

# The Ability Connection

Winter 2025

*A Newsletter by the Trumbull County Board of Developmental Disabilities*

## Gratitude Grows on Our Thankful Tree

Individuals in the VOICE program came together to partake in a heartfelt celebration dedicated to expressing gratitude for the blessings in their lives. Each participant engaged in a meaningful activity wherein they took the time to reflect on what they were truly thankful for. They wrote these sentiments on paper leaves, writing words of appreciation and acknowledgment. Once complete, they placed these leaves on the branches of a symbolic "Thankful Tree." This tree stood as a beautiful, growing testament to the collective gratitude of everyone present, creating a vivid tapestry of thankfulness that connected all those involved in a shared sense of appreciation and community.



## Celebrating Community at Candy Land Lane

We were thrilled to participate in Trumbull County Family & Children First Council's 8th Annual Candy Land Lane! Our Early Intervention and Fairhaven School teams created interactive stations at the event.



Volunteer Sissy Keeling guides a child through an interactive station.

Thank you to the organizers for sponsoring this wonderful tradition that brings families and communities together each year at the Warren-Trumbull County Public Library during Warren's Hometown Holidays.

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# Property Taxes Do More Than Fund Public Services



Property taxes have long been a major source of funding for necessary services provided to individuals with developmental disabilities. These dollars allow the Trumbull County Board of Developmental Disabilities to provide early intervention for young children, educational services for students, residential and in-home services for adults, transportation access, job training and employment programs, crisis intervention, and case management.

For many families, these services are not optional; they are vital to daily life, safety, and long-term stability. These services do more than help individuals, they strengthen families and communities by enabling people to participate more fully in everyday life.

Because a significant portion of the Trumbull County Board's operating budget comes from voter-approved property tax levies, the Board can plan responsibly, invest in provider capacity, and respond quickly when needs change. Unlike state or federal funding allocations, which can change due to policy or economic conditions, levy funding offers the reliability needed to provide and maintain lifelong support to individuals and families. In recent months, a statewide petition has been circulated proposing the elimination of property taxes in Ohio. While the petition is framed as taxpayer relief, its impact on our services would be substantial. Removing property taxes without replacement funding would strip the Board of its most dependable source of revenue. Specifically, for the children, adults, and families receiving services from the Trumbull County it would lead to severe program reductions, longer waiting lists, and fewer options for families seeking support.

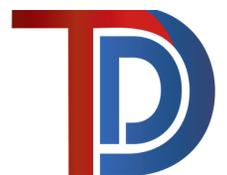
The petition also raises concerns about control and accountability in the way funds are used. Property tax levies empower local voters to decide how their community invests in necessary services. Eliminating property taxes would shift financial control away from communities and allow decisions to be made at the state level, where funding may be less responsive to local needs. Eliminating property taxes is ultimately a decision about Ohio's commitment to people with developmental disabilities. Any proposal that eliminates funding for services must carefully consider both immediate and long-term consequences.

As discussions around the petition continue, it's important for Trumbull County residents to understand what is at stake. Property taxes do more than fund public services, they provide a lifeline and safety net for individuals with developmental disabilities living in Trumbull County. So, please share this information with your family and friends to ensure residents are making an informed decision about the future of TCBDD and the vital services the Board provides.

On behalf of the individuals and families receiving services from the TCBDD, I thank you for your ongoing commitment to the people we serve and the community they enrich.

*Edward J. Stark*

Superintendent,  
Trumbull County Board of Developmental Disabilities



# Celebrating the Magic of the Season

It's been a magical holiday season for Abilities Unite Foundation of the Mahoning Valley! On December 6th, they welcomed over 1,400 guests to their 4th annual Winter Wonderland event at Waypoint 4180, creating an unforgettable evening of holiday magic and joy.



