

Lehigh Valley **Center for Independent Living**
Newsletter

LVCIL Newsletter

December, 2024



Looking to 2025

A Sweet Success

Rain or Shine

Table of Contents

LVCIL Newsletter: December 2024

Let's thrive in '25 <i>A message from Seth</i>	.....	1.
Deciding to make a Difference <i>LVCIL goes to Harrisburg</i>	.....	3.
A Sweet Success <i>Treats 2 Love</i>	.....	5.
ABLE to Save <i>ABLE accounts press conference</i>	.....	7.
Fishing and Fun <i>8th Annual Fishing and Fun in the park</i>	.....	9.
Thank You <i>For All You Do</i>	.....	11.
Join the Team <i>Now Hiring</i>	.....	13.

Who We Are

LVCIL is a non-profit organization based in Allentown, PA that provides services and support to people with all types of disabilities.

At LVCIL, we believe that every individual has the right to live a healthy, happy, and productive life in a community that is free from all barriers. We can help you achieve or maintain your independence through many of our supportive services and programs.

The Lehigh Valley Center for Independent Living (LVCIL) is a registered 501(c)3 non-profit organization that serves people with disabilities, and their family members, living in Lehigh and Northampton Counties.

What We Do

LVCIL offers a many services and programs. But like all Centers for Independent Living we offer our 5 core services.

Information and Referral

Information and referral can help you find the programs, services, and support you need to live independently.

Advocacy

To put it simply, advocacy is standing up for your rights and what you believe in.

Peer Support

If you feel like no one understands you, or that people treat you differently because of your disability, LVCIL's peer support can help.

Independent Living Skills

We can help you achieve independence by providing you with the information, support, and education you need to live independently and remain independent.

Where To Find Us

713 North 13th Street, Allentown, PA 18102

By appointment only

Contact Us

610-770-9781 - info@lvcil.org

Let's thrive in '25

A message from LVCIL's Executive Director

“Transition is Life!”

We say that often around the CIL. 2024 was a year pretty much defined by this saying. So many impactful things took place. From events like the Large Flower Head concert, to Fishing in the Park, to selling recipe jars at Christkindlmarkt, and a group of young adults going to Harrisburg to meet with legislators, LVCIL was out there in the community, doing what we do best.

In many ways the most impactful work our staff does are those day in and day out tasks. Like helping to find an apartment, matching someone with a piece of technology that they need, or someone getting their first taste of employment; the difference made in people's lives is life changing.

It wasn't an easy year with all the changes, but staff stayed true to this mission of helping people with disabilities reach their goals and continued to influence the community to be a place where those goals can be reached. Also, a shout out to our volunteers and interns. We wouldn't be able to do what we do without you. And of course, a thank you to our board, both old and new who challenged and supported us as we progressed through the year.

Two big areas of change were very impactful, for me. One was the passing of colleague, former LVCIL employee, friend and advocate: Paul Fogle. He was a fierce advocate and a quick wit. I enjoyed the time I spent with him and many of us learned a lot from being in his presence. Paul's legacy will live on through his influence in the work we continue to do at the CIL.

The second big impact was of course the retirement of Amy Beck. This was and continues to be a big transition to many of us as there have been many role changes. Staff have met these changes head on and continue to challenge themselves and each other to determine where the CIL is going and how we are going to get there. Fortunately, Amy hasn't gone too far and, even though she is taking some much deserved time for herself, she's still just a zoom call away. She continues to be a great influence and mentor on all of us!

2025 will inevitably have its transitions as well. We'll be ready for them. Let 2025 be a year of opening up to new possibilities, balance and growth. Let's take things to another level while staying true to our independent living roots. To borrow from Amy, "Let's thrive in '25."



- Seth Hoderewski



Deciding to make a Difference

Young Adults with Disabilities tell Lawmakers: Trust our decisions, support our rights to make them.

