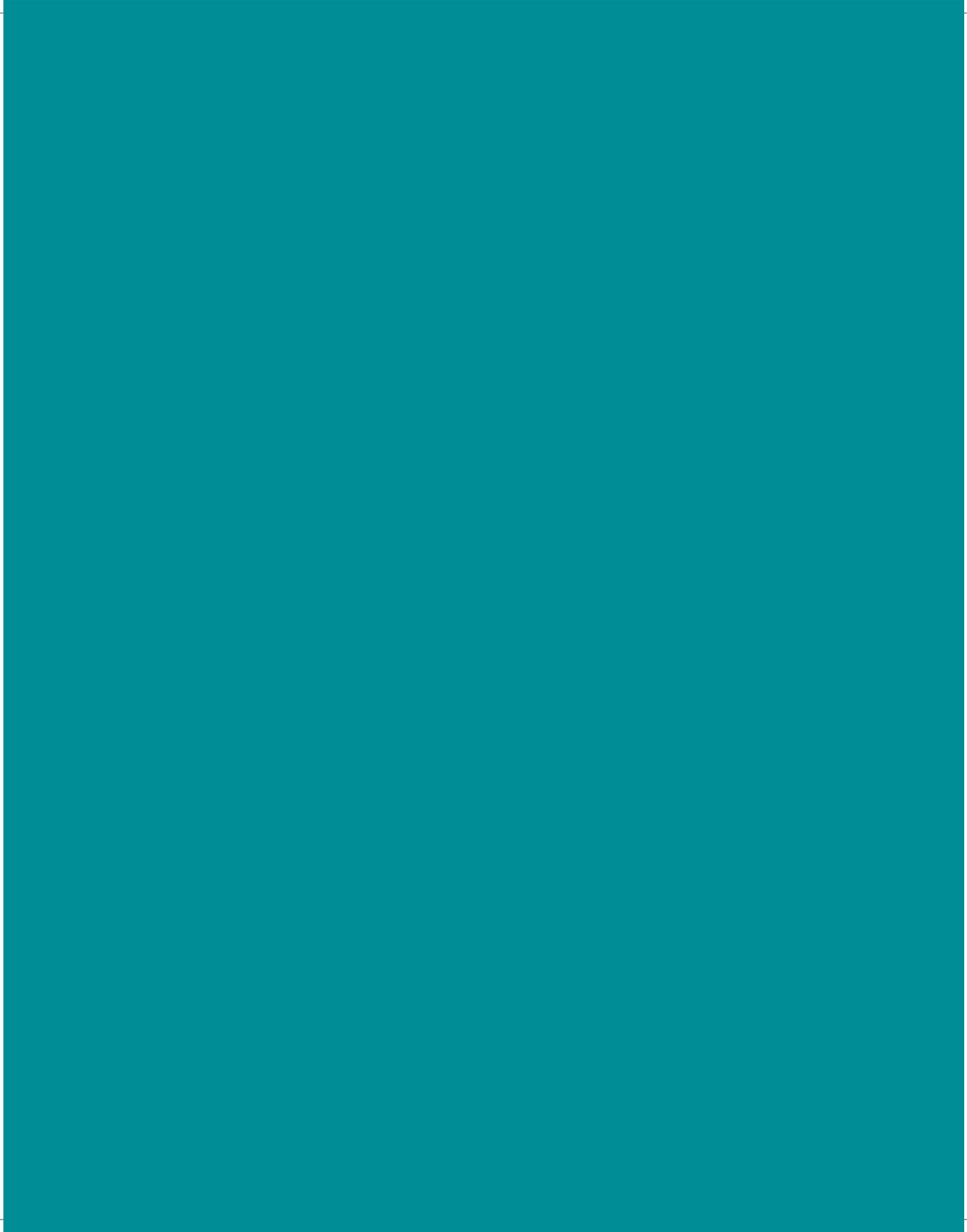




SUDDEN IMPACT!

DEMANDING & COMMANDING RESPECT
ON OHIO'S COUNTY BOARDS





**SOMETIMES, YOU JUST HAVE TO
ASK YOURSELF THIS QUESTION:**

WHY DID IT TAKE SO LONG?

Over the past few years, Ohio has seen individuals with developmental disabilities placed on our county boards. Finally, the people we are charged with supporting have a strong voice on boards in Coshocton, Crawford, Fairfield, Highland, Huron, Ottawa, and Pike counties.