Winter Wonderland was created by Abilities Unite Foundation to provide a safe, supportive, and sensory-friendly environment where everyone can fully experience the wonder of the season. This year's magical journey transported guests through enchanting immersive scenes, including Whoville with The Grinch and Cindy Who, The Ice Castle featuring Elsa and The Snow Gang, and special visits with Santa himself. Families also enjoyed Mrs. Claus's Sweet Shop, Santa's Sensory Toy Shop, and The North Pole Library, all while the John Reese Trio filled the air with Sounds of the Season.



Abilities Unite was selected as a featured non-profit in this year's Festival of Trees at Mill Creek Park! The beautifully decorated tree celebrates the diversity and joy of the community while raising awareness about their mission.

Abilities Unite Foundation also has a display at Eastwood Mall's Gingerbread Lane! The gingerbread house features their logo and highlights their community events they've hosted throughout the year.

The organization that receives the most votes will receive a donation to their cause. Voting is open through December 21st!

Visit Gingerbread Lane near JCPenney to see their creation and cast your vote!



For more information about their work, visit: [www.abilitiesunite.org](http://www.abilitiesunite.org)





## Fun at Fairhaven School

Fairhaven School has had an eventful semester filled with enriching programs and memorable celebrations. From the introduction of music and art therapy to seasonal festivities and community partnerships, students have experienced a diverse range of activities designed to support their growth, creativity, and connection to those around them. Here's a look back at some of the highlights from recent months.



### *Parades, Treats, and Halloween Beats*

On October 31st, the school celebrated Halloween with a full day of festive activities. The morning began with a preschool parade, where the preschool students marched through the school in their creative costumes. This was followed by a bus-o-treat event, where students moved from school bus to school bus collecting treats. In the afternoon, two Halloween dances were held for school-age students, featuring music and opportunities to showcase their costumes and dance moves.



### *Where Rhythm Meets Growth*

Music Therapy sessions have been added to the weekly schedule, introducing a new dimension to the school community. The program is led by Groovey Garfoose, a team known throughout Summit County for their approach to improving lives through music. Working in partnership with various County Boards, Groovey Garfoose has created meaningful experiences for students through these sessions.



### *Unlocking Potential Through Creativity*

This year, we've introduced Art classes as part of the SMARTS program from Youngstown. These sessions have been a fantastic addition to our enrichment programs. The students engage in diverse art activities and crafts, boosting their creativity and providing an outlet for artistic expression. The program successfully fosters an appreciation for the arts and offers students a chance to unwind through their creations.

## *Sharing the Gift of Music*

The University of Akron's Kappa Kappa Psi music fraternity visited Fairhaven School to engage students through hands-on workshops and interactive sessions. Students explored different instruments, rhythms, and melodies under the guidance of fraternity members, creating an enriching experience that fostered connections between college musicians and Fairhaven students.



## *Building Bridges Through Art*

Throughout the semester, art students from Hubbard High School and their teacher have been visiting regularly to engage in creative activities with our students. Each session is filled with artistic expression, laughter, and learning as the high schoolers guide our children through various art projects. These visits have become a highlight that everyone looks forward to, creating meaningful connections through creativity.



## *Autumn Adventures at the Patch*

The PTO's highly anticipated pumpkin patch field trip took place on October 21st, giving children the chance to wander through colorful pumpkin patches and apple orchards while soaking in the autumn atmosphere. After a morning filled with seasonal exploration and fun, students enjoyed lunch together, wrapping up a memorable fall adventure.



## *Grateful Hearts, Full Plates*

On November 25th, the entire school participated in a Thanksgiving feast. Each student invited a special guest to join them for the celebration. Together, students, guests, and staff enjoyed a delightful Thanksgiving meal, fostering a sense of community and gratitude. The event brought everyone together to share in the festive spirit of the holiday.



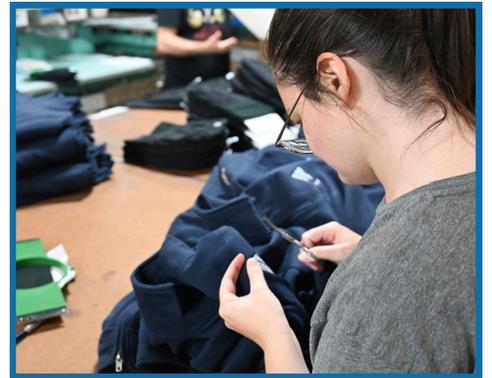
# Joel's Journey to Independence

Scan the QR code  
to watch the video!



