

A man with a plan

Alex and his most excellent Choices journey

Oh, the places 27-year-old Alex Wertheimer has come since he was first introduced to Choices In Community Living. A man with a plan for both his present and his future, he began his journey to independence as a participant in our Fun-Fit program at the West Carrollton YMCA, taking part in many of the healthy living experiences offered by the YMCA, including a range of fitness and exercise options. Taking part in a community-based program that focused on healthy living was one of Alex's personal goals. Another goal was to get his driver's license and his car, both of which he accomplished during his time as a Fun-Fit participant.

After achieving those steps on the way to independence, he set his sights on the next big goal in his life. He had worked for three years as a dishwasher for Miami Valley Hospital South. While that gave him a sense of accomplishment and a paycheck, watching the Fun-Fit staff as he took part in activities gave him motivation to take a big step. He watched what Fun-Fit staff did and he had the self-assurance that he could do the same work. He was so confident that he approached Fun-Fit Direct Support Professional (DSP) Greg Gromosiak and asked him what he would need to do to join the team as a DSP, to become a Choices employee.

It was one of the best things Alex ever did for himself when he shared his goal with Greg, because Greg has one of the characteristics that makes for an exceptional DSP. He not only listens to what his Fun-Fit participants say to him, he hears what they say. He heard what Alex said and he understood what Alex said about wanting a job with Choices as a DSP. Greg stepped forward to strongly advocate for Alex, so strongly that he added Fun-Fit Manager Danielle Barwick to the team determined to fulfill Alex's employment goal. In June 2023 Alex Wertheimer ended his time as a participant in the West Carrollton Fun-Fit program. On a day he will never forget, Alex became a Direct Support Professional, working alongside Danielle, Greg, and the other members of his Choices team.

He works four days a week. "Alex is a great employee," says Danielle, "he works out with our participants and encourages them to be the best they can be. His documentation is very detailed, and he reports on time. He is great with the participants, and they respect him as a staff

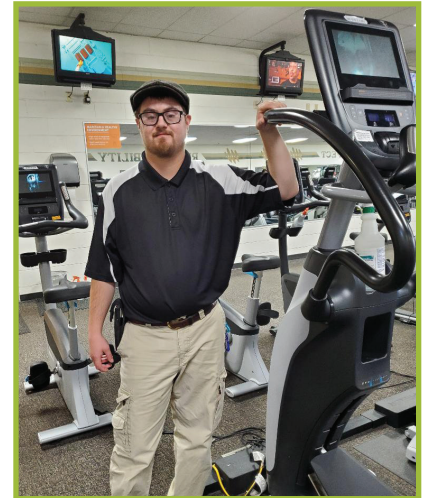
member. His experience as a participant in the program has allowed him to bond and build relationships with the participants based on personal experience and knowledge. He genuinely cares about the job and those he serves. He truly is a great employee!"

His work has been noticed not only at the program in West Carrollton. He has so impressed everyone that he was asked to join the Choices Board of Trustees, where he serves as the client representative. "Alex is a most welcome addition to our Board," says Chief Executive Officer Trent Grooms. "With his experience as both a participant in one of our programs and now as an employee, he brings a broader, mission-centered level of understanding to the Board based on his lived experiences."

Participant ... employee ... board member ... are there more goals ahead for Alex? There is a smile, a nod of the head and an answer in the soft but confident voice from the Kettering Fairmont High School graduate ... "my own apartment close to home and work," he shares, "not now because I like living with my family, but some day, that's something I want to do."

For now, when he is not working or attending board meetings, he enjoys playing third base for his Special Olympics softball team, participating in a bowling league, and building airplane and other models. He likes to box, swim, and ride his bike around his neighborhood. He wants to build his friendship with Danielle and Greg. "Danielle really helps and supports me. Greg, well he's been a real help. He's more than my co-worker. Greg is my friend!"

There is this as to his goals for the present and for the future for a young man who has found the place he wants to be along his most excellent journey. "I want to help people. I want to be a good member of the Choices team and speak for clients as part of the Board. I want to retire from this job."



