Lehigh Valley Center for Independent Living

Newsletter

Empowering all people with disabilities to achieve independence

SPECIAL FEATURE AUTUMN 2026 | 秋号



海を隔てても、使命はひとつ

「日本に行ってきました…」

FEATURE · PAGE 12

"I've been to Japan..."

特集

A story of two CILs: an ocean apart, a mission together.

06
Caught in the Rain
Fishing and Fun in the Park 2026

22
A Roller-Coaster of a Work Day
Real World Lehigh Valley

28
The Holidays in a Jar
Treats2Love at Christkindlmarkt

Inside this issue

04 **Musings from the Board President** A message from the 26-27 board

08 **Caught in the Rain**
Fishing and Fun in the Park ‘26

12 **I’ve been to Japan**
A gaijin’s tale of egg sandwiches, trains, and advocacy

20 **Just Keep Swimming**
A consumer Story

22 **A Roller-Coaster of a Work Day**
Real-World Lehigh Valley

26 **AT Talk**
Try Before You Buy

28 **The Holidays in a Jar**
Treats2Love at Christkindlmarkt

30 **How are we doing?**
Satisfaction Survey

31 **Join the Team?**
LVCIL Job / Volunteer opportunities

SHARE YOUR STORY

We’re launching a stories page on lvcil.org to show people with disabilities living their lives to the fullest. Have a story? Email info@lvcil.org or call 610-770-9781.

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

Like every Center for Independent Living, we offer five core services, and more.

Information & Referral
Finding the programs and support you need.

Advocacy
Standing up for your rights and beliefs.

Peer Support
Connection with people who understand.

Independent Living Skills
Skills and education to live independently.

Transition Services
Help through youth and life transitions.

Image Below: Two LVCIL consumers presenting



VISIT OR CALL

713 North 13th Street
Allentown, PA 18102
By appointment only
610-770-9781
info@lvcil.org

Musings from the Board President

A message from the 2026 -27 LVCIL Board



Hello LVCIL family!

As we roll into autumn, I want to take a moment to reflect on everything our Board of Directors, staff, and community have accomplished over the past few months. If the past year taught us how to stand resilient during tough financial times, the spring and summer showed us what happens when that hard work pays off. We are moving forward with steady momentum, deep community connection, and a clear vision for LVCIL's future!

Here is a quick look at what your Board has been up to since our last update:

LEARN MORE ABOUT OUR BOARD

You can learn more about the members of our board by visiting "Who we are" at LVCIL.org

Strengthening Our Operational & Financial Base

Our Board committees have been hard at work keeping LVCIL strong behind the scenes:

Budget & Facility Wins: The Finance Committee officially passed our FY 26/27 operating budget. +, Our Facilities Committee welcomed a new 2nd floor tenant to our building on May 1, bringing in steady rental revenue for our landlord while coordinating shared building safety and evacuation plans!

Standardizing SLIRS: Under Joe M's leadership, our Sign Language Interpreter Referral Service (SLIRS) streamlined 40 varied contracts down to 3 standardized agreements, renewed over 90 interpreter contracts, and secured rate updates.

Modern Governance & Tech Policies: Our Personnel and Governance Committee finalized a comprehensive new IT policy, including specific guidelines on AI usage, to keep our agency's digital operation secure.

Global Connections & Unexpected Blessings

Advocacy remains the heartbeat of LVCIL. Executive Director Seth H recently represented LVCIL in Japan, presenting on US disability policy to 50 Japanese advocates and lawmakers and connecting with the Osaka Center for Independent Living.

We were also humbled to receive a surprise, unrestricted $16,000 grant from the Island Foundation, put forward quietly by local consumers who believe in our work, along with $25,000 in housing support secured through Senator Miller's office.

Continued on next page

Showing Up in the Community

You may have spotted Board members sharing a meal at Red Robin, cheering at local events, or helping out with the annual Fishing in the Park event! One of our core goals this year has been ensuring board leadership shows up in person to support our staff and consumers.

Continue to look at LVCIL's calendar for upcoming community celebrations and events.

Welcoming New Leaders & Bidding Farewell

We want to extend a heartfelt thank you to Maia G, LeeAnne F, and Jacqui M, who are rotating off the Board after completing their three terms. There years of dedication, wisdom, and advocacy have left an indelible mark on LVCIL.

At the same time, we are thrilled to welcome our newest board nominees Robyn O (community advocate and parent), Jack C (banker dedicated to disability inclusion), and Diane W (retired educator and longtime friend of LVCIL), alongside Everett D entering his 2nd term as Vice President and Dr. Fathima W stepping in as interim Secretary.

