Loop Ohio Mentor Biographies

Local Mentors

Dennis Cleary

I have been an Occupational Therapist for 20 years and work have worked with adolescents and adults with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities my entire career. I am the co-director of the Transition, Employment and Technology Laboratory at Ohio State University. I work to test and refine methods to help individuals with disabilities in academic, social, transportation, and work environments through the use of technology, activity analysis, education, and customized strategies. I look forward to working with you.

Shari Cooper

Shari Cooper is a 44-year-old woman with cerebral palsy and knows firsthand about the issues important to people with disabilities. She is a veteran advocate and a motivational speaker for people with disabilities. Cooper is described as an upbeat person who deals well with her disability, and has a natural ability to uplift anyone she comes in contact with.

Shari is currently employed at Goodwill Easter Seals of the Miami Valley as a public relations assistant. Her job in detail includes: speaking to the public about the many services that are available at Goodwill Easter Seals and giving facilities tours to the public and new employees.

In 2005, Gov. Bob Taft appointed Shari to the Ohio Developmental Disability Council. During that appointment, she was selected as executive secretary. Shari was also nominated to Board of Directors of the National Association Councils of Developmental Disabilities in Washington, D.C. She represented the great state of Ohio and addressed the concerns of all Americans with disabilities, and became vice president of that council.

Cooper has been a member of numerous advocacy groups: Advocacy United, Advocacy Protective Services Inc., The Advocates of Montgomery County Board, Governor Council on People with Disabilities, and the State Consumer Advisory Council.
**Laura Cummings**

Growing up with a brother with a disability led Laura to a career working with people with disabilities. Even from a young age, Laura recognized the people who had a positive effect on her brother’s life. Laura has more than 10 years of experience in employment, day programs, residential, self-advocacy, and friendship programs for people with disabilities. Laura is the program consultant for Creative Abundance Consulting. Her primary role is to conduct preliminary and follow-up assessments to determine the impact of Creative Abundance Consulting’s on-site work. Additionally, she has conducted grant reviews for the Ohio Developmental Disabilities Council, as well as staff and consumer surveys for nonprofit agencies. She is also the co-presenter for the Norwich Consulting Services Job Coach Academy and Job Development Academy.

**Jan Dougherty**

Jan spent a big portion of her career as director of Employment Services for a provider agency in Stark County. Through her work, her passion grew in working with people that spent a big portion of their lives in workshops or day programs but ultimately wanted to get a real job and earn some money. Jan believes that all people have the right to work and decide when they are ready to work.

Jan's current position is with the Summit County Board of Developmental Disabilities. Jan works closely with providers developing best practices and creating a platform for collaborative approaches to workforce challenges facing employment and other services within the developmental disabilities field.

Jan and her husband, Pat, have two sons. Their oldest son, Ryan, is employed within the largest employer in Stark County. Though he is underemployed, he continues to work hard every day to pursue his goal of being fully, gainfully employed. Their youngest son, Matt, is an engineer at First Energy.
Brittany Joseph

Brittany Joseph, M.Ed., is an instructor in the College of Education and Human Development at Bowling Green State University in Bowling Green, Ohio, where she teaches undergraduate courses in special education within the School of Intervention Services. Her interests include supporting families of children born with developmental disabilities and creating assistive technology solutions for infants to aging adults.

In the community, Brittany is a board member of iTaalk (Interactive Technology Assisting Autistic Little Kids) Autism Foundation in Toledo, Ohio, and Pathway Inclusion Center in Port Clinton, Ohio. She is actively involved in Venture Bound at Perrysburg High School, Toledo Regional Autism Network, Great Lakes Collaborative for Autism, Assistive Technology Center of Ohio, and Northwest Ohio Apraxia Support. Most importantly, Brittany enjoys spending time with her two sons, Parker, a sweet supportive little brother to Payton, who was diagnosed with autism at 5 years old.

Joseph Kowalski

Joe Kowalski is the director of business development for The MENTOR Network’s human services East Division. He leads program and business development efforts in Indiana, Ohio, Pennsylvania and West Virginia. He started his career more than 10 years ago as a direct support professional. In the years since, he has held positions with the Montgomery County Board of Developmental Disabilities, nonprofit service providers, an in-home autism therapy agency and the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities.

In his current role, Joe leads new growth planning, merger and acquisition origination, special project management for marketing and branding and ICF downsizing/converting among others.

In addition to his role with The MENTOR Network, Joe is a part time adjunct professor at Columbus State Community College in the Human Services Department, as well as a board member for the Ohio Center of Intellectual Disabilities.
Carmen Shelton

Carmen Shelton has been an advocate for people with disabilities for 15 years. She holds a Master of Social Work degree from Ohio State University. She has advocated for Medicaid Buy In for Workers with Disabilities and home and community services.

Carmen was the Legislative Advocacy Day coordinator from 2009 to 2011, in which she coordinated an annual legislative event and arranged appointments with state legislators so individuals could impact public policy and systems changes. Carmen wants to assist individuals with disabilities be engaged in their communities so they can reach their fullest potential.

Tim Vogt (a part of the team from Starfire)

I spent the first 10 years of my career building up day programs and outing programs for people with disabilities. I spent the next 10 years of my career tearing them down and replacing them with something better. That journey has been a gift.
National Mentors through the Employment First State Leadership Mentor Program

Sharyn Hancock

Sharyn Hancock is a Certified Workforce Development Professional, Certified Employment Support Specialist, and Certified Work Incentive Practitioner with over 24 years’ experience in the specialty of workforce development, and over eight years’ experience in managing two successful Ticket to Work programs. Sharyn provides a variety of career services to clients with and without disabilities, regarding their individual and unique needs.

Employment is essential to somebody’s success as a whole person, and employment allows each person to reach their fullest potential to discover their gifts and abilities, to be self-sufficient to feel good about what they have been given, and leave the world a better place because of their work. If we can promote the idea of employment, we can help better the nation that we all live in. There is a job for everybody who wants a job, including people with disabilities.

Rick McAllister

Rick McAllister has over 30 years of experience in consulting, training and the day-to-day managing of service-based organizations. He is a nationally recognized speaker on employment strategies, leadership, management, and designing creative and effective organizational structures. He has extensive experience providing technical assistance to private, federal, and state-sponsored employment initiatives.

A specific focus of Rick’s with work state and regional employment programs has been system-wide financial and operational sustainability models. Rick has a bachelor’s degree in business administration and a master’s degree in applied behavioral analysis. He is the Managing Partner/EVP of Management Analytics Resource Collaborative LLC, a consulting group based in New Hampshire.