Our time of milestones, firsts and changes *from Trent Grooms, Chief Executive Officer*

Being the best we collectively can be – that’s the thought that has inspired us this year. We have achieved so many client, staff, and organizational milestones. For our clients it has meant getting back out into the community enjoying professional football, baseball and wrestling events. Some took trips to Gatlinburg, Las Vegas, Florida and other exciting destinations. Organizationally, we are continuing our focus on the development of our Martin Center, which includes our collaboration with the Montgomery County Board of Developmental Disabilities Services and remote support/assistive technology vendors to establish our Center as a Regional Tech Hub, widening our technology capacity within our service delivery area.

We’re always excited to introduce ‘firsts.’ This was the first year for our Choices Champions summer camp held on the grounds of the Martin Center. There was great attendance and enthusiasm for our two-day camp. Another milestone was our first annual “Making Strides Against Breast Cancer” Walk held at the Martin Center, with a focus on client participation, including participants in wheelchairs. We had 60 participants this year joining us in our effort to provide support for others in our community.

We added our first new home in years. The home in Clark County expands our footprint as we continue to focus on

expanding as a service provider of choice in all the counties we serve. We submitted our largest grant request in our history to build capacity to meet transportation needs.

This has been a year of change and re-structuring. By early 2024, we will no longer be the provider for Safe Haven Farm in Butler County. We have welcomed Alex Wertheimer and Doug Stanley as new members of our Board of Trustees. We have hired Doug Thompson as our Chief Financial Officer and promoted two directors to positions as Senior Program Directors.

We have changed because some of those who were with us as this year began, like Ms. Gwin, are no longer with us. At times we are weary from the changes, as we lose those who have been members of our Choices family through death or as they move on to other opportunities in their lives. At times we feel the weight from all the needs, changes, and expectations. There is never a time, however, when we do not feel excited, filled with enthusiasm, optimism, and gratitude ---because in everything we have done and will continue to do, it is all of us doing it together, all of us in unity – all of us interconnected. For what you do that makes it possible for us to do what we do for the individuals we serve, may the upcoming holiday season be full of milestones, firsts, and happy changes!

Our Guiding Star ... Remembering Gwin

Gwindine Flowers gave 19 years of remarkable, consistent and loving support and care for the men in our Endicott home (*Montgomery County*), the epitomé of a dedicated Direct Support Professional. “Gwin was a guiding star in my life,” Program Director Marvin Lewis says in his memories of her. “She always saw the good and worked towards making things better. She is missed.”

Gwin’s long struggle with Lupus ended in July at the age of 72. She had been the heart of our Endicott home. “Gwin was an amazing worker,” reflects Program Director Leah Byrd. She welcomed me with open arms when I joined the team and was always willing to help in any way she could. Even when her health wasn’t the best she always made sure her Endicott guys were taken care of. They loved Ms. Gwin like family, and she is missed dearly.”

Gwin was born in Commerce, Georgia and lived for a time in Illinois, where she first found her calling as a caregiver. With her work in Illinois and her time with Choices, she served people with developmental disabilities for more than 30 years. When not serving others, she enjoyed gardening, traveling, music, cooking and spending time with family and friends. In addition to her family at Choices, she is survived by her husband, children, brother, grandchildren and great-grandchildren, along with many relatives and friends.



Doug Thompson has joined the Choices team as our Chief Financial Officer. He brings his experience from his time as CFO for the Alcohol, Drug Addiction and Mental Health Services Board and Ohio Department of Job and Family Services.

As long as her Endicott guys gather around the dining room table or go about their household chores, watch their favorite television shows and all those things that families share, Ms. Gwin will remain a part of them. As they continue to miss her, so do those who had the honor and privilege of working alongside her. Leah speaks for them as she shares these words about Ms. Gwin, “she was a sweet and loyal spirit. Everyone who knew her speaks so highly of her. It saddens my heart that she will no longer be with our team as a valued staff member. More than that, it saddens my heart that she will no longer be that constant and accepting presence for her Endicott guys. They miss you, Ms. Gwin. They will always miss you.”

