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Introducing New Board Chair

SARA NEYER

SARA NEYER ASSUMED THE ROLE OF CHAIR OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES OF ENVISION IN AUGUST. SHE SAT DOWN FOR A Q&A SESSION TO PROVIDE INSIGHT INTO HER MOTIVATION, INSPIRATION AND VISION FOR LEADING THE ORGANIZATION.



You worked for Envision 20 years ago and recently came back to serve on the board. Now you're the newly-appointed Board Chair. What is it about the organization that has sustained your interest and commitment over such a long span of time?

I took the job at Envision (then The Resident Home) as I was working on a Masters degree in Special Education. It was a perfect marriage of my work experience with nonprofits and my education and work history with people with disabilities. I could relate to the people we served and their families a little more readily than someone who wasn't at least a little bit familiar with the developmental disabilities world. Knowing a little something about the challenges facing the people and families served by Envision made it obvious – then and now – that Envision goes to great lengths to provide individualized services that try to meet exactly the needs and desires of the people being served in the way that works best for the client and their family. Back then, Envision was super-focused on the people-first language and self-determination that we take for granted now. They were and are focused on working with people with disabilities to live their best and fullest lives.

Envision is still out in front of best practices in this kind of work with their longtime focus on dual-diagnosis mental health care and trauma-informed service in every division of the agency. They are still keeping ahead of the curve to provide the personal and

“Envision is still out in front of best practices...”
– Sara Neyer, Envision Board Chair

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individual service that so appealed to me as a young and idealistic employee and now as a board member!

As a Doctoral Candidate in Educational and Community-Based Action Research at the University of Cincinnati, how can your academic focus positively impact Envision?

My PhD is in community-based and participatory research – a field that works really hard to make sure the people being researched are involved in the research. It is often called research with and not on people. Envision has always been good about including our clients and families in decisions about the organization when possible. This agency is participatory and community-based.

My research and academic work is also focused on getting practical, applied, evidence-based solutions into the hands of people in the trenches of community work. Envision has sought and used

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evidence-based practices for as long as I've been involved. The CITE staff keeps up with the latest in communication technology and education/training news. The mental health team and the entire agency spent a lot of time and effort recently to understand and implement the tenets of trauma-informed service and they keep up with news in that area to stay current with the research. We are looking at the latest in governance research to make sure our volunteer leadership is working well.

What are the characteristics of a healthy and effective nonprofit board?

Effective nonprofit boards are engaged and passionate about the mission of the organization and they trust and support the staff to handle the implementation of that mission. In other words, boards are focused on the mission and vision that will drive the momentum and day-to-day activities carried out by the CEO and staff. Luckily, the staff at Envision is top-notch and that makes board leadership here very easy!

I was a nonprofit staff member for many, many years and I still think like a staffer. I try to lead a board that I would have wanted to work with as a staff member. To me, that is a board that knows and understands its role and is filled with folks who are creative and engaged enough to help problem-solve and troubleshoot when needed.

Board Chair Sara Neyer at Envision's West Fork Campus



“Envision is nimble enough to respond to the changing needs of the individuals being served.”

– Sara Neyer, Envision Board Chair

What sets Envision apart from other local providers of services to individuals with developmental disabilities?

Hands-down, the thing that differentiates Envision is our commitment to meeting the needs and wants of the people we serve in ways that work for them – individualized service tailored to each and every person and family we work with. This used to be called self-determination but, happily, now it is just considered the right way to work for and with people with disabilities and is the focus of the work around here. Envision is nimble enough to respond to the changing needs of the individuals being served. We also serve people through all stages of life. Some people living in our Community Living homes were first involved with Envision as small children! Some people use our services on and off over many years. Envision honestly tries to be the solution for our individuals and families at every stage of life.

What would you like to accomplish during your term as Board Chair?

Internally, Envision is a finely-oiled machine. The staff and leadership team handle the inevitable hiccups and small troubles of running a large human service organization with patience, skill and creativity. But Envision does face some external challenges in the near future: government funding streams and billing grows more complicated by the day. Changes in the labor market affect our staffing. Our campus on West Fork Road is aging and needs attention. I can't exactly say that I look forward to tackling these issues but we are ready to look ahead and begin to problem solve and plan around these issues. I feel fortunate that we are in a position to proactively plan and vision instead of just “putting out fires.”

Additionally, I would like to see Envision doubling down on including the voices and visions of the people we serve in our decision making. The nimble and adaptable nature of the agency that I mentioned before must be informed by industry best practices and the ideas and vision of staff and board. But it must also take in consideration the voices of the people who will ultimately be affected by any changes we opt to make – people with disabilities and their families.



Michael, sitting next to Linda, proudly displays his photos

Linda remained unmarried and never had children but has quite a large “family” of kids and adults who lived with her for a period of time since she started providing foster care in 1996. Virtually every age group – from toddlers to senior citizens – have called her home their home. Some for days or weeks, and others for months or years. A bedroom on the first floor of her three-bedroom brick house is used exclusively for long-term placements and another bedroom is reserved for short-term respite and emergency care.

