

BHNAlliance

ALLIES

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A MAGAZINE FROM THE BHN ALLIANCE



Annie Taggart

Little Girl Stands Tall

**Child Advocate
of the Year**

**What
Always There
Looks Like**

**The Good Life
Launches**

What *Always There* Means



By Stephen L. Williams
BHN Alliance Superintendent

When Ohio's 88 county boards of developmental disabilities were created in 1967, I was very young. So young, in fact, that I wouldn't have even noticed this important event. Others certainly did and they celebrated this significant step that made quality supports available for people with disabilities and their families. Those supports have changed significantly in 50 years, yet there is one constant presence - the county board system. We have been and continue to be there to meet the needs of tens of thousands of people of all abilities across Ohio.

The 2017 year-long 50th Anniversary theme - **Always There** - reflects the continuity of support and partnership that county boards offer. We are grateful to the community for its support and belief in our ability to help people.

I chose a career serving people with developmental disabilities in 1988. We were growing segregated programs then. It was what we knew. As time passed, our priorities changed in response to the people we supported. They had dreams and goals for their lives that didn't fit that model, so we changed. First and foremost, we changed the way we looked at people. **We looked beyond disability and began to tailor supports in creative ways, one person at a time. Because of this, good things are happening in people's lives today.**

Every person is different and the one-size-fits-all programs of the past don't work well today. We now use our resources to make investments into people, not programs. Together with our provider partners, we are finding ways to connect people to the things that matter the most, like an education, jobs, housing and other community opportunities.

And that brings me to our provider partners. The County Board pays for the supports our provider partners provide. The next 50 years will see us working closely together. After all, the people who are providing supports at home, on the job and everywhere else make a tremendous difference in people's lives. Indeed, we are all seated at the same table.

"Always There" looks like many things. For a family with a toddler, it can mean giving them the tools to help their child learn and grow. For an adult, it can mean helping him locate a job where he can afford an apartment of his own, and for a young teen, it can mean helping her identify and enhance her abilities and then take them where she wants to be - independent and in the community. Check out the back cover of this issue to see a perfect example of what a path to independence looks like for a talented young lady named Hannah.

Time passes quickly and change is inevitable. What *Always There* also means is the promise that the Belmont, Harrison and Noble County Boards will continue to play an important role in the lives of those we support as we help each person create a life of their choosing.

The Always There campaign is sponsored by the Ohio Association of County Boards of Developmental Disabilities (OACB), a nonprofit organization specializing in providing information, continuing education, and legislative support to Ohio's 88 county boards of developmental disabilities.

BHN Alliance
ALLIES

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What Always There Looks Like



Lisa Love, 47, resides in Noble County where resources can be scarce, but resourcefulness is abundant. And resourceful is what her mother has been from the start, crossing county lines to find meaningful supports for her daughter.

Faye Love describes a time when no one could tell her what type of disability her daughter had.

“She was hard to care for when she was first born,” Faye said, “In those years, there was a lot of trial and error.” Lisa was finally diagnosed with Williams Syndrome at the age of 15.

What Faye did know in those early years was that her daughter needed to be in school. Lisa’s siblings were enrolled in Monroe County schools and Faye wanted Lisa there, too. That’s when she became involved with the Monroe County Board of Developmental Disabilities. She enrolled Lisa in its preschool and later in the County Board’s school-age program. The family transported little Lisa to the Monroe County line every day where she got on a bus and rode 45 twisting miles one

way to a preschool in Fly, a little community along the Ohio River. That lasted until a preschool was built in Woodsfield. When Lisa got older, the Noble County Board of Developmental Disabilities became involved and fulfilled her transportation needs.

Lisa’s relationship with both county boards continues today. She attends the Monroe

Adult Craft Organization (MACO) where her mother says Lisa loves her job, especially in the trophy engraving department. MACO provides community opportunities, too, like walks in the park, picnics and bowling. That’s important for Lisa, who enjoys social activities and is well-known in both Noble and Monroe counties because of her community involvement.

As Ohio’s county boards of developmental disabilities mark 50 years of serving people of all abilities, Faye says that she appreciates the Monroe and Noble county boards.

“I think they do a wonderful job,” Faye said, and praised Noble County SSA Tabitha Weisend, who is helping Lisa prepare for the future.

“Tabitha has been really good for Lisa. If there are things she can attend in Noble County, Tabitha always lets us know,” Faye said.

