

NOVEMBER 2007

LifeSpan news and information

Programs in Albemarle, Asheville, Burlington, Charlotte, Concord, Dobson, Greensboro, High Point, Huntersville, Matthews, Monroe, Mt. Airy, Statesville, Troutman, Waynesville, and Wilkesboro

our MISSION

LifeSpan transforms the lives of children and adults with developmental disabilities by providing education, employment, and enrichment opportunities that promote inclusion, choice, family supports, and other best practices.

LifeSpan currently supports over 2,000 individuals in our collection of community programs across North Carolina from Haywood to Alamance counties.

Spotlight a Friend

People come into your life at different times for different reasons. LaShay came to me when my children were grown and I had a void to fill. She loves to be on the go and I had become a bit lethargic. She picked me up and I picked her up —together we make perfect FRIENDS.

People often find it odd that I work as a community coach with LaShay and that we are friends outside of work. Our friendship started in March 2006 when I began working at LifeSpan Employment in Charlotte. LaShay welcomed me when I arrived and often stopped by my work area to ask questions and smile. She has the most beautiful, warm, inviting smile. From the beginning we had a special bond and enjoyed sharing our thoughts and ideas.

In April 2007, I was fortunate to be assigned to LaShay as her community coach. It is a privilege to be able to assist my friend as she makes plans to transition from the Clanton Road facility to community activities. Together, we have looked at options for meaningful employment, volunteer work, and leisure activities.

The leisure activities we have down. As friends, on the weekends we go bowling or to the movies. Sometimes, we hang out at my house with my kids, cook dinner, and drink Kool-Aid (LaShay's favorite). We have a friendship that is special and meaningful to both of us.

When other friends ask me about LaShay and our friendship—I tell them it isn't hard to understand why I selected her as a friend since she is sweet, kind, caring, outgoing, positive, open, and inquisitive. Who wouldn't want a friend like that? I look at all the opportunities that I have in life to develop natural friendships and then I look at the limited opportunities that LaShay had to select a diverse group of friends. She selected me and I selected her.

When I take off the weekend friend hat and put on the work week community coach hat, not much changes. We still spend lots of time talking; the conversation revolves mostly around thoughts, fears, and excitement involving her place in the community. With my assistance, LaShay applied and interviewed for a volunteer position at Kidville-Kovar, a local daycare center. The executive director, Lisa Johnston, and her staff have grown attached to LaShay just like everyone does when they meet her. We are looking at employment choices and are heading in a couple directions. LaShay is a gifted artist and spends time in the LifeSpan art gallery creating pieces and then selling them. Maybe someday she will devote herself full-time to her art. She is still in the exploration and dreaming of opportunities stage of her life. Soon she will be in her appropriate place in the community and I will slowly fade to the background and let her take charge. I will remove the community coach hat but will never remove the friend hat—it is here to stay.

Stephanie Westmoreland
LifeSpan Community Coach



LaShay & Stephanie



Challenges and Transformation

Another year has rolled past us as we prepare to leave 2007. This calendar year proved to be challenging, yet rewarding, as the LifeSpan team worked to transform the lives of the 2,000 children and adults served through the 43 program locations of LifeSpan. Everyone worked diligently toward meeting our strategic goals. Like many others, 2007 was a year of change and transition.

Our greatest challenge was the transformation of our facility-based employment programs into community inclusion for the people we support. Our role is to listen to each individual as they discuss their goals and dreams in the areas of employment, volunteerism, and recreational activities. Then we find a way to help them make these dreams come true.

Transforming lives is our mission and we continued in 2007 to transform lives through several other avenues. For example, we acquired a small nonprofit in Mecklenburg County—Joshua's Farm—where hundreds of children and adults will benefit from therapeutic horseback riding and animal interaction. In collaboration with the North Carolina Wildlife Federation, LifeSpan started the Blue Sky Nature Center in Troutman. Program participants, staff, and people in the community can observe nature along the trail and from a wildlife viewing deck, while also working toward better fitness.

We more than tripled the number of individuals and their families that we support through Case Management. We can now reach an individual who does not participate in our day programs by serving as his or her case manager, thus helping more people with developmental disabilities take charge of their lives.

Technology was another major challenge and focus. Much time was spent by staff and our volunteer advisory committee analyzing how to reengineer our billing process and develop a centralized informational database. Teams of people analyzed our billing and internal processes to determine how to best operate programs and departments as efficiently as possible.

As the year comes to an end, please consider supporting the challenging mission of LifeSpan through a year-end charitable gift. For those of you who have been supporters for a while and have seen and heard of our significant accomplishments, I am hopeful that you will consider naming LifeSpan as a recipient in your will or estate plan. Together, we will head into 2008 and embrace this time of change and transition as we embrace those with developmental disabilities and offer choices and opportunities.



Leigh Derby
PRESIDENT & CEO

LifeSpan Leading a Social Movement

We are in an exciting period of time where people with developmental disabilities are taking their rightful place in society and are no longer expected to remain in segregated settings. It is time for those with significant developmental disabilities to be matched with appropriate work and

enriching experiences where they can interact with co-workers and the general public who do not have disabilities...where their work, whether paid or volunteer, is valued. LifeSpan is in the forefront in North Carolina providing training, opportunities, and support for people to work, volunteer, recreate, or attend classes within their community. Our programs are transforming as we work diligently to do our part for what is socially just.