It was long overdue.

The Ohio Developmental Disabilities Council recently embarked on a project to highlight those Ohioans with disabilities who are making a difference by serving on their county boards. This brochure is the culmination of that effort.

The stories within are equally touching and inspiring.

While the individual stories are unique, they share a common theme. The seven people featured want their respective county boards to see issues from all sides . . . including theirs. They all have the ability to offer a different perspective.

It's important that we address the needs of the people we support. Perhaps as important, we need to listen. They have much to say and much to contribute.

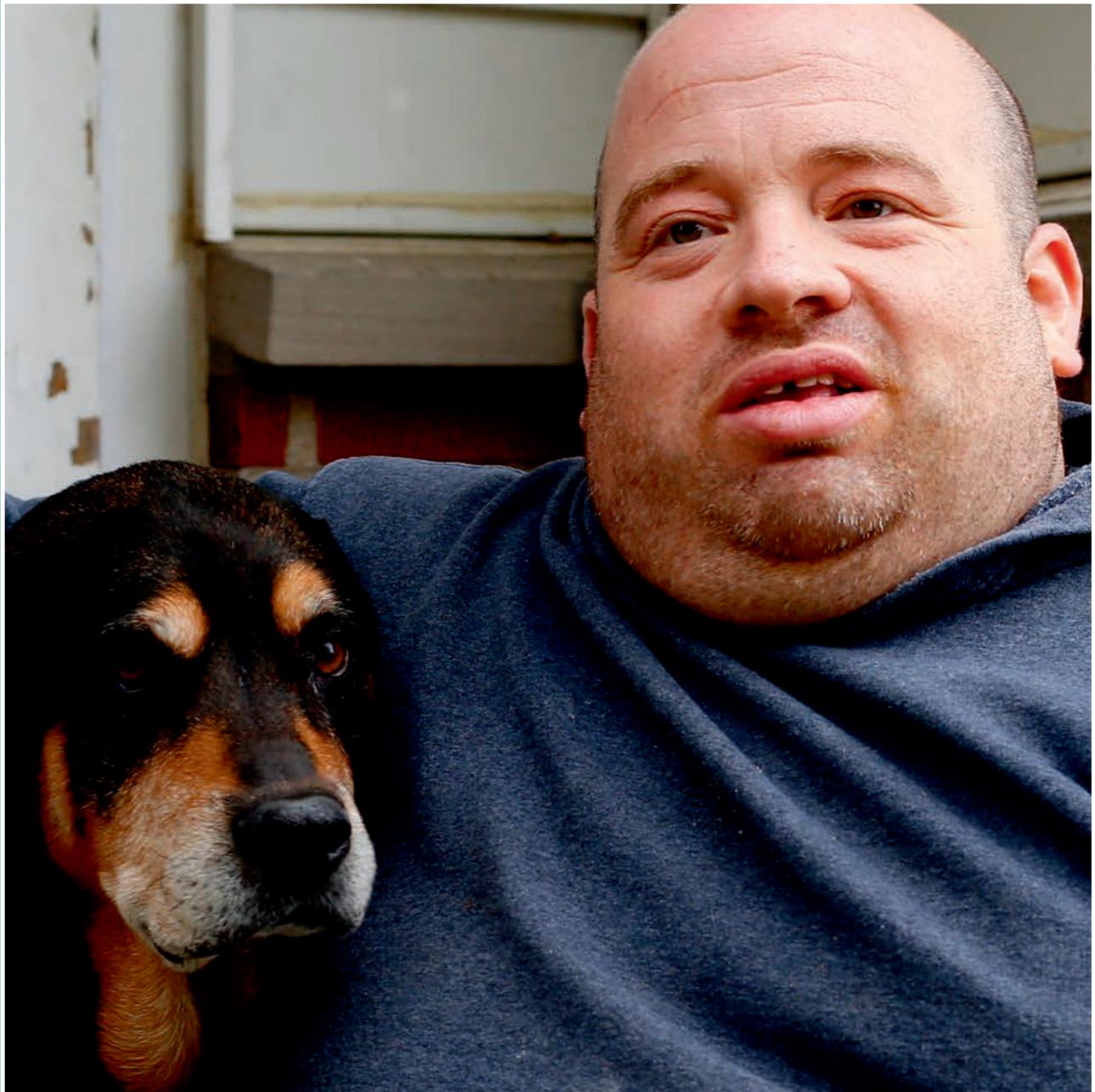
It is with great pleasure that we present this brochure and salute those individuals who refuse to be defined by their disability.

