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A New Perspective

At this year’s RECAP event, Brightpoint was honored to have Amanda Grimes as our keynote speaker. Amanda has been a Brightpoint volunteer, but before that she was a client — something she thought she would never be. As a veteran, she received help at Brightpoint through Supportive Services for Veteran Families — a part of our Family Development program. Below are excerpts from her prepared keynote address for RECAP.

“Last year, I was invited to volunteer for a poverty simulation. I had no idea what a poverty simulation was, how it was going to be conducted, or what might be the desired result. I had no idea about anything other than my desire to help.

As the time grew close for the simulation, I received a packet that outlined the format for the simulation. After reading it thoroughly, I was convinced that the format couldn’t possibly portray or relate what it was like to live in poverty. I was wrong. It turned out to be magnificently and appropriately designed to accomplish its task. I know

because I’ve experienced poverty and desperation myself.

During January 2015, I was working as a store manager. I thought I was doing well. Not as well-off as I had hoped to be, but I was doing fine; my job and my lifestyle were comfortable and secure — until I became the target of sexual harassment and discrimination in the workplace.

On Saturday, March 7th, I went to work like it was any other day. Then, shortly after noon, I was called to a back room of the store and subjected to a grueling 45 minutes of discussion that ended in my termination. I pulled out of the parking lot hurt and relieved at the same time. I had no idea what I was going to do, but I knew I wasn’t going to be hurt by them anymore.

The first few days were great. I was able to relax around the house, catch up on things, and spend time in self-care. I wasn’t too concerned because I had a little money put back and I was a well-qualified job candidate. Just in case,

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PRESIDENT'S POINTS



Steve Hoffman
President/CEO

May is Community Action Month, a time when our network celebrates the accomplishments of the families and individuals we serve. And while we work all year long to raise public awareness of the issues of poverty, our entire network puts extra effort into it during the month of May.

You may not know, but Brightpoint is a part of a national network that was founded in 1964 via President Lyndon Johnson's "War on Poverty." At that time, the establishment of community action agencies created a unique concept of providing federal funding support to organizations, but allowing local control of those resources. This still remains so today. Our board of directors, comprised of all local individuals, has complete autonomy of the work that Brightpoint engages in. This is crucial for success as our strengths and weaknesses in northeast Indiana are different than other areas of the country.

While Brightpoint is autonomous and unique, we share the work of fighting poverty in America with a vast network of organizations with essentially the same mission as ours. Today nearly every county or parish in the nation is served by a Community Action Agency, all working to create a brighter future for people who live there.

While some may note that poverty remains today, as it has in our world for thousands of years, there is no question that the face of poverty in America has changed over the last 50 years. And there is no question that the millions of people served by community action agencies throughout the years have improved their lives; mostly through their own work and determination, along with some help from organizations like Brightpoint. ▼

For a Brighter Future,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Steve Hoffman".

Steve Hoffman, President/CEO





RECAPping Another Year

Brightpoint’s annual RECAP breakfast was held on Wednesday, May 4 at Ceruti’s Summit Park in Fort Wayne. RECAP is not only a fitting word on its own to describe an event where we share with the community what has been going on at Brightpoint over the past year, but it is also an acronym. The RECAP event gives us the opportunity to: **R**eflect on our achievements, **E**ngage our communities, **C**elebrate our families, **A**ppreciate our supporters, and **P**lan for our future.

At the event, more than 175 people listened as Brightpoint’s President/CEO Steve Hoffman shared reflections about the past year and the agency’s plans for the future. Amanda Grimes, keynote speaker, engaged the audience with her experiences (as highlighted in our cover story.) We celebrated the hard work and positive attitude of some Brightpoint individuals and families. And we recognized outstanding volunteers and partners in appreciation of what they do for our organization.

The **Bright Future** award honors individuals who have succeeded at removing the causes and conditions of poverty in their own lives by using the programs and services available through Brightpoint. This award recognizes that attitude can make all the difference. And that — no matter what assistance is available — it can take considerable effort to move from where you are towards a brighter future. The nominees this year were Victor Carter; Michael Sanders; and Jason and Christina Snyder. Michael Chittick and Latanya Guinn took home awards in this category, but all of the nominees truly represent the spirit of the Bright Future award. See all their stories in a video available on mybrightpoint.org.

Volunteers are a vital part of our organization, especially for our Head Start program. The winners of the **Outstanding Volunteer** awards this year exemplify a commitment to Brightpoint and to making a difference for their children and the world around them. The winners were: Lloyd and Juliette Boggs; Nancy Edgell; Chelsea and Jason Kuse; and Misty Zent.