We are in the midst of a continual social and civil rights movement. It is an exciting—but often frustrating—time, as so many people are marching together to advocate for and with the people we support. We are faced with so many barriers as we pick up on this social movement that started in the 70's for people who were marginalized to take their rightful place among all of us. Social movements stir questions, fear, obstacles, and, often, heated debate. Fear seems to be the biggest barrier that we face at LifeSpan. Fear from family members as to whether their adult child will be safe in the outside world. Fear from care providers who are aware of individuals' disabilities but may not yet be aware of individuals' potential. Fear from the public who have preconceived ideas concerning limitations and abilities.

At LifeSpan we have been working since 1973 providing the training that would prepare people to take their abilities, use them for the greater good, and fulfill their dreams and desires for life. We are now seeing the fruits of that work in new ways: since 2005, 400 members of our LifeSpan community have moved from sheltered, segregated programs to real work in communities. We are leading the movement toward full inclusion in communities and forging ahead. As with all movements, we set out to go forward with a plan—but often stop to evaluate, make changes, and head in a different direction due to obstacles or setbacks or new insights and understandings.

As the holidays approach and you have some time to relax and reflect, evaluate your own thoughts on historically marginalized people taking a place in your community. Join us in the march within North Carolina to have people with developmental disabilities fully embraced. You will come in contact with people who have cognitive disabilities in your workplace, on a volunteer project, in an art class, or at your local grocery store. It is okay at first to feel a bit uncertain as to what to do and how to interact. My guess is you won't have to feel uncomfortable for long because the person with the disabilities will take the first step and reach out to you. They thrive when given an opportunity to have new experiences and to meet good people.

Join us as we guide this movement that is making a beautiful impact on the people we support and their families. Prepare to meet some people who will enrich your life in a way you never imagined.



Achieving their Dreams

Dobson

Belton Haynes from Dobson says, "I've found my place at Advanced Electronics Systems." Belton's work assembling computer batteries has been so impressive that he has moved from a trainee to a contracted employment position. Gary Augenstein, Belton's boss, observed that Belton's "dis"-ability gives him an unusual **ability** to focus on work tasks. Belton drives himself to the new job, and he likes the fact that he is closer to home than driving to LifeSpan Employment Dobson. Belton's dream is to live life as normal as possible. The position at Advanced Electronics affords an opportunity for Belton to excel and takes him a step further to his goal of maturity and independence. Belton tells his old school friends, some of whom are in college now, that, "these batteries that **I'm** assembling might go into **your** computer!" Belton's family is highly supportive and encourages him to reach for his dreams. They also appreciate the training and support that Belton received at LifeSpan and now receives through supported employment as he transitions toward independence.

Greensboro

Supported employment is taking off in Guilford County. Diane, a former participant at LifeSpan Employment Wendover went through two years of job training before making the decision to search for a community based job. With the help of a job coach, Diane has secured a job she loves at Applebee's. Her job is to weigh portion packs of food. Applebee's manager, Dave Nicoletta, designed this position to save time for his cooks prior to their busiest service days. Dave states, "It's one of the ways that Applebee's Gold, Inc. can support our community and give people a chance to succeed."



Success at LifeSpan

When we first met McKenzie, she was a smiling 1-year-old determined to keep up with her friends on the playground. With the support from her walker and braces, she moved toward her friends and accepted hugs when she reached her destination. Her mother, Dana, believes that the trained, professional staff in Burlington have encouraged, motivated, and taught her daughter with a "she can do it" spirit. McKenzie has been at LifeSpan for 14 months and has made wonderful progress. She is catching up to her peers in pre-school: learning, moving and running without a walker or braces! She is a fighter with a cause—she wants to be (and WILL BE) included in everything she chooses.

- ROCKING CHAIRS
- MUSIC CDs FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG ADULTS
- HEATED LAMINATOR
- OUTSIDE AWNINGS FOR SHADE
- SMALL TRACTOR WITH CART
- VACUUM CLEANER
- GARDEN TOOLS AND SUPPLIES
- PAINTING CANVASES
- LARGE ART FRAMES
- ACRYLIC AND WATERCOLOR PAINT
- OUTDOOR BENCHES AND PICNIC TABLES
- BIRDHOUSES AND BIRDSEED
- CLASSROOM SUPPLIES
- TICKETS TO SEASONAL EVENTS, MOVIES, AND CONCERTS
- 17" COMPUTER MONITORS
- LIBRARY-STYLE BOOKCASES
- ADULT COSTUMES FOR DRAMA PERFORMANCES
- MICROPHONE AND SPEAKERS
- PLATE STANDS
- OFFICE FURNITURE
- ART EASELS
- DISPOSABLE CAMERAS

VOLUNTEER NEEDS

- Organize a supply drive
- Host a holiday celebration in a LifeSpan program near you
- Offer to host a golf tournament to support LifeSpan
- Provide space in a gallery or retail storefront to display artwork created by LifeSpan artists
- Open your home to four friends—learn about LifeSpan over coffee or lunch