For Lisa and Faye, two small county boards have made a big impact!

“...Lisa loves her job...”



Lisa with Doug Yoho, supervisor in MACO’s trophy engraving department.



Annie

A Little Girl who Stands Tall

Three-year-old Annie Taggart is a little girl with a big personality. She likes to make people laugh and is always on the move. In fact, she doesn't let anything get in her way of trying new things. Even a casual observer might call this toddler one-in-a-million. In reality, Annie is 1 in 20,000. That's the frequency at which people develop the disability Annie has – Osteogenesis imperfecta, or brittle bone disease.

Annie's bones, joints, muscles, hearing and even stature are affected by OI, but certainly not her spirit. She goes about her day laughing, playing and exploring her world. She can even give her older brothers, Ty and Troy, a run for their money when she sets her mind to doing something!

Annie's story begins when she was born to Sara and Adam Taggart of Jewett. Her diagnosis occurred shortly before birth and Annie's family knew that her journey would be different. She might not reach the expected developmental milestones and small mishaps were not going to be small. A bump against a chair could result in a broken arm or leg for little Annie.

"We memory foamed everything in the house and I stopped counting the number of times she had broken bones," Sara said.

Sara encouraged family members to hold her two older children when they were babies, but it was different with Annie. It had to be. Sara said they limited how often Annie was held by others and cushioned her little body with a pillow when family members cradled her in their arms.

The Taggarts make sure that Annie has what she needs and doctor visits, therapies and treatments are part of that commitment. So, when medical personnel recommended that the family pursue early intervention supports, Sara and Adam enrolled Annie in EI offered by the BHN Alliance when she was two months old.

Evidence-based practices show that young children learn best from familiar people in familiar settings. That is why Early Intervention is provided in a family's home or other location that works best. EI Developmental Specialist Cortney Yarish began visiting the Taggarts and provided access to resources to help Annie learn and grow.

The EI team had begun exploring the use of virtual technology as a way for families to access specialists without having to travel many miles or, in Annie's case, risk injury.

"Sara didn't want anyone really holding Annie at first so the virtual visit was perfect because she could talk with the therapist, but she would be the one working with Annie," Cortney said.

The Taggart family became the first to use this new, virtual technology in early intervention and the results proved its worth.

"Annie has made huge progress and is so much farther developmentally than what the doctors thought she would be, Cortney said.

Annie has now aged out of early intervention, but Cortney stays in touch. Sara and Annie still travel frequently to Akron Children's Hospital where she receives infusions of a drug designed to strengthen her bones and to see doctors and specialists. There is health insurance, but medical costs are high and the community has come together around the family. A recent Princess Annie Ball raised funds for the family to purchase a vehicle that can accommodate Annie's motorized wheelchair. The Taggart family is grateful for the support the community has shown to them.

Ty and Troy dote on their little sister and have been a tremendous support, Sara said. Like their parents, they understand that Annie likes to do things for herself and they support her efforts to be independent.

Annie has been through a lot in her three years, yet she is in many ways a typical toddler – charming, inquisitive and even a little demanding at times.



Annie, Sara, Adam, Ty and Troy Taggart

"Annie knows what she wants," Sara said with a smile.

That's how this little girl with the big personality lives her life. And it's just one reason she is one-in-a-million.

Editor's Note: Log onto www.hcbdd.org to view a series of videos about how virtual technology is being used in early intervention to support infants, toddlers and their families across Belmont, Harrison and Noble counties.

“Dar” Named Child Advocate of the Year



Child Advocate of the Year Darlene Pempek and Belmont County DJFS Director Vince Giangangeli.

For those who know Darlene (Dar) Pempek, it was only a matter of time before her work on behalf of traumatized children and youth was recognized. That time came on April 6, 2017, when Dar received the *Child Advocate of the Year Award* from the Belmont County Department of Job and Family Services and the Belmont County Commissioners.

Dar traveled an interesting path toward advocacy for at-risk youth and adults. It began when she served in the Commissioners’ office where she saw the significant impact of county programs that served children.

Dar joined the Developmental Disabilities Board in 2005 and began pursuing its mission full-time. Since then, she promoted self-advocacy to expand supports to people and guide each one toward identifying their personal goals and working toward them.

As BHN Alliance Director of Community Supports, Dar oversees the SSA Department and represents the Alliance at Clusters in all three counties where she collaborates with other agencies serving youth at risk.

