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Choices' Voices

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Profile in self-advocacy

When you are fighting for your own independence, you need two things, dogged determination and a persistent voice. Latisha Martin has an abundance of both, which makes for one strong self-advocate and a woman who has won more independence for herself.

Latisha lived many years with housemates, where she advocated for them and herself, but she always had the dream of ultimate independence for her ... living in her own apartment. She realized that dream when she moved into her own apartment in April 2019. As with so many dreams, there can be obstacles along the way. Her obstacle was right at her own front door when she realized she would not be able to turn the door handle and push the door open at the same time, as doing so could result in damage to not only the door, but to her powered wheelchair as well.

She submitted a Reasonable Accommodation Request to her landlord for an automatic door opener, which was denied in July 2019. With the support of Choices' staff Jennifer McGlaughlin and Mindy Warner and Lisa Bluhm from the Montgomery County Board of DDS, she submitted a second Request, which was denied in September 2019. She appealed that decision, only to be denied in October 2019.

Lisa, Latisha's SSA, contacted the Miami Valley Fair Housing Center, which submitted a complaint on her behalf, which led to a mediation process in March 2020, supported by Choices and County Board staff. In July 2020 Latisha entered her apartment for the first time using her automatic door opener. The owners of the apartment complex are now installing automatic door openers on all doors leading to common areas in the complex, allowing her full access to all amenities.

Dogged determination. Persistent voice. Independence no longer a dream deferred!



Recognition and Retirement

The recognition came in October for Executive Director Tom Weaver when he was honored by the Ohio Provider Resource Association (OPRA) for decades of dedicated and innovative leadership at the local, regional and state levels, including his 25 years of service with OPRA, where he helped shape public policy and budgets, serving on numerous committees, as Board vice chair for two years and chair for three years. OPRA is the statewide association of 177 profit and nonprofit organizations providing services to more than 45,000 Ohioans with intellectual/developmental disabilities, advocating for availability of programs, services and funding. He was also a leader in advocating for value-based, community services in the statewide CREST Network.

The retirement will come June 30, 2021, when he steps aside from his role as Choices' Executive Director after more than 35 years of service. An in-depth look at Tom's exceptional career and advocacy on behalf of people with developmental disabilities will be included in the next issue of Choices' newsletter, at which time the new executive director will be introduced, following a statewide search.

Tom began as a program director in 1985 and assumed the reigns as executive director in 1987 during the transition of residential services provided by what was then the Montgomery County Board of Mental Retardation to Choices. From those first three homes and one apartment in Montgomery County with 15 staff and 23 clients, Choices has expanded to provide an array of residential, adult day and other services

Continued on page 3

State honors for Taiwana

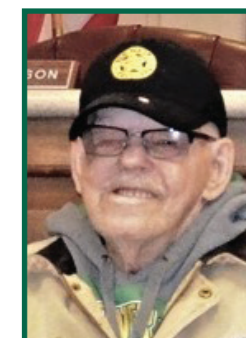
Taiwana Johnson has been one of Choices' most dedicated professionals for 13 years. That dedication was recognized when she was awarded the Front-Line Supervisor Award for District 2 during the Ohio Provider Resource Association virtual Fall Conference. She serves as Program Administrator at our Mill Trace and Wendhaven homes, where she is known for her open communication with clients, staff and families, conflict-resolution and leadership skills.

She was surprised to learn about her OPRA award. "Winning this award means so much to me," she shares. "It proves that with hard work and dedication, anything can be achieved. I would have never thought that I would win such an amazing award!"



Remembering Henry

We honor the memory of Henry Flack upon his passing in December. At 95, he had the distinction of being the oldest person we served. He is missed by all, especially by his housemates and staff at our Maple Street home (*Eaton.*)



Martin Center update

It's a beehive of activity as renovations continue at our Martin Center (formerly the George C. Martin Funeral Home,) with offices and programs on track to be opened in February. Nearly 2000 square feet have been set aside for an expansion of our Adult Day Services programs, as well as for enhancing our current programs. (*See page 3 for more information.*) The Center will also provide us space to expand training options for our staff, as well as staff from other agencies.

Our Adult Day Services support team and our Transportation team are moved in to their new offices, opening up space in our administrative offices at 1651 Needmore Road, which we will continue to operate along with the Martin Center. We will be moving our Human Resources and Compliance teams to the lower level at the Center. Our Nursing Team will move at a later date.