Greg's "most humbling" job

"This is the place that makes work feel important, that makes you feel you are part of a family and not just an employee in a business." These are just a few of the words Greg Johnson uses to describe his work as Choices tireless and dedicated Maintenance Supervisor. Greg began working with the maintenance team in 2020 through the collaborative partnership between Choices and Good Shepherd Ministries, a community nonprofit organization that provides services and supports to individuals in recovery and re-entry. He became maintenance supervisor in 2021. He brings more than 35 years of experience to his work with Choices, with a background in construction and concrete construction, home remodeling, and automotive maintenance and repair.

His experience in automotive maintenance and repair is the one most frequently called on in his job, keeping him and his other crew member Anthony Dreschel the busiest. "With a fleet of 85 vans, we never know from day to day what we will be working on," says Greg. "We do oil changes, safety inspections, brakes and other repairs to make sure we keep every van safely on the road. We also coordinate with community repair shops for the work we can't do in-house."

The biggest one-time job for Greg to date was the renovation of our Martin Center, which included working with a variety of contractors. With most of the contractors now done with their work, it's our maintenance team that has the responsibility for the Martin Center, in addition to Choices-

owned homes throughout the community, including everything from general repair, replacing flooring, bathroom renovations, landscaping, snow removal ... right down to leaky faucets. "There's an endless list of work to be done," says Greg.

Family is the most important thing in Greg's life, including his own family, his Good Shepherd family and now his Choices family. He notes that other employees have been very welcoming and easy to work with. "There is this overall attitude and atmosphere from everyone that we are here to serve the clients," he shares. "I am so grateful to Choices for this job. It came as the ideal job at the ideal time in my life. I look forward to so many years of having interactions with clients. They make work feel important. It's a most humbling job."

Note: Like Greg, Anthony found employment with Choices through our community partnership with Good Shepherd Ministries, with our two organizations sharing core values that focus on integration, service, acceptance, and independence.



(photo by Taylor White)

The home of the future ... it's at our Martin Center today

Our Martin Center continues to expand our service and outreach to the community. In addition to serving as the site for our Choices Champions Fun-Fit program and our Human Resources, Nursing, Training, and other administrative offices, it is now serving as a Tech Demo Hub. The Montgomery County Board of Developmental Disabilities, as part of our collaborative community partnership, is working with Choices to establish our Martin Center as the Tech Demo Hub for northern Montgomery County. We are working with the County Board to include goals for independence through technology in Individual Service Plans. This innovative approach to promoting freedom and independence for clients is a priority as well for the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities, who is offering grant opportunities for the development of Tech Demo Hubs.

A 'mini' home has been built inside our Martin Center, with a dual-purpose full-size kitchen, and small areas replicating a living room and bedroom. It's not what is seen when entering our 'mini' home that is important. It's what is not seen. Open the door from the kitchen to enter the living area of the home and you will be immediately greeted with a voice advising 'kitchen door is open.' Enter the living room area and tucked away

inconspicuously on one wall is a small monitor. With just the touch of a button there is a connection with another voice in another location, checking in. Think of lying on the bed in the bedroom and imagine the bed suddenly vibrating or the lamp suddenly turning on, signaling that a smoke detector has been activated.

These are a few of the remote monitoring options in our Tech Demo Home. They are also options in real-time use in more than a half-dozen Choices homes. "This is an exciting and vital option to provide as much independence as possible," says Facilities Director Dan Cochran, who is overseeing the development of our Tech Demo Hub and Tech Demo House. "We need to make it clear that what we are doing is not the fancy bells and whistles that most of us think about when we envision adding remote technology to our homes ... no little robot dogs doing chores for us and that kind of thing. These are 'nuts and bolts' tools for providing the kind of supports that make it possible for our clients to live their best and most independent lives."

There are panic buttons, locking systems on doors, the bed shaker and lights that come on to signal an emergency, sensors in refrigerators to alert staff in the

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The passion and caring

— a message from Direct Support Professional (DSP) Leab Longshore to Trent Grooms and her team

I was in a horrible accident on September 14 after getting off work at the Brantford home (*Montgomery County*.) My car was totaled. I suffered a sprained wrist, lacerations to my face and neck, displaced TMJ in my face and some burns to my arms and chest from the air bag. I am feeling great now but still have to do physical therapy.

I need to let you know that my Choices family has really supported me during this time. Program Director Marvin Lewis and Program Director Star Banks were amazing in helping me get my medications and food into my home, which was needed because I no longer had my car. I was in so much pain and they came to my rescue. I have no blood-related family here but through this experience I found out that family does not always come by blood but by love as well.

