

**Highland County Board of  
Developmental Disabilities**

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# *Annual Report 2020*

## ***Mission and Vision Statement***

### **Mission Statement**

*“Ensuring effective systems are available to assist people in achieving their life goals.”*

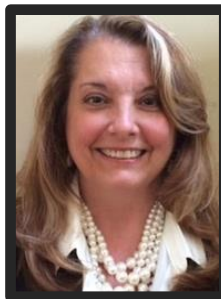
### **Vision Statement**

*“Enhancing the quality of life in our community – one person at a time.”*



**Highland County  
Board of DD**

## ***From the Desk of HCBDD Superintendent, Ms. Debra Buccilla***



Welcome to the 2020 Annual Report.

We began last year with excitement and anticipation for the months to come. During our new year planning for 2020, we could not have predicted that in the upcoming month, we would begin a journey like none other. At the end of February beginning of March, our entire team began to pivot and re-adjust priorities to begin dealing with the initial stages of the COVID Pandemic.

We quickly had to figure out how to provide services to all we serve, how to interface with our community partners, and how to create systems to support us in these efforts. I am so very proud of how quickly we were able to work together to move thru obstacles to assure continuation of quality service and supports.

During this period, our Technology Team was stellar. They created, coordinated, and implemented systems to support each department, all while assuring that our rapid expansion did not crash! Our staff jumped in by embracing these efforts and doing their part to learn and support these systems which enabled them to carry out their duties. I have been a part of many teams throughout my career and can honestly say that what this team has pulled off has been remarkable.

This annual report highlights the efforts of our Highland County team, our partners and those we serve. I hope you enjoy the information and take note of just how much we accomplished despite the obstacles.

Thank you for being a part of our 2020 journey.

Deb Buccilla, Superintendent

# Service and Support Administration

The Service and Support Administration (SSA) Department provided eligibility Determination and service coordination to over 222 people in 2020. We continued our commitment of ensuring that people receive services which enhances the quality of their lives while promoting person-centered choices. This work was accomplished through services provided including assessment, person-centered planning, referrals, payment authorization, linkage and monitoring.



Over the last year, the SSA Department continued to enroll individuals on the Level 1, Individual Options and Self Empowered Life Funding (SELF) waivers. The waivers provide funding for in-home supports for individuals living on their own or in shared home settings, in addition to day program supports. Due to the circumstances with the pandemic this year, the SSA department ensured that services were being provided as required for those served. Weekly contact was made by the assigned SSA to all individuals and families on their case load. The SSA department worked with providers to ensure that all services were in place, adjusting the required hours to expand at home care due to day programs and work sites being closed temporarily. In addition, SSAs assisted with making cloth masks that were shared with individuals and providers, as well as delivered supplies to those providers and individuals that needed them.

While 2020 was a difficult year, the SSA department stepped up to ensure that quality services continued and that individuals served were receiving needed supports and supervision, while adjusting to the challenges of doing business in a new way.



*SSA Department expressed thanks to all Direct Support Professionals.*

Direct Support Professionals (DSP) have gone above and beyond during the pandemic in providing quality services to those we serve. Due to the closures of day programs and work sites, additional service was needed in individual homes. As always, DSPs fulfilled this need. The SSA Department expressed thanks to them with goody bags, videos of thanks on our social media platforms and frequent check-ins to ensure they had the supplies they needed to keep everyone safe. Thanks to all Direct Care Professionals that stepped up during the difficult time.

## SSAs use technology to connect with individuals, families and providers.

*Guidelines for social distancing and the stay at home orders required SSAs to develop new ways of holding team meetings, communicating with individuals, their families and providers and ways of reaching out to community resources for those we serve. To keep everyone as safe as possible, face to face meetings were limited..*

Through the use of technology, virtual Individual Service Plan (ISP) and special team meetings were able to be conducted as scheduled. When a face to face meeting was important, SSAs ensured social distancing, use of masks for all parties in the meeting and use of sanitation practices to keep the environment safe. SSAs held regular staff meetings via Microsoft Teams or with social distancing at a local park or shelter when the weather permitted.



# Community First

*The Community First division is comprised of services including the Transitional Youth Program, Employment Services, Special Olympics, People First Advocacy Group, Next Chapter Book Club and the Up and Beyond Art Studio.*



Summer Youth Foundations served 21 students this year. Students were offered work experiences through a morning or afternoon session in two community locations. Students were also given the option to complete Summer Youth with remote technology. During the sessions, students learned about jobs in the community, job readiness, and post-secondary options.

