On May 22, 2020, Brandon Moorhead was the Holmes County Board of DD STAR graduate! Brandon has attended the school program since preschool age. The staff here has grown to love him as their own because we got to see him grow up with us. (some staff will never grow up---Merri admits it!) Brandon got to be in the spotlight for the day. He chose to wear a blue graduation gown. He smiled and waved at all the staff that came to celebrate the occasion. Several staff shared great stories & some of the great qualities that he possesses. We took silly pictures and serious pictures! Brandon loves buses so Dave Crilow drove one through the parking lot for Brandon’s BIG DAY! Staff honked their horns and flashed their lights as Brandon drove out of the parking lot. Classroom staff, Shannon Shontz, and Brandon’s family drove to all of his classmate’s homes to say goodbye. Several classmates made graduation cards just for him! It was a whole day of celebration! We will miss his hard work and BIG SMILES!

Lynn Hope Industries Update

By Sheri Martin

Lynn Hope Industries has been able to maintain its Centor and Denco contracts since the COVID-19 virus closed us in March. Sherry Mackey, our Production Manager has been able to complete production demands through the use of staff. During this time staff had been required to maintain social distancing.

We are hoping that we can continue to keep up with these jobs until the individuals all return back to work.
The last few months have been quite challenging for the Holmes DD/Training Center. Like all of you, the Holmes DD/Training Center was not able to do what we usually do because of COVID-19. With short notice, we closed our school and adult programs. The parts of our organization that could continue to work, had to learn to work a new way. Instead of spending hours each week in our office, staff who had a laptop took their computers home and continued to work. Plus, even though we were not in the building, our telephone system allows us to get work phone calls on our cell phones. We had our tools and we could work.

But let’s be real, the work we do is high touch. Even though we can get our work done using a computer, we are at our best when we have face to face interaction with individuals we support and their families. Our staff thrive on these relationships. This has not been easy for any of us. And we know, for those of you that count on us, it hasn’t been easy for you. We are anguished by the disrupted routines and boredom of individuals, not to mention the extra caregiving that has been provided by families and other care providers.

Since mid-April, we were working on a plan to slowly and gradually bring some adults back to LHI. Upon consulting with the Holmes County Health Commissioner, our plans were dashed, as he recommended we pause our reopening due to the steady increase of community spread COVID-19 cases. So here we are, watching the confirmed cases shared daily by the Holmes County Health District. In mid-May, when Ohio started to reopen, there were 8 confirmed cases in Holmes County. As of mid-June, the number of confirmed cases has reached 92. When the daily confirmed cases plateau, we will resume more in-person services. In the meantime, we have started “porch visits”. When it can be done safely, our Early Intervention, SSAs, and Adult Services staff are starting to visit the individuals we support from their porch or yard. We are wearing facial coverings and keeping our distance during these visits. We know it’s not great, but it’s a step.

With the start of school around the corner, we are starting to look at what that might look like. We have not yet received guidance from the Ohio Department of Education or the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities on how to safely reopen our school. We anticipate the same guidelines of facial coverings, distancing, and frequent sanitizing will be in place. As I said earlier, our work, especially in our school, is high touch. The 2020-2021 school year will be a challenge for us. Our Principal, Rhoda Mast, and I will be finalizing our plans in July.

In closing, we did have one amazing thing happen while the world was shut down. The 2.5 mill renewal levy with 1.25 additional mills that was on the March 17th ballot was approved by Holmes County voters on April 28th! Not only was it approved, it was approved with gusto. This win, during a pandemic, provided a shot of confidence. Now, if we just had another kind of shot so we could get back to business as usual...
Teaching During A School-Closing Pandemic
By Pam Miller

For the students at the Holmes County Board of DD, “school” means doing activities and being a part of a group. As teachers, our hearts went out to our families knowing that they would be taking over the role of teacher and social coordinator. From our homes, we teachers met together over the internet and tried to decide how we could support the families in doing this job. One idea that came from these meetings was a pen pal letter which gave students an opportunity to hear what their teachers were doing and then share back through a given picture page what they were doing.

It was important to contact every family each week to see if they had any particular needs.

This was done through phone calls and text messages. Some practical things done were having their order of Attends delivered and having PT equipment or communication switches delivered. Jane, Mellissa, Bernice, Lynn and Peggy helped to make these things possible.

One of the first items that many of us teachers sent out to our students was several picture aided readings that explained COVID-19 and why the schools were closed. Later a parent told me how valuable this was as it started a conversation and allowed her daughter to express how afraid she was feeling about getting sick. Another useful thing I sent was picture charts with hand washing instructions and picture books explaining why people were wearing masks.

While I provided learning review pages, I more importantly wanted to provide hands-on items that could be useful and fun for families. These included laminated play money, visual schedules (pictures to help choose and show the routine of their day), cooking activities with step by step picture instructions for working toward independence in making a snack or small meal, charts of emotions for students to use to point to if they are needing help or feeling upset or angry, and speech therapy items from Erin including a scavenger hunt, and conversation starters.

The parents have been amazing. I have received letters, text messages, and pictures showing the things the students have been doing. It has been fun to get a personal glimpse into what their life is like at home.

