

COVAVIEW

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COVA receives national award from Eli Lilly Company

COVA has added to its national prestige with recognition by pharmaceutical giant Eli Lilly and Company by receiving the second-place Lilly Reintegration Award. This is the first time COVA has been nominated for the award.

The award was in the Employment category, lauding the Careers for the Future Program, a technology initiative consisting of:

- *Careers for the Future Training Program* – a unique 12-month recovery-based health, wellness and computer training program in an accommodative learning setting that includes workplace internships and assistance with full-time employment placement.
- *Resource Center* – a staff-facilitated walk-in computer center with Internet access and common office equipment for self-directed skills training and job search, as well as assistance with resumé preparation.
- *Computer Equipment Contribution Program* – late-model, donated computers are repaired and given

to the individuals we serve for job-related home use.

“We are very pleased and honored,” says John Finch, Ph.D., COVA vice president of Rehabilitation and Employment. “All of our technology components were considered for this award under the banner of Careers for the Future, a relatively new initiative for us and the only one in the Midwest. Getting the recognition from such a prestigious source is very exciting.

“Our clients have indicated they feel a lack of computer skills disqualifies them for many jobs,” John continues. “We’ve developed the training program in response to their needs.”

The awards recognize organizations and individuals dedicated to improving the lives of persons with serious mental illness, as well as the accomplishments of notable individuals living with schizophrenia and bipolar disorder. COVA is recognized in the area of employment.

John says it is particularly exciting to receive recognition from a worldwide pharmaceutical company, since advances in medication have

empowered persons with mental illness to improve their lives through organizations such as COVA.

“Improvements and enhancements in medication help support recovery efforts such as employment, so there is a synergy between the two,” says John. “It’s often a combination of factors that move people along to recovery. It’s nice to have a pharmaceutical company appreciate the kinds of things we’re doing.”



COVA info just a click away

Surf over to www.cova.org for the latest news and information about COVA. Our newly revised Web site is the first phase in an expansion of the site, to continue this year.

Visit us to learn about our career development and benefits consultation services, special programs for teens, services for employers, Careers for the Future Training Program and other technological initiatives, job openings, donation opportunities, the latest news about COVA, and get access to brochures, newsletters and our recent annual report.

Future phases of the site will include FAQs, volunteer opportunities, speakers bureau requests, mental health resources, links to community organizations, and more.



▲ COVA board member Katie Feick and COVA Vice President of Rehabilitation and Employment John Finch, PhD, accept the 2006 Lilly Reintegration Award on behalf of COVA.

COVA receives new Social Security Administration grant to provide benefits consultation to most of Ohio

COVA's Benefits Consulting and Financial Services department has been awarded a new Social Security grant, effective at 2006 year-end, and is increasing the number of counties they serve from 38 to 50 of Ohio's 88 counties. The new counties added are Ashland, Champaign, Clark, Crawford, Greene, Hardin, Logan, Mahoning, Stark, Summit, Wayne and Wyandot.

"Our new agreement, WIPA – Work Incentive Planning and Assistance – replaces Benefits Planning Assistance and Outreach, serving more than half of the state," says Program Director Meg Griffing, MA, CRC. "Taking on additional central and southeast counties takes advantage of already out-posted COVA staff and relationships."

Under the new program, we provide services for people with mental, developmental and physical disabilities. Also, a change in best practices in the Social Security Administration means COVA Benefits Consulting and Financial Services staff now will engage in long-term case management and extended follow-along in providing service to clients under the WIPA contract.

"In the past we concentrated on providing relevant information for the participant, allowing that person to make their own decisions," Meg says. "Now, there is a strong emphasis from Social Security on not only providing those options, but the extended



follow-along in order to implement a personal vocational plan. Those who participate in the new program will benefit from increased involvement with their benefits consultant to ensure their plan is effective."

Staff will undergo additional training to take on the extra responsibilities, she says.

"Most of us have a case management background, so the opportunity to stay involved to help someone reach self-sufficiency is exciting," Meg concludes.

To learn more about benefits consultations or to access services, contact Meg Griffing at mgriffing@cova.org or (614) 291-0193.