CAROLYN KNIGHT

Executive Director

Ohio Developmental Disabilities Council





“I learned to stand up for myself, and that led to some amazing opportunities.”



PORT CLINTON OTTAWA COUNTY

Andrew Wells was in a dark spot.

It was the summer before his junior year in high school. His mother had taken him out to lunch that day when he broke into tears. The pressures of living with a disability and the uncertainty that his life held had finally overwhelmed him. When Andrew asked his mother what the future held for him, her answer was simple.

“No one knows, Andrew. Only God knows. It’s in His hands.”

He was 16. It wouldn’t be until his early 30s that God finally showed Andrew the direction of his life. It came when he was introduced to Project STIR, a training program designed to help people with developmental disabilities advocate for themselves.

It changed his life.

“I got a lot more confident after I completed Project STIR,” said Andrew, 39. “I learned to stand up for myself, and that led to some amazing opportunities.”

One of those opportunities was being named to the Ottawa County Board of Developmental Disabilities in March 2019.

“I really like serving on the board,” Andrew said. “As a self-advocate, I’ve always been interested in advocating for others with disabilities, and this gives me a platform. I think it helps to have someone on the board who understands what it’s like to have a disability. It’s really broadened my horizons”

Since finishing his Project STIR, Andrew has become a state trainer. He travels to the annual convention where he helps train other individuals to return to their home counties and teach the training. He works in the maintenance department of a hotel and has served on the council for St. John’s Lutheran Church in Port Clinton.

“I had been thinking for a long time that I would like to serve on the Ottawa County Board of DD,” Andrew said. “When I was told there was a spot opening up on the Board, I was excited about the opportunity. Now that I’m on the Board, I’m looking forward to making a difference.”





LANCASTER FAIRFIELD COUNTY

Derek Upp likes to flash his bling.

As a four-year manager for the Ohio State University men's basketball team, he has a pair of impressive rings for being a varsity letterman and a member of a Big Ten Tournament championship team.

"It was a great experience being part of the team," Derek said. "I made friends at Ohio State that I will have forever."

Sports have been a big part of Derek's life. He has participated in wheelchair basketball, football, rugby, and track and field in the Ohio Wheelchair Games, and completed the Capital City Half Marathon in his hand-powered racing chair, which, not surprisingly, is decorated in his beloved scarlet and gray and adorned with Ohio State logos and stripes.

Derek, 29, earned his bachelor's degree in sports industry from Ohio State and now works in the service department at Lindsay Honda. He is an avid auto racing fan and has made friends with several drivers, including former Indy 500 champion Tony Kanaan, who gave Derek an autographed fire suit.

Derek joined the Fairfield County Board of Developmental Disabilities in March 2019. Although it had nothing to do with sports, it was a team he had been eager to join for quite a while.

"I had been interested in serving on the board for a long time," he said. "As a self-advocate, I believe I can bring an awareness to the board that might otherwise be overlooked. Transportation, for example. It's a serious issue for people with disabilities. I want to make sure that issues that are important to people with disabilities are not overlooked."

But there's a more personal reason for wanting to serve on the board. Derek admits that he feels a sense of obligation to an organization that served him well. Along with receiving services from the Fairfield County Board, he attended preschool at Forest Rose School.

"They were there for me when I needed them," said Derek, who was born with a spinal-cord injury that left him an incomplete quadriplegic. "This is a way that I can give back."





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I'm a people person,
and I need to stay busy.”

TIGERS



WAVERLY PIKE COUNTY

Lou Fern Bowen was born along Owl Creek in Pike County in 1952. She was just 10-years old when she was sent to the Orient State Institution.

It would be another 14 years before she would be released.

When you meet Fern, 67, who is engaging, personable, and can rattle off the important dates in her life with uncanny accuracy, you are virtually forced to ask the question: *Why was she ever placed in a mental institution?*

“I had seizures,” Fern said.

Seizures?

She smiles and nods.

Fern has worked hard ever since to make up for the 14 years she lost in the institution. In January 2019, she joined the Pike County Board of Developmental Disabilities.

She is considerably proud of her accomplishment and notes that her photo is on the wall next to that of Pike County Superintendent Jeff Noble. “That’s so I can keep a close eye on him,” she joked.