Looking Ahead: Strategic Planning Retreat on November 3

While we have celebrated many wins, we know our work is never finished. That is why the Board and leadership team are coming together on November 3 for our Strategic Planning Retreat.

This retreat is our dedicated space to pause, look at the big picture, and map out where LVCIL is headed next. We will be analyzing consumer feedback, evaluating program data, and identifying key advocacy priorities... From expanding housing access to building self advocacy pipelines for the next generation of disability leaders.

Our mission to empower persons with disabilities to achieve independence is at the heart of every decision we make. Thank you for walking this path with us!

Be well,

Michelle Mitchell
Board President, Lehigh Valley Center for Independent Living

10th Annual FISHING & FUN 2026
IN THE PARK

BIG FISH SPONSOR

LEHIGH VALLEY IRONPIGS CHARITIES
PRESENTED BY AIR PRODUCTS
SINCE 2008

LVCIL wants to extend a thanks to the Lehigh Valley IronPigs Charities for being a Big Fish Sponsor for this years 10th Annual Fishing and Fun in the Park. Their contributions to the event were foundational, and we can't thank them enough.

To learn more about IronPigs Charities, please visit https://www.milb.com/lehigh-valley/community/charities or scan the QR Code

LVCIL Allentown

Caught in the Rain

Fishing and Fun in the Park 2026

An old saying goes that the weather report changes every time you look at it.

If that's true, then the crew at LVCIL was changing the weather a mile a minute the week before our 10th Annual Fishing and Fun in the Park. A week out, the forecast said clear and sunny skies – a few days out, the Nor'easter of '26 decided to RSVP.

This year marked a decade of getting our local community out into nature, learning about the Lehigh Parkway, healthy living, and, of course, the time-honored art of fishing. The plan was to go big and make it a memorable occasion. And memorable it was, that's for sure. Just perhaps not in the ways we had anticipated.

With the storm ahead of us, we met with our partners at the City of Allentown Department of Parks & Recreation to look at our options, which were few. With sponsors and vendors lined up and the following weekends booked, Saturday September 26th was our day, rain or shine.



Image above: View of the river, rain pouring down, fishes standing in the river and on the bank casting their rods.

Early that morning our crew arrived, and it was evident that this was going to be one for the books. On the bright side, we had more hands on deck than ever before: a dozen-plus students from Lehigh University's Pi Kappa Phi fraternity had volunteered their time and manpower. If college students showing up on a misty, windy weekend morning to set up tents – during midterms, no less – doesn't show dedication, then I don't know what does. What normally would have taken our crew hours was done in a fraction of the time.

Of course, our friendly storm decided to make an early appearance as well. With a cold gust of wind, tents went airborne, one crashing into the ground and being reduced to a pile of scrap. Luckily we've always erred on the side of caution; with a few extra tents, a lot of extra weights, and some team effort, we were grounded and geared up for the day. Fortunately for us, those heavy winds were just the nor'easter's grand opening, settling into a steady and damp downpour as the day went on.

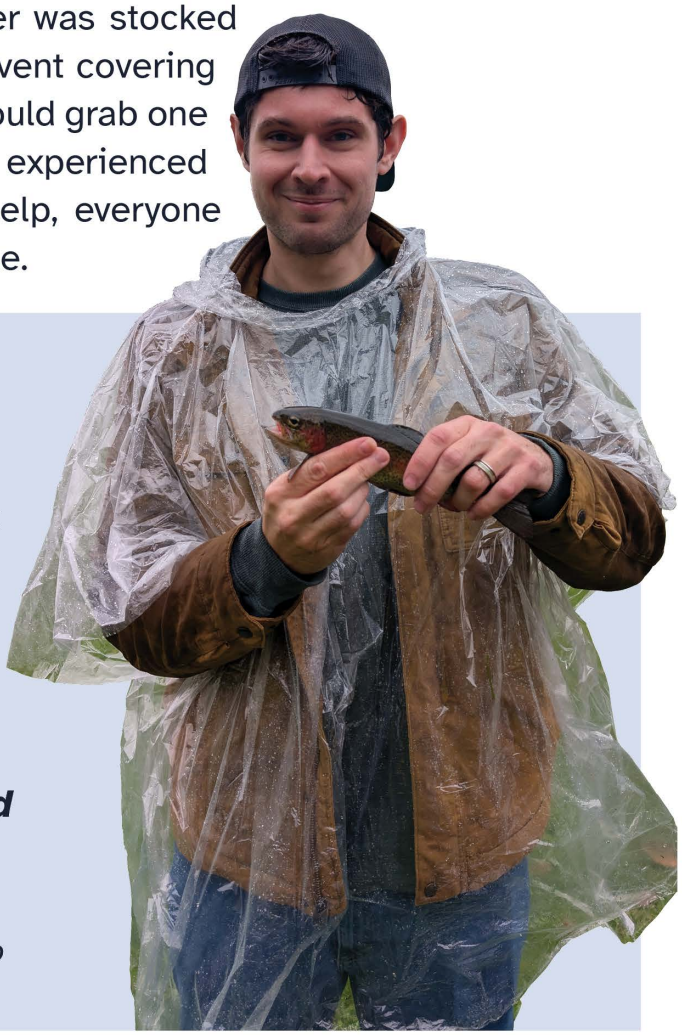
Good thing the fish certainly don't mind the rain. And apparently, neither do those who love to fish. Despite the weather, over a hundred festival-goers came out to join us. Like every year before, the river was stocked through the local hatchery, and with the event covering fishing licenses, anyone of any skill level could grab one of our rods and hit the riverbank. With our experienced angler Todd there all day to teach and help, everyone who wanted to got the chance to cast a line.