Finally, a hands-on summer project was taken to each home along with summer time fun materials (balls, bubbles...) to enjoy with their families.

The summer project for each student provided information and activity sheets about plants and what plants need to grow.

Each student received bean seeds and a marigold to plant. Step by step picture directions were made for where and how to plant the seeds and the flower. Each student was given a simple journal to record facts about their plants throughout the summer. For many of us, this has been a trying time in learning to be patient and in being more alone than we are used to. It has made us more aware of the importance of connecting with others, and it has helped us connect more personally in some unexpected ways.

Joy In A Bag
By Miriam Miller

Thank you, thank you, thank you to several churches in the area who reached out to our adults during this time off. A big shout out to Grace Church, Trinity Christian Fellowship, Living Hope Outreach, and a small group at United Dayspring Mennonite. These groups donated supplies and money to prepare “goodie bags”. Several staff members helped me deliver a bag to each adult who receives services. (Social distancing, etc. was practiced.) Items in the bags were adult coloring books, word search puzzle books, crayons, pens, pencils, puzzles, bubbles, sometimes some candy! We saw lots of smiles when handing them out! Again thanks to our donors...it was very much appreciated!

(Charlie stocking the blessing box in Millersburg.)
Coronavirus created chaos in the DD system with the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities (DODD) issuing 65 guidance memos detailing new ways of doing business since March 12. Holmes DD SSAs have been reading, interpreting, and acting on all of these changes. It has been common for SSAs to complete their work only to learn shortly thereafter that a new guidance memo is calling for a different course of action, causing them to redo their work. I’m sure you can imagine their frustration. In addition, the SSA department still must meet guidelines set by DODD including the completion of annual Individual Service Plans (ISP). There have been many ISP revisions necessary because of day program closures.

SSAs have modified ISPs to increase the amount of in-home supports some waiver recipients receive, and in some cases have added waiver funded home delivered meals because the individual no longer had access to school/day program lunches.

Holmes DD SSAs have tried their best to be creative with solutions during the pandemic. Because of COVID 19, an individual’s family member was unable to visit him in his home, to ensure family interaction still occurred, the SSA assisted with connecting the family to their loved one using a FaceTime application on his electronic device. Another individual received help from his SSA and his day program staff by helping his family learn how to add more applications to his tablet to keep him engaged with new material. SSAs have also coordinated for food to be delivered to some individual’s homes from a local food pantry. They have, however, run into some difficulty because of the limited number of respite and waiver providers in Holmes County. Most providers have been struggling to meet the needs of the individuals they currently support and are concerned for the health of their employees. In addition, most families have been uncomfortable letting people in their homes, even if they are there to help.

The SSA Department is weathering the pandemic the best they can. They are eager to resume “business as usual” but know it will be several weeks or months before that happens. Please feel free to reach out to us anytime, we are here for you!
Early Intervention continues to operate during the COVID pandemic but in a very different manner. It has been challenging to serve families when we haven’t been able to be in the homes. During March, we were extremely busy having reached our highest caseload ever at 60 families. Then our services abruptly changed and although we weren’t driving to homes, we were busy figuring out how to serve families while at home. Luckily much of our charting and handouts were already accessible on-line.

Since we haven’t been able to make home visits we have been serving families in different ways based on technology and internet availability. We have 10 of our families participating in virtual visits which is like talking on the phone but we can see each other in addition to hearing each other. Our therapy providers, Kim Tish, Sharon Alison, Melissa Duff, Lynn Allison, Angie Willard, and Megan Welsh have been very willing to learn how to use new technology in order to continue to provide services. But only being able to serve 10 of our 60 families through virtual visits makes the current situation less than ideal. Most families receive “visits” over the phone or are mailed information (31 families). Five of our families only have access to mail and five families have decided to wait until the “stay-at-home” guidelines have been lifted to resume services.

Needless to say we were excited when our superintendent informed us in June that we could begin to resume our visits gradually and in stages. Precautions will be in place until our governor determines that social distancing is no longer necessary. Quite a few of the children we serve are medically fragile so we want to do as much as we can to protect their health yet still provide services. We want to take into account the health of our providers as well.

In mid-June, we are starting to offer visits outside and in a manner that maintains social distancing. We know that there will be situations where distance may not be maintained; our providers are ready to sanitize according to our guidelines before they go to their next visit. Even though home visits may be offered, families can continue to choose virtual visits.

Although the past three months have been difficult emotionally and mentally for many people, we have had some positive elements arise from the experience. We have learned how to do virtual home visits so we will be able to continue to offer this as an option to families. We have had the time to critically look at our program organization. We have also come to realize how much we value each other as co-workers and appreciate the personal connections we have with our families that virtual visits can never replace.

Take Time to Smell the flowers

Miriam and Jane spent a morning cleaning up the flower bed on the back patio outside the adult care rooms. Dawn Speegle, Cheryl Whitman and Luann Yoakem also helped clean up the flower beds around the facility. The “Promise Garden” shows the annuals the individuals planted prior to closing.

Promise Garden

Early Intervention
By Renee Spencer

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The mission of the Holmes County Board of Developmental Disabilities is to support individuals in living meaningful lives.