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Fall Highlights from Brightpoint

The Early Head Start Advantage

In 2012, Brooklynn Carrizales heard about Brightpoint’s Early Head Start program from a friend. At the time, her daughter was ten months old. Now, nearly three years later, Brooklynn has three children. All of them have been in the Early Head Start program, and Brooklynn loves it.

“I was surprised by all the things I was offered,” said Brooklynn. “The longer I was on the program, the more benefit I got out of it.”

Brightpoint’s Early Head Start Home Visitors go to families’ homes once a week and lead the child and parent in fun, interactive learning activities based on the child’s needs. These experiences are designed to foster mental, social, emotional, and physical growth through play and age-appropriate activities.

While enrolled in Early Head Start, families receive various kinds of benefits depending on what is available in the county where they live. In Noble county, Beds and Britches, Etc. or “BABE” is a program that gives vouchers to parents who use services in the community.

The vouchers are good for baby supplies, clothes, and even cribs.

Brooklynn said the BABE vouchers are a huge help. She uses them every week to get diapers - a large expense in her household with two children in diapers. Her Home Visitor also makes sure she keeps up on doctors’ visits, which is crucial for one of her children who has had some serious health issues.

“It is something that my children look forward to every week,” she commented about the home visits. Those and the “play dates” are perhaps her favorite parts of the program.

“Play dates are really fun — and not just for the kids,” she said. These outings offer her an opportunity to get out of the house, too. She enjoys the fun times and learning experiences she is having with her children. On a recent ‘play date,’ they visited a pumpkin patch, and several times throughout the years Brooklynn and her family have been able to go to the Fort Wayne Children’s Zoo. “These are things we wouldn’t be able to do if it wasn’t for Brightpoint.”

For more information, visit mybrightpoint.org or call (260) 420-2833.

PRESIDENT'S POINTS



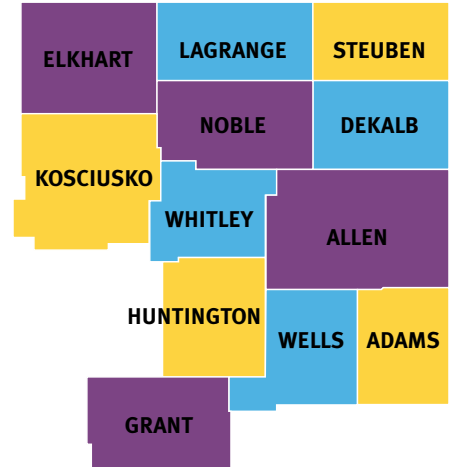
Steve Hoffman
President/CEO

We recently completed our 2015 Community Needs Assessment.

Brightpoint studies the needs of our community annually, including a comprehensive, scientific survey of our client population. As we move through strategic planning through the end of this year, what we've found in the Community Needs Assessment will help guide us toward our goals for the future.

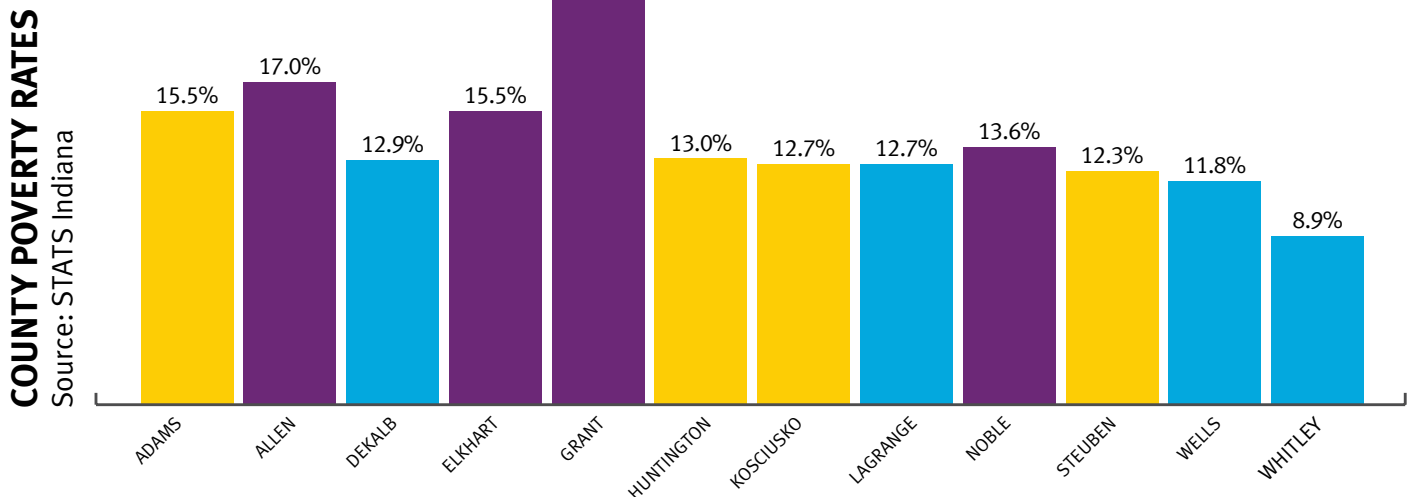
We continue to see that low-income families are a tremendously diverse population. The assessment shows that we have significant populations from all races, family types, and ages. Most of our clients are working, but not able to make ends meet. Most of our clients have at least a high school diploma, and many have a college degree. What is truer than ever is that the fight against poverty is a complicated endeavor.

