.m. in the ECEFC Bus Lane (accessed via Marilyn Lane). For more details, contact Sarah Gillilan at 614-342-5803.
- 27 Franklin County Board of Developmental Board committee meetings, regular board meeting and board member inservice. Board meeting to begin At **12:30 p.m.** at 2879 Johnstown Road, Columbus. Please contact Amy Magginis at 614-342-5950 for details.

**FCBDD Board Meeting Link:**  
<https://bit.ly/3JvZSUJ>

- 28,29,30 Opening Ceremonies and Ohio Special Olympics State Games at Jesse Owens Stadium 7 p.m.

## July, 2024

- 4 Independence Day - FCBDD facilities closed
- 18 FCBDD Early Childhood Education and the Mid-Ohio Food Collective Produce Drive Through from 5:30-7:30 p.m. in the ECEFC Bus Lane (accessed via Marilyn Lane). For more details, contact Sarah Gillilan at 614-342-5803.
- 24 Franklin County Board of Developmental Disabilities Family Support meeting, 12 Noon (Zoom)

**FCBDD Family Support Meeting Link:**  
<https://bit.ly/3JvZSUJ>

- 25 Franklin County Board of Developmental Board committee meetings, regular board meeting and board member inservice. Board meeting to begin At **12:30 p.m.** at 2879 Johnstown Road, Columbus. Please contact Amy Magginis at 614-342-5950 for details.

**FCBDD Board Meeting Link:**  
<https://bit.ly/3JvZSUJ>

## August, 2024

- 15 FCBDD Early Childhood Education and the Mid-Ohio Food Collective Produce Drive through from 5:30-7:30 p.m. in the ECEFC Bus Lane (accessed via Marilyn Lane). For more details, contact Sarah Gillilan at 614-342-5803.
- 19,20 ECE and School staff returns - Staff Preparation/ Development Days.
- 21 First day of classes at West Central School.
- 21,22,23 ECE Program Service Days – Parent Visitation (No Transportation)
- 26-30 ECE Program Service Days – Parent Visitation (No Transportation).

**The next issue of Dateline will be the July/ August issue printed in late July**

## Self-Advocacy group meets July 12 at FCBDD

The Central Ohio Self Determination Association will host its next gathering from 10:30 a.m. until around noon on July 12 at the Franklin County Board of Developmental Disabilities, 2879 Johnstown Rd.

The central Ohio group is open to self-advocates from Franklin, Delaware, Fairfield, Licking, Madison, Pickaway and Union counties. Organizer Christine Brown said meetings are open to all area residents with developmental disabilities who want to learn more about advocacy and issues affecting their lives.

A representative from the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities will be at the July meeting to discuss updates and changes to the Medicaid waiver program.

For more information about the Central Ohio SDA, and to RSVP (by July 5) for the meeting, email Brown at [Christine.Brown@osumc.edu](mailto:Christine.Brown@osumc.edu)

## Dateline

The Franklin County Board of Developmental Disabilities

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