COMPASSION, CARE, AND FUN:
How We Care for Those with Intellectual Disabilities

All of us want to connect with others and feel useful and valued—it’s part of the human spirit. For those with intellectual disabilities, that often requires a little extra support. Central to Pittsburgh Mercy’s mission is helping these individuals lead healthy, happy, and fulfilled lives.

Last year, our intellectual disability (ID) programs served more than 400 unique individuals and their families. Designed to promote community inclusion and improve quality of life, services include residential support, vocational training, preparing for employment or volunteer work, and providing community engagement opportunities and in-home support for those living with their families.

The graph below describes the usage rates of the services we provide in support of those with intellectual disabilities. Please note that many of the persons served will participate in more than one of the services we offer.

Our Day Programs Consolidate and Re-open

June saw the re-opening of Pittsburgh Mercy Intellectual Disabilities Services Adult Training Facilities (ATFs), as well as The Bridges to Employment program, following their pandemic-required closure in March 2020.

For greater efficiency, we consolidated the programs by merging the Facility-Based Vocational Rehabilitation (FBVR) programs into the ATFs. The four centers are now: Brookline, Wexford, Baum Blvd Center, and at the Frech Center. To ensure safety, COVID-19 protocols are followed.

Individuals attend either morning or afternoon sessions and enjoy activities such as art, dance, music, exercise, and games. They also learn about topics such as safety or current events and take part in community participation activities. Programs are tailored to individual needs, with Bridges to Employment focusing on work readiness skills.
Serving Up Art & Fun
Creativity is a sure way to nurture the spirit and we’re happy to provide artistic outlets to our clients.

Bringing art home: A generous grant from the Edith L. Trees Charitable Trust allowed us to provide art and music in our day programs for those with intellectual disabilities. When COVID hit in March 2020 and the day programs shut down, a pivot was needed. Luckily, the Trees Foundation approved using the funds for art supplies delivered directly to clients’ homes.

The fun result: residents of the Intellectual Disabilities (ID) Community Living Arrangements (CLAs) have been enjoying a new craft—painting ceramic animal figurines, coasters, dishes, and planters.

Pottery Place in South Park provides the pottery, paints, cups, and brushes, and CLA colleagues help the residents with the painting process. Pottery Place then fires the end products in their kilns. “The ceramics is new to us, and it’s a nice switch from just painting,” said Frank Borelli, senior manager of ID Services, crediting Brian Winkleblech, a program specialist at Brookline Adult Training Facility (ATF), for researching and arranging the fun expansion.

Improving Physical Health
For those with intellectual and developmental disabilities, healthy eating is a particular challenge. This population has higher rates of obesity, which is linked to other health risks and a decreased life expectancy. Aware of these issues, Pittsburgh Mercy put together a robust plan to improve clients’ physical health:

Goal: Between July 2019 and June 2022, reduce obesity prevalence by 10% for those in our programs at Parkview Community Living Arrangement (CLA) and Harmening CLA.

Strategy: Implement the My25 Food Plan, which focuses on a healthy eating lifestyle (versus quick diets) and encourages participants to learn about foods and enjoy preparing their meals.

My25 was developed specifically for persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities living in a community-based setting. Its outcomes have been impressive: 70% of those on the plan are at or moving toward a normal Body Mass Index (BMI) within six to 18 months.

Tamara Epperson, team lead at Parkview CLA, and Justin Moran, team lead at Harmening CLA, have each implemented the plan at their respective facilities. Participants have learned to enjoy healthier snacks like fruit, avoid sugary drinks, and prepare easy recipes using step-by-step instructions. Along with better eating, residents have increased their activity using onsite ellipticals and stationary bikes.

Progress in happening! “These have been significant changes in their diets on a positive level and their energy and demeanor is a little better and brighter,” said Moran. Read the full My25 story on our website.

CALL TO ACTION - Mark your calendars for November 30!
This Giving Tuesday, help bring
more joy and healing to those in need by supporting Pittsburgh Mercy. There is no better way to celebrate the season of giving than by doing what you can to help those here in your community. You can make an online gift HERE or send a check to Pittsburgh Mercy c/o the Development Office, 1200 Reedsdale Street, Pittsburgh, PA 15233.