The Transitional Youth Program is in its fifth year and in 2020, approximately 85 youth were served. Students ranging from 14-22 years old from Bright Local, Hillsboro City Schools, Greenfield McClain, Fairfield, Lynchburg-Clay, FRS Connections, Hillsboro Christian Academy, Laurel Oaks, Southern Hills CTC, Clinton County Schools and home-schooled students participate in pre-employment skills training. This training includes instruction in self-advocacy, job exploration counseling, workplace readiness training, work based learning and counseling on post-secondary options. Transition Coordinators work with each student to complete the modules with the ultimate goal of working in the community or attending additional educational experiences leading to a career.



## People First Advocacy Group

*The People First Advocacy Group held virtual meetings and weekly chat sessions throughout the year to stay in touch. Members also attended the virtual regional meetings led by the Southern Ohio Council of Government (SOCOG) as well as People First of Ohio. Members were shown how to use video conferencing to stay in touch with others. Many discussions were around what areas seem to be difficult during the stay-at-home orders.*

*The group was able to participate in the 2020 Developmental Advocacy and Awareness Day at the Ohio State House on March 4. Advocates were able to speak on topics such as living arrangements, work opportunities and transportation to go where they want and need to go.*

*Highland County People First Advocacy group has around 15 members.*

## EMPLOYMENT FIRST



Each student is connected to Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities (OOD) and upon completion of the Pre-Employment Transition Services, support remains to assist in seeking a job in the community. Our Employment Services in Job Development, which began in 2019, is an invaluable resource for our clients because they have access to local jobs for which they are trained.

# Up and Beyond Art Studio



The Up and Beyond Art Studio continued to thrive in 2020. The studio itself got a new look with an exciting exterior paint job. The interior of the studio was also painted to create a great environment for artists to be creative and complete their artwork. There continues to be 26 artists that share their artistic talent with us. Since the typical ways of selling art were limited (fairs and art shows), artwork was displayed on social media, including Facebook and Instagram. People interested in purchasing artwork contacted the art studio for purchases. New and exciting pieces were created, including the Welcome and Home signs that were a big hit. Many orders were received for these creations, that have a variety of interchangeable magnetic signs to display for different holidays and events. Look for more information regarding community displays on social media, upcoming newsletters and throughout the community.



# Highland County Special Olympics



2020 was a challenging year for all athletes participating in Special Olympics. Due to the circumstances, all Special Olympics events, such as the spring and summer games were cancelled. Physical practice and local events were unable to be held.

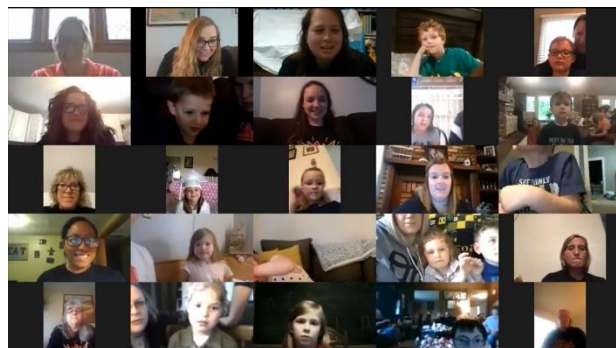
In lieu of the spring and summer games, Special Olympics of Ohio (SOOH) hosted the first ever Fitness Influencer Challenge. This is an on-going fitness competition with various incentive opportunities throughout, the most prizes being after 52 weeks of consistent fitness documentation. At the end of the 52 weeks, contenders are offered the opportunity to apply for the Fitness Influencer position with SOOH. This will be a one year appointment where the winner will be featured in fitness videos, fitness updates and fitness decisions at SOOH. Highland County had one athlete participate in the challenge and is making great progress towards the 52 week goal.



