

great lakes collaborative for  
**autism**

pushing beyond limitations.



FALL 2018

## pushing beyond limitations.

Twelve years ago, I was introduced to autism—and to an amazing group of people. To be honest, at that time I knew very little about autism and lacked any personal connection. But I quickly learned that families touched by autism are amazingly strong forces who, even when struggling with unimaginable challenges, always seek to make things better for others.

I remember as a child feeling an innate desire to do something meaningful. I truly believed that I could help save the world. As I got older, life handed me some difficult challenges. My focus changed from hoping to save the world to merely surviving in it.

When I was thirty-one years old, my dad passed away from Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS), or as it is commonly known, “Lou Gehrig’s disease.” Dad was my lifelong hero and my biggest cheerleader. As devastating as his illness was, he taught me many lessons in the final few years of his life. He was grateful for every single day. And he believed that, as challenging as ALS was for him, there were others in the world whose circumstances were much more difficult than his.

Dad taught me to live life to the fullest, and he reminded me often of my childhood dream to change the world for the better. While grieving his loss, I began searching for work that would honor him and guide me back to my true passion. It was then—twelve years ago—that I found all of you.

Back then, the autism landscape was very different than today. Very few services existed, funding was incredibly challenging, and collaboration was nonexistent. Now, although funding remains challenging, I’m very proud of the autism community we have built together. Through collaboration and mutual respect, we put our families above all else and worked together to share ideas, create new and innovative programs, and address the many needs in Northwest Ohio.

I have seen families with tremendous strength and perseverance, who continually demonstrate that—given appropriate support and resources—absolutely anything is possible. Those families and individuals have inspired me every day and convinced me that the potential in all of us is truly limitless.

Bob and Suzy Tyner, who were catalysts for change in the autism community, were my goldstar standard for doing this work. Over the years, whenever challenges and frustrations would arise, I would reflect on what the Tyners experienced. That reflection made it easy to regroup and move forward. I have always been honored and humbled to lead the GLCA and continue the work Bob and Suzy inspired.

Autism has been a piece of my heart for so long that I struggle to remember a time when it wasn’t. So it is with very mixed emotions that I announce I am leaving GLCA to find my next challenge—and a new way I might make a difference in the world.

I’m excited to pass the torch to Renée Palacios, GLCA’s new Executive Director. I know that Renée’s leadership, passion, and experience will allow her to do amazing work on behalf of our families. She will, of course, encounter the unending challenge of raising funds; and I trust that you will offer Renée the same commitment and support you have always shown me.

Thank you all for allowing me to honor my dad. Thank you for letting me reconnect with my childhood dream to make this world a better place. And thank you for teaching me, inspiring me, and trusting me to work on behalf of your loved ones.

I will be forever grateful to you for taking me on this journey with you.

## Catina Harding

OUTGOING EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

## Meet Our New Executive Director: Renée Palacios



Great Lakes Collaborative for Autism’s board of directors has appointed Renée Palacios as the organization’s new executive director. Prior to joining GLCA, Renée worked for eight years as executive director at Family House, an emergency homeless shelter for area families.

Renée holds a Master’s degree in Political Science/Criminal Justice from University of Toledo, where she also earned a Bachelor’s degree in Psychology and Criminology.

Throughout her career, Renée has worked with organizations that provide community supports. She has served as a domestic violence victim advocate at Family and Child Abuse Prevention Center, as executive director at Monroe Street Neighborhood Center, and as development and communications director at Alzheimer’s Association of Northwestern Ohio.

“People are wondering why I made the jump from working in social justice to working in the autism field,” says Renée. “My youngest son, Devin, has autism. So working at GLCA is an opportunity to combine my professional and personal passions.”

“Renée is a proven nonprofit leader,” says GLCA board president, Meg Ressler. “But, as importantly, she is an accomplished advocate for those struggling against adversities such as domestic violence, child abuse, poverty, and homelessness. Her skills will serve Great Lakes Collaborative for Autism well.”