▲ Pat Porter, employment manager with National City Bank, shares insights into what his organization looks for in new hires with COVA career developers at a luncheon in December. Pat was invited to participate in COVA's Employer Spotlight program. "The Employer Spotlight Series allows our career developers to spend time with central Ohio employers in a casual atmosphere where they can exchange ideas and information," explains Nancy Miller, business relations manager. "Officials from the visiting businesses' human resources area tell us what they're looking for in recruits, their job openings and hiring process, and the career developers get to ask questions and get to know a person from the organization." The program started in 2006 with a visit from OhioHealth, and continues in 2007. Businesses interested in participating in the series may contact Nancy at (614) 291-0191 or nmiller@cova.org.

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Donated computer essential for college and communication

Holly Harden has a promising future as an interpreter for the deaf, with a little help from COVA. She's one of the first COVA participants to receive a computer through the COVA Computer Donation Program.

Holly, age 20, was associated with COVA's Transition Youth Services Aftercare program. Aftercare provides transitional support services to youth exiting Franklin County Children Services, ages 18 to 21, who are leaving home care and need assistance in becoming independent. COVA assists them with housing,

relay service for the deaf would cost me more money," explained Holly. "It also would help ensure I get my school work and research done, and enable me to keep in touch by e-mail with my grant coordinator and teacher."

Holly plans to graduate this year. "A computer would improve and satisfy my life by helping me complete my school work and eventually lead me to one of the best jobs a person knowing sign language could have," she says, fulfilling the mission of the program exactly as it is intended to serve participants.



COVA Information Technology Specialist Vince Thomas shows Holly Harden how to connect her new computer.

Holly Harden's new computer will help with her school work, career search and communicating with her deaf parents.

education, employment, and other needs.

She benefited from COVA's Computer Donation Program, whereby COVA accepts donated computers from business and individual donors to be refurbished and given to COVA program participants to be used for career-related purposes. COVA received a substantial donation of computers from Dawson Resources and Grange Insurance.

Holly, working with Aftercare Specialist Don Clark, completed an application, explaining she needed a computer for school work at Southern State Community College to become a licensed interpreter for the deaf. She also had a special need for the computer which would improve communication with her family. Both of Holly's parents are deaf and she plans to communicate with them more effectively via electronic means instead of TTY phone calls.

"One way I would use the computer is e-mail in order to reach my mom because using the



COVA services accredited by CARF for three years

COVA was surveyed last fall by CARF (Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities) and was accredited for a period of three years for the following employment services:

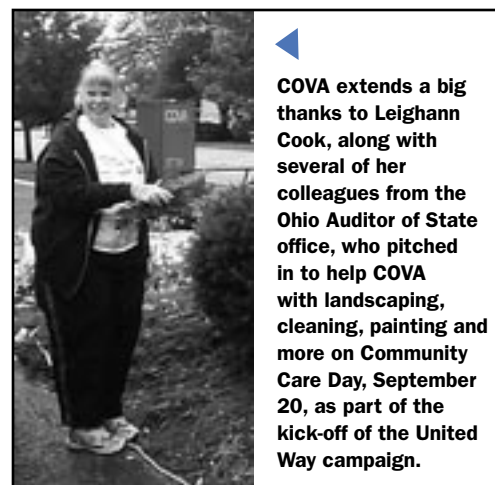
- Job Development
- Job Supports
- Job-Site Training
- Employee Development Services
- Employment Planning Services
- Employment Services Coordination
- Employment Skills Training Services
- Employment Transition Services

This three-year accreditation outcome represents the highest level of accreditation that can be awarded to an organization.

COVA was commended in many areas. Referring to COVA as "the provider of choice for employment services for persons with mental illness," CARF recognized COVA's services for their innovation, tailoring to each individual's needs and desires, and the broad spectrum of employment-related services.

CARF singled out COVA's Careers for the Future program, including its technology training and resource center. COVA's staff and board also were recognized.

CARF International is an independent, not-for-profit accrediting body whose mission is to promote quality, value and optimal outcomes of services through an accreditation process that centers on enhancing the lives of persons served. During a survey, an organization's level of compliance is reviewed against CARF's standards of quality.



COVA extends a big thanks to Leighann Cook, along with several of her colleagues from the Ohio Auditor of State office, who pitched in to help COVA with landscaping, cleaning, painting and more on Community Care Day, September 20, as part of the United Way campaign.

