

# 65<sup>TH</sup> touchstone

## ANNIVERSARY

**A quarterly publication providing the latest news and information for individuals with disabilities, families, friends and our community.**

## Building a brighter future together

For 65 years, Stone Belt has empowered individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities to have a voice, a sense of belonging, and a chance to realize their dreams. In partnership with the community, Stone Belt built a pathway to self-actualization for the thousands of people it has served.

On March 10, 1959, Stone Belt Council was incorporated. Founding families and others from Indiana University and the broader community started a movement that put Stone Belt on the trajectory to where it is today.

Stone Belt continues to advocate on behalf of individuals with developmental disabilities and their families to ensure the rights earned

over the past six and half decades persevere. Since its inception, Stone Belt has worked toward connecting clients with family, friends, and the community so their lives can be fuller and more meaningful. Regardless of where the future leads us, Stone Belt's core belief in the right to self-determination will continue to permeate all we do.



**Stone Belt Now:** Photo taken outside taken at the Tenth Street facility in Bloomington.



**Stone Belt Then:** Students stand in front of the sign posted off Tenth Street during the site dedication in August 1968.

**1958** – The Stone Belt Council for Retarded Children was organized in the basement of a church by nine families who wanted to provide education for their children.

**1970** – Stone Belt opened one of the state's first group homes.

**1985** – The Habilitation Program, known today as Employment Fundamentals, encouraged clients to volunteer, shop, and pursue recreational activities.

**1997** – Stone Belt began offering Supported Living options, allowing individuals more control of their lives.

**2000** – Stone Belt hired a full-time psychiatrist to provide clients with clinical services.

**2004** – Stone Belt opened Milestones Clinical and Health Resources in Bloomington.

**2016** – Stone Belt Community Employment received funding for pre-employment transition services for students.

**2017** – Stone Belt began offering a trailblazing spiritual support program for individuals with disabilities.

# Contacting Your Legislators

Every Indiana citizen has a state representative and a state senator. To find your legislators go to: <http://iga.in.gov/legislative/find-legislators/>.

## In Washington:

To express your concerns about federal issues, contact these legislators.

- Senator Todd Young  
202-224-5623 in Washington, D.C.  
or 317-226-6700 in Indianapolis  
[www.young.senate.gov/contact/email-todd](http://www.young.senate.gov/contact/email-todd)
- Senator Mike Braun  
202-224-4814 in Washington, D.C.  
or 317-822-8240 in Indianapolis  
[www.braun.senate.gov/contact-mike](http://www.braun.senate.gov/contact-mike)
- Representative Erin Houchin  
202-225-5315 in Washington, D.C.  
or 812-288-3999 in Jeffersonville  
<http://houchin.house.gov/contact>
- Representative Greg Pence  
202-225-3021 in Washington, D.C.  
or 812-799-5230 in Columbus  
<http://pence.house.gov/contact>

FROM THE CEO

# It's a time to celebrate

A new year has begun, and what an exciting year it will be. To start this new year, I would like to take a moment to reflect back to our beginnings.

I recently heard from Carolyn Rhodes, the daughter of Gordon and Mary Phillips. She contacted me when her mother passed away and shared many documents and stories about Stone Belt's inception. The Phillips' had a son, Timmy, who was born with significant disabilities. Timmy went to an institution called Muscatatuck when he was two and a half. He passed away in July of 1958, just before his third birthday. His parents wanted something more than Muscatatuck for other children.

Mary gathered the names of local families with children with disabilities and used that list to call a meeting on November 9, 1958. She found others, including the Smith and Abbitt families (whose daughter we still serve today), who also wanted something more for their children. She invited these families to a meeting, and only four months later, on March 10, 1959, Stone Belt became a legal entity and began serving nine students in a classroom at the First Baptist Church. Through the efforts of these families—and the help of the community—the lives of future generations were changed for the better.

Over the last 65 years, Stone Belt evolved and changed in ways our founders probably never even dreamed of at the time. We currently support over 1,100 individuals through thirteen different programs in three communities.

As we begin to celebrate our 65th year, it's important to reflect on how we got here and remember our history so we can continue to evolve and change and make lives more inclusive and meaningful for those who want and need our support. Because we believe in the uniqueness, worth, and right to self-determination of every individual, all of us at Stone Belt will continue to strive to meet our mission, in partnership with the community, to prepare, empower, and support people with developmental disabilities and their families to participate fully in the life of the community.

I want to start by celebrating Bedford and Lawrence County. The Arc of Lawrence County (LARC) was formed in 1972 and thus began a cooperative relationship with Stone Belt to provide services in

the county. These services have grown and evolved over the years, starting in a house on Norton Lane and now offering a full array of services to over 100 individuals.