Each family that comes to Brightpoint has a unique situation. Yes, they have issues that we help them deal with, but they also have strengths to draw upon. All we need to do is provide them with the opportunities they need to make change happen. Our Community Needs Assessment is a great tool to help us find those opportunities. Please take a look at the full document at www.mybrightpoint.org/cna.



Here's to a Brighter Future,

Steve Hoffman, President/CEO





The Sweet Smell of Success

In November 2014, Chad Seewald left his job, and with his wife Heather, opened Sweets So Geek on North Anthony Boulevard in Fort Wayne. Sweets So Geek is a bakery that creates unique cookies, cakes, and other confections, usually with a comic book or science fiction theme.

While their retail location only opened late last year, Sweets So Geek has slowly been growing from a hobby to a business since December 2011. Chad gained experience making confections during his time working at a restaurant in Muncie. But in 2011, he created his now signature “Han Rolos,” to send as Christmas gifts to a community of online comic book aficionados. He got a very positive response from friends, and a local toy store started selling the product.

Chad also generated some buzz by posting photographs of the creative cakes he would make for his children, Emma and Conner. To continue to be able to grow and get their unique creations out there, Chad and Heather decided to rent space at a local commercial kitchen. This move allowed them to start selling cakes for parties and weddings and at area comic book conventions.

Throughout this time, both Heather and Chad continued working full time jobs so Sweets So Geek was still more of a hobby than a business. But when the commercial kitchen they were renting closed due to unforeseen circumstances, they were forced to make a decision. They could give up what they had started or take the plunge and invest in Sweets So Geek as a full-time business.

Even though the thought of opening a retail space was a little scary, they couldn't imagine giving up on all the momentum they had created. They had built relationships with customers and gained support from the community for what they were doing.

Brightpoint was pleased to be able to help the Seewalds realize their dream of becoming a full-fledged business. Through the Brightpoint Development Fund, Chad and Heather got a loan to help with marketing and capital expenses for their business.



When you visit the Sweets So Geek store, you find the epitome of a family business. Chad as the “Chief Chocolatier” is the creative force and face of the business. Heather helps with schedules and assists Chad. And their children, Emma and Conner, help with the register, talk with customers or, when there's nothing else to do, play video games in the back.

Now, after almost a year in their shop on North Anthony, Chad and Heather have experienced many of the challenges common to small business owners. These challenges include things like fluctuating income, dealing with unexpected expenses, never really being “off work,” and various employee issues.

But while there have been the downsides, they have also seen their share of success. Chad credits this to changing their focus from a day to day retail space to a community-focused space. This can be seen by the hundreds of people who attend their outdoor movie events, the thousands of dollars they raised in their pie pan auction to help support a fellow small business owner diagnosed with cancer, and all the relationships they have built with employees and customers.

We encourage you to check out all the creative confections Sweets So Geek has to offer - from Butter Beer to Star Wars chocolates. They are located at 3410 North Anthony Blvd in Fort Wayne. ♡



Brightpoint has been happy to help Sweets So Geek and many other businesses like them through our Small Business Loan Program. If you have a business that you would like help getting started or taking to the next level, give us a call at (260) 423-3546, ext. 563.



Gearing Up for Winter

As we all brace for the cold of winter, imagine what it would be like with no heat. Not something you want to think about, is it? The Energy Assistance Program, or EAP, aims to make sure that no one has to try to survive the winter in the cold.

Last year, Brightpoint helped nearly 9,600 families with their utility bills helping to keep them warm. This winter, we anticipate helping about the same number of families. The program runs November 2, 2015 through May 13, 2016.

The average benefit that each family receives for their utility bill is about \$290. This amount differs from family to family and is based on income, household size, dwelling type, and heating source.