Expansions in Benefits Consulting and Financial Services enhance programs

COVA continues to grow its benefits consulting team to serve more clients through a wider range of services.

While COVA is pleased to announce the receipt of the Work Incentives Planning and Assistance (WIPA) grant from the Social Security Administration, we also have grown the private-pay and fee aspect of benefits consulting to provide solutions to additional government and non-profit social service agencies, as well as private individuals and families.

An entrepreneurial approach

"We remain committed to services under the Social Security Administration – in fact, since we started in 2001, we continue to increase our volume of clients through those referrals," says Meg Griffing, COVA Benefits Consulting and Financial Services program director. "As we grow benefits consulting, however, we're also excited about building on that defined service model with additional consulting that allows us to help people in different ways."

COVA has dramatically expanded benefits consulting by serving as a contractual referral partner for Franklin County ADAMH, the Delaware-Morrow Mental Health & Recovery

Services Board, and On My Own Inc. Additionally, COVA is offering a full-range of individual benefit services, including: applications for benefits; employment planning considering the impact on Social Security Benefits; impact of increase in minimum wage; changes in health care options through employment; financial literacy training and development; Plan for Achieving Self-Support (PASS); and resources on benefits eligibility (Medicaid waiver, Food Stamps). For agencies, COVA can provide technical consultation on difficult cases as well as staff training on benefit issues.

"We already provide great service to our clients who work with us through an established model in our government referrals: determining the earnings-to-benefits ratio, negotiating benefits overpayment issues, composing PASS (Plan for Achieving Self-Support) documentation and determining other ways to become self-supportive," says Meg. "We can accomplish these same goals with clients who establish a direct relationship with us as we expand our service base."

Meg says Benefits Consulting and Financial Services is newly energized by the addition of specialized staff members. Karie Urban,

LSW, has a background in geriatric social work dealing with Medicare, Medicaid and housing. Julie Koehler, JD, has an extensive background working as a Workers Compensation liaison between hospitals and state and local government.

"By increasing our staff, each of us will be able to further specialize, which means we can maximize our individual levels of expertise to create the strongest possible benefits consulting team," says Meg. In addition, Ron Swain is now serving as senior benefits consultant and will focus on the full range of fee-for-service offerings.

The on-site staff is completed by Mike Keffer, who works with Franklin County mental health consumers, Stephanie Gibson in eastern Ohio, and John Hartman in southern Ohio, working with clients in the respective geographic areas through the Social Security Administration relationship.

"We are looking forward to continuing to serve our existing relationships and seek opportunities to serve clients beyond central Ohio as our referrals grow statewide," Meg says.

For information about private-pay benefits consulting, contact Meg Griffing at (614) 291-0193.

COVA welcomes new staff

We are pleased to welcome the following new employees to join our skilled, talented staff:

Melony Ross is COVA's new human resource specialist in Human Resources and had worked at North Central Mental Health for seven years prior to joining COVA, and has experience in the banking and health care environments as well. She is a graduate of Wilberforce University.



Melony Ross

Jennifer Urig, MS, joins COVA as transition youth evaluator in Transition Youth Services, providing independent living skills assessments for Franklin County Children Services. She was previously a youth advisor in the Juvenile Residential Center and has a master's degree in criminal justice.



Jennifer Urig

The following new employees are career developers, providing vocational rehabilitation case management, helping clients identify, acquire and keep employment:

Brandy Cook, MA, has nine years of experience in counseling, and received a master's degree in counseling from the Methodist Theological School.



Brandy Cook

Cydney Goodman-McCray, MA, has worked at a college counseling center and education center for homeless youth, and has a master's degree in counseling from The University of North Dakota.



Cydney Goodman-McCray

Diane J. Linville, M Ed, has 10 years of experience in the mental health field and holds a master's of education in social agency counseling from the University of Dayton.



Diane J. Linville

We also congratulate the following staff on their recent appointments, transfers, and promotions at COVA.

Stephanie Andrian, M Ed, has been appointed program director for one of two Employment Teams. **Pam Buford**, M Ed, CRC, PC, has become program director for Career Preparation, Skill Training and Wellness Team. **Meg Griffing**, MA, CRC, has been appointed program director in Benefits Consulting and Financial Services. **Ron Swain** has been appointed senior benefits consultant in Benefits and Financial Consulting, providing expanded services to meet consumer needs.