An Unlikely Catch

Event participant Jacob Mazur shows off his prized catch. Unlike other fishers that day, Jacob went bare handed into the river and snatch the fish up without a rod.

"I couldn't catch one with a pole, so I had to go in the old fashoioned way." *- Jacob Mazur*

Image to the right: Jacob wearing a rain poncho holds up a fish, smiling.



Continued on next page

Away from the water, the Philly Fire – Philadelphia's own beep baseball team, and 2024 World Series champions – had set up a demo for anyone willing to give it a swing. Anyone who's ever tried to hit a baseball knows the pros make it look easy. Now, what about doing it with a blindfold on?

Beep Baseball is an adaptive version of the game designed for people who are blind or visually impaired. "How are you supposed to hit something you can't see coming?" you might ask. The ball beeps as it's pitched, and the pitcher – who is sighted and on the batter's own team – is actually trying to help them make contact. Using sound alone, the batter tracks the ball and makes their swing. Once it's hit, one of two padded, four-foot-tall bases starts to buzz, and the batter has to find it and get there before the defense can field the ball. Every batter and fielder wears a blindfold, regardless of their level of vision, to create a fair and equal playing field.



Image above: ED Seth with a blindfold on, swinging a bat at the beep ball.

When we asked the Fire about the weather, they told us it was nothing to them. Only extreme temperatures or lightning get them off the field. A "little" rain was the least of their worries.

Our vendors and community organizations shared that same spirit. Festival-goers could grab some nice warm food from the Heart & Hearth BBQ truck out of Kutztown, and enjoy a cold one on a cold day with a brew from Emmaus's own Yergey Brewing. And who doesn't like a little treat? Fidelity Bank, one of our Big Fish sponsors, rolled up with their ice cream truck as well. All the while they could visit the various tables to learn more about their local resources and the organizations that provided them.

While the rain and wind may not have been what we were hoping for, we can't say that the 10th Annual Fishing and Fun in the Park wasn't worth the effort. What started out as a small gathering has grown into a community tradition, and none of it would be possible without our sponsors – especially IronPigs Charities, whose grant funding has been foundational to this event – our partners at Allentown Parks & Recreation, our volunteers, and every one of you who came out in the rain. Each year we meet fantastic people, make meaningful connections, and help inspire a love for the outdoors in the youth and families of our community.

If the pattern holds from previous years, we're owed a nice sunny day for Fishing and Fun in the Park 2027. So cross your fingers, and we hope to see you then!



Image above: Fishing and Fun Angler Todd helps a young fisher with her bait and tackle.

Fishing and Fun 2026

Our Sponsors

Fishing and Fun in the Park exists in due to our many generous sponsors. We want to thank all of them for their support and contributions

Big Fish Sponsors

- Lehigh Valley Iron Pigs Charities
- Fidelity Bank
- PA Health & Wellness

Catch of the Day Sponsors

- Lehigh Valley Health Network - part of Jefferson Health

Angler Sponsors

- Guardian
- Values into Action
- WilliamSIGNS
- Kiwanis Club of Allentown
- Coplay News Agency Live Bait & Tackleshop
- Cool Print Tee

東京の自立生活センターを訪ねて*

"I've been to Japan..."

