

touchstone

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

Stone Belt appoints new CEO

In January, Stone Belt Board of Directors named Bitta DeWees as its next chief executive officer. Leslie Green, Stone Belt's current CEO will retire on April 1, 2022. DeWees is well-known and deeply respected by many inside and outside of the organization. She brings 31 years of experience with Stone Belt and the field of disability services to her new role.

DeWees was selected by the board's search committee after a thorough selection process, which included consideration of several outside candidates.

"The depth of experience and working knowledge of the many services provided made her the clear and unanimous choice for Stone Belt's next leader," said Board of

Directors' President Dan Lodge-Rigal. "She also brings with her an overarching concern for clients, their families, and staff."

As chief operating officer for Stone Belt, DeWees currently oversees executive program directors and works closely with Stone Belt's chief financial officer on developing budgets and ensuring the fiscal viability of revenue-generating programs. DeWees also coordinates with Stone Belt's human resources director to assure staff are recruited, trained, developed, compensated, and evaluated.

DeWees has participated in many state committees to advance services for people with disabilities in Indiana and is a strong advocate at the state level for progressive



Bitta DeWees will become Stone Belt's CEO on April 1, 2022.

public policies. She is widely regarded by her state-wide colleagues as one of the most knowledgeable people in her field.

DeWees began her career at Stone Belt in 1990 and has advanced in the agency numerous times serving as an employment consultant, team leader, teams coordinator, director of employment, director of service development, and chief operating officer.

Through her years, DeWees has held fast to her belief that people with disabilities can work. She has lived Stone Belt's mission in all she has done. Countless people she has supported either directly or through her leadership have improved lives because of her efforts.

Congratulations to Bitta DeWees on becoming Stone Belt's fourth chief executive officer.



Bitta DeWees has worked closely with employment partners like Cook Medical Group to ensure individuals with developmental disabilities can work and contribute in their communities.

FROM THE CEO

Passion & Perserverance=Legacy

By Leslie Green

This will be my last full article for *Touchstone* before I retire on April 1 of this year. So I want to use it for a bit of reflecting on my 42 ½ years in my chosen profession—and I am really glad I chose it. My husband and I arrived in Bloomington in 1979 for what was supposed to be a two-year stint for him to get an advanced degree at IU. It didn't take long for me to realize how much I enjoyed supporting individuals with developmental disabilities. In fact, I came to love it and I never left. All of the positions I have held at Stone Belt have given me the privilege and honor to serve this outstanding organization and the people we support. In unique and rewarding ways, I have had the opportunity to see things from a 10,000 foot perspective as well as from the ground level.

I have worked in this field during what I believe has been the most exciting and empowering time in all of history for people with developmental disabilities. Societal changes and personal empowerment have transformed the lives of many individuals with disabilities from living in exclusion to being fully included in the community. I am happy to have played a role, however small, in helping these things come to pass.

At the time I started, community organizations like Stone Belt were pretty small – created by families that wanted a better life for their sons and daughters with disabilities. Before the 1950s thousands of people were shoved out of sight from society into large institutions. Those who stayed home with families did not have many options. So Stone Belt and similar organizations were established to provide a safe and caring place for children and adults with disabilities to learn and be accepted.

By the 1980s things changed significantly as Stone Belt became less of a safe haven and more of a launching pad. That's when things got really exciting. New approaches for supporting people in schools, workplaces, neighborhoods, and communities became prominent, demonstrating the valuable social roles of people with disabilities could take. Our mission statement, written and adopted in 1990, reflects our purpose to "prepare, empower, and support people with disabilities to fully participate in the community." It remains our driving force even today.

Being a part of these organizational and societal changes created a passion for my work that I would not have imagined in 1979. Who wouldn't be excited when they can witness someone earn their first paycheck or obtain a key to their first apartment or home. People we support are a critical part of the supply chain for life-saving medical devices.



Leslie Green has served as CEO of Stone Belt since 2000 and she has held a variety of leadership roles within the organization since joining the agency in 1979.

They contribute as volunteers to strengthen the safety net against hunger and better the natural environment. They produce and sell beautiful art. Professionals such as myself have reoriented our approaches in supporting people with disabilities to be person-centered and self-directed. While I am a vocal advocate for the people we support, I take my lead from these self-advocates as they create more empowered lives for themselves.

I count myself among the most fortunate of people. Not only have I had fulfilling work that I love, I also have worked with some incredible people. The senior leaders that I directly supervise share my passion for inclusion and empowerment, which they imbue to their staff. A committed board provides significant support and guidance as we weather through the challenges that have come before us.

So I leave knowing that our ship is on a good course. Much remains to be done, including increasing employment opportunities for people with developmental disabilities and elevating the status and the pay for Direct Support Professionals; but the uniqueness, worth, and right to self-determination of every individual will continue to be the bedrock of Stone Belt's belief system for years to come.

