

touchstone

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

ACTION FOR CHANGE

Client advocates to save Medicaid and raise DSP wages

Jason Harris values advocating for people with disabilities. Just this year, he's starred in an advocacy video to raise awareness of low DSP wages and talked with state legislators about that same issue. He also traveled to Washington, D.C., to attend the Disability Policy Seminar and voice his concern to legislators about Medicaid cuts and the repeal of the Affordable Care Act.

Jason says he feels it's important to advocate to legislators, "So they will know what issues concern you, and also to help other people."

For 40 years, the Disability Policy Seminar has provided an opportunity for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities to come together with advocates, self-advocates, experts and professionals in the field to discuss and learn about key issues affecting them.

At the conference, Jason says he learned tips that he hadn't tried, but wanted to, like having groups of people call legislators and connecting with other local self-advocates.

"I also liked the meetings at the end because it talked a lot about disabilities and autism," he says. "The person with autism talked about his struggles and had trouble getting things done every day. He's come a long way, and it teaches you to not give up and to keep trying."

While the trip was "the opportunity of a lifetime," Jason says, "I was a little disappointed that I didn't get to meet Senator Joe Donnelly, but was glad I was able to meet Senator Todd Young and his staff and Representative Luke Messer and his staff," Jason says.

Jason told his representatives that his main concerns were cuts to SSI and Medicaid, "because we all need these programs to help pay our bills and to live a more independent life and to keep our 24-hour staffing."

During his trip to Washington, he was able to take a break and see some of the sights, especially enjoying the bus tour and Capitol Building. "I thought it was a nice city," he says. "I also liked being in a city with so much history."



BOARD MEMBER DAN LODGE-RIGAL, STAFF STEVE WHITSITT, CLIENT JASON HARRIS AND LINDSEY OGLE, A SPECIAL EDUCATION DOCTORAL STUDENT, PREPARE TO VISIT CAPITOL HILL AND SPEAK WITH LEGISLATORS.



JASON HARRIS MEETS WITH SENATOR TODD YOUNG.

Advocating for change makes a difference

Someone asked me recently if I felt we could make a difference in the legislative process with our education and advocacy efforts, especially when our influence seems so small. My answer: We have to try. We only have a few strings to play in the process, but we must play them. The lives of clients, families and staff are too important not to fulfill this obligation. Besides, we do make a difference. Our state legislators are keenly aware of the DSP crisis and, as of this writing, seem poised to increase funding in the state budget to help us address it. Our Washington, D.C., legislators have toured Stone Belt and seen the tremendous impact our services have on people's lives and the community. Putting a face on issues back home helps legislators see how their votes impact constituents. When they realize that those constituents are also voters, it makes it even more important to them. I also told that person I hoped Stone Belt could serve as an example to our colleagues, urging other disability organizations to host forums, educate constituents, promote ideas and publish information that serves to increase citizen advocacy. This is one of the hallmarks of our democracy and is very much within Stone Belt's mission to accomplish.



Being in the United States capital is always an awe-inspiring experience. Having five Stone Belt advocates in Washington, D.C., attending The Disability Policy Seminar recently was no exception. Standing on the lawn of the Capitol Building to listen to political speeches or visiting congressional representatives in their offices can make one feel a part of the democratic process. During our visit with Senator Todd Young, our contingency of The Arc of Indiana was one of about 10 groups attending his meeting venue, The Hoosier Huddle. He graciously spoke with members of our group, hearing our concerns about threats to Medicaid and how essential the program is to self-advocates and their families. He then turned to the other people in the room to hear their concerns. It can't be an easy job when there are so many people to please, but we wanted to make sure he understood the negative impact of fundamental changes to the Medicaid program, which were a part of the legislative efforts to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act.

