



The ALL-STAR Newsletter

February 2021

Jefferson County Board of Developmental Disabilities

Issue 28

Jefferson County BDD

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Steubenville, Ohio 43952
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Superintendent's Message: New Year Brings Changes

Happy New Year! Let's pray for a less stressful 2021.

With the new year, we are seeing a few changes both within the JCBDD and this newsletter. We bid farewell to longtime members and most recent board President Lorie Sullivan and Vice President James Morgan and thank them for their years of dedication, and we also welcome Melinda Aleksiejczyk and Diane Gray as our newest members and wish them great success as they serve for the next four years. Additionally, we also recognize the efforts of our current board, which includes Presi-

dent Dr. Ed Florak, Vice President Stephanie Chester, Secretary Jim Padden and fellow members Chris Irvin and William Kerr.

We also have a slightly new look to the newsletter. Instead of the monthly calendar, we will now feature a "Getting to Know You" section to highlight one employee and one individual enrolled in our program. We will continually seek individuals to recognize, so please reach out with suggestions. I hope you like the new look to the newsletter, and as always your comments and suggestions are welcome.

JCBDD Board Welcomes New Members

The Jefferson County Board of Developmental Disabilities recently welcomed two new members who will help carry forward its mission of providing opportunities for individuals in the community.

Melinda Aleksiejczyk and Diane Gray began their terms Jan. 1 following their respective appointments by the Jefferson County Commissioners and county Juvenile Court Judge Joseph Corabi. They were sworn in during the board's Jan. 21 meeting to replace longtime members Lorie Sullivan and James Morgan and their four-year terms run until Dec. 31, 2024.

Aleksiejczyk, who hails from Chester but now resides in Steubenville, has a personal connection to the JCBDD which led her to join the board.

"I wanted to be part of the board because I have a special needs son. I have been put in the unique position to help the disabled community and their caregivers," she said. "Over the last few years, it became apparent that Jefferson County provided services that other counties and states bordering us do not. I also noticed that not every parent or caregiver handles their situation caring for a special needs individual the same. Some find it overwhelming, lonely and extremely difficult, and this is often very true. I have been blessed with a very positive outlook in my situation, as well as support in many ways. I feel it is my duty to help in



Melinda Aleksiejczyk, at left, and Diane Gray have joined the Jefferson County Board of Developmental Disabilities as its newest members and succeed Lorie Sullivan and James Morgan, whose terms expired in December. Aleksiejczyk and Gray were appointed to four-year terms running from Jan. 1, 2021 to Dec. 31, 2024, and said they were excited to serve the community.

any way as an advocate and support to anyone with special needs and their caregivers. When the opportunity to join the board became available, I knew that it could be a way for me to not only help but perhaps help in a big way."

She is familiar with the many services JCBDD provides since her son participated in early intervention and currently attends preschool at the School of Bright Promise. Being privy to these services has given her the advantage of helping others in a similar situation and she was eager to carry on the board's

mission.

"Although I know I have a lot to learn having just been to one board meeting, I am excited for a future with the board and the direction they are going," Aleksiejczyk continued. "As a parent to a child with special needs, you not only want to help in areas that are of concern now, but you want to build a solid foundation for their future. Every parent of a special needs child worries about the future when one day you are not here. I would not only

(Continued as MEMBERS)

want to focus on matters of the school-aged children, but also adults and the issue of integrating disabled individuals into the community and making sure they have a quality of life. It seems that a lot of parents who are just starting out on their journey with a disabled child may feel overwhelmed and do not know what services are available, so they may have a delayed start in some areas."

She is currently focusing on the hands-on needs of her young son but also attends Eastern Gateway Community College's Health Information Management program with the goal of one day returning to work. In the meantime, she is becoming comfortable with her new role at JCBDD and is excited to work with the fellow board members to help improve the lives of so many in the community.

"I am excited to have the opportunity to serve in my community in this specific way. I feel that this is part of my journey with my son," she commented. "There are not just individuals with needs like his but individuals in the disabled community with all kinds

of needs, and we have to remain open-minded and understanding to everyone with a disability and be able to assist anyone that needs the extra help to find their full potential in life."

Gray, who resides in Steubenville and works for the county juvenile court, said she really wanted to contribute to the community she lives in.

"People with disabilities and their families need to have access to resources to help and guide them. I was hopeful when I joined the board that I would be a part of something that did in fact do that," she commented. "After meeting with [Superintendent Michael Zinno] for the training session, I knew I was in the right place. The county has so much to offer families and individuals in need."

Like Aleksiejczyk, she also has a personal understanding of what the JCBDD has to offer since her aunt and uncle both attended the School of Bright Promise or had a connection with the Jeffco Workshop and her daughter, who is now a special education teacher, previously was employed at the

Jeffco Training Center. Gray said she was very excited to join the board and looks forward to learning from the current members. She and Aleksiejczyk met with Zinno prior to the first board session to learn about the board's role and meet the staff, but Gray said she will continue to learn the ropes and has full faith in the current board's abilities to help the disabled population thrive.

"I am very grateful for this opportunity and would like to thank Judge Corabi for the appointment to the board," she said. "I'm so excited to have the opportunity to work with everyone and look forward to learning more from my fellow members with each meeting."

Zinno welcomed the newest members aboard and said they will bring a lot of ideas and energy to the panel.

"I'm very happy to have them aboard. When Lorie Sullivan and Jim Morgan left, I said, 'When doors close, others open up.' I'm excited to have the new board members who are here to help the children and adults we serve."

Getting to Know You...



**Sean
Smith**



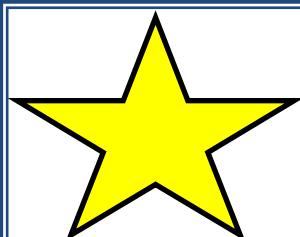
Sean Smith is marking a series of milestones as he completes his first year with the Jefferson County Board of Developmental Disabilities.

He serves as the information technology (IT) specialist and is responsible for day-to-day repairs and operations of the systems, network reviews and handling hardware issues with equipment.

The Wintersville resident is newly engaged (Congratulations!) to Izzie Biasi and they have a dog, Remi. Sean is currently completing his masters in business administration (MBA) in management at West Liberty University and plans to graduate in May.

Sean said he enjoys working at the JCBDD and the people involved with it.

"I love it here. This is my favorite job and I don't see myself going anywhere else. Everyone is really nice and it's easy to get along with people."



**Stormy
Hooper**



When it comes to loving the Black and Gold, Stormy Hooper is true blue.

Ask anyone who knows him and they will say he loves to spout facts and figures about sports, namely his favorite football team the Pittsburgh Steelers.

Stormy is the 13-year-old son of Doug and Melissa Hooper of Toronto and nephew of Tina Hooper. He attends the School of Bright Promise and his teacher, Nanette Neary, said Stormy's first day back to school after remote learning had a special touch when school staff and the ENGAGE program through the Jefferson County Educational Service Center provided a special "Steelers Cave" just for him in his classroom. It includes memorabilia and Stormy even received a jersey, hat, jacket and Terrible Towel to motivate him to learn.

"We wanted his first day back at school to be happy and fun and it worked," she said.