Let me win.  
But if I cannot win,  
let me be brave  
in the attempt.  
- Special Olympics athlete oath

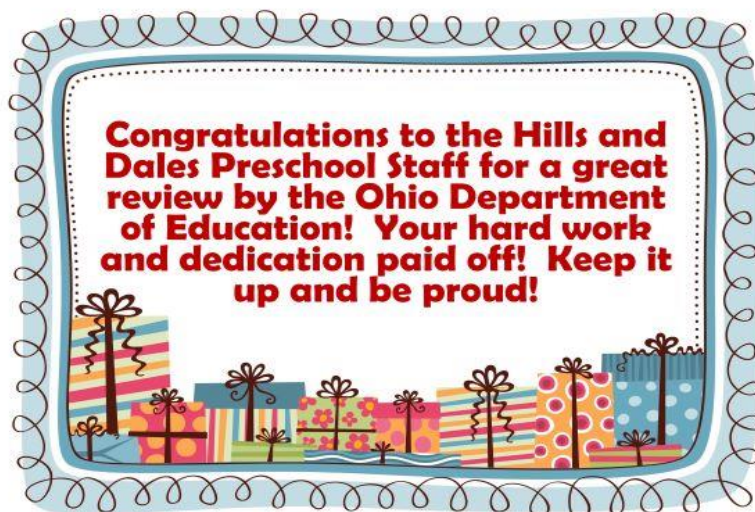
# Hills and Dales Preschool

In 2020, our program had 4 all day preschool classrooms, lead teachers, classroom aides, an administrative assistant, with oversight from the Education Director. The 2019-2020 school year ended with preschoolers learning through a distance learning program. Several care packages were delivered to homes, educational videos developed by our staff were posted on Facebook, and connections using video technology were made. Care package items included; work sheets, resource lists, craft ideas, t-shirts, coloring books and crayons. Personal letters to students from their teachers were also delivered to make sure these little ones knew they were missed. Preschool graduation was different this year, but staff made it as special as possible by doing a virtual graduation celebrating the success of each student.



The beginning of the 2020-2021 school year started with many preparations and changes to follow the guidance provided by the Ohio Department of Education regarding safe practices for in person classroom activity. In person classes began at half capacity, with a two day schedule, where students attended Monday and Wednesday and other students attended Tuesday and Thursday. New procedures were implemented for pick up and drop off times to ensure social distancing and safety for students, staff and families. A special newsletter was sent to families prior to the beginning of the school year outlining the changes. On-going information was sent by the Education Director to keep families informed of the progress of the school year and any changes being made.

A big thank you to the Southern Hills Community Bank for their generosity and donation of pumpkins for all preschoolers this past October. Preschool staff created a "pumpkin patch" since students could not go on the annual field trip to the pumpkin patch.



During the month of October 2020, the Hills and Dales Preschool had a review by the Ohio Department of Education (ODE). During the review, ODE ensured that all standards are met by the staff, which includes educational and physical environment topics. Hills and Dales Preschool had a positive review with no findings or citations noted. Hills and Dales Preschool continues to be a 5-Star Step Up to Quality Award Winner, confirming that the staff provide higher than required educational experiences for the students.

# Operations and Transportation



Operations and Transportation staff played an increased role this year due to the COVID-19 safety precautions and cleaning regimen. While most staff worked remotely, the preschool and administration offices required enhanced cleaning and safety protocol to remain safely open for business. Operations staff cleaned all areas daily and Transportation staff ensured the school buses were sanitized after each route. This effort made it possible to offer services in a safe environment for students and staff, while providing peace of mind for parents and families that had students or staff attending. The increased demand for supplies affected the budget, but we were pleased to receive reimbursements of those costs through CARES Act dollars approved by Highland County Commissioners.

## **Information Technology (IT) Department assisted with remote working and software enhancements.**

With most staff working remotely, the IT Department ensured that all staff had the equipment and accessibility to produce quality work. A Sharepoint site was added to allow easier access to files and other information while working remotely. Microsoft Teams was introduced to provide a platform for multi attendance meetings. A bridge conference phone line was established and used for meetings when computer access was not possible. Additional server upgrades were made for backup of data and contingency plans. Throughout the year, the IT department offered trainings for all staff on cybercrime, safety while on the computer and the new software products put into place.

Highland County Board Transportation served around 57 students for the 20/21 school year. All students participated in bus safety drills and all buses passed required safety checks completed by the Ohio State Highway Patrol.

During 2020, HCBDD parking lots were sealed and relined and the communication tower was repaired for better radio reception, with the antenna being secured to the tower to provide improved service.