Stone Belt, as part of The Arc, a statewide and national advocacy organization, was founded on grassroots advocacy. The founders of our organization, and those that came afterward, went to the State House, Washington, D.C., and our local funders, such as Monroe County, to build the case for public support for services. Over the past 60 years, this support has made it possible for individuals with disabilities to live, learn and earn in their local communities. We have made remarkable progress since the days when families were told to send away their loved ones with disabilities. This progress gives us the impetus we need to continue the fight.

Thanks to all of you that joined in grassroots advocacy efforts by calling, emailing and visiting state and congressional legislators. Your stories and your passion truly make a difference. Threats to services are averted and improvements in funding are secured by your actions. Your citizen advocacy is what makes democracy work. Our need to do this will continue, so please stay informed by signing up for our email alerts – at info@stonebelt.org or www.stonebelt.org – and following us on social media – search for **Stone Belt Arc** on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn.

With great appreciation,

Leslie

How to Take Action and Contact Your Legislators

In Washington:

To express your concerns about the changes in the Medicaid program or other federal issues, contact these federal legislators.

- Senator Todd Young
202-224-5623 or
www.young.senate.gov/content/contact-senator
- Senator Joe Donnelly
202-224-4814 or
www.donnely.senate.gov/contact/email-joe
- Representative Trey Hollingsworth
202-225-5315 or
<http://hollingsworth.house.gov/contact/email>
- Representative Luke Messer
202-225-3021 or
<http://messer.house.gov/contact>

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/>. Contact these individuals for concerns at the state level, such as funding for the direct support professional workforce.

More information is available on our website at www.stonebelt.org/advocacy on how to effectively advocate in Washington and in Indianapolis.





MILESTONES

CLINICAL & HEALTH RESOURCES

a division of Stone Belt | milestonesclinic.org

MILESTONES UPDATE

Recent changes taking root

By James Wiltz, Director of Milestones

As readers may remember from the previous Touchstone update, one of our psychiatrists left late last year to focus on working with children. This led to a reduction in psychiatry at Milestones, as well as a change that more closely fits Stone Belt's core constituency – people of all ages with intellectual disabilities and/or autism spectrum disorder. Dr. Weakley, who has built a reputation of excellence providing services to our clients, will continue her 12-year tenure with Milestones. In addition, Angela Nielsen, an advanced practice nurse with prescription privileges, joined the Milestones team in Columbus to handle the once-per-week psychiatry clinic there.

Not every change has been easy because downsizing means some clients were referred out and some staff positions were no longer needed. Some employee reductions happened due to attrition, but more difficult ones were position eliminations. Fortunately, those fine clinicians are already working for other providers in the surrounding communities.

The most intense part of this transition involved referring clients out and making internal transfers. This process required several steps:

- Figuring out how best to provide continuity of care for patients being referred out. Some clients transitioned with our former psychiatrist to her new employer, and others are being referred to new providers.
- Transitioning clients to Dr. Weakley's and Angela Nielsen's caseloads. Much of the transition has been accomplished with the generous effort of Behavior Support supervisors Julie Miller and Mari Shawcroft, who have spent dozens of hours evaluating and summarizing cases. Nandy Rajanayakam has done similar work in Columbus. Julie, Mari and Nandy deserve much of the credit over the past couple months for helping keep the outpatient clinic going.
- Initiating our exciting and new Anxiety Disorders and OCD Clinic for Children and Adolescents. Our plan for this is to start marketing this new clinic by summer, beginning with a redesign of the Milestones website. We also are revamping our intake process to ensure clients and families are moving in the right direction.

So that's the update for now. We are looking forward to seeing the fruits of our labor as we settle into our new Milestones model of services. Change is never easy, but as long as we continue working toward our goals as a team, we are confident that positive outcomes will follow.

PROGRAMMING

Families, friends to be enlisted as caregivers

Families First is a program started in late March that allows waiver recipients to hire family members and close friends as their staff. As of the launch, two families had been identified and staff for the first family had been trained.