Surveys prove customer satisfaction remains high

COVA values input from everyone it serves and conducts surveys of many individuals and organizations annually. Last year we conducted two separate surveys – a buyer survey, conducted with the case managers, counselors and others who refer participants for career development, youth and benefits consultation services; and a survey of COVA program participants.

Results from each survey show a high level of customer satisfaction and other key measures of quality.

Buyer Survey

The annual buyer survey was conducted in Franklin, Delaware and Morrow Counties, and other key areas where we provide services. Those results are shown in graph format here to the right.

Comments from the survey included:

- “Impressed with placements in difficult cases.”
- “Communication is excellent, services are top-notch.”
- “(Staff) is very easy to work with and extremely knowledgeable regarding benefits and planning for the future. The clients and families with whom I work appreciate the easy to understand explanations.”
- “Am very satisfied that the consumers I have assisted obtained information they need in a very timely manner.”

Consumer Survey

During the third quarter of 2006, an independent research firm conducted an annual survey of 121 program participants who were actively participating in selected COVA programs at that time.

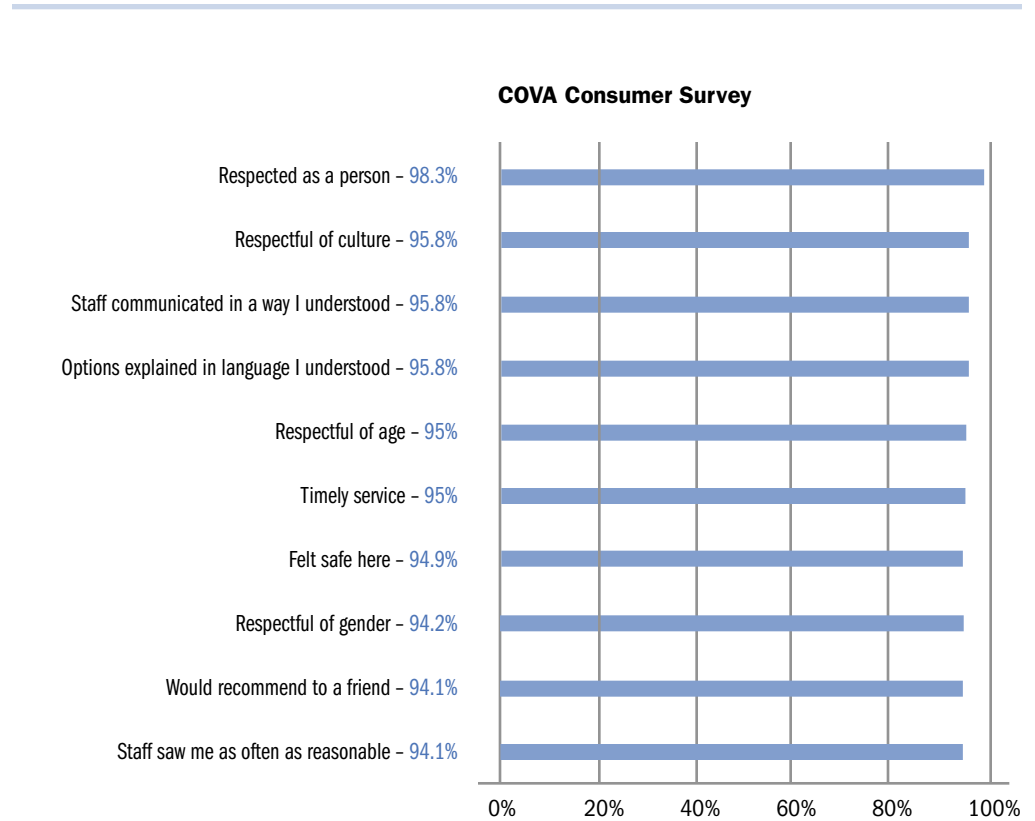
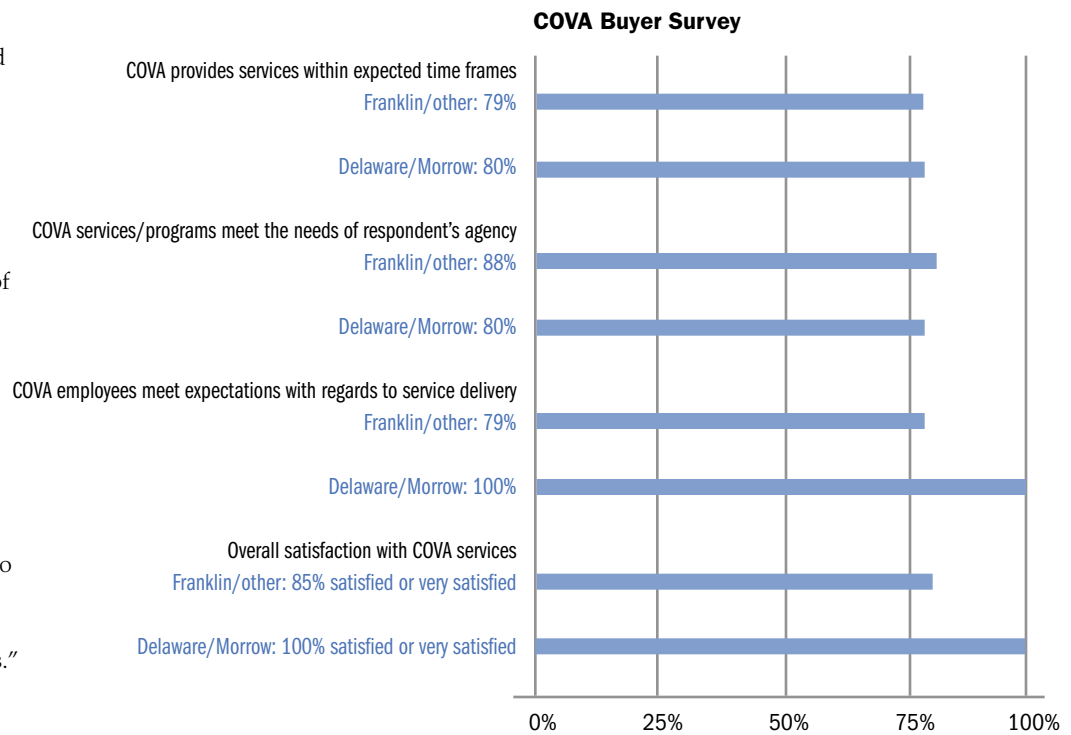
The survey takes into account varying levels of satisfaction by program, demographic characteristics, and satisfaction across time, with the goal of developing quality and service improvements as a result.

