



# The ALL-STAR Newsletter

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Jefferson County Board of Developmental Disabilities

Issue 38

## Jefferson County BDD

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## How Are We Doing?

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## In This Edition:

**\*NDEAM Highlights  
Workforce Efforts**

**\*Special Needs  
Parents Support  
Group Available  
Online**

**\*Getting to Know You**



Connie Brookes, left, and Mikayla Parteli have gained independence by joining the workforce and earning their keep. Brookes has been employed as a baker at Dunkin' Donuts in Weirton for the past six months while Parteli is nearing her fourth year with the Steubenville Kroger and was recently promoted to lead bagger and courtesy clerk. They are being highlighted by the Jefferson County Board of Developmental Disabilities for National Disability Employment Awareness Month for October.

## NDEAM Highlights Workforce Efforts

October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month and two local residents are doing their part to contribute to the workforce.

NDEAM celebrates America's workers with disabilities and showcases supportive inclusion, employment policies and practices, and this year's theme is "Disability: Part of the Equity Equation." For its part, the Jefferson County Board of Developmental Disabilities is highlighting two of the individuals it serves through the Community Employment Services (CES) program: Connie Brookes and Mikayla Parteli.

Connie Brookes begins her day at 4 a.m. as a baker at Dunkin' Donuts in Weirton. There, she makes at least 700 sweet treats each day for customers from creamsticks and glazed goodies to jelly-filled delights and spends 30 hours a week maximizing her potential.

"It's good," she said of her job. "It's easy. I make all of the doughnuts and make drinks, do dishes and take out the garbage."

Brookes, the daughter of Larry and Laurie Brookes of Toronto, graduated from Toronto High School and Jefferson County Joint Vocational School in 2021 and currently has her own place that she shares with her pets and is in the midst of remodeling. She uses her paycheck for bills and buying sup-

plies for her menagerie, which includes three dogs, four cats, a goat, three pigs, chickens, rabbits and a guinea pig. And her affinity for animals has her dreaming of a future as a dog groomer.

She added that her co-workers have been welcoming and supportive and is thankful that her mom provides her transportation until she obtains her own license and vehicle.

"It's very refreshing and surprising that she's done so well. She's really been a faithful and efficient employee," mother Laurie added. "She takes her job very seriously and she has a great future ahead of her."

Her hard work has not gone unnoticed and she has impressed her colleagues since beginning six months ago.

"She is super sweet and very efficient," said manager Cermantha Seavolt. "She's very focused and has a good work ethic. I'm glad she's part of the team."

Seavolt worked with Brookes since her first day in April and trained her for the job, which Brookes obtained with assistance from CES. Renee Pastre-Hanlin, community employment specialist, said Brookes was also involved in JCBDD's Summer Youth Program where teens have worked at community parks and municipal facilities to earn work experience and a

paycheck.

CES assists about 24 individuals from age 14 through adulthood and many have gained employment at the likes of McDonald's, Kroger, JCBDD and Franciscan University at sites spanning across Jefferson County to Weirton and even Martins Ferry.

"CES has expanded our services by providing pre-employment transition services throughout the school year. Students transition into the summer youth work experience and they are prepared for entry-level position when they complete the program," Pastre-Hanlin continued. She also praised Brookes for making her way into mainstream society.

"CES completed job development with Connie when she graduated and she was hired in April of 2022," Pastre-Hanlin added. "She pays her own rent and bills. She's a role model for how the transition-to-work process can work when you take advantage of it."

Parteli, the daughter of Maria Cihon of Piney Fork, has spent the past four years as a bagger at the Steubenville Kroger and her colleagues have praised her dedication.

She travels up to 45 minutes and works eight to 10 hours per day to

(Continued as NDEAM)

# Special Needs Parents Support Group Available Online

Parents of special needs children have an online connection for resources and other supports thanks to the efforts of a local woman.

