

touchstone

A quarterly publication providing the latest news & information for individuals with disabilities, families, friends and our community.

What's in a name? Stone Belt launches Employment Fundamentals programming

By *Tonya Vandivier*,
Executive Employment First Director

Stone Belt recently began focusing its day programming on the essential skills an individual needs to become a productive member of the workforce. Programming called *Lifelong Learning* is now *Employment Fundamentals*.

Stone Belt, as a name and brand, dates back to 1959. However, day programming offered at Stone Belt has changed throughout the years—Habilitation, Employment and Personal Resources, Life Skills Enrichment, Lifelong Learning, and now Employment Fundamentals.

Why is a name change necessary? This change reflects movements evolving through self-advocacy for people with disabilities around Indiana, the United States, and the world. A global movement exists for individuals with developmental disabilities to obtain competitive integrated employment if they choose to do so.

Stone Belt has offered employment services since 1985. The name change solidifies the agency's commitment to this movement. The state of Indiana currently provides incentives for agencies to partner and find ways to increase opportunities for competitive integrated employment.

One of Stone Belt's *Principles of Service* states that employment is a fundamental part of adult life. Even though a heavy emphasis will be on employment, Stone Belt is committed to the weight and power of



Stone Belt's Student Self-Advocates participated in this year's Lemonade Day. They devised marketing strategies, worked on customer service skills, and developed distribution logistics.

choice. We understand and appreciate that not everyone will choose to be employed. However, if the desire is there, we are dedicated to providing the skills and tools necessary to allow them an opportunity to pursue a job or career where they can succeed.

Stone Belt will continue working with clients to develop individualized plans focusing on those areas most important to them. We are developing curriculums and kinesthetic activities allowing clients to develop skills to assist them once they enter the job market, including communication, decision-making,

how to follow the rules, problem-solving, self-advocacy, self-awareness, and self-confidence.

We are excited about the directional ambition of our new name. We look forward to you joining us in this pursuit. If you have any suggestions about the idea of employment fundamentals, email tvandivier@stonebelt.org/.

Regardless of our name, we will start where the client is, as our rich history has taught us to do.

Contacting Your Legislators

In Indiana:

Every Indiana citizen has a state representative and a state senator. To find your legislators go to: <http://iga.in.gov/legislative/find-legislators/>.

In Washington:

To express your concerns about federal issues, contact these legislators.

- Senator Todd Young
202-224-5623 in Washington, D.C.
or 317-226-6700 in Indianapolis
www.young.senate.gov/contact/email-todd
- Senator Mike Braun
202-224-4814 in Washington, D.C.
or 317-822-8240 in Indianapolis
www.braun.senate.gov/contact-mike
- Representative Trey Hollingsworth
202-225-5315 in Washington, D.C.
or 812-288-3999 in Jeffersonville
<http://hollingsworth.house.gov/contact/email>
- Representative Greg Pence
202-225-3021 in Washington, D.C.
or 812-799-5230 in Columbus
<http://pence.house.gov/contact>

FROM THE CEO

So Grateful. . .

By **Bitta DeWees**

We are celebrating summer at Stone Belt and participating in some favorite activities like Special Olympics. At the same time we are figuring out how to navigate services and support in a world where COVID-19 continues to strike those we support and our workforce.

Stone Belt continues to follow guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Indiana and Monroe County health department, and local experts regarding the best response to mitigate the spread of COVID. However, we are going further than these recommendations. When someone tests positive for COVID, we do the following:

- Begin extensive contact tracing.
- Isolate the person who is positive for recommended time frames.
- Require close contacts to follow strict testing procedures and wear masks,
- Continue to operate services and supports in the safest location based on the circumstances.

The latest variant seems much less potent and—thanks to vaccinations—most cases are mild or asymptomatic. For this I am grateful.