Renée grew up in Berkey, Ohio. She now lives in Blissfield, Michigan with her husband, Joshua, and their sons, Austin and Devin.

“When it comes to work, I’ve spent my life helping families—especially families with children—transition from crisis to self-sufficiency,” says Renée. “Through my own trials and successes, I understand the plight of those affected by autism. I believe children deserve a shot at having the best lives possible.”

## Venture Bound Update: “Applying” What We Learn

For the past two years, Venture Bound participants have been practicing their one-on-one job interviewing skills in mock job fairs at Bowling Green State University. The annual event allows students to apply the interview techniques learned in the classroom to realistic situations—and helps them prepare for the social expectations in approaching potential employers.

The job fairs began with Tom Daniels, Assistant Director, Graduate & Executive Programs in Business at BGSU. Tom reached out to area human resources professionals for help, and the response was overwhelming. Participating employers include SSOE Group, Jones-Hamilton Co., The Ability Center of Greater Toledo, BGSU, and Goodwill Industries of Northwest Ohio. BGSU hosts the job fairs at its Levis Commons campus.

“The opportunity for students to practice their interview skills with local employers is a priceless experience,” explains Venture Bound’s executive director, Kelly Elton. “Students come away with increased confidence in their abilities to compete for jobs.”

But Venture Bound students are not the only participants benefiting from the job fairs. For their part, employers gain a better understanding for conducting interviews that lead to enhanced diversity in their workforces.

“Community collaborations such as the job fairs are what help make Venture Bound a two-way success,” says Kelly.

If your organization is interested in being a participating employer in a future mock job fair, please contact Kelly at [kelly@venturebound.org](mailto:kelly@venturebound.org).

“Students come away with increased confidence in their abilities to compete for jobs.”

- Kelly Elton  
Venture Bound Executive Director



**VENTURE**|bound  
*employing potential*

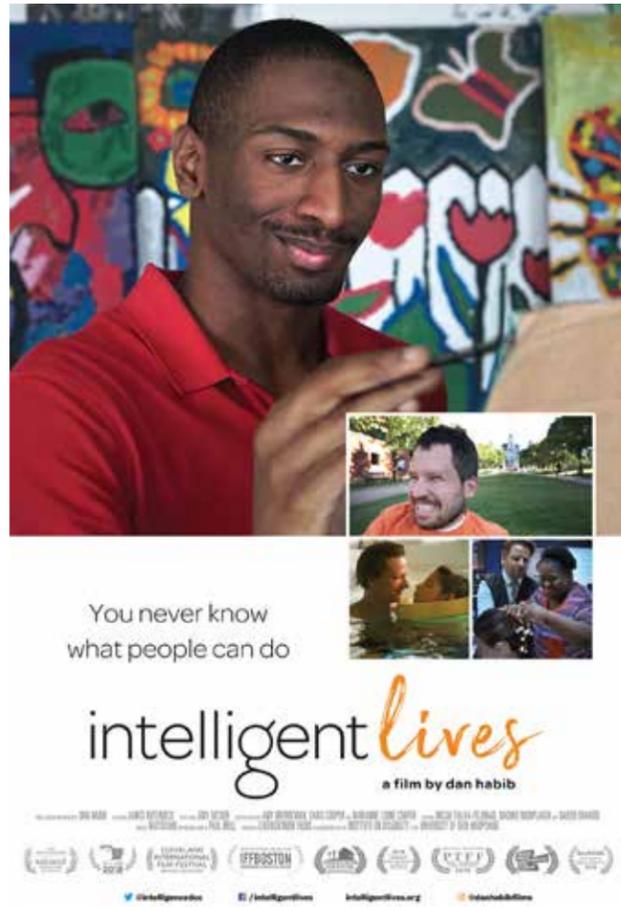
# Venture Bound hosts *Intelligent Lives* screening

October 24, 2018

Venture Bound, a program under the Great Lakes Collaborative for Autism, will be celebrating National Disability Employment Awareness Month in October with a complimentary screening of the film, *Intelligent Lives*. The screening will take place on October 24, 2018, at the Maumee Indoor Theatre. Doors will open at 6:00 pm, and the movie will begin at 7:00 pm.