Joel joined Afterburner FX about four months ago and has quickly become an integral part of the team. Afterburner FX specializes in custom apparel, embroidery, and graphic design, and Joel has mastered the skills needed to run several machines at once.

This is Joel's first full-time job, and it has proven to be very fulfilling for her. She takes pride in her ability to contribute to her household and feels this opportunity has brought her one step closer to her own definition of independence. We're thrilled to see Joel thriving in her role and celebrate this important milestone in her journey.



## CITE in Action: Big D's Newton Grill

We recently visited Big D's Newton Grill, one of the CITE program locations for TCBBB, to spotlight the real-world learning happening there.

During our interview with Carson and several other students, we saw firsthand how they are building valuable job skills, from customer service to teamwork and kitchen operations, all while gaining confidence in a supportive, community-based workplace.

Their dedication and growth are clear, and Big D's continues to be an outstanding partner in helping students prepare for life beyond the classroom!

Scan the QR code  
to watch the video!



## Making Magic: Bailey at Disney

After years of hard work and determination, with support from family, friends, and HPC services through her County Board waiver, Bailey has achieved her dream of working at Disney.

Born a twin, Bailey faced challenges from birth. Doctors predicted she would struggle with basic skills and typical adult life, but her disabilities never held her back. With her winning personality and determination, Bailey proved them wrong. She even earned her driver's license with adaptive accommodations.

Through her self-waiver, Bailey received Participant Directed HPC services from her Independent Provider, Carol. Carol taught Bailey essential skills like sewing, cooking, and baking to maintain hand mobility and strength, especially important since Bailey had limited movement in her right hand.

Bailey graduated from Penn State Shenango with a degree in Health Policy, joined the Golf Team, and worked various local jobs including an internship at a hospital. After graduation, she applied for a Disney externship and moved to Florida.

While working in a quick-service restaurant at Disney, Bailey thrived until she experienced a seizure. After addressing her health concerns and temporarily losing her driving license, she persevered, returned to the program, and regained her license.

When her externship ended, Bailey applied for a permanent position. Out of 1,400 applicants, only 21 were selected, and Bailey was one of them! She's now in a 90-day restaurant training program with hopes of a permanent position.

Congratulations, Bailey, on this incredible achievement!



## Hoops and Hustle: Basketball Practice Underway



Our athletes are back on the court for basketball season! Practice has been happening twice weekly from 3:15-5:00 PM, with Tuesday nights for Niles workshop and home athletes, and Thursday nights for Champion workshop athletes. November and December practices have been building skills and teamwork as our athletes prepare for game season in the new year. Our transportation team helps to bring workshop athletes to practice, with families providing rides home. Stay tuned for game schedules coming in January. Let's go, athletes!

## TCBDD Annual Training

On October 17th, our team gathered for an all-staff in-service at the Our Lady of Mount Carmel Family Parish Center in Niles, Ohio. Throughout the day, we reviewed key industry updates, participated in MUI/UI training, and engaged in meaningful discussion led by advocate and guest speaker Jordan Zimmerman. It was an energizing and informative session that helped strengthen our skills and reaffirm our commitment to quality service.



## OACB Annual Convention

The Ohio Association of County Boards' 42<sup>nd</sup> Annual Convention brought together DD professionals and advocates from across Ohio to exchange ideas, ignite innovation, and celebrate the significance of our collective efforts. TCBDD employees discovered fresh strategies to tackle challenges and heard inspiring stories that motivated and uplifted them. They left the convention feeling energized and prepared to advance the system for individuals with developmental disabilities and their families. Throughout the week, employees gathered at the conference to gain insights and learn from industry professionals about the real-world issues affecting those we serve.



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