On any day you can find Pennsylvania’s State Capitol building full of people from every profession, cause, and background. Each there to make their voices heard. On the morning of November 13th LVCIL’s young adult social group, **Adaptations**, arrived in Harrisburg with the same goal. They walked through the Capitol’s marble halls to speak up for change: visiting offices to share information and talking with lawmakers about their experiences and hopes for a more inclusive future.

The group focused on **Supported Decision Making** and the problem of unnecessary guardianship that many young adults with disabilities face. They discussed the “**School-to-Guardianship Pipeline**,” where parents of graduating high school students are often told that guardianship is the only way to keep their young adult children safe. While this choice usually comes from good

intentions, guardianship is one of the most restrictive legal arrangements in America – it removes most of a person’s legal rights to make decisions. And when people are not allowed to make their own choices, they are proven to be less happy, less safe, and less able to care for themselves.

The group talked about how Supported Decision Making (**SDM**), the system where people with disabilities choose a circle of support to help them make choices, while keeping their legal rights and autonomy - unlike guardianship, was not so different from the way they make decisions:

“Every day Legislators have teams of people supporting them, researching information, communicating their thoughts to the public, and discussing important choices that they have to make. If it works for them, then it can work for us.”

Their time in Harrisburg wasn’t just about telling stories - It aimed to change how people think about young adults with disabilities and their right to make choices, take risks, and live life on their terms. The group had meaningful talks with legislators about guardianship and the need to address Supportive Decision Making to PA state law as a more clearly recognized option. For these young adults, using their voice and seeing themselves as advocates was a powerful experience.

Along with their meetings, the group was able to explore the State Capitol building as they went from office to office; learning about both how our government works, and the history of our state throughout the day. Nearing the end of the trip, Pennsylvania State Representative Steven Samuelson (135th District / Northampton County) was kind enough to bring the group through a personal tour of the Capitol Building, giving them a firsthand look at what a day in the life of a Representative looks like.



Image: Consumers and Staff with Rep. Samuelson

With Rep. Samuelson the group had the opportunity to visit the House chambers during a legislative recess, letting them see the place state laws are crafted. The tour continued to the

Keystone building, where the group was able to have a wonderful lunch, relax, and talk after a busy and important day. The Harrisburg visit meant more than a simple day trip - it showed LVCIL’s commitment to helping young adults with disabilities shape their world.

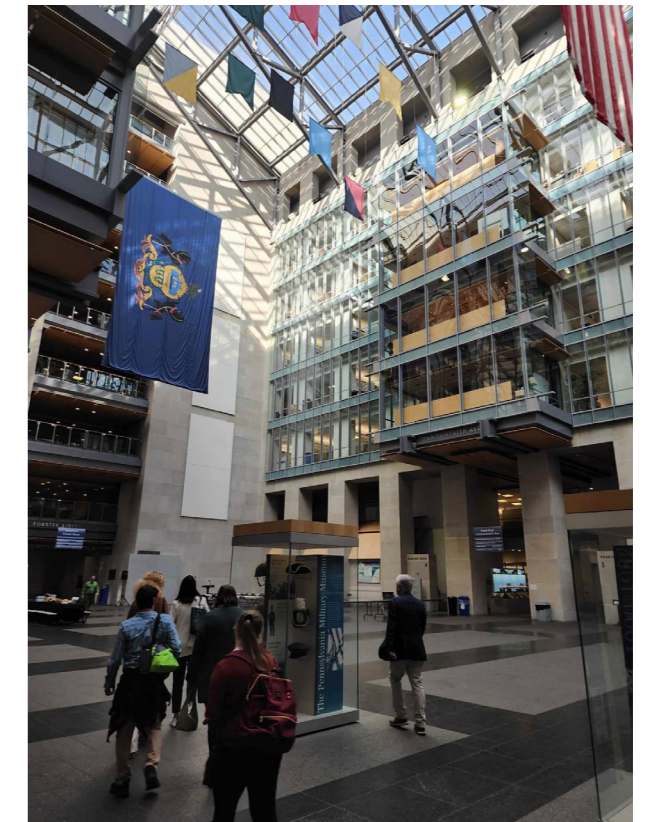


Image: Interior of the Keystone Building, State Capitol Complex

Many group members spoke directly with state legislators for the first time, standing up for their rights and needs. They learned that advocacy means taking action - showing up where decisions are made and making your voice heard.