To reduce storage space and to ensure that all required documents were stored securely, a scanning and shredding project was initiated during this past year. The records retention policy was revised and documents were identified by each department and placed in a staging area to begin the process. Documents that did not need to be kept were shredded. Documents which needed to be maintained were backed up onto a computer data storage server. While this is an ongoing project, significant progress was made towards the goal of having all documents well organized and stored properly. Staff working remotely were able to scan and shred from home as well as assisting with this project at the office.



# Help Me Grow (HMG)

HMG was very busy in 2020, serving over 99 families in six counties and expanding services with new referrals. Eight home visitors, two supervisors and one program manager continued to focus on the early experiences for those age 0 to 3 years. Services were offered in Adams, Brown, Clinton, Highland, Pickaway and Ross Counties

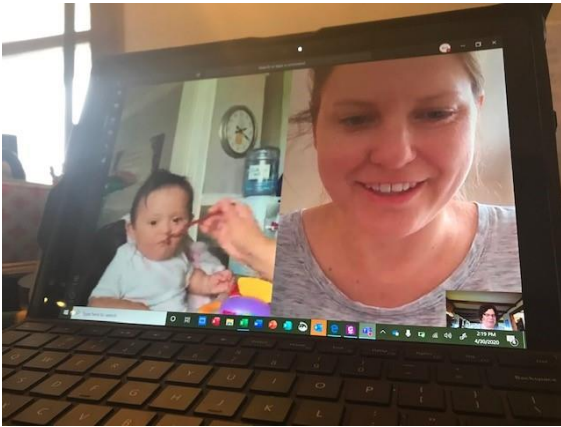
*HMG is funded through the Ohio Department of Health and does not rely upon local tax dollars from HCBDD.*

HMG continued to work with families through virtual visits called telehealth, phone, text or video. ODH provided an additional funding per family to purchase incentive items (phone cards, diapers and wipes) to keep families engaged through the critical time. A safety initiative grant through Ohio Children's Trust Fund (OCTF) was awarded in all counties served by HMG. Eligible families could receive safety items, like cribs, mattresses, toddler beds, bassinets, pack and plays, highchairs, car seats, smoke and carbon monoxide detectors, gates and safety kits. HMG served 113 families through this grant from January 1-June 30, 2020 and was awarded the grant for the second half of the year to serve another 100 families.



# Early Intervention

As with the rest of the world, Early Intervention looked significantly different than it did in previous years. The pandemic created a unique challenge for the Early Intervention professionals in how connection with families occurred and still providing the consistent service that they had grown to expect. The Early Intervention Team turned the challenge into an opportunity for growth. Work transitioned to the virtual realm, from intake paperwork to the actual visits themselves. The team was able to move all work to a remote working platform before the end of the first week away from the office.



EI staff stayed hard at work connecting with families, completing the crucial EI paperwork to begin services, conducting standardized assessments and connecting with local school districts to facilitate EI students who were turning three with a smooth transition into preschool. EI Staff stayed connected with community partners to provide information and support as part of our outreach, holding weekly EI team meetings, collaborating with others, including vision, hearing, mental health professionals and community partners from Help Me Grow, Early Head Start and parents interested in being a part of the team meetings. A Facebook page was created for the Early Intervention Group that routinely shares resources, upcoming

events (typically of the virtual nature!), developmental information, and bedtime stories from familiar faces. Perhaps most importantly, we were able to maintain all the scheduled visits with families throughout the time of remote working. Families were connecting on Microsoft Teams with their child's Primary Service Providers, who were able to hold visits, offer insight, make suggestions for things to practice, and encourage continued growth just the same as before

The time frame from birth through three years is so incredibly crucial for a child's development, and our Early Intervention team did not waste a moment in providing the same level of quality and connection for our families and the children being served. EI was able to serve over 103 children and families during 2020.



## 2020 Board Members

Karen Adams, President  
Elizabeth Fryman, Vice President  
Cheryl Lyle, Secretary  
John Levo  
Paul Pence  
Michael Richards  
Matthew Roberts

## 2020 Administrative Staff

Debra Buccilla, Superintendent  
Sherry Burns, Executive Administrative Assistant  
Lori Moore, Business Director  
Larry Gray, Operations Director  
Elizabeth Brennfleck, Human Resource Director  
Kraig Walker, Community First Director  
Kelli Williamson, Service and Support Director  
Suzie Janasov, Early Childhood Director  
Renee Achtermann, Education Director  
Becky Pollard, Nurse  
Jennifer Goodwin, Investigative Agent