“A lot of people think they won’t qualify because they over-estimate their income,” said Lesa Cassel, Family Support Services Manager. She urges everyone who thinks they are even close to the income guidelines to fill out an application and let Brightpoint’s staff determine their eligibility.

Another common reason that Lesa hears as to why some people don’t apply is that they don’t want to take assistance that someone else might need more than they do. “We don’t want people to think

of this as taking the money away from someone else,” said Lesa. “The assistance is here to be used and if we can help you with one month’s utility bill, you can use the extra money for other bills or put it into savings so you can be prepared for future unexpected expenses.”

NIPSCO customers who are having trouble paying their heating bills have even more incentive to apply for energy assistance. Families who qualify for the Energy Assistance Program, and use NIPSCO for their heating, receive a discount on their bill for the rest of the season. The discount varies from 10 – 25% off the total bill based on income and can add up to a huge savings!

In addition, a program called NIPSCO Hardship helps customers who are over-income for the regular EAP, but are still struggling. This program assists families with household incomes up to 200% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines.

For all families who qualify for the Energy Assistance Program, an added benefit is that the heat cannot be shut off from December 1, 2015 through March 15, 2016 (as long as their account is in good standing as of Dec. 1st.) This ensures that families are not going without heat during the coldest times of the year. ♡

PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT: Energy Assistance Program (EAP)

WHAT IT IS

A program that helps pay a portion of a household’s heating bills during the winter months. Eligible households receive the benefit one time per heating season.

WHO IT HELPS

Homeowners and renters who need help paying their heating bills. Household income must be at or below 150% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines. Some assistance is offered for NIPSCO customers who are between 150 – 200% of poverty guidelines.

WHERE YOU CAN FIND HELP

Households up for disconnection or already disconnected may call the 24-hour appointment line at (800) 589-2264 or 211. Others may complete the application and mail or drop it off at one of our offices. More information can be found at mybrightpoint.org.



Energy-saving tips everyone can use!

Clean it up. If your furnace is more than five years old, or has run for any period of time without a filter, have a licensed heating contractor perform a thorough safety check and cleaning of the furnace. Expect to pay at least \$250 for this service. The \$79 special that many companies offer will not likely include cleaning of the circulating blower – and this is the most important part. One way to remember to check the filter every month is to do it when you pay your heating bill.

Breathe freely. Ensure all the heat supply registers and cold air intake grills are not being obstructed by furnishings, curtains, or stored items. Pull the registers out and use a vacuum to clear out any accumulated debris.

Get smart. Upgrade your thermostat to one that can be programmed. Having the temperature adjust automatically based on your schedule can lead to significant savings. Figure on spending \$50 - \$100 for the thermostat and install it yourself. Follow the installation instructions and pay close attention to the colors of the wires.

Layer up. You already own winter clothes – wear them. Don't pay the utility companies to keep you warm while you roam the house wearing your summer garb. Wearing layers of clothing is the easiest thing you can do to stay warm and save energy.

Halt the HOT water. Heating water spins the meter more than you might think. Use hot water only for bathing. Clothes and dishes come clean with cold water and detergent. Dishwashers will still use hot water, but if you wash by hand, use cold water, scrub well with a good detergent, and rinse.

Investigate and insulate. Don a dusk mask and snoop around in your attic. If you're not kicking around several inches of insulation to find a joist to stand on, your attic may not be sufficiently protected against heat loss. Some is better than none, but 10 to 12 inches of insulation is best.

Duct, duct, loose. Air ducts need to be air-tight. If ductwork is located in an attic or crawlspace, run the system and look for leaks. Check to see if there's a leak by using a thin sheet of toilet paper. If the paper flutters away from the duct, you've found a supply air leak. If the paper acts like a magnet and gets sucked onto or into the ductwork, you've found a return air leak. Both are bad - seal them.

Seal the ceiling. Heat wants to flow out the top of your house; stop it before it leaves with your money. While you're in the attic, find the tops of the walls that are inside the living area below. Is solid wood framing visible or can you peer down the stud cavity? Oftentimes, these may be double walls with spacing in between them. All of these areas may allow significant amounts of air and heat out of the house in the winter. They need to be air sealed at the top with some type of rigid material (if the space is large) or other material that is impermeable to air flowing through it like heavy duty plastic trash bags. ▽

These tips are brought to you by the Brightpoint Weatherization Department.

Brightpoint offers a weatherization program that assists income-eligible households with a comprehensive home energy audit and energy-savings education from Brightpoint's nationally-certified auditors. Those interested in seeing if they are eligible to receive free weatherization services must first apply for the Energy Assistance Program. Approved Energy Assistance applicants are automatically placed on the waiting list for Weatherization and contacted when funds are available and they reach the top of the list. More information is available at mybrightpoint.org.