“I’m a people person, and I need to stay busy,” Fern said.

To say she stays busy is something of an understatement. She recently retired from the Bob Evans restaurant in Waverly. “I washed dishes for 20 years,” she said. “That’s enough.”

Although she has retired from the restaurant, she stays busy working as a dog walker, housesitter and babysitter; selling programs at home football games at Waverly High School; and volunteering at River Valley Community Church and for a variety of local fundraisers, such as an annual chili dinner.

Daily, without fail, she makes an early-morning visit to the offices of the Pike County Board of Developmental Disabilities. From there, Service and Support Administrator Dave Burriss gives her a ride to Bristol Village, a retirement home, where she enjoys visiting with the residents.

“Fern is a favorite around town,” Dave said. “If there’s an event going on, she’s probably there working. She’s an amazing woman.”





NORWALK HURON COUNTY

Colton Wilson has a vision. He hopes that he will be able to promote self-advocacy for the rest of his life.

Colton, 23, says he has “a passion for advocacy.”

“Having a disability myself, I try to recognize the needs of other people with a disability,” he said. “When they can’t speak up for themselves, I want to help.”

While most people would agree that Colton is committed to speaking up for himself, he jokingly calls it “a work in progress.”

Colton grew up in the Lorain County community of Clarksfield and graduated from Wellington High School. He moved to Norwalk with his Pekingese, Tippy, when an opportunity arose to live in a house with supports. It was part of his search for greater independence.

“When I was younger, I was content to let other people take charge of my life,” he said. “As I’ve gotten older, I’ve become more confident.”

That confidence led to a seat on the Huron County Board of Developmental Disabilities in 2017. His SSA informed him that a spot on the board was opening up and asked if he would be interested in serving.

He was.

“I enjoyed being on the board,” Colton said. “I tried to make informed decisions on behalf of others and bring a perspective to the board from someone who could appreciate what it’s like to be disabled.”

He served on the board for 18 months, until conflicts with his doctor’s appointments and therapy caused him to step down.

He was disappointed that he had to resign, but he hopes there will come a day when he can return to the board and work with other agencies that advocate for people with disabilities.

“Life takes its course, and everything happens for a reason. I’m not sure where life will lead me next,” Colton said. “I hope to work in some capacity in helping other people. I have aspirations to fulfill, and helping other people would be part of that.”



“I have aspirations to fulfill and helping other people would be part of that.”





“I want other people with disabilities to reach for the stars. That’s what I did.”





BUCYRUS CRAWFORD COUNTY

Jeffrey Turner is Mr. Bucyrus.

It's hard to find someone there who doesn't know him. He's an avid fan of the Bucyrus High School Redmen and can always be found at the football and basketball games. He has gone to school and spent his working career in the town he loves.

Now he's giving back to the community by serving on the Crawford County Board of Developmental Disabilities.

"I love it," said Jeffrey, 58. "It makes me a role model for other people with disabilities. I tell them, 'Look, if I can do this, you can do it.' I want other people with disabilities to reach for the stars. That's what I did.

"I can tell the other board members the other side of the story – the self-advocacy side of the story."

Jeffrey said he grew up being very shy. Joining the board has helped his confidence and his ability to speak up for himself. "I used to be real shy," he said. "No one would believe that now. I tell people what I think."

At this point in the interview, Jeffrey's Service and Support Administrator, Melissa Hardesty, jokingly said, "Now we can't get him to shut up."

"That's because I have too much to say," Jeffrey countered.

Jeffrey said he attended special-education classes at Bucyrus High School and didn't have a lot of friends. However, he had encouraging parents. "They told me, 'Jeff, you can be anything you want to be as long as you believe in yourself.' They would never let me feel sorry for myself. I wish they would have lived long enough to see me put on the board."

Jeffrey has served on the Ohio Developmental Disabilities Council, taught classes for Project STIR, and been a member of the local Aktion Club. He believes in public outreach on behalf of individuals with disabilities. In fact, the kid who didn't have many friends in high school now returns to area schools to speak about developmental disabilities.

"I'm an outgoing people person," Jeffrey said. "Nothing bothers me anymore. Life is too short to let the little stuff bother you."





HILLSBORO HIGHLAND COUNTY

Don't let the grease under Michael Richards' fingernails fool you. He's as adept at dealing with complicated issues at the Highland County Board of Developmental Disabilities as he is at tuning up a two-stroke engine.