By being there and speaking up, these young adults proved they can make their own choices and help others facing similar challenges. Their work adds to a growing movement that supports independence for all people with disabilities.

To learn more about Supported Decision Making, please visit SDMPA.org



A Sweet Success

Treats2Love lights up Christkindlmarkt and beyond

With the early snow and cold weather, Bethlehem was living up to its name as the Christmas City. Christkindlmarkt, the city's large German-style Christmas market, was in full swing. People from across the state and country were busy shopping for the holidays and enjoying the festivities – and learn more about LVCIL.

Tucked inside one of the many outdoor huts, LVCIL's youth microbusiness, **Treats2Love** (T2L), was hard at work selling their signature recipe jars. The initiative, born from our **School2Life** (S2L) program serves as a hands-on opportunity for young adults gain practical experience in leadership, teamwork, and employment skills. From inventory management and production to marketing and sales, these young adults are calling the shots.

The story of Treats 2 Love lays in the heart of LVCIL's School2Life program: A youth-led, and youth-driven peer group for young adults with any disability ages 14-25 who have independent living goals for their futures. Beginning as a simple project selling recipe jars to friends and family, through the program's hard work and commitment Treats 2 Love has grown into a strong microbusiness.

Just this past holiday season the group had hand made and sold over 2600 recipe jars – the proceeds returning back into their program to continue to support School2Life (S2L) and ensure it remains a free and open program for all families and consumers.



While the sales at Christkindlmarkt continue to support and promote T2L, it also offers something money simply can not buy: A connection to the community, and a chance for our young adults to demonstrate their skills, dedication, and potential. Each jar sold represents an opportunity to share LVCIL's mission with thousands of visitors, raising awareness about the capabilities and contributions of people with disabilities in our community. The face-to-face interactions at the market help break down barriers and challenge preconceptions about disability and their career paths.

Thanks to crucial appropriation funding through Senator Bob Casey's office, T2L has been given a unique chance to grow more than ever. The program welcomed a dedicated Treats2Love Project Coordinator, enhancing our ability to support jar preparation, creation, and business development. This additional support has proven invaluable as T2L looks beyond seasonal sales toward year-round opportunities.



Image: LVCIL consumers creating T2L jars to sell at Christkindlmarkt

Looking ahead, T2L's expansion plans reflect the program's growing ambitions. The team is actively exploring opportunities to participate in additional community events throughout the year, bringing their popular recipe jars to new audiences while creating more opportunities for program participants to develop their business skills.

This growth wouldn't be possible without the dedicated support of program staff, volunteers, and community partners who believe in the potential of young entrepreneurs with disabilities. As T2L continues to evolve, it remains an example of how innovative programming can create meaningful opportunities for independence, skill development, and community engagement.

For more information about Treats2Love or to learn how you can support this growing initiative, please contact LVCIL or email: Donnahendrickx@lvcil.org



Image: A guest speaker (left) shares how the ABLE account will help her as a person with a disability. American sign language interpreter translates. (Right)

ABLE to Save

LVCIL hosts Bipartisan press-conference announcing major update in Disability Savings accounts.

A significant milestone in the fight for financial independence within the disability community was celebrated at LVCIL’s Allentown headquarters as Senator Bob Casey and State Treasurer Stacy Garrity announced that Pennsylvania’s ABLE Savings Program had reached over \$135 million in assets, surpassing its original \$100 million goal.

LVCIL was honored to be asked to host the bipartisan press conference, bringing together LVCIL consumers, family members, and community leaders to share personal stories about how ABLE accounts have transformed their approach to financial planning.