A gaijin's tale of egg sandwiches, trains, and advocacy

Back at the end of July I was fortunate enough to take a trip to Japan, two weeks in Tokyo and Osaka. Most folks are probably tired of me talking about it, as it seems like I bring it up every chance I get. (There's a wonderful video about American tourists who brag about going to Japan, and the first line is "I've been to Japan." Scan the QR code to check it out.) But there's just something about the experience that stays with you and makes you want to talk about it every chance you get.

Flash back to 2002. My brother Ara was in Japan, teaching English. I visited him. It was a very interesting time, as 9/11 had just happened a few months earlier and everyone we came in contact with wanted to talk about it. People were so very empathetic to what had happened. It really made me realize what a global event that was. Flash forward 24 years. My brother wanted to return to try and locate some of his friends in Osaka. This time he convinced my son, Adin, to go, and Adin in turn pressed me until I agreed. My niece, Elsa, also had a hand in it. Throw in my cousin Ed for fun and laughs, and we had our crew!

If folks know me, they know my wife has been pretty ill for the past few years. I was teetering almost daily on whether to go, because I wanted to make sure I was home for her if needed. She had been doing much better since her surgery in January, and around then I had the idea to see if I could connect with the CILs in Japan. I've always promoted the fact that there are CILs all over the country and the world.



Image right: Seth reaching into a cabinet at a shrine to get his fortune read.

I reached out to the National Council on Independent Living. They were able to put me in touch with Masami Morigami. Masami and I were going back and forth for some time, and she presented the idea of me speaking to a group in Tokyo. I ended up meeting with leading disability advocates in Japan, who asked me to present on what was going on in the United States, how some of the new legislation was impacting people with disabilities, and what was being done as far as advocacy goes. They had been hearing about how there had been cuts to Medicaid and other issues. That sealed the deal... I had presented locally, statewide, even nationally, but having the opportunity to present internationally was a no-brainer, an incredible opportunity for me and for the CIL. We made sure my wife had what she needed while I was gone, and the decision was made. I was going to speak in Tokyo on my second day of the trip, and then later in the trip I was going to meet with the CIL in Osaka.



Image above: Seth and family with the Asakura Sumo Club

Oh yeah, I almost forgot, I was going for some fun as well, some time with my son and the rest of the family. We were going to go to Japanese baseball, temples, Monkey Mountain, restaurants, convenience stores, and hit all of the sights and sounds you can take in in two weeks!

I had forgotten how long the flight and the entire day of travel is. Thirteen to fourteen hours is a long time to be stuck in a giant tin can 40,000 feet above Canada and Alaska! We landed in Tokyo raring to go. I did my best to get settled, as the presentation was literally the next day, but I wanted to check the city out as well.



Image above: Shinto Shrine Fushimi Inari Taisha Seth and family had visited

The next day was the day... Masami came to our hotel and escorted us to the City Council building where the presentation was going to be. I learned a lot about Masami and her connection to the independent living movement in the US. Years ago, she actually lived with Justin Dart and his wife Yoshiko. For those that are not aware, Justin Dart is regarded as the Godfather of the ADA. Talk about being connected! The room was all set up. There were sign language interpreters, English/Japanese interpreters, and CART services. Around 50 disability advocates attended. This number also included Tokyo council people and an award-winning documentarian who did a documentary on autism in Japan. No pressure! I guess I didn't really realize how big it was going to be!



Image above: Masami and the group posing together as she helps them navigate the Tokyo train system.

The focus of my presentation was on three areas from what we are seeing in the United States. The first was cuts to Medicaid. The second had to do with the Department of Justice memo that had just come out, threatening the Olmstead decision. The third revolved around the federal government wanting to move special education from the Department of Education to the Department of Health and Human Services. I also talked about things like housing, transportation, and employment issues. I spoke about the need to find the next generation of advocates. The current generation doesn't know the struggles disability advocates went through 30, 50, or more years ago to win what people have now. The world isn't perfect, but the new generation lives in a world more accessible than ever before, and they didn't have to fight like previous generations did. On top of that, the older generation of advocates is retiring or has passed away. Finding new advocates and training them has to be a priority, but in today's age, we need a different way to reach young people. Attendees shared with my family that they had not really put this all together in Japan, and that they felt the same way.

The presentation flew by. Afterwards we stayed to talk to attendees, who were so gracious and thankful for us being there. We took pictures and chatted for some time. Later, our hosts took us to a wonderful buffet dinner. We continued the conversation through the evening. It was such an incredible time! Our hosts were marvelous.



