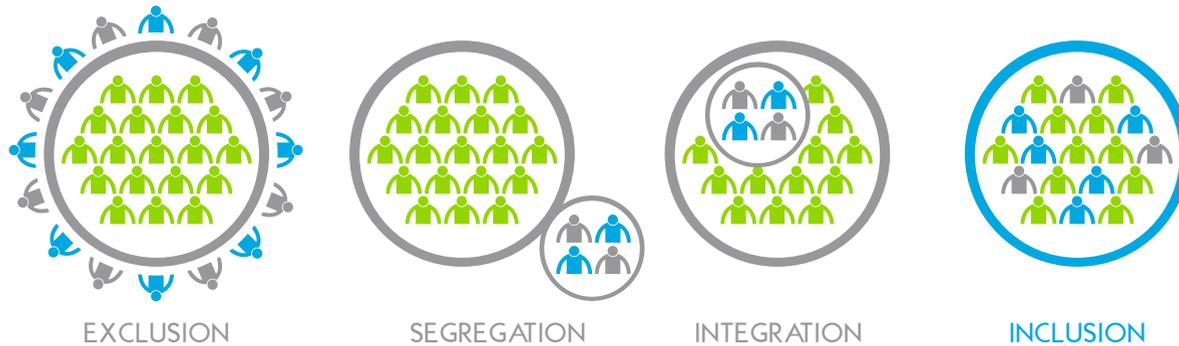


2021 ANNUAL REPORT



DEDICATED TO INCLUSION

Abilities First promotes inclusive opportunities for people with developmental disabilities. We support individual choices that allow people to live, learn, work, play and be productive in meaningful ways in our community. Our programs include support coordination for all ages, training and employment services, creative arts classes and retail operations.



10 YEAR TARGET

- Everyone has opportunities to experience acceptance as a community member.
 - People can choose where they live, work and play.
 - People are supported for success.
- All people have opportunities for meaningful relationships and experiences.
- People recognize that inclusion benefits everyone involved by bringing together different abilities and perspectives to make a greater whole.

CONTENTS

2	Board Members
3	Grant Funding
5	Abilities First Programs
6	First Steps
9	The Next Step
12	Art Inspired Academy
14	Employment Services
15	Artisan Elements
16	Community Education
18	Inspired Boutique
20	Friends of Abilities First

A LOOK INTO 2021



As it did in 2020, the pandemic changed the way all of us worked and lived for 2021. Like others in the world, we hoped for end of the pandemic. We hoped to be back in our office. We hoped for in-person meetings and educational opportunities. We hoped to see those we serve in person. We hoped for a community where there is equality and inclusion for all.

Despite many challenges, there was progress. We were able to meet the needs of the individuals we serve. Through technology, we were able to reach out to individuals in their homes. Platforms were built to enhance communication with employees and other agencies. New programs were developed, and many new virtual opportunities were created. Our employees went above and beyond to ensure the success of Abilities First and to ensure inclusion in our community.

In addition, I'm extremely grateful to our Board of Directors. Their guidance and expert perspectives are a huge asset to our agency.

We hope you take a minute to review the 2021 Annual Report and read about the many success stories and amazing programs that have been built on Hope and Progress!

Sincerely,
Jan Kraft, Executive Director



ABILITIES FIRST BOARD MEMBERS 2021

The Board of Directors of Abilities First is comprised of nine community members who are appointed by the Greene County Commission to serve as board members to administer and oversee agency activities.

The Board of Directors and Executive Committee meet regularly. All meeting dates, times, and agendas are posted at abilitiesfirst.net and are open to the public.



Austin Williamson
Chair



Dr. Kyle John
Vice-Chair



Crystal Reynolds Roberts
Treasurer



Alexis Brown, MA
Board Member



Martha Crise
Board Member



Laura Curtis
Board Member



JoAn Johnson
Board Member



Lori Slater
Board Member



Bradley Weaver
Board Member

GRANT FUNDING

Grant funding is provided to local non-profit agencies and direct support services for vocational services, early intervention, residential services, independent living assistance, employment and transportation. These funds are provided by a property tax levy and administered by the Abilities First Board of Directors.

