

About LEAP

Linking Employment, Abilities and Potential (LEAP) is an agent of positive change in the lives of people with disabilities in Northeast Ohio and works to advance their participation and equality in society.

Through its comprehensive services, LEAP assists people with disabilities in living independently in their own homes, participating in community life, and finding and maintaining employment.

Founded more than 30 years ago by people with disabilities, the agency serves about 1,700 individuals annually and works to promote social change to enhance the quality of life for people with disabilities. The majority of staff and board members are people with disabilities themselves.

LEAP is a federally recognized Center for Independent Living (CIL). CILs are non-residential places of action and coalition where persons with disabilities learn empowerment and develop the skills necessary to make life choices. In addition, LEAP is accredited by CARF, the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities, which is the major international accrediting agency for health and human service providers.

The Independent Living Philosophy

Disability is a natural part of life. Everyone knows someone who has a condition that interferes with their ability to live the life they want. Roughly one in every four people has a

disability, and the majority of those disabilities are acquired through illness, accident, or disease.

The Independent Living Philosophy emphasizes the right of people with disabilities to make choices for themselves, and it places the utmost value on consumer control, self-help, and self-advocacy. Equal access to all services, activities, and facilities are also important tenets in the independent living philosophy.

In every service it provides, LEAP gives people with disabilities control by providing opportunities and by supporting them in their choices. LEAP upholds the values of choice and self-direction, independence and empowerment, inclusion and integration, and dignity and respect—values that are derived from the independent living philosophy.

A Mission of Equality

LEAP's mission is to advance a society of equal opportunity for all persons, regardless of disability.

We accomplish this mission by:

- Providing information, education, training, employment, and independent-living services to people with disabilities
- Helping people with disabilities identify and eliminate barriers to employment and independent living in the areas of income support, access to health care, transportation, housing, personal care, and assistive technology
- Promoting fully accessible and integrated communities so that all persons with disabilities can live, work, learn, shop, and socialize where they choose, without barriers, and

- Advocating on the local, state, and national levels for social change and public policies that promote improvements in quality of life for people with disabilities.

A History of Dedication

LEAP's history is rooted in the Independent Living (IL) Movement, which originated during the civil rights movement of the 1960s. Before this time, many decisions were made for people with disabilities by family members, service providers, and medical personnel, often without any input from the person with the disability. As part of the IL Movement, people with disabilities demanded control of their own lives.

LEAP was founded in 1981 as an independent agency affiliated with Cleveland's Lutheran Metropolitan Ministry. Known then as the Lutheran Employment Awareness Program, the agency originally focused on helping people with disabilities secure employment.

In 1986, Doris Brennan became LEAP's first executive director. Brennan—who had become a quadriplegic after a tragic automobile accident in 1954—had already established herself as a powerhouse in the Independent Living Movement in Ohio, and she brought the vision and philosophy of that movement to LEAP. Over the course of her nearly 20 years with LEAP, she led the agency as it became a federally recognized Center for Independent Living (CIL) and expanded services to address the desire of people with disabilities to live, work, and participate in their communities. Brennan was present at the 1990 signing of the historic Americans with Disabilities Act, and in 1998 she was the first Ohioan inducted into the National Hall of Fame for Persons with Disabilities.

Upon Brennan's death in 2000, Melanie Hogan became LEAP's executive director. Under Hogan's leadership, the agency again expanded the scope of its services. Additional focus

was placed on advocacy at the federal, state, and local levels for changes that would improve the lives of people with disabilities. An assistive technology center was established, services in benefits planning and analysis were enhanced, programming for high school students was expanded, and collaborations and partnerships with other agencies were forged and strengthened. In 2010, Hogan led LEAP's move to independence from LMM, as well as the move of its main office to its current location in Cleveland's Ohio City neighborhood.

During Hogan's tenure, LEAP has been recognized by PepNET (the Promising and Effective Practices Network) for the quality of its programs for high school students with disabilities who are transitioning to work and adulthood; by the Ohio Association of Nonprofit Organizations for meeting its standards of excellence; by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission with a Freedom to Compete award; and by the U.S. Department of Labor with a New Freedom Initiative Award.