MISSION MOMENT

Cassandra (CK) Kelly-Haney

*Family Support Worker II
in Fort Wayne*

LENGTH OF TIME AT BRIGHTPOINT

Almost 33 years

OTHER POSITIONS HELD

Community Services Specialist / Host of
CANI's public access monthly T.V. show

MISSION MOMENT

Helping change someone's
attitude about race.



Almost a year ago, one of my co-workers introduced me to a young, white woman who wanted to tell me what I did and thank me. She had come to Brightpoint with her cousin, a 30-year-old white male, a few months before. In her own admission, she told me that he was a racist, but to her amazement, her cousin was excited and overwhelmed with the attention and help I gave him. She said that he has never liked people of color, but said that he could not get over my acts of kindness and the fact that I would extend myself to him for further assistance if needed. She said that I had shown him something he had never ever experienced in his life.

Over my three decades of service to this agency, I have heard many people share their gratitude for the help we do in the community and my personal way of service delivery. Nonetheless, this story resonated in my mind because it not only made this gentleman happy, but it helped him change his worldview of a race of people that he previously hated. My personal agenda each and every day is to provide the best customer service possible. I am here to serve.



Easy Ways to Create a Brighter Future

Looking for easy ways to give back? Brightpoint offers several opportunities to do so – like buying a program at our Mad Ants night on Dec. 12th or registering Brightpoint as the charity partner on your Kroger card. In addition, Brightpoint is part of the Amazon Smile program which donates .5% of your eligible purchases when you shop through our link: smile.amazon.com/ch/35-1111819. Have time to give? We have opportunities for you to volunteer at Poverty Simulations and other events. Visit our website, mybrightpoint.org, and click on “Help Others” to see all of ways you can give. Thank you! ▼

Do you have a Kroger Plus Card?



If so, Brightpoint now has the opportunity to receive rewards every time you use your Kroger Plus Card. This enables you to give back without any additional effort or without compromising your own personal rewards. Whether it's groceries, gas or household items, as long as you use your Kroger Plus Card when purchasing, it will benefit

both you and Brightpoint. To activate this beneficial feature, just follow the instructions below. Please feel free to share this information with family and friends, so they too have the chance to show their support to Brightpoint.

Instructions:

1. Go to krogercommunityrewards.com
2. Click on “Sign In/Register” and use your email address and password to sign in. New online customers must click on “Sign Up Today” and follow the instructions, then confirm the email in their inbox.
3. Once signed in/registered, enter Brightpoint's NPO number (19143), select Brightpoint from the list of organizations, and click on “confirm.”

Once this is confirmed, your Kroger Plus Card is now set up to benefit Brightpoint. We very much appreciate you taking the time to do this and cannot wait to see what comes of this program for our community and those we serve. ▼

CONTINUED FROM COVER

Another benefit of being in Early Head Start is being connected to additional assistance through Brightpoint and other community resources. Brooklynn and her husband were recently excited to be able to purchase their first home. They were excited, that is, until one day they discovered leaks in their plumbing that they couldn't afford to fix.

"My Home Visitor came that week and I was crying," Brooklynn said. "I explained to her what was going on and I

really didn't know what I was going to do." Brightpoint was able to get her leaky pipes repaired and her Home Visitor discovered that she qualified for the Weatherization program.

"I didn't know that (Brightpoint) did that," Brooklynn said about the home repair and weatherizing work that was done. "Everybody worked together so fast to get those things done. It was a true blessing." ▼

Brightpoint Scrapbook



1. Eight Brightpoint JAG students were given the opportunity to go to an Indianapolis Colts game on Sunday, Oct 25. Made possible by the Brandon Burlsworth Foundation "Burl's Kids" program.
2. In September, the Covering Kids & Families (CKF) program partnered with MHS and local agencies in Elkhart County to organize a Community Baby Shower. Twelve mothers-to-be received prizes, food, and informative, educational presentations from local agencies.
3. Brightpoint JAG students from Snider High School volunteered at the Community Center in downtown Fort Wayne for "Fright Night" on Oct. 17.
4. Columbia City Mayor Ryan Daniel attempts to do business with Brightpoint board member Kathy Heuer who was playing the role of a pawn broker during a Poverty Simulation held on Oct. 8 for the Whitley County community.
5. Students from Brightpoint JAG cheered on walkers and runners during the annual Fort4Fitness races held September 26 in Fort Wayne. Nearly 40 Brightpoint employees, friends, and family walked to support Brightpoint who was a charity partner.
6. While Brightpoint JAG students volunteered at Frigate Night, students earned community service credits while providing fun activities for children.

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