“In order for effective treatment to occur and families to remain together, coordination is imperative,” Dar said, adding that one person can have a positive influence on an abused child looking for hope.

“Any one of us can be that hope for a child – any one of us by our actions, our words, can be the one that touches a young life and enlightens that hope.”

What is a Good Life?

By Adam “Nick” Nicholoff, Director of Transition Services

So, last Thursday evening I was driving home on Route 40. I just finished spending time with 25 acquaintances or, dare I say it - friends. We had been talking about the good life, sharing our thoughts and feelings. I was really impressed how brave people can be talking about things close to their heart.

On paper, “The Good Life” is a series of learning experiences designed to help people live a good life based on compassion, appreciation and respect. This got me to thinking. What’s a “Good Life?”

Is a good life about being happy all the time? About having money and living in a big fancy house? Driving the car of your dreams? All of these things would be nice, but I know some folks who have all these things and are not so happy.

I pulled into our driveway, turned the car off, and sat for a moment. I grabbed a napkin and wrote down the 10 things that I enjoy most in my life. This is what I came up with:



I sat back and looked at the list. I quickly realized the common thread woven through my life. It’s relationships. My life is best when I have good, meaningful relationships with my family, friends, people I meet at the mall, my dog... the list goes on.

I now keep this napkin in my pocket and read it every day to remind myself about what is important to me.

So, what’s on your napkin?

Editor’s Note: The Good Life is a series of learning experiences offered to providers, staff and other partners who support people with disabilities. Nick is one of several Good Life facilitators across the BHN Alliance. For more information, call him at 740-695-0407, ext. 352, or email anicholoff@bcbdd.org



NIGHT with the Stars



The School of Hope, Martins Ferry and Union Local teamed up to create a Night with the Stars prom where students with and without disabilities came together for dinner, dancing and fun on April 21st at Marian Hall in St. Clairsville. Thanks to Intervention Specialist Katie Fischerkeller and her team for developing a small idea into a really big deal! Most photos courtesy Tiffany Vcelka

Congratulations to Cortney Yarish, Early Intervention Developmental Specialist, for receiving the 2017 Above & Beyond Award from the National Autism Association of Southeast Ohio



Amanda DeLuca of Cadiz nominated Cortney because of the difference she has made in the life of her and her husband Sal's young son, Jackson, who has autism.

In her nomination, Mrs. DeLuca wrote that Cortney listened to the family's concerns even when medical professionals recommended that the family wait to test Jackson for autism. Cortney set up appointments and testing that ultimately led to the autism diagnosis and the supports he needed at an early age.

"Cortney has done great things for our family and has made one of our greatest wishes for Jackson come true since receiving our diagnosis: he is transitioned and succeeding in a typical classroom setting."

Cortney Yarish (center) is pictured with Amanda DeLuca (right) and Jessica Hinson of the National Autism Association of SE Ohio.

ALWAYS Supporting



Hannah (pictured front) and her circle of support: Employment Works Job Developer Jeremiah Williams; Union Local High School Intervention Specialist Cathy Cordner; Sleep Inn Suites Manager Jerry Delman; Housekeeping Manager Barb Phillips; and Employment Works Service Coordinator Emmy Helms.

It takes a village to raise a child points out that children have the best chance at success when many people are actively involved in their lives. This is being demonstrated in the “village” that has surrounded 19-year-old Hannah Day.

Hannah is enrolled in *Bridges to Transition*, an offering of the BHN Alliance that helps teens identify their interests and sample jobs in the community while they are still in high school. The purpose is to prepare each youth for a competitive wage job after graduation.

According to Kara Shutler, the BHN Alliance’s Transition Specialist, students typically try out jobs in the summer. *Hannah, on the other hand, has already been hired in the laundry department at Sleep Inn.*

She practices her skills in the classroom and then takes them on the job with her two days a week. This approach works because of the great people around her - an amazing teacher, supportive job coach, a caring co-worker (*who says Hannah’s work ethic is second-to-none*) and an employer who understands the value she brings to the workplace.

And Hannah? She’s determined to do her part, and that is demonstrated in a job well done!

Transitions at any age can be challenging, yet the BHN Alliance is always there, doing what it takes to help each person achieve their goals in the community.

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50 YEARS OHIO COUNTY BOARDS OF
DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES