The Ability Connection

Allen County Board of Developmental Disabilities
Welcomes New Superintendent

The Allen County Board of Developmental Disabilities appointed Theresa Schnipke as the Superintendent at the October 27 meeting. She began her duties December 1. Schnipke comes to the position with 25 years of experience serving people with developmental disabilities. Since 2010, she has worked as the Service and Support Administration Manager for the Board. She came to the Allen County Board in 1998 having worked previously for the Seneca County Board of DD and for Advocacy and Protective Services, Inc.

President Thomas Fleming said, “We have utmost confidence in Theresa’s ability to handle this new position. Her years of experience in the field have prepared her well for this new challenge. Our Board is facing some of the greatest changes in our history. Theresa has the vision and the commitment to the people we serve to effectively manage the pending changes.”

The Board conducted a statewide search with the assistance of a consultant from the Ohio Association of County Boards Serving People with Developmental Disabilities. Of the five applicants, they interviewed two individuals several times. It became clear that Schnipke has the depth of knowledge and the leadership qualities that the Board is looking for.

Schnipke lives in Allen County with her husband Terry. Her son Brent attends medical school at Wright State and her daughter Brooke attends Mt. Vernon Nazarene University. When asked about her new position, Superintendent Schnipke said “I have always enjoyed working for this board and with the individuals, families and staff who make great things happen every day. I am very excited about my new role here and am very grateful for the transition process that Superintendent Baldridge envisioned. It has made the first 19 days very smooth and a great learning experience for me. I will continue to serve this community to the best of my ability and if I can do anything to assist, please let me know or stop in to see me.”

Former Superintendent Esther Baldridge said, “I couldn’t be more pleased with the Board’s selection of Theresa as the new Superintendent. She is so very capable and truly cares about the people we serve. I am leaving the agency in very good hands.”

See Page 4 for information about Director Martin’s visit.
Recently at the Annual Convention of the Ohio Association of County Boards Serving People with Developmental Disabilities, a question was asked of colleagues within the field that caused me to reflect on their answers as well as on my own answer. The question was simple. “Are We There Yet?” Having worked in this field in some capacity for almost 43 years, I have seen a lot of changes. The desired outcome of all of the changes were to provide better services for the people we serve. We have indeed come a long way.

As I was entering this field, the Pennhurst lawsuit was in progress which started the movement toward eliminating large state-run institutions where people were warehoused, entirely segregated from the community. Group homes began to develop throughout the nation. Some were just smaller sized “institutions” and eventually we came to the conclusion that less people living under one roof is generally better. Today, most people live in houses or apartments in residential areas with no more than four people. Is that where we want to be? Sometimes. Often people we serve have not been able to develop meaningful relationships within their neighborhoods. So even though they are physically in the heart of the community, the segregation continues. We still have work to do to eliminate segregation and isolation.

My first job involved taking an agency station wagon to people’s homes and picking them up. We then went to a one-room schoolhouse that had been converted into an activity center for adults who had disabilities. During the day, we did crafts with the people we served. At the end of the day, I drove people back to their homes. As time went on, activity centers became work centers. During our peak years we had so much work from area industries that we had to bring extra people in to help meet the production demands. One could say that we had achieved a level of integration within the sheltered workshop. Unfortunately, the economy took a significant downturn and we no longer have enough work for everyone to do during the day. Today there is a movement afoot to eliminate sheltered workshops completely in favor of community-based employment.

When Medicaid funding came into play, people had the opportunity to choose services that didn’t include work. It became the expectation that adults with a great deal of ability could go to an activity center with the goal of having fun. That is one point when I personally feel we took a step backwards. I certainly agree with the concept of “free choice of provider;” however, I believe that almost all adults should be expected to work in some capacity. Governor Kasich shares this view and instituted his “Employment First Initiative” a few years ago.

At our Board, we started community-based employment in 1984. It was difficult for Board members of that time to understand that people we serve really could work in the community. Fortunately, they took a chance and even committed to providing transportation to and from community-based employment. Our agency has received many commendations for being that supportive of community-based employment. While we have done quite well in supporting people in jobs, this is another area where I believe there is much room for improvement.

So, to the question of whether we are there yet, my answer is no. There is still much work to be done to ensuring that people are well connected within their community. One of the huge gaps remaining is ensuring that people have friends who love them and want to spend time with them. Isolation continues to be a problem for many of the people we serve even though they now live in typical neighborhoods and work side-by-side with people who don’t have disabilities. I am confident the next generation will make even greater strides improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

I will be retiring in several months at the end of a long vacation. The changes our agency is going through are the greatest changes I have seen in my career. We have an amazing staff who will guide the agency. Our new Superintendent is so very capable and caring. I am very confident that most of the changes will again improve the quality of life of the people we serve. I want to thank the Board, the community, the people we serve and our staff for giving me the opportunity to serve in this capacity for so many years. Best wishes to each of you as you continue this amazing journey.
Rashawna Perry Named Executive Director of Marimor Industries, Inc.

Marimor Industries, Inc. hired Rashawna Perry as their Executive Director effective September 1, 2015. Rashawna comes with fourteen years of experience in the field of developmental disabilities, working in Vinton County in a variety of positions. Most recently, she was the Executive Director of Vinton Industries, Inc. (a sister agency to Marimor Industries, Inc.) which had privatized in 2012. Prior to that she worked as the Associate Superintendent of the Vinton County Board of DD, Director of Service and Support Administration and as a Service and Support Administrator.

Her wealth of experience is serving her well in her new position at Marimor Industries. As we are progressing to a new business model, Rashawna has already experienced much of what needs to occur in Allen County. Superintendent Theresa Schnipke said, “Rashawna is one of the most positive people I have ever met. With her knowledge and ability to work effectively with staff and the people we serve, I have great confidence the transition to our new business model will go smoothly.”

Ms. Perry said, “I am pleased with the warm welcome that I have received from the Allen County Board. I appreciate the willingness of staff to assist in preparation for our new business model. Allen County has become a wonderful place to live. I am happy to be here.” Ms. Perry replaces Andrew Wilker who has taken a job with the County Board of DD to work on Medicaid billing.

Commissioners Appoint Melissa Weaver to the Board

At the November 24 meeting, Commissioner Jay Begg administered the Oath of Office to Melissa Weaver, who will fill the unexpired term of Ariel Meister on the Allen County Board of Developmental Disabilities. Melissa and her husband Chad are the parents of Carsen 10, Owen 8, Aiden 6 and Gaven 3. They live in Allen County and have been associated with the County Board of Developmental Disabilities since 2008 when Owen entered Early Intervention.

Melissa has participated with the Board in several areas including serving on the oversight committee for Strategic Planning. She has a Bachelor of Science degree in Child and Family Community Services from Bowling Green State University. She has taught in several YMCA Child Development Centers.

Holiday Music Program

Owen, Carsen, Aiden, Gaven and Melissa with Santa following the Christmas program at Marimor School.
The Imagine Information System (ImagineIS) is a tool built to support person-centered work and streamline administrative processes. It creates an opportunity for immediate engagement by the person accessing support services, their family and their support team.

ImagineIS offers real-time access to information by the individual, staff of the Allen County Board of Developmental Disabilities, providers and families. This access will make it easier to discuss outcomes, communicate needed supports and implement or revise action plans while integrating with state business applications. It will eliminate the need to enter data into multiple systems.

ImagineIS is designed to be a paperless system allowing the team to focus on what is ‘important to and important for’ the individual and their family. It is designed for the development of the Individual Support Plan and it will be updated continually as the life of the individual changes. It allows the individual, with the help of their SSA, to secure natural supports or choose paid providers to assist them in reaching desired outcomes in a transparent, yet protected system. It works somewhat like a personal blog, including pictures the individual wants to add, a list of favorites, hobbies, interests, etc. This will all be accessible to the individual through an internet portal 24 hours a day.

The Allen County Board of DD is joining more than 20 other counties in the State of Ohio in using this system designed by the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities. We are one of the first counties to implement this system in Northwest Ohio. ImagineIS has been tested by several counties for nearly 3 years, and is fully compliant with the concept that every person is deserving and capable of achieving the life they want. SSA staff and providers in Allen County have been working on the development of the Imagine process since January 2015. Training on ImagineIS has been underway since August 2015. Over the next 12 months the Allen County Board of DD will phase-in a new Individual Support Plan (ISP). As individuals participate in developing their new ISP in Imagine, information and training will be made available to the individual and family on how they can access and build their plan. For those who don’t have internet access and prefer traditional methods, ISPs will still be available in the paper format.

Please look for these changes as it comes time for meetings and ISPs to be reviewed. We are confident that ImagineIS will put the individual served at the center of their services, provide accountability for what they determine to be important and will improve collaboration among all team members.

Elijah recently moved into a home of his own with some roommates after his Uncle Buck was no longer able to care for him. He had a history of showing his frustration by breaking furniture. His team discovered he had always wanted a fish. Since he has gotten his own fish, he has been able to handle stressful situations much better, and has not broken anything.

Tom shared that before he had kids, he liked to ride his bike as a way to decompress. His bike had been broken for a few years and he never had the money to fix it or get a new one. Staff were asked for help and a bike was quickly located. Our mechanics checked the new bike over and made adjustments. Tom was very surprised and thankful when his SSA delivered his new bike.
Changes in the Developmental Disabilities Service System Discussed in Community Forum

Director John Martin came to Allen County on December 14 to talk with families about the changes that are coming to the Developmental Disabilities service network. The first change involves achieving “conflict free case management.” Director Martin said, “The feeling with the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services is, if I’m working with a family to help them select a provider, but then I’m also a provider, that’s a conflict of interest. The provider that’s out there trying to compete with something like a county board would say you’re steering people to your own services.”

Director Martin shared that as a parent, he sometimes found it hard to really understand what his son Joel wanted or needed because he was so invested in what he believed to be the right solution. As an example he shared that with severe cerebral palsy, eating food by mouth was very difficult and actually dangerous for his son. However, he believed his son enjoyed the experience and that as a parent, was he was making the correct decision to resist having his son get a g-tube. It took someone from outside the situation to realize that his son really needed a g-tube. He likened that to a County Board of DD that is so invested in the programs they offer that they fail to see that other alternatives might be better.

To resolve this dilemma, the Allen County Board of DD intends to move the administration of Adult Services and transportation to other entities. Marimor Industries, Inc. has decided to become certified through Medicaid to provide day services and non-medical transportation. They are also interested in becoming a provider of homemaker and personal care. The Board of DD has also been contracting with the Lima Allen Regional Transit Authority for transportation. They too are in process of becoming certified to provide transportation through Medicaid. The people we serve as always will have a choice of who will provide the services they need. We assume most people who currently are choosing the County Board of DD for their service delivery will choose Marimor Industries. In like manner, if the individual is currently being transported by the RTA, they will likely choose to continue that mode of transportation. As is always the case, individuals occasionally choose to change providers. It will continue to be the practice of the Board to ensure free choice of providers.

Director Martin also discussed the importance of increasing opportunities for the people who receive services to interact with the broader community. He referred to it as “community touches” - times when people with disabilities freely interact with people who don’t have disabilities in a typical environment.

We expect the transition to our new business model will be seamless for the people we serve. One day the staff who support them will be employed by the County Board of DD and the next day they will be employed by Marimor Industries. We hope that many of our current staff will choose to stay and continue providing high quality services.

Notice of Delays and Cancellations

In the event of delays or closings, the Board will make every effort to have the announcement for Marimor School and Industries made by 6:30 a.m. via the following:

PLEASE NOTE: Beginning this year, Marimor Industries will often be open when Marimor School is closed. The County Board will not transport on those days; however, other transportation providers will be transporting and families may choose to transport if they wish.

WLWD(93.9 FM) Kiss FM  WBUK(106.3FM) The Fox
WMLX(103.3FM) Mix 103.3  WZRX-(107.5 FM) Rock X
92.1 The Frog-WZOQ  93.1 The Fan-WGF
104.9 The Eagle WAJC  940JAMZ-WLJM
WTGN 97.7  WDOH 107.1
WONB 94.9  TV35 WLO
www.wlio.com School Closings

On days we experience inclement weather, typically fog or snow, families are asked to listen to the radio or watch TV for information rather than calling directly. Staff will be EXTRA busy on those days making phone calls, checking road and weather conditions, and clearing snow. Thank You in advance for your patience and cooperation with delays and closings!
**Supporting people through community partnerships and quality services**

**DATES TO REMEMBER**

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<th>January</th>
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<tr>
<td>1 - New Year’s Holiday - Closed</td>
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<td>2 - Resume Regular Schedule</td>
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<td>18 - Martin Luther King Day - Closed</td>
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<td>21 - Parent Teacher Conferences, 4:00 to 7:00 p.m., Marimor School</td>
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<td>26 - ACBDD Board Meeting, 2500 Ada Road, 5:30 p.m.</td>
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<td>12 - Marimor School Staff Work Day - School Closed</td>
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<tr>
<td>12 - Marimor Industries - In-Service Training - Industries Closed</td>
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<tr>
<td>15 - President’s Day Holiday - Marimor School and Industries Closed</td>
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<tr>
<td>23 - ACBDD Board Meeting, 2500 Ada Road, 5:30 p.m.</td>
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<tr>
<td>17 - Parent Teacher Conferences - Marimor School Closed</td>
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<tr>
<td>17 - Marimor Industries In-Service Training - Industries Closed</td>
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<tr>
<td>22 - ACBDD Board Meeting, 2500 Ada Road, 5:30 p.m.</td>
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<td>25 - Spring Break, Marimor School and Industries closed.</td>
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