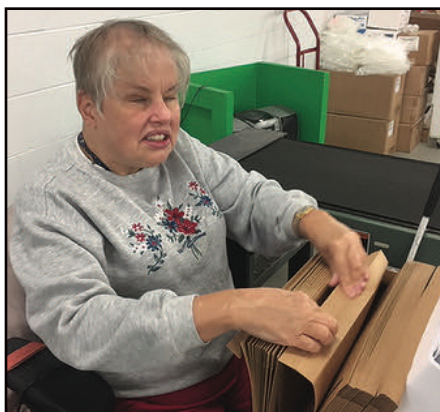


Clovernook Pivots to Support Employees During COVID-19 Crisis



Print House



Social Enterprise



Adult Day program

On a normal day, Clovernook Center for the Blind & Visually Impaired is a lively place full of activity. The Braille Printing house – the largest volume print house in the world – is transcribing and printing books and magazines for the National Library Service and other organizations. The Social Enterprises department is full of employees producing top-quality file folders for government and private entities, as well as other work in collaboration with regional manufacturers. The Procter Center is busy with fun activities for its adult day programs, hosting BVI support groups and operating low vision clinics for children and adults alike.

All of that came to a halt in March with Ohio Governor Mike DeWine's statewide business closure and shelter-in-place order.

"The first thing our board did was commit to continuing to pay every single employee their current wages and benefits throughout the duration of the closure, no matter how long it took. We have almost 100 employees, 1/3 of whom are blind or visually impaired," explained Chris Faust, President and CEO.

"That's a big commitment because we had no idea if it was going to last two weeks, two months, or longer."

Clovernook's leadership team committed to reach out personally to every employee who is blind or visually impaired to confirm that they were safe, had what they needed to shelter-in-place, and to keep them up-to-date on any new developments within the business and community. That outreach also included individuals in Clovernook Center's adult day program.

In preparation for returning to work, the safety of every employee was Clovernook's top priority. The team put a plan in place that included increased workspace distancing, sanitization of equipment, purchasing PPE for staff, and flexible scheduling to allow fewer people to be in the building at a time.

"Our team meets regularly to review progress and address all issues that come up," states Faust. "I've received several letters and expressions of gratitude from our staff. I can't thank our board and supporters enough for their encouragement through this process."

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FROM OUR PRESIDENT AND CEO, CHRISTOPHER FAUST

As the realities of the growing pandemic began unfolding in March, we at Clovernook were coming off the high of our largest and most successful Ohio Regional Braille Challenge. Our Adaptive Sports program had been gaining momentum as well, with growing attendance at events such as rock climbing and snow skiing.

Our employees very quickly pivoted to address the issues at hand. Many were able to work at home and some, like Sean Ogletree, provided an increased level of care to address the challenges raised by social distancing and restricted ability to touch.

I am especially proud of our Board of Trustees, who made the decision that employees would come first. They understood that our first obligation is to the safety and well-being of every employee, especially those most at risk.

The stories on pages 3 and 4, while pre-pandemic, serve an important purpose. They remind us of our fundamental mission and what is possible. A rock wall can transform into a ladder toward potential, and a cognitive challenge can form the bedrock of a lasting friendship. The stories in this issue of *The Perspective* relive these tales of courage and friendship, and of human resilience among the youngest of our members.

That possibility extends to the members and friends of the Clovernook community. **Each of us has the resources and a particular skill we can apply to make the difference.**

What is yours? When considering the roles we play in this health crisis, we want to look back and see that our actions were selfless. This is how the Clovernook team operates every day, and it is how we will make it through this emergency.

Christopher Faust,
President and CEO

SEAN OGLETREE: On the Front Lines



The coronavirus pandemic has been unsettling for everyone, but imagine experiencing this if you were blind or visually impaired.

Clovernook Center's Case Manager Sean Ogletree has been on the front line of navigating the pandemic daily as he has assisted clients and employees since the beginning of the shelter-in-place orders.

Sean has accompanied several Clovernook clients on their trips to the grocery. He serves as a teacher as well as a guide, helping them learn new habits that will keep them more protected, like always wearing face masks in public and washing hands repeatedly.