The **Outstanding Partnership** award honors business and organizations in the community who have gone above and beyond to assist Brightpoint in meeting its mission. The nominees were: Chase Manor Apartments; Expressions of Spirit Inc.; Father Michel Holland, Holy Redeemer Catholic Community; Indiana Tech; Ligonier Rotary Club; McFadden Resource Center; Mustard Seed Furniture Bank; and the winner: Lutheran Social Services of Indiana. ▽



Top: Bright Future award winners pose for a picture after being honored. **Bottom:** Angie Moellering, President and CEO of Lutheran Social Services of Indiana, accepts her Outstanding Partnership award from Steve Hoffman.



Head Start On Cooking Up Success

LaQueisha Brown is the mother of a Brightpoint Head Start student at Werling Drive, but this is not her first experience with the program. LaQueisha was also a Head Start student - about 24 years ago. Since then, LaQueisha has been in the Head Start classroom as a teacher assistant at the East Wayne Street site.

Head Start Center Supervisor Danielle Lyons remembers how good she was with children and was distraught when LaQueisha came to her one day in 2012 and told her she was leaving.

LaQueisha had just had her third child, Emmanuel, who is now in Head Start. She said she found herself saying things like, “Why do you keep going down this same path? Maybe success is not for you.” She signed up for the Early Head Start program with Emmanuel, which helped her appreciate the skills that she had as a parent— some of the same things that made her a good Head Start teacher. She began to see that she did, in fact, have something to give her son.

“Being able to be his first teacher, and begin to be something more to my other children, too, because I had kind of stepped away from them because I was depressed having another child, being a single mom.” Now she says that if it hadn’t been for having Emmanuel and signing up for Early Head Start, she wouldn’t be where she is today.

During this time, a light bulb went off for her. She wasn’t sure exactly how she was going to do it, but she decided to go to culinary school and gave her two weeks notice that day. She had always wanted to cook and grew up in the kitchen around her mom and her grandmother.

Because it had a reputation for producing successful culinary students, she began traveling four days a week to the Art Institute of Indianapolis to get her education. She graduated with honors while working full-time and caring for her three children.

“It was a struggle at times, but I persevered, and I made it,” she said proudly. She credits her children for giving her the strength to continue; wanting to inspire them to follow their dreams.

Her children are now helping LaQueisha follow her dream by helping her with her catering business, Pure and Diving Catering LLC. She collaborates with her mom, who is a pastry chef, and is training her daughter to help with table decorations, making the business quite a family affair.

In addition to her catering business, LaQueisha works for Parkview Hospital in both Columbia City and Warsaw as a supervisor for nutrition services. She shares management responsibilities like overseeing the kitchen, planning menus and catering, and is also trained as a barista.

While she says she doesn’t have a favorite dish to cook, she loves working with different seasonings. She enjoys mixing Greek, Mexican, Asian and soul food styles of cooking and seeing what flavors she can come up with.

LaQueisha has gotten help with her business through the Brightpoint Development Fund and has some high praise for Brightpoint’s Evan Neubacher, who has helped her understand the basics of running a business from how to get started, to opening up a checking and savings account. “He sat down with me and told me, ‘This is who you are competing against, so you need to figure out how are you different.’” She then decided that she needed to be licensed so she could set herself apart.

If there was a question she had that Evan couldn’t answer, he knew where to refer her. “Every connection, every network he has connected me to has taken me two steps forward. He is A-MA-ZING!”

While she doesn’t have plans to have a restaurant right now, she is currently trying to gear her business toward corporate and executive functions. She is in the process of getting licensed so she can prepare and serve food for facilities that only accept licensed caterers. ♡



Mobile Office Offers New Opportunities

The idea of having a mobile office has been around for many years; maybe even 10 years ago as Lesa Cassel, Brightpoint’s Family Support Services Manager, first remembers President/CEO Steve Hoffman talking about it. Steve had imagined a mobile office driving into communities that don’t have a Brightpoint office, like Monroeville where he lives, and providing services such as utility or child care assistance.

This idea was in the back of Lesa’s mind last year when Brightpoint learned that it would be expanding the child care assistance program into six new counties. During a family dinner, Lesa was talking about the expansion and how the time might be right for a mobile office since it did not make sense to have a permanent office in smaller communities. As luck may have it, Lesa’s brother who works for Open Range, a local RV manufacturer and division of Jayco, was at dinner and thought that he may be able to help make that happen.

While Jayco wasn’t able to accommodate Brightpoint’s needs, they put Lesa in touch with a dealer in Middlebury, Indiana. This dealer, Indiana RV Connection, worked with Jayco to be able to offer an RV to Brightpoint at a discounted price.