We are grateful to be moving forward in this “new normal” world we live in. Grateful we can adapt our responses to COVID and keep services open. Grateful our clients continue to stay safe and healthy. Grateful for the staff continuing on this journey with us in the face of personnel shortages. And grateful to work for Stone Belt, an agency full of people who care so much.

There are other things to be grateful for at Stone Belt. We recently received a donation of office furniture from one of our most valued partners, Cook, Inc. Leadership staff evaluated furniture needs in all of Stone Belt’s facilities and then visited Cook to select from furniture they were no longer using. We now have desks, chairs, tables, cabinets, and shelving to distribute to our different locations in the upcoming months. Thank you to Cook Inc. for all they do to support Stone Belt in so many ways.

I am grateful we were finally able to celebrate, in person, Leslie Green’s retirement as the CEO of Stone Belt. On June 29, many of Leslie’s favorite people came together to honor her legacy. Stone Belt’s Art Instructor Tiffany Hanner and client artists created sparkling, green centerpieces and painted an incredible mural on the wall. Adam Hamel,



Bitta DeWees
Chief Executive Officer

development manager, coordinated with a local caterer on a delicious selection of appetizers. And, his decorations transformed the room. A video celebrating Leslie and her 42+ year career was created by Penni Sims, communications manager. The video included speeches from Representative Matt Pierce, Rotary President Sally Gaskill, Director of the Institute on Community Integration, Amy Hewitt, local artist and long-time Stone Belt supporter Joe Lamantia, along with Self-Advocate and former Board of Director’s member Betsy Higgins.

Former Board members Henry Upper and Charlotte Zietlow along with The Arc of Indiana’s Director Kim Dodson spoke of Leslie’s many contributions during a presentation ceremony. Board members Hal Turner and Kate McQueen presented Leslie with a plaque dedicating the former cafeteria at Bloomington’s 10th Street facility as “The Green Space.” And finally, an incredible honor from Governor Eric Holcomb was bestowed on Leslie by Senator Eric Koch. He presented her with the *Sagamore of the Wabash* award. Created in the 1940s, the *Sagamore* is one of the highest honors in the state of Indiana, awarded by the governor as a personal tribute to those who have rendered distinguished service to the state through their wisdom, public commitment, and concern for the well-being of others.

“I am so grateful for the dedication of ‘The Green Space.’ I’m still reeling from receiving the *Sagamore of the Wabash*. Never in my life could I have imagined something as powerful as that. I’m humbled to receive it. I truly had a wonderful life at Stone Belt. Seeing all the people that were a part of my circle over the years was such a joy. Of course, all of you and Stone Belt occupies a big part of my heart and won’t be forgotten,” said Leslie in response to the party and all the accolades.

I invite you to join me in celebrating summer, navigating the new normal, and being grateful.

Fondly,

Bitta DeWees

Employees receive Awards for Excellence

With their support and dedication, staff makes a difference in clients' daily lives. On Wednesday, June 22, five employees were recognized for their commitment to Stone Belt. These employees have made outstanding contributions to Stone Belt's mission of preparing, empowering, and supporting individuals with developmental disabilities. Honorees included:

Melanie Adams, Onboarding Coordinator
6 years, 3 months

Melanie works tirelessly to give new employees a strong foundation from which they can grow their careers. Melanie also wears many hats including serving as a therapist for new, and current employees. Melanie is outstanding at forging positive relationships with new employees and thrives at connecting with people.

Jennifer Johnson, Client Support Coordinator
19 years

Jennifer is always ready and willing, to help where needed. She works extra shifts, supports other sites, and coordinates staff training. Jennifer also serves as a volunteer advisor with the local self-advocates group. She continually works to empower clients and help them reach their goals. She truly inspires those around her to be the best they can be.

Josh Hazelgrove, House Manager
4 years, 3 months

Josh leads by example and is always calm, supportive, and respectful to all, even under extreme circumstances. He treats everyone with dignity and respect and is willing to do whatever it takes to keep everyone healthy, happy, and safe. His calm demeanor and patience with clients, and staff alike, make things run smoother for everyone involved.