Mindy Aleksiejczyk, a Steubenville resident and mother of a six-year-old child with autism, created the Special Needs Parents Support in the Ohio Valley Facebook page about four years ago but its membership has since grown to more than 90 people. She developed the private group page to help others find access to resources and interact with someone who understands their situation. She has also been a member of the Jefferson County Board of Developmental Disabilities since 2020 and is actively involved with The School of Bright Promise where her son, T.J., is a student. Most recently, she participated with the school's parent council in a

Special Summer Bash held in Richmond this past July.

She said she saw the need for a social media connection and word has been spreading about it ever since.

"I created it back in 2018 and it just started gaining members. I called it Special Needs Parents Support in the Ohio Valley because we have so many counties close to us. As we started getting parents at The School of Bright Promise, the page started becoming very special to me," she said. "We have 91 members who are parents, caregivers and people who provide support including therapists and the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities [DODD] and they provide resources and share information. It's a private Facebook group, but somebody might need a resource or some direction or have an

event. I had hoped people would join and now it has grown."

Since its formation, the page has garnered participants well beyond the valley to Cleveland and other parts of Ohio. It has helped unite special needs families for summer pool parties and other events to interact while further ideas are to invite each other to their kids' birthday parties so everyone has a chance to congregate in a fun environment.

Aleksiejczyk said the support page is open to parents of children with a variety of disabilities, from autism and seizure disorders to youth requiring wheelchairs, and the goal is to provide everyone with a support system so their lives know no bounds.

Those interested may request to join the private Facebook page or contact Aleksiejczyk at (740) 457-9941 for more details.

**NDEAM**

*(Continued from Front)*

perform her job. A 2015 graduate of Buckeye Local High School, Parteli said she enjoys what she does and how much independence it affords her.

"I like the people and the money," she said, adding that she has used her earnings to create a game room in her basement complete with a collection of videogames. Her miniature arcade features the likes of Pac-Man,

Mortal Kombat and other throwbacks.

She was referred to CES by the Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities (OOD) and was assisted by Pastre-Hanlin in gaining employment.

"We work with students, and we also receive referrals for adults from OOD," Pastre-Hanlin said. "Mikayla completed a community-based assessment and she did so well at

Kroger that they hired her."

Assistant Manager Kathy Zapotoczny had nothing but kind words for Parteli, saying she has thrived and even risen to become a lead bagger and courtesy clerk.

"She's fantastic. Mikayla had no confidence in herself at first, but now she does anything we ask of her. We love Mikayla and we couldn't ask for a better associate."

## Getting to Know You...



**Stacey McAllister**

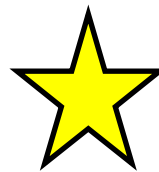


Stacey McAllister has been a fixture with the Jefferson County Board of Developmental Disabilities for nearly three decades and continues to support the people JCBDD serves.

McAllister, a native of New York, N.Y., began working as a habilitation specialist II with the adult service program in 1994 and ultimately became part of the case management department. Since then, she has served with the Service Support Administration (SSA).

She has been married to her husband, Charlie, for 24 years and they have two sons, Riley and Brody, who both attend West Virginia University. Her hobbies include cultivating plants and vegetables in her garden, as well as cooking, baking and making bread. She also works with high school students as a member of an engineering advisory committee and seeks grants for the Project Lead the Way curriculum, which assists students with their resumes and interviewing skills.

She also enjoys the company of her dogs Chuey, Freya and Thor.



**Cheyenne Monigold**



Cheyenne Monigold is a recent graduate of the School of Bright Promise who is making her way in the world.

Monigold, of Mingo Junction, has been an alumna since this past May and is just one of the people who gains support through the Jefferson County Board of Developmental Disabilities' Service Support Administration (SSA). She said she appreciates the work her case manager does to help her and her family.

"[My SSA] provides my mom with information and helps with anything I need," she said. "My provider helps me with everything."

Monigold enjoys time with her family, which includes her mom, Harriett, and two brothers, Jeff and Ray Jr.

Meanwhile, she clearly loves animals as evidenced by the brood of pets in her household, which includes two dogs and three cats. She also enjoys art, movies, all forms of music and watching "Stranger Things" on TV.