According to Ilese Sabelhaus, South/East Region Supported Living director, who helped organize the program with Nancy Smith, Central Region Support Living director, Families First is important due to difficulty in hiring and retaining direct support professionals. When Indiana started offering more family support waivers, clients didn't have necessary funding to move to their own home with community supports. These changes resulted in more individuals remaining in family homes and receiving support from their families. These issues caused Stone Belt leaders to think of alternative ways to continue to support individuals with disabilities and their families.

Families First is a service model that will allow a family member to be a paid support to their loved one, rather than having supports provided by a DSP. For more information on Families First or to become involved in the program, contact Sabelhaus at 812-376-7149, ext. 425, or Smith at 812-332-2168, ext. 226.

STAFF

DeWees takes SLP leadership role

Employment Services director Bitta DeWees is taking a leadership role in the Supported Living Program. In her new position as Director of Service Development and Expansion, she supervises and works with Supported Living directors Nancy Smith and Ilese Sabelhaus and their respective staffs to grow this essential program, while also providing supports for the current clients and staff.

"We will be developing strategies to help us grow Supported Living and improve staffing issues," DeWees says. "We will also be exploring some new models of service around Respite, Families First and Structured Family Caregiving."



Bitta DeWees

DeWees is a 27-year veteran of Stone Belt and has overseen a number of programs, including Employment, Lifelong Learning and Manufacturing. In all positions, she implements innovative ideas to bring teams together, solve problems and get results.

DeWees also has worked on many state-level groups and has earned the respect of administrators and policymakers in Indianapolis. This will serve Stone Belt well in her expanded role.

She will continue to oversee the Employment Program, which is also in an expansion phase. Due to new funding, the program will be growing in staff and clients served. With the two programs working closer together, more Supported Living clients, among others, will become successfully employed.

AWARDS FOR EXCELLENCE

Stone Belt honors five top employees at Awards for Excellence ceremony

On March 30, guests, clients, board members and staff honored the five 2017 Award for Excellence recipients, who are considered the top 1 percent of Stone Belt's nearly 500 employees. According to their nominations, these five people – Tiba Walter, Jessica Sears, Linda Nelson, Majed Alomari and Sarah McKenney – have demonstrated exceptional qualities of professionalism, ambition and reliability in each of their respective fields. Here's a closer look at the winners:



SHIRLEY FREEMAN & JESSICA SEARS

JESSICA SEARS

Jessica Sears has been the Hiring Coordinator for three of her 3½ years and consistently works and pushes to find and hire employees to join the Stone Belt team. Despite the high turnover rate, Jessica keeps the wheels moving by interviewing, hiring, conducting background checks, checking references and making sure employee files are complete and accurate. Her coworker says, "Jessica pushes herself harder than most people realize to make sure that the clients in all regions and programs have the staff they sorely need," and, through it all, she continues to laugh and smile. Not only does she work hard for the clients, she offers ongoing support to her staff and readily answers questions about human resource laws and hiring guidelines. Jessica also speaks fluent Spanish and is finishing a bachelor's degree in Human Resources.



LINDA NELSON & BRENDA NOEL

LINDA NELSON

Celebrating more than 17 years at Stone Belt, Linda Nelson is a Direct Support Specialist at Larc. She is often heard singing and encouraging a cheerful, positive atmosphere as she gently leads activities and helps clients feel at ease, reach for new heights and experience new things. She is a dedicated, hard worker who rarely misses a shift. Linda's kindness and compassion are attributes that cause clients to be drawn to her. Her care of the clients is exceptional and she makes sure hygiene needs are met. She also works with other staff in her room to ensure clients are engaged. A coworker says, "You will never catch Linda in a bad mood. She constantly lifts the spirits of those around her." Linda has faced challenges but she doesn't complain. In fact, her happiness is contagious.