Grant Funding Recipients:

- A Sporting Chance
- Abilities First Employment Services
- Art Inspired Academy
- Artisan Elements
- Champion Athletes
- Community Support Services
- Developmental Center of the Ozarks
- Dynamic Strides of the Ozarks
- empower: Abilities (formerly SCIL)
- Human Sexuality Project
- Inspired Boutique
- MSU Bear Power
- Nova Center of the Ozarks
- Ozarks Area Community Action Corporation
- SWI Industrial Solutions
- The Arc of the Ozarks
- TRIP
- Vision Rehabilitation of the Ozarks
- Artisan Elements

Thanks to the citizens of Greene County, over 50 million dollars has been allocated for services for people with developmental disabilities in our community for the past 43 years.

Over
\$50 million
allocated
in 41 years.



ABILITIES FIRST PROGRAMS

FIRST STEPS

First Steps provides early intervention for families with children from birth to age three with developmental disabilities and delays.

THE NEXT STEP

The Next Step provides targeted case management for people with developmental disabilities age three and over.

ART INSPIRED ACADEMY

Art Inspired Academy provides an inclusive experience for individuals to participate in the creative arts, including theatre, music, movement and art.

EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

Abilities First Employment Services is designed to meet the needs of people with developmental disabilities who want to work and the needs of local employers to have a reliable workforce.



Inspired Boutique is an upscale resale shop featuring name-brand women's clothing, jewelry, collectibles, household items, and furniture.

COMMUNITY EDUCATION

Community Education provides educational opportunities to promote full inclusion. This team works to break down barriers to support the growth of inclusive cultures in businesses, nonprofits, and academic institutions.



Artisan Elements creates and sells innovative hand-cast custom wall tiles, table tops, commercial and residential outdoor benches and larger planters/firepits from recycled paper or glass, concrete and commercial additives.



FIRST STEPS

First Steps is designed to improve a family's ability to enhance their child's development and learning and to increase the child's participation in family and community life.

As Missouri's Early Intervention Program, First Steps serves families with young children ages birth to three, who have special needs or developmental delays. First Steps helps children acquire important developmental skills, such as crawling, playing, talking and eating. Services are provided to support the family in order to meet their child's developmental needs. Abilities First has operated the First Steps in South Central Missouri since 2006 through the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE).

Our 13 county region has seven Early Intervention teams. Teams are made up of at least one Physical Therapist, Occupational Therapist, Speech Therapist, Special Instructor, and Service Coordinator. All teams have more than one person representing their specialty. Teams meet to support one another by sharing ideas, strategies, and family updates to further support families and children served.

2021 FIRST STEPS

- Average children served with an IFSP monthly is 790
- Annual referral total is 1585
- SC Average Monthly Caseload is 48
- Average monthly child count (referral/ongoing) is 946
- Average monthly referrals is 132
- Average monthly Percentage of 0-3 Population served is 3.38%

790
average
children
served
monthly

1,585
annual
referral
total

GAVIN'S STORY

"I would like to thank everyone at First Steps who has helped with my grandson, Gavin. Throughout the last year, they have helped and guided us to get the help we need for Gavin. Gavin will be 3 on April 3, 2022. He has always been nonverbal. With the help of his in-home speech therapist, he has learned lots of new words and participates in playing with others. He would always just scream and scream when he wanted or needed something. Now, through working with her, he is saying many words and understands many more things that we say to him."

- Kevin Blackwell

FIRST STEPS CONTINUED

FAMILY HIGHLIGHTS

“My son absolutely loved the service and if I had to cancel, it would be a BIG deal to him. Highly recommend. 10/10”

“Early intervention was the key success to my child’s development. The providers professionalism and positive disposition made a successful outcome in developing my child’s behavior and development. Thank you for all you do and continue doing.”

“We have worked with First Steps for 8 years, through 5 kids, and count the providers as amazing addition to our lives. The last 3 years, we’ve had the best team, and a true blessing.”

“We are forever grateful for First Steps and all the ways they helped our child and empowered us to help him in their absence. They will always be a special part of his story. We miss them!”

“We were blessed with some wonderful ladies that helped our child in all areas. Our SLP really went above and beyond to show us support and what we could do as a family to continue supporting him! Thank you so much.”

