Passages: Who We Are

For more than half a century, Passages has been dedicated to helping people with intellectual disabilities or other challenges thrive in the community at work, at home, and at play.

The journey began in 1954 with a group of parents seeking learning opportunities for their children, who were not being educated in the public schools. With the help of numerous community supporters, Passages now fulfills the dreams of more than 200 men, women and children throughout northeast Indiana.

Committed, compassionate staff and partners – our Dream Team – work to enhance people’s quality of life through social and work skills training, career opportunities, internships, healthy families guidance, and residential services.

Our empowering passages to promise, possibilities and partnerships:
• Identify jobs that bring the greatest satisfaction and income.
• Foster living arrangements that maximize independence and quality of life.
• Create environments that promote beneficial interactions among peers and others.

Our Mission: Passionately leading or assisting people with disabilities into a thriving and meaningful life.
Our Vision: To enable people with disabilities to discover their potential and achieve a meaningful day.

LEFT: Chris Dippert stamps designs in clay.

RIGHT: A necklace showing the artist’s ‘faith’ hangs at Passages. For those interested in browsing the art on display, contact Passages at 260-244-7688.

BELOW: Waiting for a Spotlight Avenue production to start are, from left: Larry McCullough, Mike Szkrumelak, Rachel Kissinger, Jamie Horn and Dan Lude.
In 1954, Passages began with a group of parents hoping to find learning opportunities for their children outside of public schooling. Today, Passages now helps more than 200 people with intellectual and developmental disabilities or other challenges in Whitley County.

“We started the Creative Learning Center in 2013,” Passages President and CEO Jason Meyer said, “and it’s grown our art department and art programs at Passages as a whole. Prior to our move to the Creative Learning Center, we had a much smaller art program at our location on Towerview Drive from 1994 to 2013.”

The Creative Learning Center is where Passages Artistry and the Bridge 333 Art Studio began to thrive, as well as the creation of Spotlight Avenue, Passages theater performing program.

Meyer said the Art Show and Silent Auction have grown considerably over time.

“Passages first involvement in the arts began with our participation in Art Around the Square in Columbia City, along with the Whitley County Art Guild in 2002. We started out with our first Passages art show and silent auction in 2011 with Passages Presents Pickles, Painting and Patrick at the Pickle in Dunfee. Prior to moving to the Creative Learning Center from our Towerview Drive location, we had another show at the Peabody Public Library then we moved it to our Creative Learning Center in 2013,” he said. “From the Creative Learning Center we moved our art show to Ceruti’s Eagle Glen where we’ve had it the last four years.”

Meyer said there has been a lot of growth not only with the art studio, but also the Passages Artistry program. The artists are also compensated for their work. The Bridge 333 Art Studio showcases creations such as paintings, drawings and ceramics, and the culmination of these projects leads to money in the artists’ hands.

“For every art piece sold with the exception of our Art Show and Silent Auction,” Meyer said, “the artist gets 75 percent of the proceeds and Passages gets 25 percent. For the art show specifically, we flip that, so Passages gets 75 percent and the artist gets 25.”

Meyer said proceeds each year go toward different Passages needs. “One year, we’re able to purchase pottery wheels, a slab roller and these past couple of years has been lighting for the arts and art show with proceeds from the program, too.”

Artwork is not only available at the show, but can be sold throughout the year, as well. Anyone interested in viewing the artwork Passages has to offer, stop in or call to set up a time to tour, 260-244-9331 or can plan to attend the annual show held in March.

Spotlight Avenue is a theatrical program that started in 2015 to bring live arts and theater to those served by Passages. A couple of skits and performances turned into a full community performance. The Spotlight group writes their skits, design their sets and learn their parts.

“The first year, we had 10 people participate,” Meyer said. “This last year we had 34, so we’ve seen a lot of growth there.”

**BRIDGE 333 DONATIONS:** To make the program possible, Passages asks for donations from the community. Items needed include new and/or used fabric, including cotton, upholstery, sheets, curtains, shirts, and other items that can be used in art projects.

*Chester Hobbs makes a beautiful piece of art out of a common wooden chair.*

*Tony Geiger lounges during a skit at a Spotlight Avenue production.*

*Angie Householder creates a masterpiece at the Bridge 333 Art Studio.*

*In front, Gary Enyeart is with Tony Geiger, Nick Toam, Dan Lude, Zakk Johnson, Jon Lacy, Brent Brown, Ron Alwood and Ryan Jackson at a Spotlight Avenue production.*

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and jeans; zippers; paint smocks (men’s XL or larger long-sleeved dress shirts or aprons); cotton quilting thread and embroidery thread; house paint; plastic containers to hold paint (large yogurt, margarine, hummus tubs - all with lids if possible); metal pop or beer bottle caps; CDs or 45s; wooden objects (chairs, tables, stools, dressers); lumber scraps; beading for jewelry; strings for beading jewelry; pre-stretched paint canvases; or picture/art frames of all sizes.