Image right: Seth along with other presenters giving a talk on disability in America and Japan

We had a good number of days until I was going to meet with the CIL in Osaka, so we hit the town. I've never walked so much in my life, about 20,000 steps a day. Tokyo and Osaka were incredible. The stores, the temples, the restaurants. We went to a Tokyo Giants baseball game and a sumo experience too. My favorite thing to do was going to the 7-Eleven for an egg sandwich. It was the most delicious sandwich I've ever had. The milk bread so soft, the egg filling so creamy and delicious. I ate one every chance I could. Prices were unbelievable. What would cost $40 at McDonald's here cost 15 bucks. You could get a Red Bull out of a vending machine for about a dollar. Here it's $3.50 a can.

We took the trains everywhere. The two youngsters, Adin and Elsa, picked up the systems quickly, so we followed them all trip. I started to notice a lot of disability and accessibility features everywhere we went. There was Braille on the top of cans to let people who are blind know that a drink has alcohol in it. There were Tenji squares* (*translates to "braille blocks."*) on every walkway. This allowed people who are blind to use their cane to more easily navigate the city. There were ramps everywhere and different accommodations to help people use a sink or a toilet.



Image above: Tenji Squares in front of a door.



Image above: A japanese Seven Eleven with two members of the group exiting.

There were still a good number of stores and restaurants that were not accessible. Some stores only fit 3 patrons at a time, had doorways only big enough to walk in sideways, and had lots of steps, layers, and levels. The older infrastructure made it tough for full accessibility everywhere. The newer buildings, like the government building I gave my presentation in, were fully accessible. Our friends mentioned that there were laws in Japan about disability-related topics and accessibility, but they were not as strong as our ADA.



Image above: the cartoon painting of the group made by member of the Muchu Center, reading "Welcome to Muchu Center"

About a week after the presentation, we were going to meet with the CIL in Osaka. Unfortunately, my niece was sick, so she and my brother did not get to attend. Masami met us at the train station, and we took the ride to Muchu Center. The center sat right on top of the train station, which was underground. Talk about being accessible! We got to the center and were greeted by about 30 people and a round of applause as we walked in. Ed, Adin, and I greeted each person and shook everyone's hands. It was quite a moment. One of the first things we saw was a cartoon painting of each of us, which read "Welcome to Muchu Center." It was very cool.

We were whisked away to a conference room where we sat with Masami, who worked at Muchu Center, and other leaders. We met the brothers, Shacho and Hirashita. These dudes, who opened and ran Muchu, looked like they were rock stars. It turns out that's because they were rock stars! They showed a video about Muchu Center that featured one of the brothers singing as the lead of a rock band. They told their story about their lives and shared gifts for all of us. They got my son a wonderful figure of Hideki Matsui (a former MLB player and my son's favorite). It was so thoughtful. We talked about what is going on at their center and what we are seeing in the US.



Image above: Sacho and Hirashita gifting Adin the Hideki Matsui figure

ふたつのCILの物語

After that we had a full lunch where they cooked right in front of us. We took pictures and talked. Everyone wanted to chat. They were really interested in speaking to my son, who is a kindergarten through second grade autistic support teacher. They were interested in inclusive practices, as they have special schools for people with disabilities there. Lunch was fabulous. We went back to chat some more and talked about ways we could work together. They would like to send someone to LVCIL through a program they have, where they can work and learn through us. We'd have to work with them on finding accessible housing for the time they are here. I'd love to make that happen! They ended up taking us to a baseball glove store and then for one of the best donuts I've ever had. We had a blast!



Image above: Full shot of the members of the group and those from the Muchu Center posing with their fists up.

The trip was one of the best experiences of my life. I think my family got a lot out of it as well. They still talk about the experiences, especially being at the presentation and the Muchu Center. I'm glad they got to see that. Spending time with Masami and others was probably the best part of the trip. I wish I had more time with them. I've stayed connected to Masami, and we send messages from time to time. She is saying that she is coming to the US for a visit next year and would like to see us at LVCIL. I hope she does.

I'm still struck by how much interest everyone had and how they want to be connected with what we are doing here in the US. Disability is everywhere. There's lots to be learned from our brothers and sisters all over the world, and with things that are impacting people with disabilities in the US and beyond, it's important to stay connected, work with, and learn from each other. Kanpai! Oh yeah... "gaijin" means "foreigner" or "outsider" ("tourist" is the nice way of putting it), which you'd often hear as you're fumbling around the train station not knowing where you are going! If you ever get the chance, take the trip. Visit Muchu! You might be a gaijin, but it's worth it.

Translations 翻訳

海を隔てても、使命はひとつ。
An ocean apart, a mission together

日本に行ってきました…
I've been to Japan...