Michael has lived with Linda for the past four years. With a prosthetic right eye and a left one that is nearly blind, some are surprised to learn that photography is Michael’s greatest passion. He has amassed an impressive collection of pictures of the shapes, shadows and colors that comprise the world as he sees it.

“I’ve always wanted to help. That’s just who I am. My mother influenced me a lot on how to treat people.”

– Linda Barnfield

“I wish I could live with my real family, but they pretty much gave up on me when I was 16. The best thing about Linda is that no matter how bad or intense things might get, she never gives up on me and we can move past it and start again with a clean slate,” says Michael.

Michael acknowledges that his frustrations can sometimes bubble over and confides that he struggles with depression, too. “I want to be more independent. But when I try, I get really anxious and nervous. No matter how happy I am, that sadness and dull gray depression is always there like background noise,” says Michael.

When he gets upset, Linda skillfully diffuses the situation. “You have to create the atmosphere you want and set the right tone. I can see when things are going to go sour, so I redirect the situation to make everyone at peace,” she says.

With help from Linda and Envision, Michael is making progress and meeting goals toward greater independence. The journey is difficult at times for both Michael and Linda. But Envision provides the tools to keep them on track.

“I have great support from Envision. They check on me, as well as Michael. They ask: ‘How are you doing, Linda? What are you doing to take care of yourself?’ That motivates me even more,” says Linda.

Fostering **INDEPENDENCE** One Day at a Time

Linda Barnfield didn’t consciously choose her vocation. In some sense, it chose her.

She was a single woman in her 20’s when she decided to seek employment as an in-home caregiver for the elderly. But as she was scanning job listings in the newspaper, an advertisement for foster care providers with Envision (then known as The Resident Home Corporation) caught her eye. She had no experience working with people with developmental disabilities, but was intrigued by the opportunity and took the steps to become trained and certified.

That was 22 years ago.

Today, Linda, is one of Envision’s most valued foster care providers. She’s often called upon for respite and emergency stays – in addition to her full-time care of Michael, a 22-year-old with high-functioning autism and other disabilities, including hearing loss and blindness.

“I’ve always wanted to help. That’s just who I am. My mother influenced me a lot on how to treat people,” she says.

“I wish I could live with my real family, but they pretty much gave up on me when I was 16.”

– Michael, age 22

Interested in learning more about becoming a foster care provider? Please contact Kristie Hirsch at: (513) 619-2953 or khirsch@envisionohio.org

Will Stephens was diagnosed with a rare form of muscular dystrophy as a child and relies on services from Envision to support his active lifestyle.



“Our support obviously makes a huge difference, but it’s dwarfed by the positive attitude and spirit that Will brings to the table. He’s a force to be reckoned with.”

– Jim Steffey, Envision President & CEO

WILL STEPHENS: Living A Full and Vibrant Life

It’s 4:30 in the afternoon and Will Stephens, age 20, uses his electric wheelchair to push open the door to his apartment that Mels Mbuyi has left slightly ajar. Mels is one of four Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) assigned to Will who provide round-the-clock care. He’s been waiting for Will to return from work and asks if he had a good day.

“Yeah, nobody yelled at me!” Will answers with a hardy laugh as he checks his phone for text messages.

It’s not Will’s supervisors who raise their voices at him. They think he rocks – and recently presented him with a “Most Valuable Player” certificate for his work at RDI Corporation, a Blue Ash-based call center where he’s worked for nearly a year. It’s cranky people on the other end of Will’s phone who sometimes speak harshly or hang up. He takes it all in stride, though – something he’s learned to do well after being diagnosed a decade ago with a rare form of muscular dystrophy that affects every muscle, including his heart. His initial clumsiness in walking progressed fairly quickly and by high school he was attending the prom in a wheelchair.

Was that hard? Will brushes off the question with a smile. “Heck no! I got to zoom around in this really cool chair,” he says. But then his smile dissolves for a moment and he quietly admits: “It wasn’t easy.”

Nevertheless, Will has a knack for making his life look easy. He gets up, goes to work, pays his bills, eats dinner, plays some video games, takes a shower, brushes his teeth, goes to bed – and does it all over again the next day. But for Will, each



“I have goals. When I finish one, I move on to the next one.”

– Will Stephens



Will's employer presented him with the “MVP” (Most Valuable Player) award in September.



Top: Will works more than 30 hours a week at RDI Corporation, a Blue Ash-based call center.

Right: Will with his high school sweetheart, India, at their 2016 Senior Prom. The young couple are now planning for marriage and a family.

of these activities requires support that Envision provides, including DSPs like Mels, transportation, and assistive devices. Envision's service plan for Will makes it possible for there to be a rhythm and routine to his life. Dates on the weekend with India, his high school sweetheart, visiting family, eating out when the budget permits, church on Sunday, and making plans – big ones – for the future.

“I'm saving up to buy India an engagement ring!” he reveals. Marriage, children, and a satisfying career are life milestones that Will is determined to experience in spite of his profound physical limitations.

“I have goals. When I finish one, I move on to the next one,” he says. Will is focused and intentional because he knows that his disease will continue to undermine his health and will likely shorten his lifespan. But even that stark reality doesn't rob him of his joy. He's confident that advances in research will lead to better treatments and maybe even a cure during his lifetime.

