PEARL BUCK CENTER

Newsletter
Fall 2020

Remote Learning for LEAP & Academy



In March, the coronavirus pandemic changed everything. For service organizations like Pearl Buck Center, which rely heavily on person-person interaction, the question became: how can we provide the services people need in a way that keeps everyone safe? The answer to that question has not always been simple. But if we've learned anything in these last six months, it's that anything is possible with creativity, flexibility, and grace.

Pearl Buck Center's **Life Enhancing Activities Program (LEAP)** and **Vocational Academy** have traditionally been held onsite. Both programs regularly scheduled community outings to local businesses and organizations, whether for fun or educational purposes. **When the pandemic hit, all of that had to change.** We kept in touch with our clients, sending activity kits and notes from staff. Once reopening our center for in-person services became feasible, we had to focus on smaller groups.

In order to provide services to as many clients as possible, our staff adapted our in-person curriculum for online learning. Preparing clients, their families and support staff to participate in online classes presented a challenging transition. It involved ensuring clients had access to the right technology, internet connectivity and software. Learning how to use the technology presented a learning curve for everyone. But once our students and those that support them tried online learning for the first time, apprehension quickly gave way to ease.

We found that online learning actually comes with many benefits. Once technology has been accounted for, more people are able to access classes than ever before. It's a great option for those who live in remote areas, or have physical or logistical reasons that make being in a classroom environment problematic.

> Academy Instructor Will Bucknum adds, "for hearing impaired students, online classes can be a more accessible option when watching mouths helps comprehension, and you can turn the volume up to hear students clearer."



Instructors are also finding that online classes are easier to adapt to the interests and needs of students. Even the things which have been challenging have presented new learning opportunities, as many students learn to use technology and stick to a different kind of schedule for the first time.

Moving forward, instructors would like to offer a more diverse curriculum, and use more class time to connect students onsite in the Academy with students who are unable to attend in person. It is also important to ensure that students can earn tangible work-related qualifications as a result of their classwork. Some of this is already happening: recently, two students earned a Food Handlers Card and five are on their way to receiving First Aid certifications, thanks to our online classes.



Although the circumstances that brought us to remote learning were not ideal, we are pleased with how online classes have turned out. They provide the opportunity for our clients to stay connected and continue working toward their goals for personal development and employment, no matter what tomorrow brings.

Supported Living Program

These employees and the services they provide have *always* been essential



Pearl Buck Center's **Supported Living Program** provides direct support in some of the most urgent ways. This is the work that never stopped for inclement weather, a virus, fires, or any other unforeseen event; on the contrary, those are the times when this program is needed most.

The Supported Living Program supports clients to **live as independently as possible** by assisting them with daily activities such as household cleaning and maintenance, meal planning, grocery shopping, doctor appointments, medication management, social activities and outings. Pearl Buck Center currently has fourteen employees who do this work, five of whom also do job coaching. Demand for these services continues to grow.



While always rewarding, the work can vary widely. It's not always as simple as helping a client to go about their day. Recently, the program's manager helped get two clients out of deplorable living conditions, and into a better living environment. **When the pandemic hit, staff faced a number of new challenges.** Rapidly changing mandates from the state were difficult to keep up with. Many outings and visits that were once central to our clients' social lives had to be altered or put on hold entirely. **Supported Living staff had to offer comfort and reassurance amid all the uncertainty, assuring clients that this would not last forever.**

The Oregon wildfires affected blessedly fewer of our staff and clients. One client was on a level three evacuation; she and her family were able to get out safely. Two other clients were close enough to the fires that Supported Living staff had to help ensure they had an emergency plan, in case they had to evacuate. Staff also had to ensure clients stayed protected from the hazardous air quality. Outings were limited to only those necessary, such as doctor appointments.

> "Supported Living Manager Brooke Bodewitz says, "It has been hard for our clients to adjust to the threat of fire and smoke on the heels of the COVID quarantine and I'm proud of my staff for the level of support and compassion they showed."



As the coronavirus continues to keep our community on its toes, Supported Living staff continues to face challenges. To follow safety protocols, field staff have had only limited access to the office. Not physically coming in to see co-workers and supervisors has been difficult and isolating for them. The team has come up with some innovative ways to stay connected, whether it's providing snack bags for the field staff to pick up, cupcakes to boost morale, or the fun poster of office staff with cloud thoughts of encouragement that hangs in the office. Brooke says, **"We let them know they truly are our heroes."**

Board Member Spotlight:
Gary Collins



Gary Collins is the President of Marketing at First Interstate Bank, and serves as Treasurer on Pearl Buck Center's Board of Directors.

How did you get connected to Pearl Buck Center? What inspired you to join the board?
My employer encourages us to volunteer in our communities and giving back to society is something that connects with me. When I learned about Pearl Buck, it immediately had an impact on me personally because my oldest son has IDD.

What do you enjoy most about volunteering on the board?
I love meeting new people and learning new things, so joining the Board provided me the opportunity to do both.

Has the board faced any challenges since COVID-19 or the wildfires?
Any challenges the Board has faced during Covid or the wildfires pales in comparison to its impact on PBC's clients and employees. The Board quickly adapted by holding its meetings virtually and increasing our communications via email.

What draws you to community service?
I've always been drawn to giving back to society and community service is a natural component of this.

Are there other community service projects you are passionate about?
I've volunteered time and donated money to projects that address food insecurity, housing and financial education.

What do you hope to see improve in our community?
I'd love to see a more comprehensive solution to homelessness and mental health issues.

What do you enjoy doing when you're not working or volunteering?
I love playing in the outdoors, so it depends on the season, but to name a few - hiking, mountain biking, canoeing, skiing, golfing and wine tasting.

How YOU Can Make a Difference

Be a Part of Changing Lives | Support Pearl Buck Center



Donate today and help support the programs and services that help people with disabilities in Lane County.

Consider becoming a Monthly Giver!

- Stay in control with convenient, hassle-free giving
- Receive insider information on events and organizational news
- Get an annual statement of your giving for your tax records

To sign up for **monthly giving**, call or visit us online, or simply **indicate your preferences on the enclosed donation envelope.**

Sign up for Monthly Giving by December 1st and receive a personal thank you postcard from a Pearl Buck preschool student!

WAYS TO GIVE:

Online at pearlbuckcenter.com/give
Call 541-484-4666
Mail to 3690 W 1st Ave. Eugene, OR 97402
Donate through our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/Pearlbuckcenter