特集
Feature

秋号
Autumn

東京の自立生活センターを訪ねて
Visiting the Tokyo Center for Independent Living

ふたつのCILの物語
A story of two CILs

翻訳
Translation

10th Annual FISHING & FUN 2026
IN THE PARK

BIG FISH SPONSOR

Fidelity BANK

LVCIL wants to extend a thanks Fidelity Bank for being a Big Fish Sponsor for this years 10th Annual Fishing and Fun in the Park. Their contributions to the event made a genuine impact, and we can't thank them enough.

To learn more about Fidelity Bank, please visit https://www.bankatfidelity.com/or scan the QR Code

Just Keep Swimming

A consumer submitted LVCIL story



Image above: a watercolor type painting of an Olympic swimming pool

How LVCIL support helped Michael Lado achieve his dreams

Michael Lado's swimming journey began in December 2023 with support from LVCIL when his LVCIL Supports Coordinator (SC) recognized an opportunity and sent Michael a flyer for Special Olympics spring sports. Michael expressed interest in swimming, so the SC helped confirm his eligibility and guided him through the application process.



That initial outreach from LVCIL opened the door to a new community and an ambitious athletic path. Michael began swim practices and competitions while looking forward to the Special Olympics.

Image Left: Michael among other winners, wearing their awards.

National Competitions

Watching the 2024 Paris Paralympics inspired Michael to pursue elite para-swimming. After confirming his eligibility, he began competing in Move United–sponsored U.S. Para Swimming events. Michael competed at regional meets at Rutgers University and Loyola University, qualifying for the Move United Hartford Nationals at both events. He then competed in his first elite national para-sport championship in Grand Rapids, Michigan where Michael set S19 national records in the 50-meter freestyle, 50-meter butterfly, 100-meter freestyle, and 100-meter butterfly. He earned four first-place medals in individual events and a silver medal in a freestyle relay.



Image above: Michael smiling fist-bumping another outside of the pool. He wears swim trunks and a swim cap with goggles. Behind him a professional swimming pool.

Worth Every Lap

Swimming made a positive difference in Michael's life. Besides building friendships, he became noticeably happier.

His passion for swimming led to his current employment as a lifeguard at the Reading YMCA.

Michael's story shows the impact of person-centered support. By connecting him with Special Olympics and helping him take the first steps, LVCIL helped turn Michael's interest in swimming into friendship, employment, and record-setting achievement.

A Roller-Coaster of a Work Day

Real work, Real people, Real-World Lehigh Valley

For many teens and young adults across the Lehigh Valley, working at Dorney Park is something of a rite of passage. Just outside of Allentown, from May to November, roughly 1.5 million people from around the world come to experience the rides and thrills of the park. With eight roller coasters, 60+ rides, and the attached Wildwater Kingdom water park, there is a lot to do – and a lot of workers needed to keep it all going.

Keeping a park running is no easy matter. Every day, staff deal with thousands of guests, tend to complex rides, and handle the endless behind-the-scenes jobs that keep the day moving smoothly for everyone. Among those many workers are the participants in LVCIL's Real World Lehigh Valley (RWLV) program: This Extended School Year (ESY) version provides six weeks, three days a week, of interactive summer work experience that brings young adults with disabilities (ages 16–21) into Dorney Park & Wildwater Kingdom for direct life and vocational education.

Participants take on an array of positions – admissions, kitchens, guest services, education, and more – all of which give them room to practice self-advocacy, leadership, vocational, and independent living skills. Along the way, they discover what they excel at, where they want to improve, what they love, and what they don't. Each ultimately leaves with a wider view of themselves as professionals, plus skills and experiences they'll carry into their futures.

I had the chance to sit down with a handful of RWLV members and hear a bit more about their time at the park and what they gained from it.



Image above: Dorney Park's Steel Force Roller Coaster

Jack

Jack learned about the program through his mother, who thought it might be a good opportunity for him. While he agreed to give it a try, he admits he was a bit worried as the program began, unsure how it would all turn out. But the more he worked and got out into the park, the more those worries faded, and he soon found himself enjoying the work.

Jack explained to me that one of the things that kept him feeling confident was the little touches he added to his everyday outfit, which helped him stay grounded and true to himself. While he kept to his professional uniform and work standards, he made it his own with small additions like his firefighter bracelets, his Steelers necklace, and, of course, his Jordans.
Of all the tasks Jack got to explore, his favorite was working at the Guest Re-entry station. There, he got to talk with guests about their plans for the day, hear how their visit was going, and help solve any problems they ran into going in and out of the park.



Image above:
Jack pointing to a park sign, helping park goers find what they are looking for.