Participants were surveyed regarding the Careers for the Future Training Program, Resource Center, Employment Team, Transition Employment, and Rehabilitation Readiness services. They were asked about service responsiveness, informed choice, respect, participation, and overall value of these services.

Results are shown in a graph format to the right.

Comments include:

- “COVA is a powerfully important agency in Columbus...providing me with a career opportunity I may not be able to find anywhere else.”
- “I bonded right away with my career developer. She has helped tremendously in



my search for employment ...We are pursuing volunteer work and then transitioning into employment.”

- “The services at COVA are geared toward what I need ... Staff members are patient and help us network resources in the community ...

ask questions, answer us, retain our dignity at the same time. Rehab and job readiness ... mock interviews are great tools for our employment-ready toolbox. We can't help but succeed.”

Students get experience, give back to community



▲ Alum Crest High School students Donnie Swank (center) and Jarrett Ervin (right) present a \$200 donation check to Pets without Parents Director Amy Klavinger (left).

Alum Crest High School students Donnie Swank and Jarrett Ervin had an opportunity to learn vocational skills while experiencing the fulfillment of doing community service and supporting a nonprofit organization. The \$200 donation check they presented to Pets Without Parents Director Amy Klavinger October 17 represents money they raised doing a student vocational project with COVA.

The students are part of COVA's CHOICE program, provided in partnership with Alum Crest High School, Ohio Rehabilitation Services Commission, and the Columbus Public Schools to perform vocational development for high school students with emotional disturbances. CHOICE provides career exploration activities and assistance in securing and retaining employment.

