The ALL-STAR Newsletter

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In This Edition:

Summer Youth Program Concludes for Year

The 2025 Summer Youth Program has come to close after helping more than a dozen teens hone their skills to successfully gain employment.

Young participants aged 15 to 18 years old wrapped up the second of two sessions on Aug. 8 by beautifying and organizing around the city of Toronto. Now in its 17th year, the program has aided countless teens and young adults with developmental and intellectual needs in their journey to become independent adults by preparing them for the job front. It is conducted through the Jefferson County Board of Developmental Disabilities' Community Employment Services and participants spent weeks performing entry-level tasks such as weeding, mulching, painting and other maintenance under the guidance of Community Employment Specialists Renee Pastre Hanlin and Elyzabeth Grimm. They worked four days per week from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. and earned minimum wage for their duties, plus they became equipped with crucial work and soft skills needed to become employed.

The Jefferson County Board of Developmental Disabilities Community Employment Program wrapped up its 17th annual Summer Youth Program on Aug. 8, helping more than a dozen teens and young adults sharpen their work skills to successfully gain future employment. Workers pictured include Amari Wilson, at front, with James Wooden, Katelin Russell, Zayne Carlson and Kaleb Manion painting curbs along Dennis Way to help beautify the Gem City of Toronto.

The program includes participants between the ages of 14-22 who require an individualized education plan, or IEP, and the youth represent a multitude of local school districts including Buckeye Local, Indian Creek, Edison, and Toronto, as well as Jefferson County Joint Vocational School. Officials said the goal is to offer pre-employment transition services throughout the school year, followed by the summer youth work program in a comprehensive approach that will continue until the student graduates and is employed. The first session ran from June 4-27 and seven teens busily spruced up Jefferson Lake State Park in Richmond, while the latest endeavor ran from July 9-Aug. 8 and included nine participants working throughout the Gem City.

> **"They enjoyed the Laughter, friendships, and different experiences they received. They build basic work skills and migrate into future employment."**
>
> ***—Elyzabeth Grimm JCBDD Community Employment Specialist***

Grimm said this was the group's first time working in Toronto and plans are already in the works to return next year. Duties ranged from organizing the storage center for Inspire Toronto to mulching and making improvements along the brush bridge for Hike Toronto, plus they tended to the city gardens by weeding, watering and mulching the area. The youth also cleaned the Karaffa Recreation Center and Toronto American Legion and painted curbs throughout city, including along Dennis Way near Toronto High School.

She added that they enjoyed the experience and learned valuable employability skills for the future.

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Wright Assumes New Role as Education Director

Sara Wright is stepping into a new role at the School of Bright Promise, but it is a place which changed the course of her future years ago.

Wright, a resident of Steubenville, was appointed as the education director on Aug. 4 and succeeded Dr. Georgia Pavlic-Roseberry, who served as children's services director for the Jefferson County Board of Developmental Disabilities. Interestingly, Wright had served as a Board-Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA) at the site for the past three years and she said her career trajectory took an unexpected turn when she visited Bright Promise while still a student at Steubenville Catholic Central High School.

"I initially planned to study biochemistry and dentistry and was taking a psychology course at Central. We had a training day and came in to see what it was like at the School of Bright Promise," she recalled. "That one day changed my life."

Wright found herself very comfortable working with developmentally and intellectually disabled youth and volunteered as a teen, spending time with the students once a week and learning the staff members' jobs. She would graduate from Catholic Central in 2012 and obtain a Bachelor of Science degree at The Ohio State in 2016, followed by a Master of Education degree in applied behavioral analysis from the University of Cincinnati two years later.

Wright

She went on to work for a charter school in Columbus and Western Psychiatric at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, then she returned to work at Catholic Central and Bishop John King Mussio Jr. High School before circling back to where it all began at Bright Promise.

As a BCBA, she was responsible for reviewing students' strengths and deficits using assessments and developing programs to increase their skill development and acquisition, as well as determining the function, or the "why," of challenging behavior.

Wright is carrying those skills into her new position and said she was eager to get started.

"I'm thrilled! I believe that since I've been working as a BCBA for the past three years, I'd like to leverage that knowledge in my new role as director. I'm eager to apply these principles outside the classroom and integrate them with academics. My objective is to thoroughly analyze the deficits across different school districts and identify the areas with the greatest need."

Wright continued that being familiar with the Bright Promise staff and students was beneficial to her new role, and that she was thrilled to work with everyone as a team and benefit the 31 pupils at her school, in addition to assisting the local school districts the JCBDD serves.

"I will continue collaborating with the districts to identify areas requiring the most significant support based on assessments," she continued. "I am committed to maintaining a strong relationship with the staff and observing their success in implementing ABA at the School of Bright Promise. My goal is to foster positive relationships, instill confidence, and empower educators to excel in their roles."

Meanwhile, she enjoys spending time with family including four children ages 1 ½ to 9, but also relished seeing the students' faces as school began on Aug. 21 while having the opportunity to carry the school forward.

"I'm excited that life brought me full circle," she concluded.

The School of Bright Promise is Building Engagement

The School of Bright Promise is building engagement with staff and students and promoting the facility through a series of new efforts.

Education Director Sara Wright said since the school opened on Aug. 20, it has been touting its staff and 33 students both in the building and online.