Yasuo Miakashi
Skills Development Clinician
6 years, 2 months

Despite an overwhelming schedule, Yasuo consistently meets clients' needs ranging from children to adults. Yasuo adapts sessions to meet a particular individual's needs and incorporates aspects relating expressly to their interests. Yasuo goes above and beyond to support clients throughout Stone Belt in multiple programs.

Becki Matlock, House Manager
2 years, 4 months

Becki goes out of her way to ensure that client and staff accomplishments are celebrated. She is positive, proactive, and is continually helping others achieve success. Becki always goes the extra mile without hesitation. She is committed to ensuring the individuals she supports, staff members, and clients, can live their best lives.



Josh Hazelgrove receives the Award for Excellence from Stone Belt's Executive Residential Director Ilse Anderson.



Stone Belt's 2022 Awards for Excellence recipients (l- r): Josh Hazelgrove, Melanie Adams, Becki Matlock, Jennifer Johnson, and Yasuo Miakashi.

Honor former CEO Leslie Green with a donation to Stone Belt

In recognition of Leslie Green's 42+ years at Stone Belt, contributions can now be made to the Excellence Endowment in her honor. Gifts to the Stone Belt Excellence Endowment support ongoing initiatives enabling the agency to reach levels of excellence in support, training, and outcomes for clients and staff.

Examples of programs funded through the Excellence Endowment include Stone Belt Art Studios, Hand in Hand, and I Am You performances. Enhanced staff development programs help staff obtain quality outcomes for those we support.



Stone Belt's former CEO, Leslie Green, poses in front of "The Green Space" mural with Celicia Upper and her husband, former board president Henry Upper.

CORPORATE SPONSORSHIP

Becoming a corporate partner is a premiere way to show support for people with disabilities and is vital in helping Stone Belt staff and clients reach beyond what current resources allow. For more information on becoming a corporate sponsor, visit www.stonebelt.org/giving. If you have questions, please contact Development Manager Adam Hamel at (812) 332-2168, ext. 269, or ahamel@stonebelt.org.



Why I Give...

By Hal Turner

In the second grade, I met my friend Teddy. He was different. He was bigger, looked older, and was always smiling. He talked in short, broken fragments that were hard to understand. He wasn't good at running or tossing a ball. His walk was more like awkward stumbles.

I was bullied because I was small. Teddy was bullied because of everything he was. That seemed wrong! Sometimes he would say "Hiiiiii" in his drawn-out trademark way to the bullies.



Hal Turner,
Stone Belt Board
of Directors

Teddy lived a few farms farther out from ours. When I would ride my bike past Teddy's house, I'd yell "Hi, Teddy!" as he sat on his lawn, and Teddy always smiled and yelled back, "Hiiiiii." I never forgot that despite everything, Teddy was a feeling person who didn't forget his friends, and I was Teddy's friend!

Later in junior high school, I would have a best friend, Bob, who was newly mobile with the help of a wheelchair after spinal surgery. One day his mother whispered to me that we should try a camping trip so Bob could stretch and test his abilities. We planned a two-week journey across the USA in a VW Beetle. We slept in a pup tent, pushing Bob to use his abilities to get around. He grew more confident and independent because he started to believe he could do more. I only helped when he needed it. When we got back, Bob's confidence in his abilities had mushroomed. He was no longer disabled; he was THISabled.

I learned a lot about reaching beyond one's grasp on that trip.

These remarkable people helped shape my life and helped bring me to Stone Belt. Thanks, Teddy. Thanks, Bob.

Amanda Wilson wins Silver Medal during the 2022 Special Olympics USA Games

When Amanda Wilson and her partner Mary Albanese won a Silver Medal in the Unified Double Bocce competition at the 2022 Special Olympics Games USA in June, it culminated in a significant journey beginning 11 years ago. As a member of the Special Olympics Indiana-Monroe County, Wilson has competed in basketball, bowling, corn hole, and bocce over the past decade.