Michael, 47, is a determined man who started his own small-engine repair shop in a 10-by-16 shed in his backyard in 2006.

"My brother brought me an old lawn mower and asked me if I could fix the engine," Michael said. "I started tinkering with it and thought, 'I could do this.'"

He began taking courses in engine repair and is now a registered master mechanic. The business has grown from that backyard shed to a large building in Greenfield where the counters are full of engines and the walls are adorned with his certificates.

"I treat my customers fairly and the word gets out," Michael said. "I'm a Briggs & Stratton master technician, and I have many certificates for the classes I've taken. When it comes to small-engine repair, I know my way around."

He also knows his way around a conference table when it comes to being a member of the Highland County Board.

"I don't want to be seen as a token," Michael said. "That's always been my motto. Don't feel sorry for me. I'm not a victim, and I don't want handouts. I want to own it. I'm here to make a contribution."

Kelli Williamson, Michael's Service and Support Administrator, called Michael "a real go-getter."

"It's rewarding to see how far Michael has come," Kelli said. "When you look at where he is today, a member of our board and the Ohio DD Council, it's just incredible. The thing Michael has going for him is he is not afraid to try, and he's not afraid to fail. When he does, he gets up, dusts himself off, and keeps charging forward. He's an inspiration for all of us."



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“You can push people,
but you can’t give
them everything”

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COSHOCTON

COSHOCTON COUNTY

Shikara Robbins cannot remember a time when she didn't have a developmental disability.

She also cannot remember a time when her mother treated her as anything special.

Growing up in rural Utah, Shikara was expected to perform her chores around the house, just like her siblings.

"My mother never treated me like I had a disability," she said. "I fell off the bed when I was eight months old, hit my head on the hardwood floor, and suffered a traumatic brain injury. It left me partially paralyzed on the left side and with seizures. The doctors told her I would never walk or talk. My mom didn't pay any attention to them. She just treated me like the other kids."

Shikara, 39, said her strict upbringing helped her develop a strong work ethic that continues to serve her well, whether it's as a dietary assistant at Coshocton Regional Medical Center or as a member of the Coshocton County Board of Developmental Disabilities, where she is serving her second term.

"You can advocate for people, but you can't just give them everything," Shikara said. "I was pushed, and that's why I'm the way I am. I don't expect any special favors at work; I do the same job as anyone else. I can't rotate my left wrist, but I always figure out a way to do my work and get the job done."

Shikara moved to Ohio when she was 24. Because she is high-functioning, she did not qualify for services in Utah. She had lived in Coshocton for six years before her brother did some research and discovered that she qualified for services in Ohio. Primarily, she takes advantage of transportation services and job coaching.

Shikara enjoys serving on the board and standing up for the rights of individuals with disabilities, but she also finds it personally rewarding.

"I'm always learning new things about the rights of people with disabilities," Shikara said. "I like sharing that information. My aunt is a guardian for a person with developmental disabilities, and I can help guide her in providing care."



IN MY OWN WORDS

I was asked to close this brochure with some words that are uniquely mine. I welcomed that opportunity.

As a member of the Highland County Board of Developmental Disabilities and the Ohio Developmental Disabilities Council, combined with having a developmental disability, I can offer a unique perspective to the challenges faced by individuals with disabilities.

But I don't want to talk about challenges. Rather, I'd like to talk about opportunities.

For decades, the state of Ohio and our 88 county boards of developmental disabilities set rules and regulations regarding services for people with disabilities. However, the very people who were impacted by those laws and regulations were never given a seat at the table.

At last, that is changing all over the state. As Carolyn noted in her opening remarks for this brochure, it is long overdue.

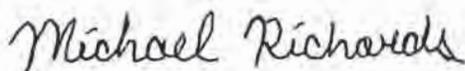
It has been said that people with disabilities want the same things in life as anyone else – a good job, a safe place to live, money in their pocket, and relationships. That is true, but we should add one more item.

Opportunities.

When people with disabilities are presented with opportunities, we can do great things. That must start with our individual county boards. We are continually asking employers to invest in individuals with disabilities. Shouldn't we ask our county boards to make the same investment?