"The blind and visually impaired rely heavily on their sense of touch. When shopping, they need touch to select the appropriate items," Sean explains. "This crisis is particularly challenging for the blind community. They often depend on a guide while away from their home, yet having a guide stay six feet away in public isn't particularly helpful or safe."

Sean also accompanied a blind client to the hospital for an emergency procedure but faced problems with COVID-19 restrictions in place. These restrictions can be difficult for a patient who is blind or visually impaired, from navigating an unknown space to reading and signing consent forms. Thanks to his experience and creativity, Sean was able to assist the medical team in devising a solution that allowed him to safely accompany her, acting as both a guide to the patient and the medical team caring for her.

Learning Life Lessons at the Braille Challenge



Participants assemble for the closing ceremonies.

Eunice and Arju may go to separate schools, but at the 2020 Ohio Regional Braille Challenge, the girls were inseparable.

During the Feb. 27 event at the Clovernook Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired, the 13-year-olds walked arm-in-arm after finishing their lunch, giggling and catching up on the day. Arju said they met at the challenge three years ago.

“The Braille Challenge has changed my life because I get to meet new friends,” she said. “And re-meet old friends.”

Friends like Eunice. Both described the challenge (part of the Braille Institute’s national program) as a chance to try their best and have fun with others. These qualities have enabled the girls to more enjoyably improve their mastery of the braille reader. In fact, many of the children in the annual challenge become pen pals, further honing their reading and writing skills.

“My opinion is that you don’t come because you want to compete, but because you want to have fun,” Eunice said. However, she added, “I can write faster and I feel like I can read faster.”

The challenge pays dividends throughout their lifetimes, in academic success as well as employment preparation. Perhaps this is why the Ohio Regional Braille Challenge broke its attendance record this year, with 47 youths –10 more than last year.

But the children don’t benefit alone. The adults who volunteer and contribute to Clovernook also are enriched through the challenge.

“It’s a monumental moment, watching these kids who have worked so hard, knowing this is their time to shine,” said Lisa Milliron, a teacher of the visually impaired at Butler County Educational Service Center, who brought a first-year competitor to the challenge.

“He wasn’t nervous at all!” she said. Milliron, also member of the Braille Challenge Committee at Clovernook, was more nervous for her student than he was himself, “because I wanted him to have a successful day.”

And he did. During lunch break she sat with him, hoping for the best, and got it. “He told me he is having a fantastic day.”

You could say that during the Braille Challenge, the children give back.



Eunice and Arju share stories at lunch.



This year’s theme was Braille Rocketeers.



Adelle climbing.



Adelle celebrates with her dad.

One Giant Step for Adelle and Other Kids: New Adaptive Sports

The sixth step was the charm.

Adelle was five steps into her rock-climbing experience, Clovernook's monthly Adaptive Sports event, and each maneuver gave her a case of the nerves. She wanted to stop.

The volunteers encouraged her gently to try just one more step, for momentum.

"She blazed to the very top!" Adelle's mom, Amy McFarland, said. "Then she went on to do two more climbs. It wasn't easy for her, but she was determined, and the staff was extremely supportive. It was amazing to see her transition from being nervous to becoming confident in such a short period of time."

The RockQuest event, held in conjunction with Cincinnati Children's Hospital, marked the kickoff of Clovernook's Adaptive Sports program, which operates under its children's recreation initiative. Our goal with the program is to embolden children to surmount the barrier of fear and celebrate their ability to accomplish a range of physical activities with joy.

Adelle embodied this reality with just a few steps at RockQuest, and it is likely going to lead her to other new activities and adventures, her mom said.

"The RockQuest experience was incredible. It definitely improved Adelle's willingness to try new things," she said. "We've referred to that experience with her several times already as a reminder that she can try new things and that she can do anything she puts her mind to."

Clovernook is looking forward to being able to hold group adaptive sports events in the future. In the meantime, check back into the the "Youth Recreation" page of our website for upcoming events. We will need volunteers as well. Let us know if you are interested!

Yes, I want to help the blind and visually impaired reach their full potential.

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