Donnie and Jarrett participated in the CAFA (Columbus Area Aid for Animals) pet treat project. The students bake dog and cat treats, using recipes they research on the internet, pack them in attractive, clever packaging and sell them at community events throughout the year. The money they raise is donated to community organizations that involve positive contributions to the welfare of animals. Since the program has originated, proceeds raised have totaled more than \$1,000 a year. Pilot Dogs, Inc. and Pets Without Parents have received funds thus far.

"It's a wonderful thing for the teenagers to be doing," says Pets Without Parents Director Amy Klavinger. "They are getting involved with a nonprofit organization, learning about homeless animals, and donating money to support us. We're very grateful for all the work they've done



▲ Abdul Kargbo (above left), along with Timothy Hunt (above right) prepare food at St. John's Community Kitchen as part of their CHOICE program vocational experience.

to raise this money."

COVA Career Developer Eddie Edwards guides the students through the CHOICE program and works with them at Alum Crest High School. "We try to relate everything we do to real work experience," explains Eddie. "The students are learning about running a small business, selling and marketing products, and they get to use the time they spend on the pet treat project to fulfill school community service requirements."

Pets Without Parents is a nonprofit, no-kill, all-breed pet shelter. They function as a pet adoption shelter, carefully placing pets into forever homes, and advocate reducing pet overpopulation.

COVA partners with Otterbein College

COVA has concluded a project with an Otterbein College MBA class to assess the expansion of COVA's Careers for the Future Training Program.

The Careers for the Future Training Program is COVA's unique 12-month recovery-based health, wellness and computer training program in an accommodative learning setting. The program also includes workplace internships and assistance with employment placement. It began in 2005 with a grant from the U.S. Department of Education, and continued in 2006 with funding from the Central Ohio Workforce Investment Corporation. Nine students completed the initial 2005-2006 course, and 12 currently are enrolled for the 2006-2007 class session.

The Otterbein course is to be taken in the last two terms of the MBA program. From September through November, the class studied COVA's Careers for the Future Training Program exclusively, researching, analyzing and determining effective marketing strategies to sustain and grow the program, maximize benefits for employers, and use COVA's core competencies. They interviewed COVA staff, board members, funding sources, program participants, families, and more, and explored various opportunities for structuring and funding the program.

"We accepted this project because we felt the work effort we were going to provide had worth to COVA, Otterbein students, potential Careers for the Future students, businesses, and the community at large," explains course instructor Tom Voight. "Also, COVA was willing to make the commitment needed to make the project a success. It was a great learning experience. The Otterbein students really embraced and gained a great appreciation for its value."

IN MEMORIAM Ken Phillips

Ken Phillips, one of COVA's earliest program participants, succumbed to a battle with lung cancer in early August, leaving a legacy of loyalty and optimism among all who knew him.

Ken, a former COVA employee on the Supported Employment team, embarked upon a 16-year career with Columbus Paper Box as a full-time employee following his initial introduction to the company as a COVA contract worker. Ken, an operator assistant, built a lasting relationship with his co-workers and employer that will long be remembered.

"He's a piece of work – he really was," recalls Columbus PaperBox President William B. Reiber. "He was the first one here in the morning; he was fun-loving, and a jokester with people. We lost a real good friend in Ken...we lost a real good man."

Mr. Reiber says Ken, 61, worked right up until the end, exactly the way he wanted. His love of work brings a favorite story to mind: "What I think of most when I think about him is his courage," he says. "Ken at one point, suffered a broken collar bone falling at his bus stop and kept it from his coworkers for more than a week, simply working through the pain," Mr. Reiber relates.

Ken also will be remembered as an outstanding example of an effective system working together to bring about recovery through treatment and meaningful employment. In addition to being a COVA program participant and employee and having a successful career at Columbus PaperBox, he

was a client of North Central Mental Health for many years and participated in Goodwill Columbus' housing program.

Carl Bogenschutz, a clinical mental health and rehab counselor at North Central Mental Health, knew Ken since 1975 and worked directly with him coinciding with his time at Columbus PaperBox. "Ken was very loyal. To the people that he trusted and knew, he was a very simple man, a man of routine. He stuck with those things that he liked, and those people," Carl says. He was so known at his local White Castle that the restaurant sent flowers to his funeral, Carl notes.

Ken maintained relationships so strongly that he became known as "Uncle Ken" to the children of a couple he originally met as a resident of a group home in the 1980s, Carl says. Even when affiliations with that home ended, the three kept in touch, seeing one another about once a month, Carl notes.