At the end of our conversation, when I asked Jack about his plans for the future, he explained that while he found a lot of value in the program, he isn't so sure amusement parks are part of those plans. His heart is in helping people, and his sights are set on roles like lifeguard or firefighter – more direct ways of serving the public. Still, he says his time with Real World Lehigh Valley was well worth it, and he recommends others give it a shot.

"Just talk to people," he said, when asked what advice he'd give others starting the program. ***"Like you would with anyone else. You'll get confidence."***

Continued on next page

Nathan

Nathan heard about the program through some of the health and education professionals he was working with, who thought he might be interested. And interested he was – he saw it as a great way to get the work experience he wanted. He was excited for the opportunity, but couldn't help feeling a little nervous about starting something new without knowing exactly what to expect. Once he got going, though, the nerves gave way, and RWLV became something he looked forward to each week.

What made the program stand out to Nathan was how different it was from other vocational training he had received. There was still a classroom component, but now he could take what he learned and put it to work right away. It wasn't just leaning about how to work, but it was actually getting out there and putting that education into action. Yet, that didn't mean it was always easy. Nathan shared that his hurdle was learning to handle upset and irate guests, sharing a story about a summer camp that arrived all at once, with not everyone having the proper tickets ready. He utilized his skills in de-escalation to help calm and organize the group, but with a crowd that size, Nathan turned to his boss and co-workers for help.

That moment ties into one of the most important things he took from the program: flexibility. Sometimes you have to step outside your routine and take on new or unexpected responsibilities on the fly, all those little things that come with the vague job description line of "other duties as required." And when things are too much and you're not sure what to do next, part of self-advocacy is being able to ask for help, whether from a friend, a co-worker, or your boss. Even with the occasional rush, admissions was Nathan's favorite position. Working the gate meant being one of the first representatives of the company that guests met, and the first chance to set the tone for their visit.



"I like helping people's day start off right."

– Nathan, on working admissions

Image Right: Nathan smiling at the camera

Nathan wanted readers to know that he's someone who stays open-minded about new things and opportunities, and that outlook comes through in his advice for anyone starting the program or a new job: ***"Try to come in with the mindset of being open to learn new things and positions."***

Mary

Mary heard about the Real World Lehigh Valley program through a family member, who encouraged her to give it a try so she could learn new skills and meet new people. Starting out was a mixed bag – there was a lot to take in, and things could be confusing at times. But the more she went, the more comfortable she became, and before long the program was a good part of her week.

For Mary, the highlight was the hands-on practice, especially the chance to build her social skills. Going in, she knew she wanted to work on her ability to talk face to face with people. Working in admissions, seeing hundreds upon hundreds of guests a day, gave her plenty of chances to put her communication skills into action while developing self-confidence. And it turned out that became one of her favorite parts of the program: talking with guests, getting to know her co-workers, and learning how to be a good team member. All of that, she noted, will help her in future job interviews as she explores new vocations.

Mary also valued her time behind the scenes, washing dishes in the kitchen. The process of cleaning, sanitizing, and drying gave her practical independent living skills she can use day to day. Just as important to her was being trusted to learn about the chemicals used in the process, and how to handle them safely and responsibly. She also explained to me this was her first time in an educational program of this kind. While she had learned about different job skills in class before, actually doing the work gave her something more: real skills to carry into a future job, and the confidence to go after one. While she isn't quite sure yet what her dream job will be, she knows it will be something where she can express herself, grow, and shine.

Her advice for future RWLV members is practical: make sure to drink water, look people in the face when you're talking to them, keep things formal, and always look out for those who might need extra help.
At the end of our interview, Mary wanted to leave some parting words for anyone reading who might be struggling to find their own path forward:

"No matter who you are, you're always welcome through the doors of those who believe in you and have faith in you."

Assistive Technology and AccessCheck

AT Talk

Try before you buy: Lending Library

LVCIL staff can support you with loans from TechOWL's central lending library, which offers a variety of assistive devices ranging from communication devices, software, iPads, adaptive utensils, mounts for various AT, and more!

Most device loans are for five weeks, except for iPads, Chromebooks, and Hotspots, which may be borrowed for nine weeks.

To learn more visit: LVCIL.org/accessibility-and-assistive-technology-programs/

Olivia Becker, a nursing student at Moravian University with a hearing related disabilityneeded a reliable way to complete the clinical requirements of her program. The main challenge was finding a stethoscope that would let her hear heart and lung sounds clearly before spending a lot of money on one.