JONATHAN HOSSLER & MAJED ALOMARI

MAJED ALOMARI

Majed Alomari has worked at Stone Belt for two years and is now Associate Manager of Bridgwaters House, having overcome language and cultural barriers to develop strong relationships with staff and build positive rapport with clients. Majed is diligent and dedicated to his job; at one point, he was working more than 100 hours a week. He has embraced Stone Belt's culture, mission and vision, and has taught others the value of commitment. He has opened the minds of others to different cultures and has overcome adversities and obstacles within Bridgwaters House. Majed loves his job and the clients with whom he works, and often works extra hours when staffing is short. He is passionate about his work and respectful of all clients and staff.



SARAH MCKENNEY & VINCENT DISBRO

SARAH MCKENNEY

Sarah McKenney has worked at Stone Belt for four years and is now a Skills Development Clinician. She demonstrates quality clinical insight and mindfulness of clients' strengths, abilities and areas where extra support is needed. She is attentive of how she interacts with clients and families, maintaining professional boundaries while building trust and positive rapport with clients. She helps clients recognize issues and ways to cope, giving clients in crisis concrete steps to encourage healthier, safer decisions. Sarah also helps parents by providing clear communication of client growth and needs. She is an active listener who supports parents through their frustrations and coaches them through problem-solving, supportive training, role-modeling positive behavior and coping skills.



LISA HACKNEY & TIBA WALTER

TIBA WALTER

Tiba Walter has worked at Stone Belt for 3½ years and is currently a Direct Support Specialist in the Lifelong Learning Moving Forward class. She structures the day and activities so all her clients succeed by creating an environment that encourages growth and independence. She spends extra time explaining job skills and work habits to clients in Community Employment and serves as their biggest cheerleader when they achieve successes. She builds rapport with the clients that enables her to help them weigh pros and cons concerning decisions, because they trust her to be honest and have their best interests at heart. One of her coworkers explains, "When things are looking down, Tiba is the first one to show you the bright side. She encourages each individual she works with to reach for their dreams, no matter what other people say."

THANK YOU DONORS

Stone Belt extends appreciation to our generous donors from July 1, 2016, to March 31, 2017. We are grateful for their continued support. Every effort is made to ensure accuracy of this listing. If you think there has been an omission, please accept our apology and contact Jana Surigao at (812) 332-2168 ext. 269 or jsurigao@stonebelt.org.

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UPCOMING EVENT

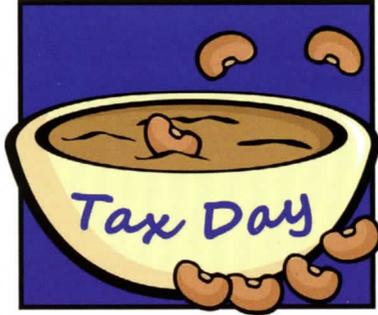
Tax Day Soup Fundraiser

Bobby's Colorado Steakhouse is hosting the Tax Day Soup Fundraiser for Stone Belt.

Guests can name their price for a bowl of ham-and-bean soup with sweet cornbread. From the purchase, 100 percent of the proceeds benefit Stone Belt and give contributors an early start on their 2017 tax deductions.

The full lunch menu will be available, but only ham-and-bean soup orders will count as a tax-deductible gift for the agency.

This fundraiser will take place Tuesday, **April 18, from 11 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.**



Make the beans count for
Stone Belt

PROGRAMMING

Columbus opens new SLP site

With capacity for growth, the Columbus Supported Living Program opened a fifth SLP site earlier this year.

The process started when Housing Partnerships had a vacant rental house and Thrive Alliance had a client looking for a provider. A second client wanted to move into the house, too, so Stone Belt hired and trained new staff and a house manager to serve the clients.

SLP is a home- and community-based waiver program that provides supports to clients living in their own homes to be as independent as they can in all aspects of their lives. Stone Belt helps people with basic living skills, health and medication assistance, budget and money management and to be active members of their communities.

"Opening one- and two-person sites opens our growth capacity even more, as we have people looking for roommates with room in their homes to welcome them," says Ilese Sabelhaus, the Columbus program director, adding, "We need to grow SLP in Columbus so sites are able to support each other with cross-trained DSPs."



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