These accounts allow Pennsylvanians with disabilities and their families to save for disability-related expenses without risking essential benefits, creating pathways to greater financial security and independence.



Image: State Treasurer Garrity and Senator Casey.



Image: Tony Swartz addressing the Press on behalf of LVCL

LVCIL Board President Tony Swartz hosted the event, where several program participants shared powerful testimonies about their experiences with ABLE accounts. Their stories illustrated how this program has opened new possibilities for greater financial planning, independent living, and over all brighter futures for Pennsylvanians with disabilities.

Before ABLE accounts, individuals receiving benefits couldn’t save more than \$2,000 without risking their vital support services. Now, ABLE account holders can save up to \$17,000 per year and use these funds for a wide range of disability-related expenses.

Account holders can pay for housing, education, transportation, healthcare costs, assistive technology, and basic living expenses. Pennsylvanians with disabilities can now begin save for their future without risking the benefits they need to live.

What more can an ABLE account do?

- **Benefit Protection:** Protect eligibility for Pennsylvania health and disability-related benefits, as well as Pennsylvania state student financial aid.
- **Expanded Employment Opportunities:** ABLE to Work lets you earn more and save more.
- **Gift Contributions:** Family members and friends can make tax-deductible contributions to a PA ABLE account with Ugift.
- **PA Medical Assistance Repayment Protection:** Account is not subject to Medical Assistance (Medicaid) repayment (Note: upon death, assets transferred to an Account Owner’s estate may not be exempt).
- **Inheritance Tax Exemption:** Entire account is exempt from Pennsylvania inheritance tax.
- **And much more**

Want to learn more about ABLE accounts?

Visit:

www.paable.gov





Fishing and Fun

Rain doesn't dampen the spirits at the 8th Annual Fishing and Fun in the Park.

Downpours of rain, mist, and mud. For most, that kind of weather would put a damper on any kind of outdoor fun. But not for those at the 8th Annual Fishing and Fun in the Park!

Just on the banks of the Lehigh Parkway, LVCIL and the City of Allentown Department of Parks & Recreation brought the community together for a day of fun in the (not so sunny) park. Sponsored by IronPigs Charities, the event drew 100-150 community members, some seasoned anglers and outdoor adventurers, and some who learned how to cast their line for the first time!



Image: A parent helping their young child reel in a fish on the banks of the river

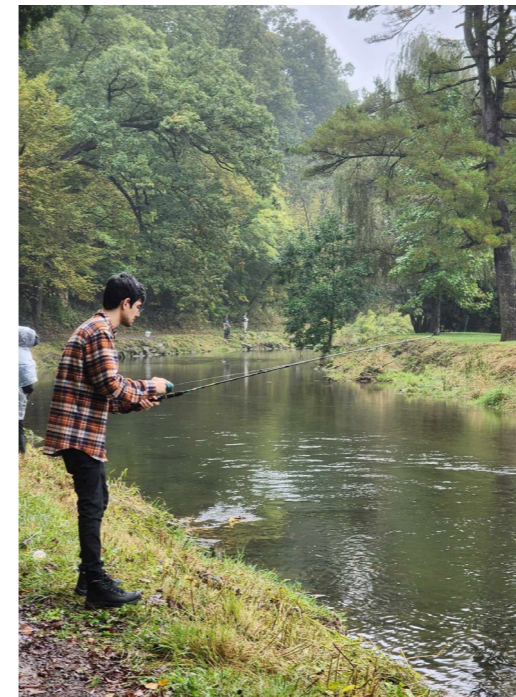


Image: A LVCIL Staff member enjoying the event

The event's success showed how inclusive outdoor activities can bring our community together. Families huddled under provided ponchos and tents, children celebrated as they reeled in their first catch, and experienced anglers shared that the light rain actually created perfect fishing conditions.