My manager Cassandra Heard was right there to help me to get my hours in and make sure I was good overall. I could not overlook this overwhelming love and support and I need to share it. The passion of caring for people is the reason I have fought so hard to get back to work and to do what I love. I want to say thank you to the amazing, caring, and compassionate people who care not only for the clients we serve, but for those of us who serve as staff as well.



Choices In COMMUNITY Living

Rollin' on the river The waters of the scenic Ohio River provided a calm and peaceful getaway for participants in our Clark County Adult Day Services program as they enjoyed their annual trip to Cincinnati for an adventure on the Ohio on board the B&B Riverboat. They were joined on this year's community experience by their friends from our Cliffwood home (*Montgomery County*.) The trip was coordinated by Program Administrator Diane Hayslip.



WWE's super fans

We found some super wrestling fans in this very happy photo of (*l-r*) Brian Mayenschein, Program Director Marvin Lewis, and Nicholas Ross as they joined other Choices' friends front and center in floor seats at the Nutter Center this summer. Joining Brian, Marvin and Nick in cheering on their WWE favorite wrestlers during one of their favorite community experiences were Steven Davis, John Browning, Andrew Tomlin (*Village Green home*); and Larry Hunter and Trinity Lutz (*Monitored Program*.) (Photo by Marvin Lewis)



It's Trunk or Treat time

It was a howlin' good time as the staff of Choices Champions (*Adult Day Services*) joined other service providers in this year's Trunk or Treat community event sponsored by the Montgomery County Board of Developmental Disabilities Services at Northview. With creativity overflowing, our team became their very own Choices-fil-A drive-thru window, taking their inspiration from a well-known chicken franchise. Helping to pass out candy from their drive-thru window in the rain and chill were (*l-r*) Program Manager Bradley Bourquin, Direct Support Professional (DSP) Danielle Owsley and her husband Jabbar. Retired Choices Champions Director Nancy Viets and current Director Amy Fansher also volunteered for the event. (Photo by Amy Fansher)



Jingle all the way



Time to imagine jingle bells and all things holiday because it's that time of year again!

This is your invitation to join us for Jingle Bucks '23 and have the opportunity to have some extra holiday cash come your way just in time to enjoy shopping. Tickets are available now by scanning the QR code, by contacting Taylor White at twhite@cicloh.com or 937-898-2220, or by going to our website at www.cicloh.com. Applicable rules and additional information are also available on our website.



Only 500 tickets are available, with one winning ticket to be drawn on December 8. If your ticket is drawn you will receive 50% of ticket sales, with 50% of sales to directly benefit individuals served by Choices In Community Living. Proceeds from Jingle Bucks '23 are designated for much needed kitchen renovations at our Gardenside home.



Happy and prosperous holidays to your family and home from our Choices family and homes!

GIVING TUESDAY

NOVEMBER 28, 2023! With your support, this could be a very important day for our four ladies who live in our Gardenside home, for our Choices Champions participants, and for all of those who rely on us for safe and accessible transportation. This is the day Choices In Community Living participates with deserving nonprofits across the globe for the 11th anniversary of **Giving Tuesday**. **Giving Tuesday** is the global generosity movement created by Giving Tuesday.org. It is a day set aside after Black Friday and Cyber Monday for people to share the holiday season with online donations to organizations they support.



Our priorities for donations we receive from this year's online campaign include kitchen renovations for our Gardenside home, an in-home generator for our Martin Center, and vans. To be a part of this global effort with support for Choices, mark your calendar for November 28 and go online at www.cicloh.com.

Note: If you miss making a donation on Giving Tuesday, we welcome your end-of-the-year donation. Checks may be made payable to Choices In Community Living and mailed to 1651 Needmore Road, Dayton, 45414 or go to our Donate button at www.cicloh.com.

