



JEFFERSON COUNTY BOARD OF DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

256 John Scott Highway
Steubenville, Ohio 43952

**Contact: Michael Mehalik
(740) 264-7176**

Release At Will

Michael A.
Mehalik
Superintendent

School of Bright
Promise
(740) 264-7176
Fax (740) 264-0399

Jefferson Regional
Spectrum Center
(740) 264-7176
Fax (740) 264-0399

Jeffco Production
Center
(740) 264-4608
Fax (740) 264-1810

Jeffco Training
Center
(740) 266-6167
Fax (740) 266-3839

Community
Employment
Services
(740) 266-3840
Fax (740) 266-3839

Service & Support
(740) 266-4291
Fax (740) 266-4293

Shaffer Plaza
(740) 264-7111
Fax (740) 266-2924

Transportation
(740) 266-2923
Fax (740) 264-5977

School of Bright Promise Students Bond with Therapy Dogs

STEUBENVILLE- Students at the School of Bright Promise made some furry, four-legged friends after a recent visit from Destiny Dog Training and Wellness Center.

Members of the Pottery Addition-based business stopped by on Sept. 30 with six dogs for a little pet therapy with the special needs students. Bill Raymond, a substitute aide at the school, also works for Destiny Dogs and the business is operated by his mother, Lorrie. Raymond said it was the first time Destiny Dogs took part and he hoped to make it a more regular occurrence.

“We’re just a dog training club and do a lot of community service. We go to nursing homes and schools and do pet retention with the pound by training puppies so they get homes,” he said.

Pet owners participating in Destiny Dogs brought six canines, including one puppy whose mother was part of the group, and the adult dogs completed advanced classes and hold Canine Good Citizen certification through the American Kennel Club (AKC) or Good Therapy Dog titles through Therapy Dog International. The average age of the dogs was three years old and most of the advanced pooches are in the show arena. Raymond added that the students enjoyed the experience and it could be quite therapeutic.

“It’s very therapeutic for kids. We see a lot of kids who are hyper and have tantrums, and it calms them down,” he said. “We were in the home living room and each class came in. I definitely see it happening more often and [it’s a] great program.”

Raymond noted that Destiny Dogs would like to visit on a monthly basis but plans were not finalized. Rachel Bodo, principal at the School of Bright Promise, agreed that they should return in the future.

“I definitely want them to do it again in December and we can talk about another day,” she said. “I enjoyed watching [the students’] expressions. You could see it on their faces.”

Meanwhile, Bodo hopes to have her pet trained to become a therapy dog at the facility and work with Destiny Dogs in that capacity, as well.

Destiny Dogs, which has operated for three decades, has been owned by Lorrie Raymond for the past 15 years. Bill Raymond has been involved for 10 years and the site offers a variety of classes, such as basic obedience, fun agility, and Association of Professional Dog Trainer Canine Life and Social Skills (C.L.A.S.S.) and conformation, in addition to pet grooming and free public seminars. For more information, call (740) 264-7793 or go online to www.destinydogs.biz.

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(Photo Cutline: Tara Brown, a student at the School of Bright Promise in Steubenville, bonds with a therapy dog during a visit by the Destiny Dog Training and Wellness Center. Officials said the pet therapy program went extremely well and could become a regular occurrence at the school.)

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"I'm 85 now," he said, then produced a small piece of cardboard from his pocket with the number 110 scrawled upon it to denote the amount of pieces he recently completed. "I am helping Brian out."

Dayton said it was a sign of the enthusiasm the people have for their job.

"They take pride in what they do and want to make money like everybody else," he said.

Connie Giamos, who oversees the training center, said adult consumers also do some production work on site but spend a lot of time in the community.

"We have Community Employment Services to get folks out in the community and get them a job," she said.

CES provides employment services to people with disabilities who reside in the Jefferson County area and focuses on their unique needs. Services are then customized and provided by an employment specialist. Referrals can be made by the Bridges to Transition program, support service administrators, the Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation, family members, or the person himself. The program offers job development, job coaching, follow-up services, and emergency on-call capabilities.

Services have been provided for Franciscan University, Kroger's, McDonald's, Walmart, and Applebee's and Giamos said many have been fortunate to gain long-term employment.

"We have 26 placements working in the community with eight in job development and several on the waiting list. There are people who have worked 15-20 years," she added. "We've been blessed to have folks be able to maintain those jobs."

For more information, contact the Jeffco Workshop at (740) 282-4608 or Jeffco Training Center at 266-6167, or the CES program at 266-3840, ext. 2104 or 2105.

(Photo Cutline: Clark Francy, a consumer at the Jeffco Workshop in Steubenville, puts the finishing touches on a piece of lawn furniture he crafted at the production center. About 60 special needs people work at the center and area businesses to earn a paycheck and some independence.)