



touchstone

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

Summer offers lots of fun at Stone Belt

One of the summer's most anticipated events at Stone Belt is Fun Day, held in July, when the Pi Kappa Phi Journey of Hope cycling team pedals their way through Bloomington. The cyclists are greeted enthusiastically upon arrival and spend the afternoon connecting with clients in various ways.

For over a decade, these cyclists have stopped by Stone Belt during their cross-country journey spanning over 12,000 miles, starting in Seattle, Washington, and converging in Washington, D.C. Along the way, the cyclists promote inclusion and generate awareness by connecting with local media and stopping at partner organizations like Stone Belt. These moments are a testament to the power of connection and the importance of inclusion.



Contacting Your Legislators

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 Erin Houchin 202-225-5315 in Washington, D.C. or 812-288-3999 in Jeffersonville <http://houchin.house.gov/contact>
- Representative Greg Pence 202-225-3021 in Washington, D.C. or 812-799-5230 in Columbus <http://pence.house.gov/contact>

Commemorating success, envisioning tomorrow, and cherishing today

As we close fiscal year 2024, it's a perfect moment to reflect on our accomplishments and eagerly anticipate the opportunities that lie ahead. At Stone Belt, our mission to prepare, empower, and support people with developmental disabilities and their families to participate fully in the life of the community continues to drive us forward with unwavering dedication and passion. Let's take a moment to celebrate our collective achievements.

Reflecting on a Year of Success

The past year has been marked by resilience, creativity, and the incredible strength of our Stone Belt community. We have faced challenges and met them head-on to continue providing the highest-quality support for those we serve.

In 2023, our Board of Directors and agency leadership sought input from staff, persons served, their families, and the community to develop a three-year strategic plan. In year two, 2024, we have focused on:

- Improving client outcomes by achieving high satisfaction, quick access to services, peaceful home life, good health, and overall quality of life.
- Stabilizing the workforce and reinforcing agency values through building a positive culture for clients and staff by decreasing shift vacancies and turnover and increasing retention.
- Transforming Manufacturing services to a competitive integrated setting and increasing the number of clients with jobs in the community.
- Growing Milestones' professional services and becoming part of the broader mental health community.
- Maintaining financial stability.
- Maintaining effective Board Governance.



Employment Fundamentals participants in Columbus enjoy cooling off in the community pool on a hot summer day.

Embracing the Present

Summer is a time for fun, relaxation, and creating lasting memories. At Stone Belt, we are committed to ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to enjoy the season to the fullest. From outdoor picnics and recreational outings to art workshops and cultural excursions, our communities are full of opportunities designed to promote socialization, foster creativity, and build lasting friendships.



Bitta DeWees
Chief Executive Officer

We now have an electronic calendar of events in Bloomington, Bedford, and Columbus that staff can easily access to find fun and exciting things to do for free in the community.

Looking Forward

I invite you to join me in celebrating everyone's achievements, supporting our initiatives, and advocating for inclusivity and empowerment for individuals with disabilities. Our number one issue continues to be staffing, and we are developing new initiatives focused on training and retaining staff.

I am always open to input and ideas that will make Stone

Belt the highest-quality agency we can be for those we support. Together, we can make a meaningful difference in the lives of those we serve and create a more inclusive and compassionate community for all. Together, we can continue to empower individuals with disabilities to thrive and succeed.

Thank you for your continued support and dedication to our mission at Stone Belt. Let's make this summer and our upcoming year ones to remember.

Warm regards,

Bitta DeWees

Celebrating excellence

On Monday, May 6, 2024, five stellar Stone Belt employees were recognized for their commitment to Stone Belt at the 2024 Awards For Excellence luncheon at St. Mark's United Methodist Church in Bloomington. The annual celebration recognizes five employees who have demonstrated exceptional professionalism, ambition, and reliability in their respective fields. They embody Stone Belt's mission of preparing, empowering, and supporting individuals with disabilities. Individuals receiving this prestigious award receive accolades for their contributions to Stone Belt and \$1000 for being named an Award For Excellence recipient. Congratulations to the 2024 Awards For Excellence recipients.



