

## **Lawrence County Developmental Disabilities sells building to Autism Services Center**

The Lawrence County Developmental Disabilities (LCDD) sold their Early Childhood Center (ECC) facility located at 1749 County Rd. 1, South Point, OH to the Autism Services Center of Huntington, WV. “The LCDD Board is very pleased that the building will be used to benefit those with autism and other developmental disabilities, as we know firsthand how important this kind of service is in our area” said Julie Monroe, LCDD Superintendent.

The LCDD operated a preschool out of the building for children with developmental disabilities, and that program ended last spring. The Early Intervention Department, also housed in the building, was relocated to the LCDD campus in Coal Grove. The Lawrence County Early Childhood Academy leased space at the ECC to operate a day care and two Head Start classrooms, and will continue doing so with the Autism Services Center.

Since the LCDD preschool ended in May 2020, the LCDD Board voted to sell the building this past July. The ECC opened in 1995 and was paid for primarily by grant funding from the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities. LCDD provided the matching funds, and along with local school districts and the Lawrence County Early Childhood Academy, contributed to the upkeep and maintenance of the building over the years.

The Board had some discussions about the future of the building last year, including some informal discussions with South Point local schools about a possible sale or lease. However, the Board decided to wait until the preschool was officially closed in May to make a decision. “It was a hard decision for the Board, said Debra Jones”, LCDD Board President. “We had to weigh the pros and cons of keeping it and possibly leasing space versus selling it. However, after considering the major repairs the building needed, including a roof replacement, we decided to sell the building”, said Jones. As a public entity, the LCDD was required to handle the sale per Ohio Revised Code 307.10, and request public bids.

The only bid received was from the Autism Services Center for 1.4 million. Dr. Jimmie Beirne, CEO, said the building was perfect for their program, and will open up a needed service option in the county. “We will be able to take 40 children off of our waiting list to begin services, and bring 80-90 jobs to Lawrence County”, said Beirne. Autism Services Center will provide applied behavioral analysis, speech therapy, and occupational and physical therapy from the South Point location. “We are grateful that LCDD accepted our offer and that we will be able to collaborate more with their agency”, said Beirne.

According to Monroe, the proceeds of the sale, approximately 24% of the agency’s 5.7 million dollar annual budget, will be used to help cover operating expenses. “The biggest relief is not having to allocate resources for the upkeep of a 23,000 square foot building. Most, importantly the transaction is a good thing for Lawrence County, specifically for those with autism, and their families”, said Monroe.

Dr. Beirne encouraged anyone interested in working with children with autism and developmental disabilities to contact the Autism Services Center about job opportunities. “We are hiring for the South Point location. Behavior technician positions only require a high school diploma, but we assure staff have access to the training they will need for certification”, said Beirne. To learn more about Autism Services Center and/or complete a job application, visit the website at [autismservicescenter.org](http://autismservicescenter.org) or call 304-525-8014.