The home of the future ... *Continued from page 3*

remote monitoring site in Choices administrative offices on Needmore Road that someone is up and moving about at 3:00 a.m. and to contact them to make sure there are no problems. There is the monitor on the wall, designed to be unobtrusive and provide privacy for individuals in their own home, while providing access for someone to check in on an individual to see how they are doing or for the individual to contact a staff member to ask a question or just to have someone to talk with. "These are not 'one size fits all' services," says Dan. "These are options that are customized and tailored to meet individual needs and interests. These visual and auditory alerts are here in case something happens ... or if something else happens. They assure that we act with caution when it comes to the safety and health of individuals."

The Tech Demo House is now officially open for tours to clients, family members and others to learn about the options that are available. As funding becomes available, there will be workstations set up that will allow family members and others to test the various options. Work is continuing to set up a bathroom section to offer health and safety technology options as well. Dan has plans to set up a Technology Lending Library that will be open to the community where options can be tested in actual home settings before individuals or families invest in purchasing technology that may not meet their needs.

"This is something that will bring value beyond the people we serve," says Dan. "These technology options can benefit so many people. They can assist older adults to be independent and stay in their own homes longer. They can make it possible for people with vision, hearing, and other physical limitations to be safe in their own homes. It can allow families in their homes to do the monitoring and not depend on Choices or other remote monitoring services. It can even work with neighbors who may want to be part of remote monitoring. There is nothing like this in Montgomery County right now, but we are on the cutting edge right now, moving by leaps and bounds into a future that continues our commitment to promoting as much independence as possible. We are at a very exciting time. With each new challenge identified and met as these technology options are developed, freedom and independence are no longer a dream, no longer a goal in a plan. It is a new and most welcome reality."

Note: In addition to the kitchen serving as part of the Tech Demo House, it also serves as a fully functioning kitchen where food is prepared for staff during training, for activities for Fun-Fit participants and for cooking classes for participants. Donations and grants were instrumental in providing funding for building the kitchen within our Martin Center.

Our Staff Hall of Fame

Ohio's Direct Support Professional of the Year – Direct Support Professional Greg Gromosiak was recognized by the Ohio Alliance of Direct Support Professionals (OADSP) as Ohio's Direct Support Professional of the year, honoring him during their annual conference in Columbus in September. Greg is a DSP at our West Carrollton Fun-Fit program. That Greg has fellow DSP Alex Wertheimer working by his side is one of the reasons Greg received his honor. It was Greg's advocacy for and support of Alex that resulted in Alex moving from a participant in the Fun-Fit program to becoming a Choices employee, a DSP just like Greg. Alex knows he has more than another staff member in Greg, he knows he has a friend, someone that listens. Every client that Greg has ever served would call Greg the same thing – a friend.



OPRA's Direct Support Professional of the Year – It's not one but two awards in the same year for DSP Brent Floyd, Jr., who serves in our Vineyard home. He was selected by Choices as our DSP of the Year, then traveled a little up I-70 to Columbus to receive the DSP of the Year awarded by the Ohio Provider Resource Association (OPRA.) "Brent is an amazing person," says Program Manager Oriel Head. "He is always in good spirits. I've never seen him have a bad day. He is always willing to help even if it is not his shift to work. The guys at Vineyard love him. If they could have their way, he would work every day." Two of the reasons Brent is inspired to be the best he can be stand beside him in this photo, Johnathan Durham (l) and (center) Devontae Wood. (photo by Brent Floyd)



Choices Manager of the Year – Many are the praises for Roxanna Zinkhon in her role as program manager for our Yorkshire, Ewers, and Soloway homes in Clark County. Among the praises are those from Clark County Program Director Kesha Tuttle, who shares, "Roxanna is truly an asset to Choices. She is a strong advocate for her clients. She is always willing to step in and help others when needed. I know that I can always count on Roxanna at the end of the day."



Choices Ninja of the Year – Employee Benefits Specialist Bea Weneck is one of the most respected and important members of the Choices team when it comes to making sure that employees come first so that their clients can come first. Thank you to Bea for sharing her thoughts on being recognized for her exceptional service.

When I was laid off from my job of 20 years nearly a year and half ago, I said to myself, "my work here must be done and wherever I'm needed is going to find me." I reached out to an old friend for references for my impending job hunt and a few weeks later found myself part of the Choices team.

Coming from a small business with less than 15 employees to Choices and being responsible for more than 300 staff members has been both challenging and rewarding. These are good people at Choices. I hope that I can continue to make a difference as I serve employees in all things benefits and payroll related. I am so humbled to be the first recipient of the Ninja Award.