Brian Bolton - 10 years & 5 months
Brian demonstrates exceptional dedication and expertise. His personalized approach to hiring ensures the best fit for each employee. As a pivotal figure in welcoming new hires, he sets the tone and fosters enthusiasm within the agency.



Dante Hardin - 2 years & 4 months
Dante consistently maintains a positive attitude and is unwavering in his willingness to lend a hand whenever needed. His responsiveness and eagerness to assist with any question or concern make him a reliable and trusted resource for the entire team.



Urszula David - 20 years & 11 months
Urszula's unwavering two-decade commitment to Stone Belt clients has been truly extraordinary. Beyond her daily responsibilities, Urszula's willingness to mentor and inspire others reflects her enduring positive attitude and professionalism.



Molly Perry - 3 years & 8 months
With a substantial caseload, Molly consistently goes above and beyond. She diligently works with Milestones' clients to ensure they understand self-advocacy, the importance of using their own voice, and how to make changes to achieve positive outcomes.



Jimmy Ritter - 21 years & 10 months
Jimmy consistently surpasses expectations with his dedication. Jimmy's exemplary work ethic and positive influence make him an employee worthy of recognition and admiration. He serves as an inspiring role model for others.

Congratulations INARF Leadership Academy graduates



Keisha Boyce, Stone Belt Regional Associate Director, and Melanie Litke, Milestones Behavior Support Services Coordinator, recently graduated from the 2024 INARF Leadership Academy.

INARF (The Indiana Association for Rehabilitation Facilities) recently presented its Leadership Academy graduating Class of 2024. The Class of 2024 attendees were selected from a pool of highly qualified applicants selected by INARF member organizations providing services to Hoosiers with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Pre-ETS: Empowering students for the future

Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) prepares students with disabilities for their futures by offering them the tools, experiences, and support they need to succeed. Pre-ETS also partners with local businesses and organizations to provide students with hands-on learning opportunities in the community.

Pre-ETS in Bartholomew, Lawrence, and Monroe counties continued providing these experiences throughout the summer by offering summer workshops to students ages 14 through 22.



Jonathan Lucas with Pre-ETS of Bartholomew County practices his planting skills at Brown Hill Nursery.

Monroe County summer workshop participants toured the Exotic Feline Rescue Center, which included an exclusive visit to the animal hospital, which is typically not open to the public. Students observed the radiology and surgery rooms and saw animals being treated. They also learned about the cats and foxes living at the main facility and heard their stories. This experience gave students valuable insights into the animal care field and the requirements for working at such a facility.

Pre-ETS summer workshop participants in Bartholomew County visited Brown Hill Nursery, where they volunteered and applied the skills they had been learning in the summer camp program. They participated in groundskeeping and maintenance tasks such as planting flowers, repotting plants, and weeding. These hands-on experiences provided students with practical skills they can list on resumes or job applications, preparing them for future employment.

Summer workshop participants in Lawrence County cleaned and maintained the Nature Center, Gus Grissom



Monroe County Pre-ETS spent a day at the Exotic Feline Rescue Center learning about the demands of caring for different species of cats and foxes.

Memorial, and Pioneer Village at Spring Mill State Park. In addition, students were paired with park employees for one-on-one work experiences in housekeeping, concession stands, maintenance, and gate attendant roles. This summer workshop provided valuable work experience, and participants earned a wage of \$12.25 per hour.

Pre-ETS is supported by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) agencies allocate 15% of federal funds to provide these services. Pre-ETS represent the earliest services available for students with disabilities, helping them identify career interests that can be explored through additional VR services, including:

- Job Exploration Counseling
- Work-Based Learning Experiences
- Counseling on Postsecondary Education Opportunities
- Workplace Readiness Training
- Instruction in Self-Advocacy

It's safe to say that Pre-ETS summer workshops made a tangible difference in the lives of many young individuals this summer.



Robert Todd and Hunter Mathis have a blast cleaning the Gus Grissom Memorial at Spring Mill State Park.