“He is an inspiration to all of us,” says Envision's President and CEO, Jim Steffey. “Will personifies our mission statement of providing a bright and vibrant future for people with disabilities. Our support obviously makes a huge difference, but it's dwarfed by the positive attitude and spirit that Will brings to the table. He's a force to be reckoned with,” Jim says.

Support Envision ON Giving Tuesday

DONATE ONLINE 11/27/18
www.envisionohio.org

Are the services that Envision provides important to you? Perhaps we serve – or did in the past – a family member or friend. Maybe you know someone with a developmental disability and have an appreciation for organizations like ours. Or could it be that you simply want to participate in the global “Giving Tuesday” movement and are looking for a worthwhile charity to support?

Whatever the reason, we encourage and welcome your donation. Federal Medicaid dollars cover the basic services that Envision delivers annually to more than 600 children and adults. But to add depth to the programs and help the people we serve lead more meaningful lives, ongoing private philanthropic support is vital.



The easiest way to donate is to go to our website and click on the DONATE button. You can also use the remittance envelope attached to this newsletter.

www.envisionohio.org

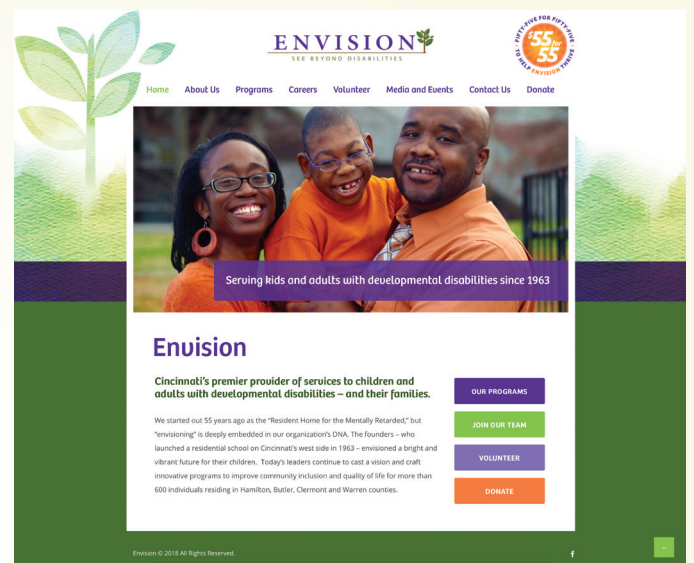
Let Us Know What You Think of Our New Website www.envisionohio.org

GET ENTERED IN A DRAWING FOR A
\$50 AMAZON GIFT CARD

Envision’s new website was launched last month and we’d love to know what you think of it. Anyone who submits a comment or suggestion by using the form on the “Contact Us” page will be entered into a drawing that will take place at 5 p.m. on November 30, 2018.

“We tried to make the new design bolder, brighter, cleaner and easier to read and navigate,” says Susan Berg, Envision’s Director of Development & Marketing. “The amount of text is trimmed down, to be more relevant, to-the-point and useful.”

Each of Envision’s four programs have their own page, which includes a description of the program, its impact in the community and a short story of the program “in action.” An inquiry button on each program page makes it easier for



parents and agency representatives to seek information or make a referral. Likewise, job seekers, volunteers and donors will be able to interact more efficiently with the website.

The re-design was made possible through a grant from the General Electric Employees’ Community Service Fund, a longtime supporter of Envision.



Legacy Event Reconnects Friends of Envision

55TH ANNIVERSARY DRIVES THE QUESTION: "WHY?"

An intimate gathering was held on October 11 at the stately Clifton home of Envision Board Chair Sara Neyer and her husband, John. Friends of Envision, going back five decades, mixed and mingled, shared stories and pored over old photos and newsletters. Later in the evening, Susan Berg, Envision's Director of Development & Marketing, facilitated a conversation with the attendees that focused on several "why" questions:

- **Why was Envision started?**
- **Why is Envision important?**
- **Why should Envision continue another 55 years?**
- **Why do you support Envision?**

Gary Glandorf shared how there was "no hope" for his sibling back in 1959 when the idea for starting a residential school for children with developmental disabilities was being spawned. He remembered being a kid selling cotton candy for a nickel at an early fundraiser – one of hundreds of events that raised money to move the project to the next level.

Members of the Conlan family talked about their late father, Tom Conlan – a local attorney who played a pivotal role in helping the founders navigate complex legal issues.

Stu Warshauer, one of the original founders, emphasized the impact of families like the Glandorf's and the Conlan's. "It was the families that made things happen 55 years ago and it will require the energy and support of new families to carry it through the next 55 years," said Stu.

Additional small gatherings will be held in 2019 to continue reconnecting people who have lost touch with the organization. If you would like to be added to the invitation list, please email Susan Berg at sberg@envisionohio.org, or call her at (513) 619-2903.



"It was the families who made things happen 55 years ago and it will require the energy and support of new families to carry it through the next 55 years."

– Stu Warshauer

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