Making Strides with our COMMUNITY



Giving back to the community was front and center for our 60 participants who walked and rolled in support of those with breast cancer at our October event.

It was a big first for IT Specialist Tamis Maniago (l) and Office Coordinator Taylor White as they coordinated our participation in the *Making Strides Against Breast Cancer Walk* at our Martin Center. We have taken part in the community walk for many years. Seeing this as an opportunity to involve more clients and other participants with disabilities, staff and families in giving back to the community, we made the decision to Walk (and roll) for a great cause at our Martin Center, where the course was designed to be accessible and safe for people of all ability levels. Planning is now underway to be a part of the community effort next year, and to focus on inviting more individuals, families, and organizations to join us in our accessible walk and roll for Breast Cancer Awareness.



NOTE: It was an important first in event planning for Taylor as she transitions into an expanded role in grant writing, fundraising and development. She is now busy with her first Choices fundraising efforts as she coordinates our holiday fundraisers, Jingle Bucks '23 and Giving Tuesday.

Empowering through employment

Choices In Community Living is an equal opportunity employer. It is one of our values that extends to any individual in the community who comes to us with a willingness to work hard, to serve our mission, and who wants to be part of an extended family and a professional team of employees. We found those qualities in Alex Wertheimer (*see page 1*), just as we found it in Maurice Hollingsworth (l) and Torry Brown. While receiving the residential, transportation and other support Maurice and Torry need as clients, they are also respected and valued Choices employees.

Known by everyone at Choices, Maurice Hollingsworth has been part of our extended family for 36 years. He is a joyful 65 years old. He lives in our Broadbush home. Over the years he has proven to be one of our most talented dancers. He can still do Michael Jackson and James Brown moves as well or better than anyone who has ever participated in our Talent Show.

He has also proven himself to be one of our most loyal and consistent Choices employees. Be at the administrative offices on Needmore Road in Dayton on any Friday and you will find Maurice hard at work with his janitorial duties. It's the best day of the week in the office not only because of his work, but because of the laughter and joy he brings as he stops by to talk with other employees, share a joke, maybe even talk about music. "When I interviewed with Choices and met Maurice, I knew this was the job I wanted," says Facilities Director Dan Cochran. "The best part of my job is working with Maurice. He has changed my life." Maurice is a member of the Developmental Disabilities Hall of Fame.

Very excited! That's what Torry Brown proclaims about his role as a Choices employee. It could be said that Torry is the most essential part of the team that is responsible



for training and preparing new employees for their responsibilities. It is his voice that matters most because it is the voice of our clients. At 50 years of age, Torry has been part of our Choices family since 2001.

While others train new employees in how to administer medications, acquaint them with policies and procedures, train them in first aid and more, it is Torry's work that has the most impact. It is Torry who eloquently and from personal experience shares what it means to be a person with a developmental disability in a world that doesn't always understand, what it means to be called a client, what it means to not only have needs but to have dreams, goals – a sense of humor, a sense of adventure – from time to time a broken heart, – what it means to struggle to be accepted for who you are – what it means to be served with compassion and respect. With his degree in communications, he feels now with his job at Choices he is doing what he should do. His self-advocacy extends to serving as a member of the community-based Partners Optimist Club and the Voices of Montgomery County self-advocacy group. (*photos by Taylor White and Leah Byrd.*)



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Judy Leasure, Editor

Scenes from summer camp



Where the Wild Things are – that was the theme of our first summer camp experience for our Choices Champions Adult Day Services participants. Held on the grounds of our Martin Center for two days in one half day sessions, the camp was so well received by participants that planning is underway to expand it in 2024.

One of the most important outcomes from this year can be seen in the faces of (l-r) Michelle Cornett and Latisha Martin as they remind us of one of life’s happiest moments – going to camp is not just for the young it is also for the young at heart.

Always ready for a party!

That’s why being part of our Clark County Adult Day Services program is just so great. Dressing up to celebrate, our participants, Program Administrator Diane Hayslip and staff could not have a more howlin’ good time. What a fun and creative kickoff to the 2023 holiday season!