“I would just like to say how thankful we are for the First Steps program. From the start, First Steps has been a huge blessing for us. Our child has come a long way and learned so much. The provider and Service Coordinator are very genuine people and really cared about his needs. They were the perfect fit for our child. Again, thank you for everything.”

“The Service Coordinator and Provider were absolutely amazing to work with for our son. They both flexed to our family schedule, worked in partnership with the school district, and ensured we understood all the next steps for our child. We would have loved to have kept the provider longer!

“We thank you for everything you did for us! Especially a huge thank you to anyone who worked with my child or myself. We need more people like you in the world. My child is doing great, walking everywhere in her walker and loving it.”

“The First Steps program as been here to help my daughter since we left the NICU at 5 months old. They, weekly, worked hard to help her reach her full potential and taught me how I can best help her too. I’m so grateful for this program. My sweet girl wouldn’t be where she is today without the care and support we received through First Steps.”

“All our providers were wonderful in not only making sure our son was successful in his growth, but assuring us, as parents, how to continue his growth when they are not here. Our son would not be where he is today without the help to our family.”

THE NEXT STEP

The Next Step provides targeted case management for people with developmental disabilities age three and over.



Jessica McDonough has her own business selling handmade soaps. Jess says, “I enjoy crafting and art and drawing. I started making my own soap. The reason I sell soap is because there are a lot of people who can’t have scents in their soap. I know what that feels like because I’m allergic to coconut. Making the soaps are pretty easy. Another reason I sell them is to have fun, and I hope to make more money.” Jess’s Honey Bee soaps are a popular item sold at Inspired Boutique in the Half-A-Hill Shopping Center in Springfield.



THE NEXT STEP CONTINUED

2021 REVIEW

- The Next Step's satisfaction survey overall with 98.40% with the highest category of satisfaction in "Sincere and respectful service" with 99.75% rate of satisfaction. The second highest category was "Supports me in living the life I choose" with 99.55%.
- 380 individuals supported who do not qualify for Medicaid.
- 98 individuals received the Partnership for Hope Waiver in Greene County.
- Served 2,575 people in 2021 in Greene County.

The Next Step provides targeted case management for eligible residents of Greene County with developmental disabilities age three and over through an inter-governmental agreement with the Missouri Department of Mental Health (DMH).

Support coordinators work to develop a person-centered plan that identifies the supports needed to assist people with developmental disabilities to live the life they choose. Support coordinators provide individualized assistance in planning a full and meaningful life for people with developmental disabilities. In addition, support coordinators assist people with advocacy, resources, services and community connections.

Abilities First has provided targeted case management since 2004.

ELIGIBILITY

Residents of Greene County may be eligible to receive services if they have a diagnosed developmental disability. Developmental disability is defined in Missouri state statute and federal Medicaid regulations, and eligibility is determined by the Missouri Department of Mental Health.

A DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITY IS:

- A mental or physical impairment (excluding mental illness) which presents prior to age 22.
- Results in major difficulties with two or more of the following: walking, talking, self-care, self-direction, learning, living independently, getting and keeping a job.
- Is lifelong or of extended duration and requires individually planned and coordinated services and assistance.

*(See Section 205.968 and Section 630.005 RSMo for complete definitions of a developmental disability.)

Contact the Springfield Regional Office of the Division of Developmental Disabilities Department of Mental Health at 417-895-7400 to begin the process of determining eligibility.

In 2021, The Next Step support coordinators continued to work remotely utilizing telehealth as the main mode of communications and interactions with the individuals who are supported through Abilities First. The support coordinators provided resources for the many challenges that families and individuals were experiencing related to the impact of COVID-19.

The shortage of direct support professionals continued to increase, creating challenges for families and individuals. The support coordinators worked closely with teams to address these challenges by creating new and/or unique resources and never giving up! Intakes were up in 2021 versus 2020, and showed another increase in discharges in 2021.

This past year, our agency created and implemented an assessment app to determine unmet needs in the daily life of the individuals that we serve. From that assessment, a second, more specific assessment focused on needs in the areas of transportation and employment. The Abilities First board utilized this valuable information to set real-time goals and funding strategies to meet people's needs.