Today LEAP is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that is recognized for offering high-quality services and producing excellent results. Despite 30 years of growth and change, the original vision of Doris Brennan—that LEAP would help level the playing field for people with disabilities who wanted to be recognized for their abilities and live lives of full inclusion—remains the agency's cornerstone.

Board of Directors

Officers

President
Mr. Charles (Chuck) Heindrichs, Eaton Corporation, retired

Vice President
Mr. Brian Roof, Frantz Ward LLP

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Mr. Thomas Hlavaty, Hlavaty and Associates

Mr. Bruce Lockhart, Dawson Companies

Ms. Mickie McGraw, Consultant/Art Therapist

Ms. Alice Sporar, Teacher, retired

Administration

Melanie Hogan, *Executive Director*

Jay Bagdasarian, *Controller*

John P. Bailey, *Development Director*

Cheryl Gorham, *Quality Assurance*

Therese Conner, *Independent Living Services Director*

Julia Donovan, *Employment Services Director*

Deborah Nebel, *Director of Public Policy*

Katherine Foley, *Aging and Disability Resource Center*

Partner Organizations

Collaboration is one key to LEAP's effectiveness. LEAP collaborates with numerous organizations and joins coalitions that help advance the cause of equality for people with disabilities. The following organizations are among the groups with which LEAP partners.

Advocates for Ohio's Future (AOF)
Association of Fund Raising Professionals
Beachwood Chamber of Commerce
CARF <logo>
Council on Smaller Enterprises (COSE)
Greater Cleveland Community Shares <logo>
Greater Cleveland Community Shares
Lorain County Chamber of Commerce
National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), Greater Cleveland
National Council on Independent Living (NCIL)
North Coast Chamber of Commerce
Ohio Abilities Network (OAN) <logo>
Ohio Association of Nonprofit Organizations (OANO)
Ohio City Merchants Association
Ohio Olmstead Task Force (OOTF)
United Way of Greater Cleveland <logo>
United Way of Greater Lorain County <logo>
Universal Health Care Action Network of Ohio (UHCAN Ohio)
Western Reserve Area Agency on Aging

Affirmations of Excellence

LEAP has been recognized both nationally and locally for the excellence of its services and innovative programs. Executive Director Melanie Hogan also has been commended for her dedication to improving the lives of people with disabilities. Among the awards and recognitions have been the following:

- **New Freedom Initiative Award**

from the U.S. Department of Labor, for developing and implementing practices that promote access, inclusion, and advancement of people with disabilities

- **Freedom to Compete Award**

from the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, for demonstrated results through best practices in promoting fair and open competition in the workplace, and for employing people with disabilities

- **Disability Award**

from the Western Reserve Area Agency on Aging, for disability and aging collaborations

- **Maximum Access Award**

from Maximum Accessible Housing of Ohio, for contributions to making Ohio more accessible to people with disabilities

- **EP Maxwell H. Schleifer Distinguished Service Award**

to Melanie Hogan, from Exceptional Parent magazine, for bringing attention to the dedication, perseverance, and accomplishments of people with special needs

- **OANO Standards for Excellence Recognition**

from the Ohio Association of Nonprofit Organizations, for meeting its certification standards for ethical practices and accountability

- **National Youth Employment Coalition/PEPNet Recognition**

to LEAP's youth development programs, from the NYEC, for meeting the international Promising and Effective Practices Network's standards.

- **CARF Accreditation**

LEAP has been accredited by CARF, the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities, continuously since 1991. CARF is the major international accrediting agency for health and human service providers.

- **Standards and Assurances of the U.S. Department of Education**

LEAP is a Center for Independent Living (CIL) and meets the U.S. Department of Education Standards and Assurances. Established through the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, CILs are required to be consumer-controlled, community-based, cross-disability, nonresidential, private, nonprofit agencies. CILS must provide four core services: advocacy, information and referral, skills development, and peer support.

Impacts and Outcomes *<link to impacts section>*

Quality of life matters, and for individuals who work with LEAP, quality of life is changed in highly personalized ways. When people with disabilities work with LEAP, they experience not only independence and choice, but also a heightened sense of life's joys.

LEAP reports its agency-wide outcomes annually in a Report to the Community. *<link to current report>*

Careers at LEAP

If you are passionate about equality for people with disabilities, LEAP may be a great place for you to put your passion to work.

Currently, we are seeking to fill the following positions:

< Give job title and link to job description PDF >