"The first day, we had photos of students with props and we also began a staff spotlight. We choose a random unidentified staff member per week and outline their favorite things, fun facts, quotations and goals," Wright added. "The staff can respond in an all-staff chat on Microsoft Teams, then we announce the person and celebrate them all week to bolster staff engagement. We also celebrate with accolades of the staff from the team to post and read all week. It's all about staff appreciation."

Wright continued that the all-staff chat has prompted more involvement among the personnel and built closer relationships. She hopes to build upon that camaraderie even more by creating committees to add more festivities to Bright Promise.

"We've talked about creating a social committee and student engagement committee to bring fun activities to the building. On the first day, we had balloons, speakers and a bubble machine to welcome everyone back," Wright said. "I love to see the staff smiling, enjoying time with one another, and relying on each other for team opportunities."

The school has also started its own TikTok page and garnered at least 1,000 views of its first video on social media. It can be viewed at "SBP2526" and Wright said it was another way to promote Bright Promise in the community.

The School of Bright Promise is building engagement among its staff and promoting its school and students through a series of activities, including creating a social media presence on TikTok and forming committees to add fun events at the site. Pictured are staff members marking the first day of school.

Abilities Camp Offers Respite for Local Families

Children with developmental disabilities enjoyed a summer of fun and learning while their families received respite care at the Abilities Camp held at The School of Bright Promise.

The eight-week program ran from June 9-July 31 for kids ages 5-17 and included sessions in the morning and afternoon. Breakfast, lunch, a snack and transportation were provided and the camp was organized by Stanton Homes, Inc., of Steubenville with JCBDD providing the facilities. Participants had the option to attend throughout the week or during various days while their giving their families some time for respite.

Seven area teachers were staffed as counselors with eight children attending the morning session and about a dozen participating in the afternoon. Organizers said the participants were from Jefferson, Harrison and Columbiana counties and their day included a meal, fun in the gym, classroom time with music and art, and rotating among activity centers in the cafeteria. Officials hope to continue the camp and that it would grow bigger each year.

The Jefferson County Board of Developmental Disabilities collaborated with Stanton Homes, Inc., and OhioRISE (Resilience through Integrated Systems and Excellence) to provide an Abilities Camp for respite care to local families from June 9-July 31. Pictured is Lily Hooper, 5, taking a closer look at some plastic bugs during an insect-themed activity.

Counselor Michelle O'Karma said the youth worked on social-emotional and fine and gross motor skills while also having fun and forming friendships.

"This gives kids with disabilities a chance to learn skills and about making good choices," O'Karma continued. "The activities were geared to their ability and age group.

"Everything we do is hands-on through centers that included art, music, and sensory activities, plus they used the motor gym and outdoor playground and talked about their feelings through social-emotional learning (SEL). The kids enjoyed coming here and were excited for the next activity. They couldn't wait to come back."

Meanwhile, Stanton Homes provides residential and respite services as well as Adult Day Hab and transportation and officials were approached by OhioRISE (Resilience through Integrated Systems and Excellence) for assistance. OhioRISE is a Medicaid-managed care system provided by the Jefferson County Educational Service Center that coordinates services for children and youth with complex behavioral health and multisystem needs in an eight-county area, including Belmont, Carroll, Monroe, Harrison, Jefferson, Columbiana, Tuscarawas and Stark counties.

Brandy Bridges, director of operations for Stanton Homes, said OhioRISE officials were seeking respite provider services and Stanton Homes representatives reached out to the JCBDD for further discussion.

"We went to JCBDD and asked what needs there were in Jefferson County, and they said it was with children. We've been working with [JCBDD Superintendent] Michael Zinno and [Service and Support Administration Director] Lynette Ekey," Bridges added. "Stanton Homes created the camp to use respite in a more structured way and it gave parents a little break during summer while keeping the kids engaged."

"We agreed to open up the school," Zinno commented. "Our role was to provide the space and we assisted in helped coordinate with Stanton Homes and OhioRISE for [Stanton Homes] to be a certified provider in this area."

JCESC OhioRISE Director Lindsay Brandon said her program was responsible for referring children it serves to the camp.

"Anyone in the OhioRISE program is eligible for behavioral health respite and Stanton Homes has become a provider," Brandon said. "We make the referrals to Stanton Homes."

YOUTH (Continued from Front)

"They really liked it. They said they enjoyed the laughter, friendships, and different experiences they received," Grimm continued. "They build basic work skills and migrate into future employment."

Officials added that three graduating seniors transitioned directly into employment at Franciscan University and Kroger last year and one of this year's members was also joining the job front.

"We have had students move on and get jobs and currently one has shown great work skills and is transitioning into employment," Grimm noted.

A few of the young workers shared how much they enjoyed the experience.

Indian Creek High School senior Kaleb Manion said he liked painting and making money, adding that he hoped to use his savings to visit the Kansas City Chiefs' training camp next year. This was his second year to take part and he said he has learned a lot.

"I learned about great work [skills], working together, and making new friends," Manion commented.

Zayne Carlson, a recent graduate of Toronto High and the Jefferson County Joint Vocational School, said he enjoyed painting, organizing at the Karaffa Center and learning skills to be employed. He was planning to get a job in the near future.

Meanwhile, Steubenville High School senior Katelin Russell was equally enthusiastic about gaining experience from the program.

"It's fun," she said. "I learn a lot about work skills and making friends, and [I liked] painting."

Summer of Fun

Kids and Adults Enjoy Fairs, Festivals and More...