Betsy Nofziger, COVA Employment Team leader, says Ken was one of the first people she ever worked with. "He was always real consistent," Betsy says. "You could always count on Ken to have a smile. I was fresh out of graduate school and I learned a lot from Ken over the years. He could always find a way to look at the positive and just move on with it."

Ken Phillips' appetite for life and the experiences it offered made him special to the COVA team and everyone else he knew. He is sorely missed.



Ken Phillips

COVA introduces New Freedom Staff Innovation Award

COVA has created a new award for staff based on the principles of the national award COVA received in 2005 – the U.S. Department of Labor's New Freedom Initiative (NFI) Award. The NFI award is given to only seven individuals or



organizations nationwide who demonstrate exemplary and innovative efforts in furthering the employment of youth and adults with disabilities. COVA was selected for this award based on our comprehensive, innovative and forward thinking practices, and these are the principles by which the special new COVA Staff Innovation Award was developed.

"The COVA board established the award to recognize any individual staff member or staff group for creating and implementing a concept, practice or service in place for at least 90 days that improves COVA's ability to serve our clients, directly or indirectly," explains Joe Burke, chair of COVA's board of trustees. "This improvement could vary from the creation of an exemplary employment service to the development of a practice which increases COVA's efficiencies to serve clients. The idea is that this concept, practice or service helps position COVA as a national leader in serving persons with disabilities."

The award will be given annually, and is presented in October, during National Employer Disability Awareness Month.

2006 Award

The 2006 staff award was given to Transition Youth Services Career Developer Julie Amaya for her creation of the CHOICE program's Columbus Area Aid for Animals project (CAFA).

Participants in the CAFA project learn to run a small business making and selling dog and cat treats, while earning required community service. The program enables students who struggle with many behavioral issues to have a new way to participate in community service activities that do not always require leaving the school. Also, the students – many of whom have no previous job experience – obtain useful vocational skills that can be added to applications and aid them in finding future employment.

"This program is indicative of the kind of forward-thinking this award represents," explains Judy Braun, COVA president. "We hope to encourage and foster this kind of innovative initiative that has made us a national leader."

Speakers Bureau Presentations

COVA staff spoke at many local, state and national groups and conferences recently. Among the presentations were the following:

- **Benefits Consultation for People with Mental Illness;** at Ohio Advocates for Mental Health annual meeting.
- **The Effect of Motivation on Job Search & Work Outcomes and the Demand for Supported Employment Services;** at Ohio Department of Mental Health.
- **Transitioning Adults with Psychiatric Disabilities from Janitorial Enclaves to Competitive Employment; Integrating Vocational Services into a Mental Health Agency;** and **On the Borderline: Dealing with Personality Disorders and Rehabilitation;** at Ohio Rehabilitation Association Conference 2006.

- **Integrating Vocational Services with Mental Health Services; A Recovery-Based Computer Training Program for Persons with Mental Illness; Transitioning Adults with Psychiatric Disabilities from Janitorial Enclaves to Competitive Employment;** at Ohio Psychiatric Rehabilitation Association Conference.

- **Developing Effective Remain at Work and Return to Work Plans for Persons with Psychiatric Disabilities;** for staff at The Ohio State University.

To schedule a presentation, call (614) 291-0191 or email nmiller@cov.org.

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Tracy White

COVA extends appreciation to the following individuals and organizations who contributed cash or in-kind donations during the second half of 2006:

COVA's Funding Partners

ADAMH - Alcohol, Drug and Mental Health

Board of Franklin County

Central Ohio Workforce Investment Corp.

Columbus Public Schools

Delaware-Morrow County Mental Health &

Recovery Services Board

Franklin County Children Services

Ohio Department of Mental Health

Ohio Industries for the Handicapped, Inc.

Ohio Rehabilitation Services Commission

On My Own, Inc.

Social Security Administration

U.S. Department of Education

Contracts with private industry

COVA's Mission Statement

To assist and support the community in overcoming mental, emotional and other challenges to a productive life, focusing on employment, economic stability and life skills.

COVA

*Creating opportunities
that work*

**Center of
Vocational
Alternatives**

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Columbus, OH 43214

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