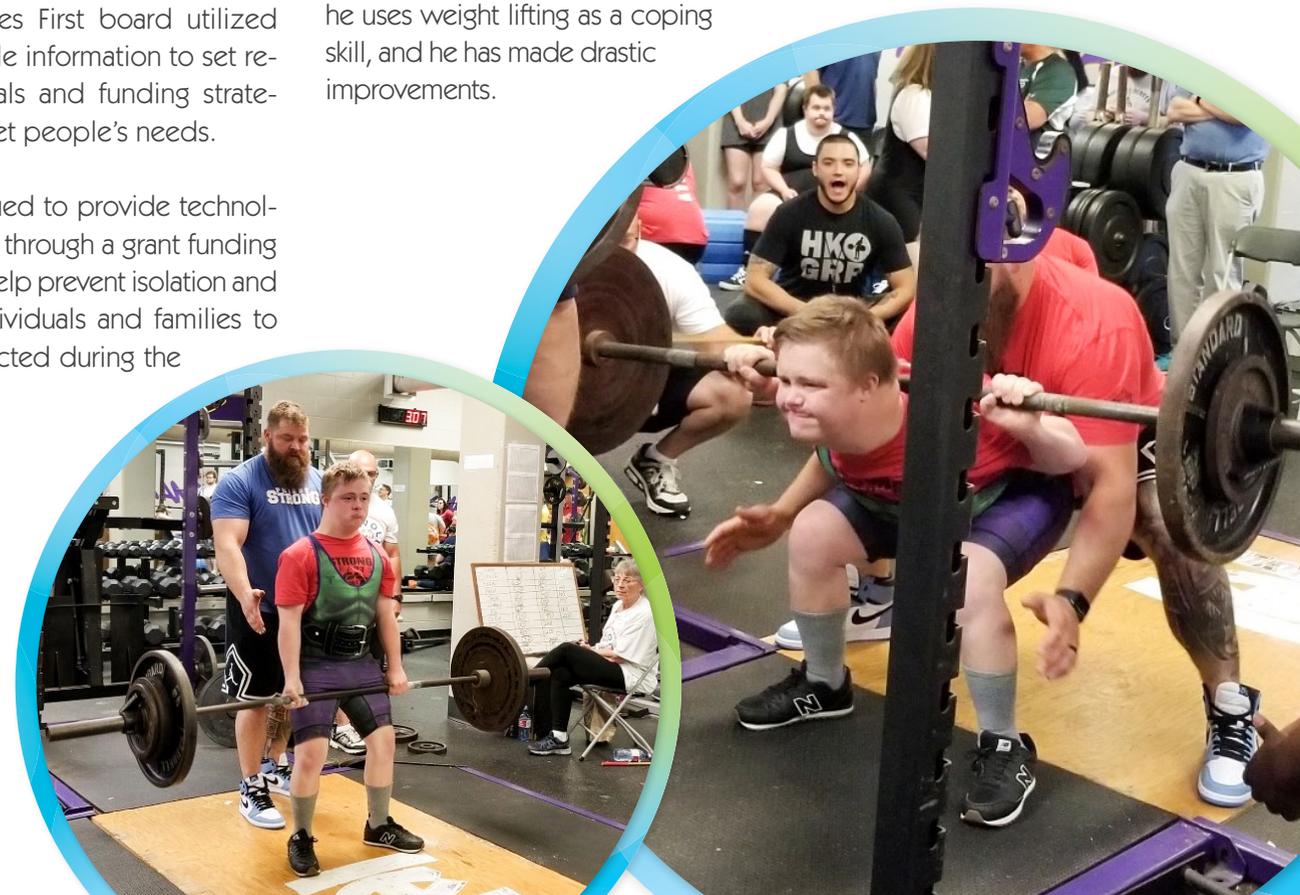
We continued to provide technology access through a grant funding tablets to help prevent isolation and enable individuals and families to stay connected during the pandemic.

Our Community Support Specialist team continued to support families and individuals by helping people find the resources and assistance they needed, understand Medicaid Expansion and helping individuals apply for eligibility if desired.

CAMERON ROBERTS

Cameron Roberts and his support team have been working to find different ways to increase his independence and positive interactions with people in the community. Through this process, Cameron was linked with Special Olympics at Cross-Fit Republic. He trained for several months and had his first competition in Columbia. He did an amazing job! Cameron's mom says that he uses weight lifting as a coping skill, and he has made drastic improvements.