Visit our Choices and Partners websites for more information about open houses at our new Center, along with information about an auction of art, furniture and other items from the Martin Funeral Home.

Moving forward *by Tom Weaver, Executive Director*

I don't consider myself a writer. Nonetheless, over the years I have been encouraged and cajoled by a not-to-be-named source to put together some thoughts to share with you in each of our newsletters. Sometimes I know you have seen me struggle in the words I have strewn together. Hopefully, you have seen the many times I have been inspired, because despite my writing ability or lack thereof, there is so much to be inspired by in this uniquely caring, generous, creative and deeply dedicated organization.

And so I come to you one of my final times, still cajoled by that not-named source, and I am struggling still ... struggling to be current and on message for what is happening now ... struggling because no matter how hard it has been for me sometimes to write a message, I know that not being cajoled again, not being here to share whatever words that do come to me ... to share them with you, my Choices family, is a loss I do not want to think too much about.

And so, my thoughts on moving forward ... on each of us as individuals and collectively as this remarkable Choices family ... on moving forward with strength ... with hope ... and with love.

A year ago, I was in Portland, Oregon visiting one of our sons, his wife and our new grandbaby. On the news was something, maybe a little vague at the time, something about this possibly dangerous virus that was finding its way into our country ... COVID 19. Little could I know at that time just how much that news would end up changing not just my life, but the world as we had known it. It is 12 months later and day by day the news continues to be challenging.

We are still trying to adjust to wearing masks, constantly washing our hands, having new words added to our vocabulary – social distancing, virtual meetings, zoom, pandemic. No attending sports events. No music concerts. No leisuring enjoying a meal with friends in a favorite restaurant. No hugs and cooing with new little babies. No holding hands with loved ones, even as they take their final breaths. No eulogies, music, no shared tears and grief – no gathering to say final farewells. Stay at home – just way too much staying at home.

But we go on. I was shown how we go on, how we get through each minute of each day, by the people I have been so privileged to work alongside, the remarkable people who provide the care and support that makes us who we are at Choices. Resilient. That is what they have shown me, still show me. Take something like this thing called COVID

Self-Advocates continue awareness despite COVID

The Voices of Greene County self-advocacy group continues their many efforts, making modifications as necessary for safety and health during COVID. They continue to host their weekly meetings, along with Voices Matter of Montgomery County, via Zoom, as well as making presentations to Transition students when requested.

In September they presented a Disability Awareness zoom presentation to over 100 third year medical students at Wright State University. They are working with the

that threatens to not only take our lives but our humanity, as big and as scary as it is, take it and put it alongside these remarkable people I am surrounded by and that old phrase of 'making lemonade from lemons' becomes one of the most beautiful phrases I know.

How creative they are, from our Direct Support Professionals to our management and administrative teams. There have been those short drive-by trips for clients so they can joyfully wave from cars as families waved back to them from front doors, these small moments to be cherished until the day that waves from cars and front doors are replaced with hugs. At our Hornwood home an outdoor movie screen was purchased, along with blow up furniture, a small swimming pool and a snow cone machine. A flower garden was planted at Lincoln Park. Student volunteers from Carroll High School practiced social distancing as they spruced up the yard at Gardenside. There was a new trampoline at Village Green. There was holiday decorating, videos of happy dancers and so much more.

And now there are vaccines, and with them comes reason to hope. We still mourn the client and employees we lost to this cursed virus. We support the clients and the staff who became sick. We honor all those who never wavered, not one time, in being with clients, in doing what was needed to keep them healthy. We have 60% of our staff who have the first dose of the vaccine and almost all of our clients.

And so we move forward. We move forward steeled in our determination to continue to serve no matter what course this pandemic may still take. We move forward with laughter, joy, dreams, goals, with love and respect for each other. And so I too will move forward. I will put aside my angst in trying to string together words to share with you as that becomes the responsibility of our new executive director this summer.

I move forward, as we all do in our lives ... a time and place for everything. This is the time and this is the place where I try to sum up 35 years of my life that I have walked with you, our remarkable staff, board, clients, families, volunteers and friends. Even if I were a great writer, there are no words to let you know the depth of my respect and care for each of you. You have always, always, lifted me up, inspired me, encouraged me, made me better than I could have ever been if you had not been by my side. Do think kindly of me and know I always tried to do my best for you.