With warmest regards,

Contacting Your Legislators

In Indiana:

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
- Senator Mike Braun
202-224-4814 in Washington, D.C.
or 317-822-8240 in Indianapolis
www.braun.senate.gov/contact-mike
- Representative Trey Hollingsworth
202-225-5315 in Washington, D.C.
or 812-288-3999 in Jeffersonville
<http://hollingsworth.house.gov/contact/email>
- Representative Greg Pence
202-225-3021 in Washington, D.C.
or 812-799-5230 in Columbus
<http://pence.house.gov/contact>

Bacteria—The good, the bad, and the ugly

By Eryn McCabe

Lifelong Learning Room 3 Instructor

Lifelong Learning's Moving Forward (Room 3) class, and other Lifelong Learning guests, were visited by Indiana University Science Professor, JP Gerdt along with two of his graduate students, Zhiya (Troy) Zang and Soniya Rayi. They brought in items and equipment for the class to perform experiments and learn about bacteria.

During their first visit, the class learned about good and bad bacteria. To show the difference, participants mixed yeast, water, and sugar together in a bottle. A balloon was then placed on top of the bottle before shaking everything up. To the delight of the class, the balloon began to expand rapidly with the gas created by the chemical reaction.

The next experiment required the class to get their hands dirty. Professor Gerdt and his graduate students helped everyone to individually mix ingredients together to make bread dough. The dough was placed into bread tins and wrapped for everyone to take their dough home to bake.

The third part of the experiment allowed everyone to look through a microscope at the mixture. Classroom participants could either look through a microscope lense or

watch through a connected monitor.

The class embarked on another experiment about how good bacteria is used. This time the class made unsweetened yogurt by mixing together milk and a little bit of yogurt. The mixtures were sealed up and put into a warm, water bath overnight to help the culture in the yogurt grow. The next day, the class was able to take home the yogurt they had made.

Professor Gerdt then passed out petri dishes and swabs to everyone. These petri dishes were for growing bacteria. The class went around swabbing objects and surfaces to see what bacteria was growing on them. Then they rubbed their swabs onto the petri dish and covered them up. Everything was placed in a tote to keep them safe and allow the bacteria time to grow.



Stone Belt's Associate Employment First Director Eric Ford and Riley Hawn learn about bacteria as part of an experiment.

“Getting my hands dirty was my favorite part.”

– Riley Hawn

A week later, Professor Gerdt, Zhiya Zang, and Soniya Rayi returned to Stone Belt to check on the petri dishes. Terri's bacteria was white and fuzzy. Tom's grew two spots, one white with a black center and one that was just white. Both Cindy and Cheyenne's bacteria grew little, milky white spots.

Room 3 and guests really enjoyed these visits with Professor Gerdt and his graduate (or “rad” students as the participants referred to them). They enjoyed seeing bacteria up close and were able to make a connection to the impact bacteria, both good and bad, has on everyday life.



Indiana University Graduate Student Zhiya (Troy) Zang helps Julia Adams mix together yeast, sugar, and water as part of a science experiment about bacteria.

DONOR SPOTLIGHT

Stone Belt receives donation from 100+ Women Who Care



In December, members of the *Bloomington and Monroe County 100+ Women Who Care* presented Stone Belt's Chief Executive Officer, Leslie Green, with a check for \$13,150. Stone Belt was selected to receive support from the local *100+ Women Who Care* organization on November 3 during their meeting after hearing a presentation given by Mary Anne Sterling (Stone Belt advocate/donor). Stone Belt will also receive a \$5,000 match from the Schulze Foundation.

The money will be used to renovate the cafeteria at Stone Belt's 10th Street location in Bloomington. Plans are underway to convert the existing space into a common room. This project would not be possible without the funding provided by this group.

100+ Women Who Care is a giving circle composed of women in Bloomington and Monroe County who have joined together to support local nonprofit organizations. The idea is simple: four meetings per year to generate thousands in support for local causes. One hundred percent of funds go to support local agencies like Stone Belt.

CORPORATE SPONSORSHIP

Becoming a corporate partner is a premiere way to show support for people with disabilities and is vital in helping Stone Belt staff and clients reach beyond what current resources allow. For more information on becoming a corporate sponsor, visit www.stonebelt.org/giving. If you have questions, please contact Development Manager Adam Hamel at (812) 332-2168, ext. 269, or ahamel@stonebelt.org.

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Why I Give...

By Trish Sterling

I grew up in a family that valued giving back and set an example by their humble generosity. When I moved to Bloomington, I knew that the best way to learn about the community was to get involved. While my children were young I tended to be involved with organizations that revolved around them.