Cameron also started working with an employment provider to assist him with competitive employment. He's currently working at Price Cutter two days a week, and has progressed enough that he no longer needs a job coach. Cameron takes great pride in being a good employee, and his supervisor is already talking about teaching him new skills so he can learn other jobs that he is interested in.



ART INSPIRED ACADEMY



Art Inspired Academy (AIA) provides individuals of all ages with and without disabilities the opportunities to participate in a variety of creative arts classes, including music therapy, theatre, drawing, painting, movement, and many more. Students have a chance to interact with their peers while improving fine and gross motor skill development.

Due to the pandemic, Art Inspired Academy continued with our online platform throughout 2021. This is hard for some, however we have developed new classes, new ideas,

new relationships and observed unlimited amounts of growth from our students. During 2021, AIA held over 169 virtual classes with 903 students attending.

One new class project has been online baking and cooking classes. This was suggested in the 2020 year-end survey. AIA added these classes in the culinary arts and had great success. Bailey, one of the instructors, has watched as many students grow in skills, communication,



and problem solving during each 6 week course.

Elizabeth is one of these students. Bailey says, “Elizabeth has been baking with the Academy this past year, and it is amazing watching her grow in her confidence in the kitchen. Elizabeth always comes to class with a positive attitude and a cute apron, ready to show off her supplies and get to baking! Elizabeth uses support staff to bake and enjoys sharing when they are ready for the next step and sharing about her favorite desserts (icing being her favorite part of almost any dessert.) Elizabeth has a plethora of recipes now from AIA, and she has brand new skills in the kitchen that I am honored to share with her. I love seeing how she is comfortable identifying and using a variety of measuring cups and spoons, identifying the correct mixing bowls, and knowing when to use a whisk or an electric mixer. Elizabeth is continuing to build on her skills in the kitchen in future AIA classes by practicing cleaning up after baking and supporting her staff by taking on greater roles in the kitchen.”



AIA turned 8 years old in 2021. Several families have been with us since the beginning of our journey. We are honored to watch Jacob grow up before our teams’ eyes. Jacob’s mother, Becky, shared with us encouraging words about Jacob’s time with AIA.

Becky says, “Jacob loves taking classes with AIA. He really enjoys music, movement, painting, and drawing. AIA was the first program we used after Jacob was diagnosed with Autism. All of the staff are amazing. You can tell they are passionate about their field and about inclusion. His experience with AIA helped empower our family to get the supports that Jacob needed to be successful. His teachers from AIA model presuming competence and striving for inclusion ev-

ery time we see them. Taking classes with AIA has not only helped Jacob experience the arts, but it also helped him work toward success in getting a haircut. This used to be a major issue for him until some of his AIA classes were held at Pigtails and Crewcuts. After attending class there for several weeks, Jacob became more comfortable with going there for haircuts too. We truly appreciate the commitment and effort AIA puts into all of the classes. It has been so wonderful to have virtual classes offered during the pandemic. We know that AIA truly cares about Jacob as an individual and they have supported our family from the very beginning.”

Art Inspired Academy is excited to meet the excitement and New Journey of the 2022 year!

EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

Abilities First believes everyone should have the opportunity to seek and obtain employment in the community at a fair and competitive wage. The goal is to provide inclusive employment opportunities to the population we serve and other underserved populations in south-west Missouri.

REGISTERED APPRENTICESHIPS

Abilities First Employment Services works with many local employers to offer registered apprenticeships in the following career paths:

- Materials Handling
- Internet Technology
- Environmental Services
- Culinary Assistant
- Apprentice Cook
- Clerical Receptionist
- Clerical Office Manager
Administrative Service

Abilities First Employment Services provides pre-employment skills training and related technical instruction to help all apprenticeship candidates succeed in their job. Apprentices work independently under the direct supervision of their employer for a pre-determined length of time, learning skills necessary for the position. At the end of the apprenticeship, the apprentice earns a Certificate of Completion from the US Department of Labor documenting their accomplishment.

SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT

Supported Employment services are available for individuals with disabilities to help them find and succeed in job opportunities that match their interests, strengths and abilities. Supported Employment consists of the following activities:

- Discovery and Exploration
- Job Development
- Job Placement and
Job Coaching
- Long-Term Follow Along

2021 EMPLOYMENT SERVICES:

In 2021, AFES continued to navigate the ever changing post pandemic world. We continued our work with Vocational Rehabilitation adding an additional thirteen referrals over the course of the year. In addition, AFES grew as a team adding two new staff members. We were able to resume services in the community, partnering with the Missouri Career Center to provide pre-apprenticeship training courses to clients from within the community. As a result of our work, we were able to successfully place sixteen of our clients into competitive work at a variety of employers in the Springfield area. Finally, our apprenticeship program had three individuals successfully meet the requirements of their program and graduate with an apprenticeship certificate from the Department of Labor.

Through the many trials and tribulations that post pandemic life brought, AFES continued to remain committed to our goal of serving people through creative solutions and is the driving force behind what we do every day.



ARTISAN ELEMENTS



Artisan Elements (AE) creates and sells innovative hand-cast custom wall tiles, tabletops, commercial and residential outdoor benches and large planters, and firepits from recycled paper or glass, concrete and commercial additives. The gallery and manufacturing facility provide inclusive employment opportunities, and continues to work to build business relationships and create jobs in the local economy.

In 2021, we were involved in several major projects in the area. We love working with local companies and agencies, and promoting inclusive employment while showcasing our product.

Our major project for the year was for 535 sq ft of Riprap tiles for the Silverleaf Complex on Battlefield & FF. This was an awesome project to be a part of. We were a part of another Oakstar Bank project in Clinton, MO that required 171sq ft of our Riprap tiles. And, the new Springfield Chamber of Commerce building required 115sqft of our Natural ArtisanStone™ Riprap tiles.

Artisan Elements developed a new sidewalk planter for outdoor seating areas (parklets) in Downtown Springfield and along Commercial Street. These are one solid piece with a built in "false bottom" for ease of fill and planting and are

the largest and heaviest item that Artisan Element has ever created weighing in at around 250lbs.

With the pandemic still in full swing, events were slim. However, we had a booth for display at The Lawn & Garden Show again this year and continued to sell our soy candle line at the Mercy Gift Shop and Inspired Boutique.

Lastly, we were happy to provide the raffle item (one of our Natural ArtisanStone™ Fire Pits) for the Sporting Clay Shoot event, a fundraiser through Friends of Abilities First that benefits people with developmental disabilities in our community.

COMMUNITY EDUCATION



Community Education provides educational opportunities to promote full inclusion. This team works to break down barriers to support the growth of inclusive cultures in businesses, nonprofits, and academic institutions.

In 2021, Community Education provided fully inclusive education experiences and supported over 1,000 people in Greene County. Abilities First worked to break down barriers and offer virtual opportunities. This proved a valuable tool for the future of hybrid events in our community supporting efforts to include everyone!

The Family Violence Task Force hosted the Stop the Violence Conference in partnership with Abilities First and Missouri State University Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice. which presented an opportunity for Greene

County Task Force members to effectuate a critical paradigm shift – one that moves from addressing violence against ALL people after it happens to stopping violence before it starts.

Bear Aware, an interpersonal violence prevention and healthy relationships educational initiative, was implemented for a second year during 2021 (virtually). BEAR Aware is an inclusive program that was developed in collaboration with the project partners BEAR Power, Missouri State College of Education, Abilities First Community Education and Project HEAL. This collaborative has worked to break down barriers and pushed to broaden the community perspective to be inclusive and purposeful, serving ALL people to stay safe and healthy.

In addition, Community Education served in supporting and imple-

menting many virtual or hybrid events for 2021 including an Independent Living resource event at the Springfield Library Center, Disability Rights Legislative Day, a Post-Secondary Education/Career Exploration resource event and a “What will you do when the bus stops coming” transition focused resource event all in partnership with Springfield Public Schools and the Greene County community.