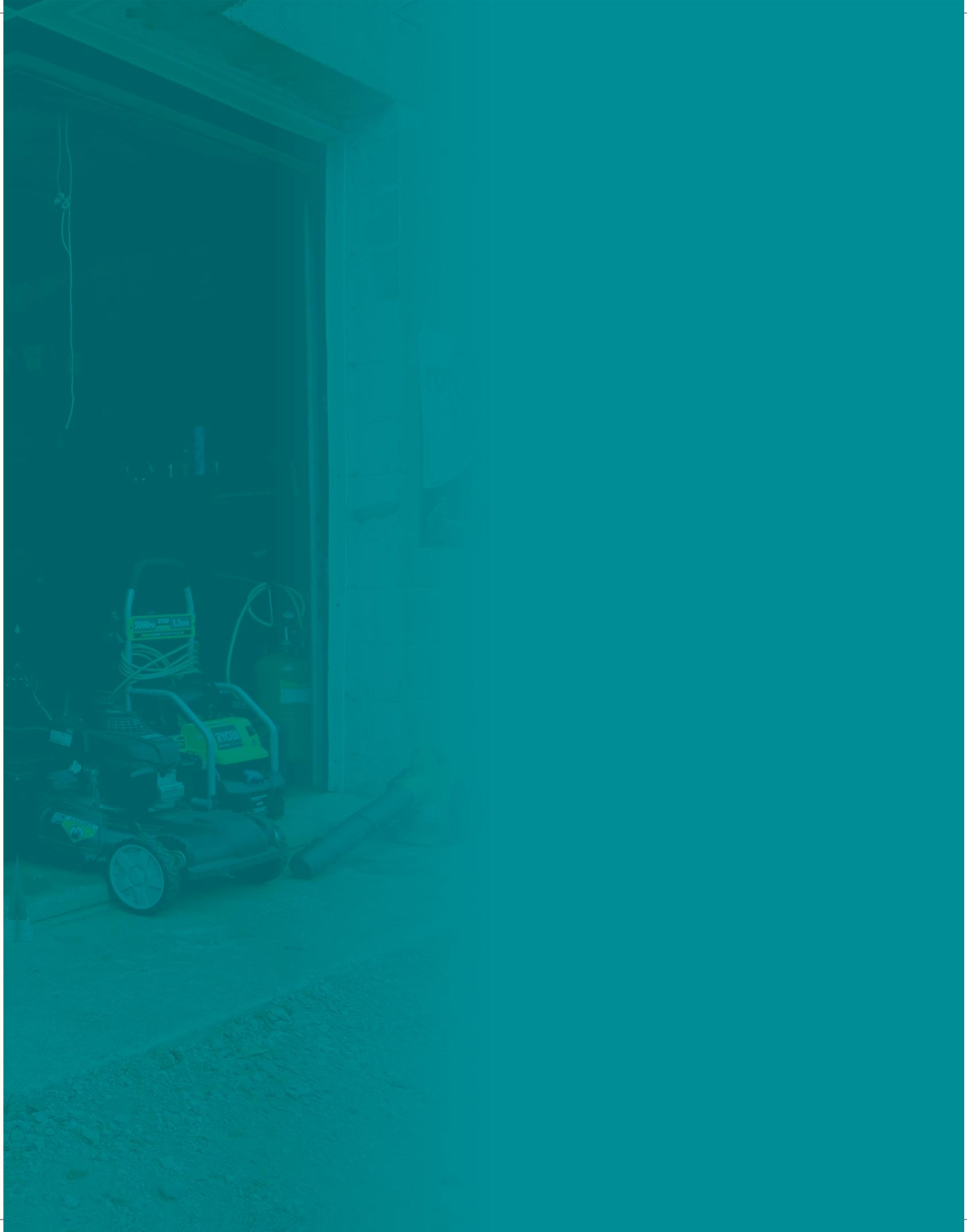
We all know the answer.

Thanks to the Ohio Developmental Disabilities Council for creating this brochure and highlighting the individuals who have taken the bold step to join their county board. Also, thank you to the boards that have provided them with that opportunity. You will find their insight and dedication invaluable to your mission.



– Michael Richards







Ohio Developmental Disabilities Council

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The Ohio Developmental Disabilities Council is one of a national network of state councils, committed to self-determination and community inclusion for people with developmental disabilities. The Council consists of at least 30 members appointed by the governor. Members are people with developmental disabilities, parents and guardians of people with developmental disabilities, representatives from state agencies, and representatives from nonprofit organizations and agencies that provide services to people with developmental disabilities. One of the Council's goals is to educate and inform how state and local government services and policies can be improved, expanded or strengthened on behalf of people with disabilities.