Special tribute to Barbara Horvath

By Carol-Anne Hossler, President, Stone Belt Board of Directors

For twenty-five years of my professional career, I was a classroom teacher and elementary school principal; I sat in on numerous case conferences during those years. But those conferences took on new meaning after my son Jonathan was born because he was, at a very early age, identified as a child with "special needs." Consequently, I know and understand a little bit about how other parents with "special needs" children might feel. The challenges and uncertainties of this type of family situation are life-changing.

Recently, I attended a memorial service for Barbara Horvath; Barb was Jonathan's case conference coordinator for at least ten years. She was a treasure not only to her family and friends but also to children who received special education support services in our community, as well as their parents and families. And the good news was that Barb's reputation preceded her: she was student-centered – always caring, knowledgeable, skillful, and most importantly, forward-thinking. Barb's most significant gift to students and parents was hope for positive outcomes and the future. At every yearly case conference, Barb would ask what eventually became a dreaded question: "What do you envision Jonathan doing after high school?" I had no response for many years, which was a terrible reality.

In 2008, a picture of what life after high school could be for Jonathan came into better focus. In conjunction

with his teacher and job coach, I created the Hand in Hand program. With support from Stone Belt staff and food donors, he collected food items and delivered them to a local food pantry. Before the pandemic, the food route had over 200 weekly donors. It has received regional, state, and national recognition. It allows individuals with disabilities to demonstrate their contributions to community building through meaningful volunteer employment. Never in my wildest dreams did I envision this possibility for my son's future.

At Jonathan's final case conference, Barb shared that she hoped Jonathan's Hand in Hand project could continue. She explained that it was challenging and quite unusual to start a project in the public school setting and have it continue and transition with the student post-high school. But Hand in Hand has endured, and other Stone Belt clients participate now.

Thanks to Stone Belt for supporting the Hand in Hand project and all the other programs that prepare clients for a bright future: Employment Fundamentals, Pre-Employment Transitions, Project SEARCH, Manufacturing, and the Art Studio. More clients are transitioning to jobs in the community.

I will always be grateful to Barbara Horvath for helping our family with the difficult task of looking forward to Jonathan's future. During those early years, she gave us hope. That's what Stone Belt does: it gives hope and provides support to ensure the brightest future.



Don Robinson and Amber Pruitt strike a pose during the party.

2024 Belt Out Loud!

Stone Belt had a blast at its Second Annual Pre-Belt Out Loud! Party at Trinity Church in Bloomington on May 25 before heading to the Buskirk-Chumley Theatre (BCT) for the Fourth Annual Belt Out Loud! Benefit Concert featuring Busman's Holiday.

The party featured karaoke and a photo booth. Busman's Holiday even stopped by after their sound check at the BCT to pose for a few photos. There was never a lull in the entertainment, with Stone Belt performers belting out their favorite tunes. Stone Belt moved the party up the street to the BCT, where everyone enjoyed listening and dancing to the melodic music of Busman's Holiday.

Thanks to sponsors IU Credit Union and Old National Bank.



Busman's Holiday posed for a few photos before performing at the Buskirk-Chumley Theatre.



September

- Sept. 2 **Labor Day**
(Bloomington/Bedford/Columbus facilities closed)
- Sept. 4 **Annual Awards Celebration**
Artemis Hall, Bedford
- Sept. 6 **Annual Awards Celebration**
YES Cinema, Bedford
- Sept. 8-14 **Direct Support Professional Week**
- Sept. 18 **Annual Awards Celebration**
Ivy Tech Community College-
Shreve Hall, Bloomington

October

- Oct. 4 **Gallery Walk/First Friday**
Monroe Convention Center
- Oct. 16 **Job-A-Palooza**
Monroe Convention Center

Corporate sponsors

For information on corporate sponsorship, visit www.stonebelt.org/giving. For questions or if you need assistance, please contact Adam Hamel, Director of Community Engagement at ahamel@stonebelt or (812) 332-2168, ext. 269.



812.332.2168

@StoneBeltArc

Stone Belt Arc



www.stonebelt.org

PREPARE EMPOWER SUPPORT

www.stonebelt.org

2815 East Tenth Street • Bloomington, IN 47408



NONPROFIT ORG
US Postage
PAID
Bloomington, IN
Permit No. 310