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JAM

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Air*

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ARE TAKING OFF

One Step Beyond

Innovative programming for adults who have intellectual disabilities

By Jennifer Schwegman

Believing her daughter, Dylan, should have post-high school opportunities to contribute to the community and achieve her personal goals, former teacher Mimi Rogers went into action.

In 2003, she started One Step Beyond Inc. (OSBI), with a vision of providing innovative programs that empower adults who have intellectual disabilities, like her daughter, to be independent, seek and maintain employment, and achieve greater social participation in their communities.

"We started the program with 16 participants in a small Phoenix neighborhood location," says Rogers, who will retire as CEO later this year. "Today, we're the Valley's largest provider of advanced education programs for adults who have intellectual and cognitive disabilities, serving more than 500 individuals at four Phoenix Metro locations."

Funded through the Arizona Department of Economic Security's Division of Developmental Disabilities, the newest One Step Beyond campus opened in the Scottsdale Airpark in early 2020.

"A flood of requests from Scottsdale-based special education teachers and families persuaded us to expand our services," Rogers says. "Knowing that we had a strong infrastructure in place, this was an easy decision to make."

According to One Step Beyond Executive Director Mike Homco, the 14,000-square-foot campus includes a fully equipped music room, art studio, commercial kitchen, fitness center, and four large classrooms for individualized instruction.



Austin and Stevie enjoy making music at the Scottsdale Airpark campus music studio. (Special to the Scottsdale Airpark News)

"The amenities at OSBI are unmatched and enable us to provide one-of-a-kind programs unavailable anywhere else," Homco says. "For instance, our culinary training programs take place in a real commercial kitchen where we provide food-industry training with an emphasis on customer service, healthy dietary planning, food preparation and proper sanitation skills that equip our participants with the necessary skills to seek employment in the food industry."

The culinary program also includes a catering business that can provide lunch service and catering to Scottsdale businesses.

One Step Beyond's life skills programs help members strengthen independent living skills, with an emphasis on money management, functional literacy, social skills and safe community access.

Employment programs provide training and volunteer opportunities for self-reliance that lead to competitive or supported employment.

OSBI recreation and fine arts programs provide music, art, dance and fitness with an emphasis on personal wellness.

Music students can work with some of the best in the business, performing in front of large crowds and recording with A-list producers.

According to Theresa Robinette, whose son Eric attends daily programming at OSBI, "My son was struggling, but his language and communication skills have skyrocketed. He now loves singing in front of an audience, and when he sang an entire 4-minute Ed Sheeran song at the last One Step Beyond music performance, I cried."

OSBI also has the first and only campus-based day training program that has a special needs hockey team, The One Step Coyotes. OSBI has a formal partnership with Special Olympics where more than 300 OSBI athletes participate in year-round sports training and tournament participation.

While the mission of OSBI is to provide hands-on experiences, the recent pandemic and stay-at-home orders challenged the team to provide services in a new way.

"COVID-19 definitely threw us a curveball, but with the encouragement from our members and their families, we have been able to deliver many of our programs in a virtual environment," Homco says. "We still have community-based services for members that require it, but the online classes have helped us maintain social engagement with many of our members, including a guest speaker series that has enabled our members to interact with local mayors and other distinguished VIPs."

Unlike other campus-based day training programs, OSBI partners with its members and their families to identify and provide innovative, individualized and comprehensive educational, employment, life skills and transitional services. If a desired program isn't currently offered, the team finds a way to make it happen.

"One Step Beyond gives our members a voice," Rogers says. "It's not up to us to decide what opportunities to provide, so we rely on our members to provide that feedback."

One Step Beyond staff is comprised of professionals who have made it their life's mission to better the lives of adults who have intellectual disabilities.

Info: osbi.org ■