

Children's Programs Provide Families the Tools to Succeed

The mission of Better Community Living is to support and enhance the lives of those with developmental and intellectual disabilities. Though known for its quality services for adults, Better Community Living serves the unique needs of children with disabilities, and their families as well.

The Children's Program at BCL provides support to individuals ages 3-22, who are at home living with their families. The goal is to assist the family to maintain the family unit and avoid the out-of-home placement of a child. Several programs are offered, ranging in services from advocacy and support, to direct in-home assistance, and recreational programs. Supports are also catered to meet each individuals' needs in areas that include medical, social, educational, housing and transportation.

Cathy Tremblay, Coordinator for the Children's Program, has devoted 11 years to BCL, and says she particularly enjoys her work with children and families. She cites the many successes across all three programs offered, helping youth to grow and develop and helping families during challenging processes, changes, and new experiences.

One program, Intensive Family Flexible Support (IFFS), provides direct family outreach and home visits on a weekly basis, typically for a short amount of time ranging between 6-12 months. During this time, Cathy works with families who may be in crisis, those who may have multiple children with disabilities, or those who simply struggle with the challenges of a child with limitations and/or challenges.

"It can include referrals, PCS services, maybe the family needs Mass Health... Children with IDD qualify for all those

services,” says Cathy, who then assists the families with obtaining access to anything they need. She visits weekly, then bi-weekly, and then monthly, until the family is able to continue and support their child without further help.

An additional program offered to children and families by BCL is their DESE/DDS Program. Families served in this program, unlike the IFFS program, receive support for an unlimited amount of time. In fact, the ages range from 6-22, and individuals remain in the program until they are 22 years old.

“We provide family navigation, different supports and assistance, and we provide staffing 6-8 hours per week, focusing on goals, providing ABA services...” says Cathy. Visits are monthly and parents are able to play a role in who is staffed to assist the family and the child. “Parents have a say in who is hired,” Cathy says. She will then also assist these families with guardianship, DDS eligibility and application processes (especially when individuals must reapply at age 18), and any needs pertaining to MassHealth, food stamps, and housing. The program also focuses on each individual’s IEP (Individualized Education Program).

The third, and perhaps most fun program offered to children by BCL is their Children’s Recreation Program – a collaborative initiative with the Arc of Bristol County. The program is held on Friday evenings right at BCL, offering everything from dance to gymnastics, tae kwon do, and more.

BCL also utilizes their Day Hab room two Fridays per month for their “Friends Nights” where 20-30 consumers will get dropped off, ranging in age from 3-22. “Parents will say, my kids have real friends now... It’s opportunities that they wouldn’t have been able to find without these facilitations,” says Cathy. “Parents also connect with each other. They are isolated so often. The entire evening really comes together nicely.”

Cathy truly is a wealth of information on area resources and

offerings for these families. She notes that even the local AMC Dartmouth Mall offers monthly sensory-friendly films. Child and family-friendly movies occur on the 2nd Saturday of every month, and films for adults are offered on the 2nd Tuesday of month. These sensory-friendly movie nights cater to the needs of those who have various disabilities, including welcoming those who need to get up and move around mid-film.

Since facilitating the Children's Programs Cathy says, "We've had a lot of successes." Starting in the field 21 years ago, Cathy began working with adults with ADD and helping them with job development. She then started working with families, and then in family support. This, she says, is rewarding and defines what she loves about her work.

"I really enjoy working with families and giving them the tools to succeed and grow... best part of my job. Even though I start off helping, it's getting them to continue that on their own... Giving them the tools and putting all those pieces together."

Better Community Living's Children's Program serves individuals from Dartmouth to Wareham. The program helps children and young adults with any type of intellectual disability, including autism. For more information, call 508-999-4300 or email cathy_tremblay@bettercommunity.com.