COMMUNITY SUPPORT: Getting to Know Passages is a relatively new program, which brings people from the community together to learn about the Passages mission and the ultimate goal, Meyer said, is to raise community partnerships with Passages. During a Getting to Know Passages event, attendees will meet people served by Passages, tour the Creative Learning Center and Passages Artistry and the Bridge 333 Art Studio, hear the history of Passages and watch videos about Passages. The events take place at the Creative Learning Center, 333 N. Oak St., Columbia City. These events are hour-long informational sessions for attendees to learn everything about Passages. Those interested in attending can contact Tara Smith at tsmith@passagesinc.org or call 260-244-9360. Check out Passages on Facebook at Passages, Inc. or the website at www.passagesinc.org for dates of events.
Funding, depending on community awareness, support

It’s no secret state and federal funding has been a challenge and Passages President and CEO Jason Meyer said with very limited increase rates from Medicaid funding, and increased needs from individuals served by Passages, help from the community is vital.

The Passages budget is around $5.5 million and $4 million of that budget goes to staffing to support the organization’s 24/7 residential and day programs.

“Now more than ever, we need individual, family, corporate support, foundation support and grants,” Meyer said. “Of our overall budget, about 90 percent of it is Medicaid funded, that’s state and federal dollars, so anything we can do to diversify helps.”

Medicaid funding helps Passages meet its basic needs, “but to go above and beyond that, we need additional funding,” Meyer said. “We are putting a larger focus on increased donor awareness so Getting to Know Passages is a good example of raising our community awareness, and with the creation of our Development and Marketing Manager position, we can now focus more on our events and corporate funding.”

Meyer is referring to Tara Smith, the organization’s Development and Marketing Manager. One of the many events Smith handles is the Passages 5K.

“We started the 5K a few years ago,” Meyer said. “That’s held every April at Morsch’s Park. All the proceeds raised there go to the bottom line of the organization.”

He said Passages’ five-year plan will focus on an increased focus on individual, corporate and foundation funding, as well as affordable and accessible housing. Whitley Crossings Neighborhood Corporation, is a separate 501 c 3 that Meyer is also the President and CEO of. WCNC has 65 low-to-moderate income housing properties in Whitley County. Meyer said the Heritage Homes development is a subdivision in Columbia City that has about 100 homes; 21 of which are lease-to-purchase homes where there are four Passages homes within that.

“Each resident in that home has an option to buy that house in 15 years,” Meyer said. “We also have Whitley Meadows Apartments, one of our group homes is in front of that, and we have 22 apartments there as well.”

Meyer said the Clugston on the Square consists of 22 apartments we lease, as well,” Meyer said.

Meyer said through the Medicaid waiver program, 18 homes are supported living with 11 of those 24/7 fully-staffed homes. The other seven homes/apartments are people who receive support on an as needed basis, for meal times, budgeting, etc.

In addition to the waiver homes, there are three Passages group homes in Whitley County which 24 men and women from Passages live in.
Passages President and CEO Jason Meyer addresses the crowd gathered for the annual 5K as runners take off (BELOW).
Retaining employees and keeping skilled positions filled is a main goal for Passages, whose mission is Passionately leading or assisting people with disabilities into a thriving and meaningful life, according to Jason Meyer, Passages President and CEO.

"Basically, that meaningful day means something different for each person served by Passages. Some people work in the community and some come to the Creative Learning Center just for an hour or two, half a day, or some all of the day," Meyer said.

Staff and administration are vital for Passages values, which are partnership development with employees, referral resources, persons and families served and the community; supporting choice-making; delivery of support valuing dignity, respect and personal responsibility; adapting services and training to customers' needs as they move through life changes; financial health of the organization; commitment to human resources in an environment with continuous improvement and learning; being diverse; and making the community a better place.

With that in mind, Passages prides itself on its staff who have a passion for helping others. “We have a very strong, dedicated and passionate staff who have a heart for servant leadership,” Meyer said.

To thank staff, Meyer said Passages likes to recognize employees with appreciation gifts, meals, thank you’s and sometimes events.

"Every month, we do something special," Meyer said, "whether it is around the holidays with meat and cheese trays, or gift cards for our employees.

Meyer said events are changed up quite a bit to keep employees interested. “It’s one of the ways to give back to the employees,” he said. "We want to keep our long-term direct support professional staff, our managers, and administrative staff. It’s worked well in terms of that because it’s a very competitive market and it’s very hard to bring on new people. When you’re hiring for a very niche employment it’s hard to find people. Also when you rely on state and federal Medicaid dollars, increases don’t come in that regard very often, so we have to be creative in our appreciation and retention.”
DO YOU DESIRE TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN PEOPLE’S LIVES?

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visit www.passagesinc.org or in person
at 301 W. Van Buren St. 2nd Floor, Columbia City, IN
or call: 260-244-9320

We are hiring for:
Direct Support Professionals: Residential and Community Programs- Evening and Weekend hours available
| 1st, 2nd and 3rd Shifts Available