And I want to celebrate Columbus, who joined the Stone Belt team when we began offering employment services in 1998. We had no permanent location, just staff working out of their cars, helping clients find jobs in the community. Today, we offer community-based residential, day, employment, and clinical services to over 150 individuals.

Finally, I want to celebrate Milestones, our clinical and professional services. For years, we struggled to find suitable mental health support for people who also had developmental disabilities. So, in 2004, Maureen Gahan brought her vision to life by opening our Milestones clinic and offering psychiatry and therapy services. We moved our behavior clinicians and nurses to this new location and began to serve many clients throughout Indiana who also struggled to find these much-needed supports. As all our locations have done, the clinic has evolved to offer a wide array of therapeutic services.

Many thanks to Leslie Green for documenting Stone Belt's history through her 12 Chapters Project. I encourage you to visit our website, [www.stonebelt.org](http://www.stonebelt.org), and click the About tab to find the 12 Chapters Project. Chapters One and Two tell the history of services and supports from the late 1950s to the present.

So, I hope you join me in remembering our past and looking forward to our future as we turn 65! We will spend this next year celebrating. Please follow our social media for updates on all the events we are planning to honor this "milestone" birthday.

Warmly,

*Bitta DeWees*



**Bitta DeWees**  
**Chief Executive**  
**Officer**

# Home life must be self-directed

**By Genna Lynn**  
**Executive Residential Director**

One of Stone Belt's Seven Principles of Service states, "Home life must be self-directed." In 1974, Stone Belt built one of the first group homes and has been helping individuals with developmental disabilities find a place to call home ever since.

In the 1970s, Stone Belt played a significant role in closing down state-operated institutions by providing community-based options to those residents. Not only did Stone Belt provide a place for these individuals to live in the community, but it also gave local families a place for their loved ones to reside. Throughout the next decade, Stone Belt would continue finding homes for individuals with developmental disabilities.

Stone Belt built six more group homes, including three in Bedford, in the early 90s. This construction was the most expansive growth phase Stone Belt had ever undertaken. Then, in 1997, Stone Belt clients living at Travis House were among the first individuals to experience supported living. This new model enabled individuals to pay rent and move into homes with fewer roommates and more personal control. By providing services through the Supported Living program, Stone Belt encourages clients to take a step toward independence and a self-directed life.

Unfortunately, after surviving the pandemic—and all of the challenges related to the epidemic—it became evident that Stone Belt's supervised group living program could not continue to sustain operations for eleven homes.

Stone Belt made the difficult decision to close Blackstone House, one of its group homes in Bloomington, and to



***Then: In 1987, Stone Belt built and opened three new group homes, and in 1992-93, six more homes were built, including three in Bedford.***



***Thanks to Supported Living staff, clients can participate in activities like the Special Olympics. Gregory Maxwell, an experienced skier and racer, competed in the advanced slalom and advanced giant slalom at the 2024 Special Olympics Games in Indiana.***

transfer the residents to alternative settings. As luck would have it, several of the ladies living at Blackstone wanted to move into the less restrictive setting provided by supported living, so it made sense to close down Blackstone. The last client moved out on April 1, 2023.

Hite House, another group home in Bloomington, was also closed in 2023. Hite was difficult to staff due to its rural location and expensive to manage. Its five residents wanted to move into supported living where they would be provided more independence; therefore, it made sense to close it down. The last two clients living at the Hite House moved out just before Christmas last year.

Stone Belt now manages nine group homes. Three of the homes are in Bedford and currently provide care for 16 individuals. The remaining six homes in Bloomington currently provide care for 34 clients.

Despite the challenges facing Residential Services currently, Stone Belt is dedicated to its Principle of Service stating, "Home life must be self-directed" and will continue providing quality living experiences in the community as long as they are needed.

# Employment is a fundamental right

**By Breanne Siniard**  
**Director of Community Employment**

Stone Belt believes employment is a fundamental part of adult life and has been providing employee opportunities to its clients since 1985. The program grew quickly and successfully using the best known practices of the time. In the beginning, dozens of individuals with significant disabilities contributed their skills and talents to local businesses. Stone Belt developed a reputation for the high quality of its employment programs and was called upon to advise other agencies who wanted to start employment programs.

William (Billy) McGovern is one of the individuals benefitting from Stone Belt's Community Employment Services. His mom says being able to work in the community was a defining factor in Billy's life. His first community job was at the Pizza Hut on North College Avenue in Bloomington. Billy worked at the West Pizza Hut for several years.