She found out about our services through a recommendation from the Director of the Office of Disability Services at Moravian University. Wanting a solution that would help her succeed in nursing school, Olivia reached out to borrow a digital stethoscope from our lending library.

By trying out the equipment first, she could see if it worked for her needs before deciding to buy it. Luckily, the stethoscope she borrowed was the same model she was thinking about purchasing, which helped her make a

10th Annual FISHING & FUN 2026
IN THE PARK

BIG FISH SPONSOR

Pennsylvania's Children's Health Insurance Program
We Cover All Kids.

wellkids by pa health & wellness

LVCIL wants to extend a thanks to Pa Health & Wellness for being a Big Fish Sponsor for this years 10th Annual Fishing and Fun in the Park. Their contributions to the event made a significant difference, and we can't thank them enough.

To learn more about Chip and PA Health and Wellness, please visit https://www.pahealthwellness.com/members/chip.html or scan the QR Code

LVCIL Allentown

The Holidays in a Jar

Treats2Love: Back at Christkindlmarkt 2026



Image above: Four different Recipe Jars, each with a tag, a logo, and a different holiday themed fabric attached to the lid

That's right – Treats2Love is back at Chistkindlmarkt for this holiday season!

We heard we were sorely missed, and we can assure you we missed being there last year. But our young adults have been hard at work and back in action to make it happen: business planning, inventory control, marketing, and, of course, making lots and lots of recipe jars. While Treats 2 Love is a microbusiness, there is nothing small about the effort and dedication it takes to run it.

For those who may not know, Treats 2 Love is LVCIL's Youth Microbusiness Program, where participants create and sell various types of recipe jars. This business allows us to fund the program at no cost to families or consumers. It also leaves its participants with leadership, teamwork, communication, and, of course, independent living skills.

If you can't make it out this year and would like to purchase a jar, send us an email and we'll arrange a time for you to pick your order up at the LVCIL office (*713 N 13th Street, Allentown, PA*). Email: **Treats2Love@lvcil.org**.

This year you can find us in the outdoor hut market, at 26C.



Image above: Christkindlemarkt Bethlehem logo, presented by Univest

Schedule

November 13th - December 20th

Nov 13 – 15

Fri – Sun

FRI	Nov 13	10:00 a.m. – 8:00 p.m.
SAT	Nov 14	10:00 a.m. – 8:00 p.m.
SUN	Nov 15	10:00 a.m. – 6:00 p.m.

Nov 20 – 22

Fri – Sun

FRI	Nov 20	10:00 a.m. – 8:00 p.m.
SAT	Nov 21	10:00 a.m. – 8:00 p.m.
SUN	Nov 22	10:00 a.m. – 6:00 p.m.

Nov 27 – 29

Fri – Sun

FRI	Nov 27	10:00 a.m. – 8:00 p.m.
SAT	Nov 28	10:00 a.m. – 8:00 p.m.
SUN	Nov 29	10:00 a.m. – 6:00 p.m.

Dec 3 – 6

Thu – Sun

THU	Dec 3	10:00 a.m. – 6:00 p.m.
FRI	Dec 4	10:00 a.m. – 8:00 p.m.
SAT	Dec 5	10:00 a.m. – 8:00 p.m.
SUN	Dec 6	10:00 a.m. – 6:00 p.m.

Dec 10 – 13

Thu – Sun

THU	Dec 10	10:00 a.m. – 6:00 p.m.
FRI	Dec 11	10:00 a.m. – 8:00 p.m.
SAT	Dec 12	10:00 a.m. – 8:00 p.m.
SUN	Dec 13	10:00 a.m. – 6:00 p.m.

Dec 17 – 20

Thu – Sun

THU	Dec 17	10:00 a.m. – 6:00 p.m.
FRI	Dec 18	10:00 a.m. – 8:00 p.m.
SAT	Dec 19	10:00 a.m. – 8:00 p.m.
SUN	Dec 20	10:00 a.m. – 6:00 p.m.

How are we doing?

Take LVCIL's Satisfaction Survey and let us know!



We are always looking for feedback on ways that we can better support you! Please click on the link to take our satisfaction survey.

https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/L85NS6C

10th Annual FISHING & FUN 2026
IN THE PARK

Lehigh Valley Health Network

part of Jefferson Health

CATCH OF THE DAY SPONSOR

This year's event was possible in thanks to the Lehigh Valley Health Network. We thank them greatly for their significant contribution as a 'Catch of the Day' Sponsor.

To learn more about Lehigh Valley Health Network, please visit https://www.lvhn.org/ or scan the QR Code

LVCIL Allentown

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!



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.