TRISH STERLING,
Stone Belt Board
of Directors

Over the years I learned more about Stone Belt and all the wonderful resources

they provide to people with developmental disabilities and their families. I have been a supporter for years. When I joined the board five years ago, I was impressed by the staff's daily and genuine commitment to help their clients live their best life.

I have so much respect for Stone Belt's management, its responsible spending and its ability to make the absolute most out of every dollar donated. I am so grateful for what I and my family have that, to me, giving back is a duty and a privilege. I give because more people in Southern Indiana need to know the Stone Belt story, one I enjoy sharing whenever I can. I give because I want Stone Belt to continue to succeed for generations to come.

Please consider making a donation to Stone Belt so that it may continue to prepare, empower, and support people with developmental disabilities and their families to participate fully in the life of our community.

Employment Services: A Providers Perspective

By MaryEllen Noe
*Associate Director of Community
Employment*

Employment service providers benefit both an individual seeking employment as well as a business looking to hire employees. Employment providers match the talents of individuals to a business's needs for long term success. In the current job market, there is a vast number of openings as well as numerous talented individuals that want to work. Tapping into an employment service provider can greatly benefit an individual seeking employment and business leaders. This in turn promotes inclusion in the workforce and community.

Entering the employment field can be nerve-racking and an anxiety producing experience for individuals. If you have a disability this process can seem even more stressful or confusing. Luckily, individuals can contact their local office of Vocational Rehabilitation



for assistance. Individuals who qualify for this service work with an employment provider of their choice. The individual and the provider work together to discover a long-term work placement that best resembles the employment goals of the individual. The assistance of an employment consultant, also known as a job coach, can greatly ease some of the stress and anxiety about the job search.

The hiring process for businesses can be daunting, time consuming, and frustrating. The COVID pandemic is causing even more frustration as the work force continues to dwindle. What most business leaders don't know is that they have local help just a phone call away. By calling the local Vocational Rehabilitation office, a business leader can obtain a list of local employment providers who are ready to guide the match.

An employment consultant can offer a comprehensive business assessment, provide education about hiring an individual with a disability, give information on accommodations, screen applicants to ensure a quality job match, and help supplement training. These services allow a business to hire talent with more knowledge than someone walking in off the street.

If an individual seeking employment chooses to use an employment service agency, such as Stone Belt, they will be paired with an employment consultant before going through a discovery process. This process assists in finding an individual's likes and dislikes. The employment consultant will observe and gather information and then present ideas for job placement. Most times an individual can try out the job first which allows an opportunity to see if the type of work is a good fit.

This discovery process allows the job-seeker to determine if their assumptions of the work matches the realities of the position. This "real world" experience can be invaluable exposure for someone who is just entering the workforce and the starting point in crafting a resume.

Here are some tips for individuals seeking a job that choose to use an employment service:



MaryEllen Noe

- **Be open minded.** The most successful individuals are those open to trying new things. You might not think you would like something but your employment consultant is gathering information about you throughout this process and may have some great ideas for you.

- **Self-advocacy is important.** Speak up about what you like, not what someone else wants you to do. This is about you being successful. You have to be happy in your job to make it last a long time. It's okay to say no if you do not want to try something and it's also okay to ask for help when you need it. Make sure to use your voice throughout this process.

- **Come to your meetings prepared.** Always arrive on time (or a little early) and be ready to go. If your employment consultant asks you to bring three job leads to your meeting, take time to do some work outside of your meeting and think about what you would like to do. Providers don't have a catalogue of jobs to hand out. This is a collaborative process between all of you.

Tapping into an employment service provider can be the secret to success. Businesses hiring individuals with disabilities benefit from less turnover and attendance issues. They also raise their bottom line by bringing in a whole new market of supporters. Plus, they can create happier, more inclusive work environments. Job seekers using an employment service provider may experience an increase in opportunities to consider and that can ultimately lead to more meaningful employment.

It's a win-win scenario for the employee and the employer.

Upcoming Advocacy Luncheon—It Matters to Me



Indiana Senator Eric Koch and House Representative Matt Pierce joined Stone Belt for a proclamation presentation in 2021. Knowing who represents you is important. It helps with advocacy efforts and can result in important policy decisions at the state and federal levels..

It Matters to Me - Advocacy 101

Midterm elections are coming up. Most members of Congress are up for election and there are many important state and local races. Join Stone Belt and learn about the 2022 Midterm elections and what they mean to you. The event is free to attend but registration is required.

Topics include:

- The importance of voting
- Who represents you
- Current legislation being considered

Thursday, March 10, 11:30 a.m. - 1 p.m.

**Stone Belt Gymnasium,
2815 E 10th Street, Bloomington**

**Lunch will be provided if event is in-person
(If health protocols dictate, event will be
hosted online via Zoom)**

Register via email at advocacy@stonebelt.org



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