In 1995, Billy began working as a bagger at the Marsh supermarket, located within walking distance from his house. He struggled a little initially, but with the help of Stone Belt's Community Employment Services and Vocational Rehabilitation, he persevered and ended up working at the grocery store until it closed in 2017. Billy then applied to Kroger and started working at the Jackson Creek Kroger before transferring to the Kinser Pike store when it opened. He worked for Kroger until his retirement earlier this year.



***Now: Billy and his brother Steve posed for a photo before Billy retired from Kroger earlier this year.***



***Then: Billy was a valued employee at Marsh from 1998 until the grocery store closed in 2017.***

"Billy has been so blessed to have had wonderful, supportive co-workers through the years," said Diana McGovern. "The help he received from Stone Belt's Community Employment Services was instrumental in providing Billy with the opportunity to work in the community for the past 40 years."

Stone Belt continues to be a steadfast advocate for integrating people with disabilities into the workforce. Today, a dedicated team of employment consultants collaborate with over 65 businesses. In the current fiscal year, there have already been 26 new placements among well-known establishments across Monroe, Lawrence, and Bartholomew Counties.

Stone Belt's Community Employment Services has set ambitious goals for the future. The employment team hopes to consistently increase the number of placements in 2024. Stone Belt also seeks to elevate awareness about the significance of its work and the positive ripple effect it has on the community. By educating the public about the transformative power of inclusivity, Stone Belt aims to foster a culture that recognizes every individual's inherent value and potential for employment.

# Empowering the Future

## The Significance of an Estate Plan for Families of People with Developmental Disabilities

Families of loved ones with developmental disabilities often grapple with the uncertainty of their loved one's long-term needs. It can be difficult to look at our own mortality and think beyond immediate caregiving responsibilities to plan for a loved one's financial well-being in the long term. An estimated 70% of Americans don't even have a will.

One of the primary benefits of making an estate plan is the assurance that financial support will be available throughout your loved one's lifetime. A few things we find important to consider:

### Special Needs Trusts:

A special needs trust is a crucial component for families of someone with a developmental disability. It allows you to set aside funds for future care without jeopardizing eligibility for government assistance programs. Thus ensuring that your loved one's quality of life is maintained even after you can no longer provide support.

### Create a Legacy:

You may also consider creating a legacy of generosity through charitable giving. Preparing a well-considered estate plan will help you determine the best way to plan for the life of your loved one and allow you the opportunity to ensure the future success of Stone Belt.

Creating an estate plan is a commitment to securing a brighter future for your family member with developmental disabilities. Empower yourself to face the future confidently, knowing you have taken every measure to guarantee your loved one's security. Because you may have specific needs, you will want to contact an attorney. With the advice of your independent attorney, you can create a customized plan that truly fulfills your unique family, healthcare, estate, and planning goals.



# MILESTONES

CLINICAL & HEALTH RESOURCES

*a division of Stone Belt*



***Milestones Clinical and Health Resources provides clinical services to children, adolescents, and adults with disabilities.***

Twenty years ago, Milestones, a division of Stone Belt, opened its doors in Bloomington in a former medical office facility on South Adams Street. The intent was to provide much-needed services in the community.

In 2000, Stone Belt put its belief that positive supports provide the best long-term results into action by contracting with a psychiatrist when it was discovered people with disabilities did not have access to appropriate mental health services in the community. Stone Belt soon learned there was a severe lack of mental health services throughout the community, so they began offering the services to the community.

The need to provide mental health services increased significantly. In 2004, Stone Belt opened Milestones Clinical and Health Resources, which quickly became a vital community resource specializing in providing care to individuals of all ages.

Fast forward to 2023, Milestones provided Behavior Management Services to 105 clients, and 72 received Wellness Coordination Services. They also offered Recreational Therapy Services to 19 clients while hosting events such as prom, Day of Fun, and Trunk-or-Treat.

Happy Anniversary, Milestones! We can't wait to see what happens in the next 20 years.

## CORPORATE SPONSORSHIP

For information on corporate sponsorship, visit [www.stonebelt.org/giving](http://www.stonebelt.org/giving). If you have questions or need assistance, please contact Director of Community Engagement Adam Hamel at (812) 332-2168, ext. 269, or [ahamel@stonebelt.org](mailto:ahamel@stonebelt.org).

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# Save the Date for Belt Out Loud!

Stone Belt is proud to announce the Fourth Annual Belt Out Loud! Benefit Concert—featuring Busman's Holiday—on May 25 at the Buskirk-Chumley Theater in Bloomington. The show is sponsored by IU Credit Union and Old National Bank.

Busman's Holiday is Lewis and Addison Rogers, brothers of melodic charm and ecstatic showmanship. A full brass band will join them for this special concert. Be sure to look for their new album coming out in February.

**Special thanks to Belt Out Loud!  
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