Before being greeted by Football Hall of Famer Peyton Manning on the runway at the Orlando Executive Airport, Wilson went head-to-head with a Boeing FEDEX 757 jetliner during *Special Olympics Plane Pull Challenge* at the Indianapolis International Airport postal hub. She also participated in the "Freezin' For A Reason" Polar Plunge—an event to raise money for the Special Olympics by jumping into a freezing pool of water—at the Starlite Drive-In in March 2021.

All of the effort paid off when Wilson stood on a podium and received her Silver Medal. Wilson and her partner Albanese, who she has known for 15 years, also took sixth place in the Unified Bocce competition at Disney's Coronado Springs.



Amanda Wilson poses with the Silver medal she won competing in Unified Double Bocce with her teammate Mary Albanese during the USA Special Olympics held in Orlando, Florida.



Tom Brantley poses with the Gold Medal he won in Bowling with a final score of 309 during the Summer Special Olympic Games in Terre Haute.

How do you top all of this? By going to Walt Disney World, that's how! Special Olympians attended a special theme park party for the athletes and event organizers. According to Wilson, the Disney World party was the highlight of her trip.

Wilson is taking all of the fame in stride. She was featured on *ABC* and *ESPN* channels walking into

Exploria Stadium with Team Indiana during the Opening Ceremony for the games. While she and the rest of her team were marching into the stadium, her friends texted her that she was on tv. And, before she departed, her co-workers at *Catalent* signed their names to a huge banner wishing her luck and hung it in the cafeteria where she works.

What's next for Wilson? She plans on continuing with Special Olympics and will try to compete in the 2026 games, primarily since they will be held in Minnesota, a state with much cooler temperatures than Florida.

Special Olympics is the world's largest sports organization for people with intellectual disabilities, with over 4 million athletes, coaches, and volunteers around the globe. In Monroe County, there are 117 athletes and about 50 coaches.

Congratulations to Amanda Wilson and Team Indiana. We celebrate their accomplishments on and off the playing field and are champions for a more inclusive world—a world where we all *Shine As One*.

Summer Special Olympic Games return

Special Olympians returned to Terre Haute for the first complete, in-person Summer Games since 2019. The games included bocce, bowling, cycling, horseshoes, powerlifting, soccer, swimming, track and field, and volleyball. Athletes from Stone Belt brought home several medals in recognition of their achievements, lots of stories, and many memories.

Highlights included the Opening Ceremony held at Indiana State's newly renovated Hulman Center, Olympic Town, one of the most popular locations during the games, a movie night featuring *The Peanut Butter Falcon*, and a Victory Dance to round out the weekend. Congratulations to all of the athletes who competed in the Summer Games.

Leslie Green honored with prestigious award

Leslie Green, former Chief Executive Officer for Stone Belt, was awarded the *Sagamore of the Wabash* award—the highest honor given by the state of Indiana—on June 29 during a ceremony to celebrate her recent retirement. The award was issued by Indiana Governor Eric Holcomb and presented to Green by State Senator Eric Koch (R-Bedford) during the ceremony. Before her retirement in April, Green had served as CEO of Stone Belt since 2000 and had worked 42+ years with the nonprofit organization.

“It is an honor to present Leslie Green with this prestigious award,” said Senator Koch. “Leslie has exemplified the qualities of wisdom, public commitment, and concern for the well-being of others in her distinguished service to the citizens of south-central Indiana.”

Created in the 1940s, the *Sagamore* is one of the highest honors in the state of Indiana, awarded by the governor as a personal tribute to those who have rendered distinguished service to the state through their wisdom, public commitment, and concern for the well-being of others.



Senator Eric Koch (R-Bedford) presents Stone Belt's former CEO Leslie Green with the *Sagamore of the Wabash* during her retirement celebration in Bloomington.



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