The Abilities First Good Life Group builds advocacy skills through community engagement and educational opportunities. Activities this year include:

- Conducted a Community Food Drive collecting canned goods and commodities
- Adopted an “Everyday Hero” recognizing someone who goes above and beyond in our day to day lives
- Participated in a Virtual Legislative Day & writing letters to Legislators, highlighting inclusive businesses
- Focused on Mental Health Awareness with a speaker from NAMI
- Provided information on City Wide Neighborhood Clean ups
- Learned about advocacy & voting with Rock the Vote with guest speaker, Shelby Butler with Empower Abilities
- Hosted back to school post-secondary opportunities with MSU: Bear Power, OTC and ACHIEVE with Evangel

- Built a partnership with St. Louis Arc
- Good Life Group member Jessica McDonough submitted drawings that were included in the Disability Pride group out of Canada as well as to the MO Mental Health Foundation Director’s showcase.
- The Good Life Group officers are now running the monthly meetings with some support. The group has met virtually for 2 years and are transitioning back in person with a hybrid model.
- The Good Life Groups officers can be found on the group’s Facebook group C.O.N.N.E.C.T.I.N.G.

Our Education Liaison worked with Springfield Public Schools and Fair Grove Schools demonstrating and training on the LifeCourse philosophy to professionals, students, and families to support self-determination throughout the Individualized Educational Plan process.

Building Blocks Program Pilot program was developed and implemented. This program works with folks who want to be employed but do not feel quite ready and supports them to build skills, confidence and keep moving toward fully inclusive competitive employment.



INSPIRED BOUTIQUE

Inspired Boutique is an upscale resale shop featuring name-brand women's clothing, jewelry, accessories, shoes and home décor located at 2810 E. Battlefield Road in the Half-A-Hill Shopping Center in Springfield.

Inspired Boutique creates opportunities for community awareness and provides inclusive job opportunities for people with developmental disabilities. By engaging customers, the boutique builds strong relationships and creates name recognition as well as opportunities for additional inclusive job experiences in the community.

In 2021, Inspired Boutique had a 56% increase in sales over the previous year and record sales despite a continued worldwide pandemic. The increase in sales allowed us to reach a larger group of people and promote the importance of inclusion, especially in business, throughout our area. More importantly, customers learned the mission of the boutique, and donated and shopped more knowing that proceeds benefit people with developmental disabilities.



FRIENDS OF ABILITIES FIRST

Friends of Abilities first is a non-profit organization 501(c)(3) that assists with the growing needs and expenses of people with developmental disabilities in Greene County. The funds raised are used to support people with developmental disabilities and to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to live, learn, work, play, and be productive in meaningful ways in our community.

As the COVID-19 pandemic continued, 2021 was another challenging year for fundraisers. We relied on the generosity of our community to provide items to the people we served.

We were able to hold a successful second annual Sporting Clays Shoot at the Ozarks Shooters Complex in October. Sportsman from across the area and spent the day outdoors visiting with others in a safe environment.

2021 was another successful year for our online fundraiser, Giving Tuesday. Giving Tuesday is an annual day of giving for non-profits the Tuesday following Thanksgiving.



Our friends at Jordan Valley Community Health Center made a generous donation of hygiene items for the people served by Abilities First for the United Way Day of Caring. Friends of Abilities First was also thankful for a very generous donation from the Nick Hostler Memorial Pickleball Tournament in 2021.

We are extremely thankful to everyone who gives to our non-profit throughout the year. Thanks to you, people are warm, fed, had clothes to wear, and toys at the holidays.



2021 FOAF BOARD MEMBERS

*Laura Curtis,
President*

*Mary Kay Hostler,
Vice-President*

*Crystal Reynolds Roberts,
Treasurer*

*Tom Jensen,
Past President*

Martha Crise

Jessy Glair

Cathie Hampton

Craig Kelsay

Jessica Majorhahn

Ellie Widmer





3216 S. National Ave. | Springfield, MO 65807
417-886-0404 | abilitiesfirst.net

MISSION

Turning Abilities Into Opportunities

VISION

People with developmental disabilities live the life they choose.

VALUES

Selfless Respectful Service
One Team, One Mission
Inspire Others

Be Resourceful, Never Give Up
Seek Knowledge
and Embrace Change



Abilities First has held an accreditation from CARF (Commission on Accreditation on Rehabilitation Facilities) since 2012, and is currently accredited for:

- Community Employment Services – Employment Supports
- Community Employment Services: Job Development
- Community Integration
- Services Coordination

CARF is an independent, non-profit accrediting body whose mission is to promote the quality, value, and optimal outcomes of services through a consultative accreditation process that centers on enhancing the lives of the persons served.