Brightpoint then had to figure out how to turn this recreational vehicle into a mobile office. The pre-installed bed was removed from the back and, instead, a desk was installed. Wiring and electrical needed to be configured to make the unit accessible for a computer, printer, and other standard office equipment. Since the front of the RV already had a TV and seating, it became the waiting area. Lastly, the sliding door system was installed between the waiting area and the cab to keep it separated.

Initially this new office on wheels will be located in the parking lots of Work One offices in Fulton, Pulaski, Marshall, and Starke counties. Brightpoint currently operates in these counties where they are inside these Work One buildings. Eventually Brightpoint plans to offer additional hours in other locations as well, such as Goodwill Industries. Lesa has been talking to locations about

having Brightpoint’s mobile office at their stores in different towns in these same communities.

Although it has taken a while to get the mobile office ready, Lesa is excited about the opportunities it will allow the agency. “I’m happy about being able to pull it up into a parking lot and have people see our name. It’s like a big, moving billboard. I’m hoping that we can use this new opportunity to educate people about what Brightpoint is and all kinds of services that we offer.”

The first mobile office visits are planned to begin in mid-May. The schedule is listed below, but for up-to-date information, please visit the Brightpoint website under locations as more locations, dates, and times will be added. ↘

MOBILE UNIT LOCATIONS

FULTON COUNTY

WorkOne Fulton County
927 Main Street
Rochester, IN 46975
Hours: Tuesday
9:30am-12:30pm EST

MARSHALL COUNTY

WorkOne
Marshall County
2878 Miller Drive
Plymouth, IN 46563
Hours: Wednesday
9:30am-12:30pm EST

PULASKI COUNTY

WorkOne
Pulaski County
123 North Market
Street, Suite 2
Winamac, IN 46996
Hours: Tuesday
1:30pm-4:30pm EST

STARKE COUNTY

WorkOne Starke County
1913 South Heaton
Street, Suite B
Knox, IN 46534
Hours: Wednesday
12:30pm-3:30pm CST

CONTINUED FROM COVER

I filed for unemployment benefits, but felt confident that I would have no trouble at all being picked up by another company. I was wrong.

At first the failed job searching was disappointing. I knew that disclosing my termination raised a red flag on my application. I became frustrated by the fact that most applications did not allow for an explanation as to why I was discharged, or that my discharge was wrong in many ways. It was simply that I was fired.

After nearly one month, I had placed more than forty applications and resumes without obtaining a single interview. Then I received a letter informing me that my request for unemployment had been denied. The Department of Workforce Development investigated my discharge for two more months before awarding me my unemployment benefits, concluding that I was wrongfully discharged. But by then the damage was done.

I had won the battle against my former employer, but was told it could take two weeks before I would see my first unemployment check arrive. I had exhausted my savings, cashed in my investments, and put off paying bills for far too long. I had to decide from day to day whether I was going to put food on the table, gas in the car, pay my bills, etc. I needed serious help — now!

It's not always easy asking for help, even when you know you need it. Pride has a nasty habit of getting in the way. I had been a store manager, with great responsibilities and good pay. I had been active in the Better Business Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, my church, and been elected president of a non-profit organization. Now I was at the bottom of my barrel needing help and that meant crawling on hands and knees to some of the same people I had worked with or had known very well as customers. But humble pie was the only thing on the menu, and I needed to eat.

I scurried about from one organization to the next, barely knowing where to turn. Phone call after phone call produced little bits of information about where I might go next or why I didn't

qualify for assistance from that organization. Worry had turned to serious anxiety and desperation. With a court date set for eviction, my unemployment insurance came through. I received an initial check that totaled nearly \$600, but it was too late; I was too far behind for my creditor to accept such a relatively small payment.

On an annual visit to the VA for a check-up, my nurse ran through a required list of questions. One of the questions asked if I felt like my housing was secure, with no perceived imminent threat of homelessness. The term "homeless" had never resonated within me quite like it did at that moment. I paused, looked her in the eye, and admitted that for the first time in my life I was facing a court ordered eviction from my home within the week. My family and I were about to be homeless, and I knew of no other place to seek help.

I had no idea that the VA could help, but they did. I was referred to Brightpoint and the staff that received me did so with a level of dignity and respect I had lost within myself weeks before. They went to work tirelessly and relentlessly to ensure that my family would not be out on the street.