Along with the fishing supplies LVCIL had provided, The Da Vinci Science Center helped the youth explore nature through hands-on terrarium making, while the Allentown Fire Department and K9 Unit provided exciting demonstrations that entertained and educated those who need a break from the riverside.

The presence of health and wellness vendors offering fresh produce, alongside various social service agencies providing community resources, transformed the fishing event into a real community resource fair, connecting families with valuable services while they enjoyed the outdoors.

Planning ahead

As LVCIL and the City of Allentown look toward next year's event, plans are already forming to expand food vendor participation and extend planning timelines. However, the core mission remains unchanged: creating accessible, inclusive outdoor activities that strengthen our community bonds and introduce more families to the joys of outdoor recreation.



Image: Fishing and Fun participants on the riverside

Our Thanks to You

LVCIL would not be who we are without the support and kindness of our community

As a Non-Profit organization, LVCIL exists and sustains itself through various grants, awards, and donations from our community. To the many who have, and continue to, give their time, attention, and financial resources to our organization - we can't thank you enough.

Bob's Discount Furniture

Every year LVCIL's housing department is able to help countless people find safe, affordable, and accommodating places to live across the Lehigh Valley and beyond. But that is only the first step to creating a home. Many of our consumers face the challenge of furnishing that new space with the most basic items. Beds, kitchen wear, toiletries, and more. But thanks to the generosity of Bob's Cares: Bob's Discount Furniture Charitable Foundation, those empty spaces are being turned into comfortable homes.



Throughout 2024, Bob's Discount Furniture has demonstrated an extraordinary commitment to our community's needs by providing multiple gift cards totaling over \$1,000 to LVCIL's Housing program. These donations have enabled consumers to obtain essential furniture items that have helped them in establishing stable and dignified living spaces. As healthy places to sleep and eat are not luxuries, but necessities for independent living.

Everyone at LVCIL would like to thank Bob's for their continuous support and care. With your help, we have been able to offer a more comprehensive assistance to consumers transitioning into new living situations, ensuring they return each day to a place they can proudly call their own.



Guardian continues to be a great friend to LVCIL - from donations to opportunities to connect with a greater community, we want to extend a thanks for all you've done this year.

Guardian had supported LVCIL in many ways this year, such as:

Providing us with the opportunity to table at Musikfest - allowing us to share LVCIL's services and work with thousands of people.

Generous financial supports which continues to support our programming and support.

An amazing Team-building event, where roughly 100 of their employee's came together to support our Treats2Love program. Staff helped our young adults in the creation of recipe jars for our winter sales at Christkindlemarkt, while also learning about disability and inclusion. That event had made a major impact within the micro-business, and we can not thank them enough.

A Heartfelt Thank You to Our Community



At LVCIL, our work is made possible by the generosity of you, members of our community. While we're immensely grateful for major events and large donations, we want to celebrate every act of kindness, no matter the size.

Whether you've contributed financially, volunteered your time, donated equipment like wheelchairs or canes, or provided other supplies, your support directly improves the lives of our consumers. What might seem like a small gesture to you can be life-changing for someone else.

These acts of kindness, big and small, are the foundation of what we do at LVCIL. They remind us that our mission of fostering independent living is a shared one. To everyone who has supported LVCIL in any way: thank you. You are the heart of our organization, and the reason we can continue to make a difference in the lives of people with disabilities in our community.

Interested in being a part of LVCIL?

Check out our job postings for current positions, or visit our website to learn more about volunteer opportunities with us!



**Interested in
Joining the Team?**

LVCIL Careers
and
Employment:

<https://www.indeed.com/cmp/Lvcil>



Volunteer

Volunteers are essential to any non-profit organization, including LVCIL! Our volunteers complete endless tasks that contribute to our success as an agency. They also help make our CIL a great place for people with disabilities. Volunteers are always welcome, and everything our volunteers do is much appreciated.

**Please visit our website at: <https://lvcil.org/volunteer/>
or scan the QR code below to find out more.**