Beavercreek Police Department for a Disability Awareness training for Citizens on Community Patrol. They continue to meet with Miami Valley Transportation to provide input on adaptive transportation, including providing feedback about services provided by Greene Cats.

The two self-advocacy groups are providing input for new statewide advocacy centers in Ohio for people with disabilities who are crime victims. They also partnered for a statewide video thank you to Direct Support Professionals.

Recognition and Retirement

... continued from page 1

for more than 400 individuals in Butler, Clark, Greene, Madison, Montgomery, Preble and Warren counties, operating a fleet of approximately 70 vehicles, with more than 300 professional staff providing direct care and administrative support.

With his retirement, he and his wife Kathy plan to pack up their RV and head to some of those unique and interesting places they have been reading about in travel brochures. With the Tom we know, no doubt there will be great new adventures in this next part of his journey! Just think of him trying to decide where he is going to park that RV every night. Look out, America, here he comes!



Torry is pictured with fellow Optimists Sue Armstrong, Bob Duffy and Myron Rheaume. Myron is also a member of our Choices Board of Trustees.

Torry Brown has the distinction of being the first president of the first Optimist Club in the nation to be led by members with intellectual/developmental disabilities, the Greenmont Optimist Club, which was sponsored by the Greene Optimist Club and Kettering Noon Optimist. That distinction is one of the factors that led to him being inducted into the Developmental Disabilities Hall of Fame in virtual ceremonies hosted by the Montgomery County Board of Developmental Disabilities Services in October. He was inducted in the area of Advocacy. In addition to his leadership role with the Optimists, he has also been a leading voice in the self-advocacy group, Voices Matter Montgomery County.

Torry is excited to share that an Optimist organization from Iowa has heard about the Greenmont Optimists and has contacted them for information on how they started and how they are continuing to be an active and energized Optimist Club during all the challenges of COVID-19.

(The Hall of Fame induction ceremonies and Erin Ritchey Memorial Awards can be viewed by going to https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UefyNXg_f70&feature=emb_logo.)

New space and new opportunities for Adult Day Services

It's a new year and new changes for the participants and staff in our Adult Day Services programs. According to Fun-Fit Director Nancy Viets, upcoming open houses will showcase not only the space but service options that will be available in the new location. "Following the open houses and tours, and after we have met all codes and regulations from the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities, we will be providing programming with individuals from each Fun-Fit community location at least one day a week," she says. "We are also hoping that by word of mouth and with the open houses to get some new participants for the programming that will be available at the Center. Our goal is to offer facility-based day programming with staff based at the Center Monday through Friday as a stand-alone day program and to continue with our current Fun-Fit programs in the community." The area will also include office space for Adult Day Services staff.

Opportunities at the Martin Center will begin with the traditional day services programming, including exercising, arts and crafts, gardening, computers, dancing, karaoke, hiking, board games, cooking and possibly music therapy. The Day Services space at the Center will include a game room set up with ping pong, foosball, basketball, and video games. There will be an innovative sensory room with the latest technology that will provide space for quiet time, to include an aquarium and separate television. Participants will have the option to select their own schedules for participating at the Martin Center and at their community-based Fun-Fit location, such as choosing to attend Martin Center programs one or two days a week and their community program (*such as the Huber Heights YMCA and others*) another one or two days a week. "Once we are up and running with these efforts, we would like to expand to include Career Discovery, Career Exploration and Vocational Habilitation," continues Nancy. "I can see participants receiving training in janitorial and shredding services and possibly assisting the café area."

Community-based Fun-Fit programs closed in March 2020 following state mandates and guidelines, re-opened in June, and then closed again on November 20 due to a surge in COVID cases. At that time, Fun-Fit served 166 individuals in Butler, Clark, Montgomery and Warren counties. Since that time we have been providing services to approximately 60 individuals, while carefully maintaining COVID-19 safety requirements. Staff have purchased and delivered activity kits, held small group exercise classes at the Choices' office and have tapped in to Zoom activities provided by the Montgomery County Board of Developmental Disabilities.

Community-based Fun-Fit programs for four or less participants were scheduled to resume on February 1, depending upon changes due to COVID-19. Full programming for 10-12 participants is planned by Spring, to include full participation at the Martin Center.

More information about Adult Day Services is available by contacting Nancy Viets at nviets@ciclob.com.