My case worker was Katie Graham. She spoke of many options, sources to contact, and assured me that there were shelters available. A homeless shelter! My family and I might end up in a homeless shelter. I was frightened, but Katie calmly kept things in perspective. She helped me focus on the present and what I could do. We were removed from our home on a Monday, and I used the last of my unemployment check paying for a room at a local hotel. Five of us stayed in one room because I couldn't afford a second room. Any personal possessions that could not fit into the storage unit I rented had been abandoned, and now we were living out of a single suitcase each.

Trying to find a place to live proved difficult. Because I had a court eviction on public record, most places would not even consider my application for residency. Late Wednesday evening, Katie called to say she had mediated successfully with a property manager — we could sign a lease on Thursday evening. We were

MISSION MOMENT — Tammy Pifer, *Early Head Start Program Manager*



LENGTH OF TIME AT BRIGHTPOINT
Almost 16.5 years

MISSION MOMENT
Brightpoint helping *my* future

OTHER POSITIONS HELD
Child Care Development Fund Intake Specialist and Service Coordinator, Healthy Families Quality Assurance Supervisor, Program Supervisor, and Program Manager.

As we were preparing to change our name from CANI to Brightpoint last year, I began reflecting on my career at Brightpoint and realized that this agency has been a "bright point" in my own life.

In 1999, I was living with my mother. I was a single mom with a one-year old, a bachelor's degree and a job paying \$6.25 per hour. When I applied for a position at CANI, I didn't know much about it, but I was excited because it paid better.

I knew very shortly after starting here that there was room for advancement. Although I was shy, I fit in and began to discover and grow my strengths. It made me feel like part of a team.

now absolutely penniless, out of any other option, but Brightpoint had helped us secure the impossible — hope for a brighter future.

Giving up her time off of work, Katie came by at the appointed time to make sure everything was taken care of properly. She stayed into the evening until the papers were signed, an inspection was complete, and the keys to our new home were in our hands. We were secure once more because she cared. She had not given up fighting for us, even when we no longer knew how to fight for ourselves.

I learned many valuable lessons in those three months. First, what looks like security may not be security at all. At any time, anyone may find themselves subjected to circumstances beyond their control that strip them of everything they thought they had. I learned that it is just as hard to ask for help as it is to find it. I realized that most, if not all, of the people I see begging at street corners are probably amazing individuals with many talents and boundless potential who may have simply fallen prey to unfortunate circumstances — not lazy, worthless blights on the community. And, I learned that privileged perspective can be less helpful, and perhaps even hurtful.

I occasionally appear as a guest speaker at various local universities, and I often illustrate privileged perspective by completing a simple exercise. I ask all of the students to pull out a sheet of paper and wad it up into a ball. Then I ask them to simultaneously throw their paper wad into the trash can at the front of the classroom while remaining firmly seated in their chair. The result is always the same. Students in the front rows chuckle and toss, usually with success. Students in the middle rows lean this way or that and give it their best shot. Sometimes they make it, but most do not. Those in the back of the classroom are always offended by the challenge. “It’s not fair,” they cry out. “Why do they get to be closer to the trash can?” They murmur and complain, but eventually give it a toss, sometimes with genuine effort, other times without any real effort at all. None of them make it to the basket, and many will spend time sulking with furrowed brow while I explain the exercise.



In that exercise, they represent society in all of the social classes that we pretend are not so well defined. Those at the front represent people who have come from a privileged position. The homes they came from were safe and secure, their education was one of quality, they may have had no concern of going to college, and they secured solid employment.

Those at the back had little or no educational opportunities for one reason or another, have come from homes that were unstable, or they may have been uprooted many times over as a child. They have troubles getting a job with a meager education and find themselves struggling continually. No matter how hard they try, the resources necessary for their success elude them. And those in the front rows seldom show much concern or even take notice.

I find myself in a position that affords me great opportunities to view things from a new perspective. I have resources and skills that I didn’t previously possess. And what will I do with my newfound privileged perspective? Will I keep making baskets while others struggle from the back rows? Or, will I give them an assist, and help them achieve their goals?

As an integral part of Brightpoint, what will you do? How are you, individually and collectively, going to make a difference?”

Throughout my time here, I have advanced in my positions and am now manager for a program I helped build. No longer the shy person I once was, I now can’t wait to tell people about the great things that Brightpoint does and the passion that I have for this agency.

Brightpoint helped me out of poverty by not just giving me a job, but allowing me opportunities to grow, advance in my career, and earn more money. My now-teenage son will graduate from high school this year with honors, I am now married, and own my own home — a home that Brightpoint helped me secure by improving my credit score through the employee loan program.

My mission moment at Brightpoint has been happening in little and big ways throughout the last 16 years of my life. Brightpoint has given me quite a brighter future.

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