*Intelligent Lives* stars three pioneering young American adults with intellectual disabilities—Micah, Naieer, and Naomie—who challenge public perceptions about intelligence as they navigate high school, college, and the workforce. Academy Award-winning actor and narrator Chris Cooper contextualizes the lives of the central characters through the emotional personal story of his son, Jesse, as the film unpacks the shameful and ongoing track record of intelligence testing in the United States.

Reserve your tickets here: [www.venturebound.org/film](http://www.venturebound.org/film)



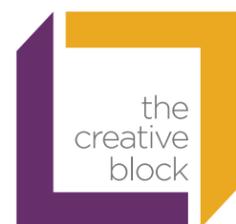
# A Message From Our President, Meg Ressler

Catina Harding has been a champion for our organization and our community—the ultimate family advocate—fighting each and every day to help those with autism reach beyond limits. Collaboration has been at the center of her leadership, knowing that if we work together, we can change the future. I have loved being on this journey with her, breaking down barriers, creating possibility, and learning so much along the way. As Catina moves to this next chapter, she leaves behind a legacy and a foundation that we are fortunate to build upon. I am beyond grateful for all that she has done for autism in our community, and I am blessed with a forever friend.

Thank you Catina, and welcome Renée Palacios. GLCA is blessed to have you both. Your leadership, your passion, and your commitment have—and will—make the world better for those touched by autism in our community. With Renée's leadership, I'm confident we will continue to make a difference and change the future.



SPONSORS:



# 9 & wine + The Party IS

## GLCA supporters hit the links for autism

GLCA's 9 and Wine FORE Autism scramble took place on August 10 at the beautiful Stone Oak Country Club. Some serious—and many not-so-serious—golfers took part in the unique 9-hole event.

Although the golf was challenging, players enjoyed wine tastings on the greens, appetizers, and prize opportunities on various holes. We're happy to report that all Stone Oak scoring records—as well as the windows of neighboring houses—remained unbroken when play ended.

After the scramble, players and guests kicked off The Party IS, a relaxed and truly fun party, under the stars at Stone Oak. All proceeds from both events benefit GLCA.

Mark your calendars for next year's 9 and Wine FORE Autism on August 9, 2019.





## New Board Member Spotlight: Mike Ariss

Mike Ariss knows firsthand the challenges and uncertainties that face parents raising children with autism. But he refuses to allow autism to define his relationship with his son, Jonah.

“I think of Jonah as my son, not my son with autism,” says Mike.

Mike joined the Great Lakes Collaborative for Autism board in 2018. He demonstrates a strong commitment to ensuring that all families have access to the critical programs they need, and to creating additional services and resources.

As Vice President of Business Development for ProMedica, Mike helps develop innovative solutions that lead to new business opportunities—such as the healthcare organization’s recently established Specialty Pharmacies. His work experience has included leadership roles at the Cleveland Clinic, the Clinic’s Taussig Cancer Center, and Henry Ford Hospital.

Born and raised in Toledo, Mike attended St. John’s High School before earning a Biology degree from University of Toledo. He has a Master of Public Health, Health Administration from the Northwest Ohio Consortium of Public Health, and he is currently pursuing his Doctorate in Leadership Development at Creighton University.

When not working or studying, Mike likes spending time with his family. He enjoys being active with nonprofit organizations such as GLCA, and helping to raise funds and awareness for autism. He also likes playing and watching sports.

“Mike’s perspective as a parent, and his experience with our partner programs, is invaluable to GLCA,” says Catina Harding. “He wants every family to benefit from the support that his family receives.”

## When it comes to pushing beyond limitations, your financial help can go an extra long way this year.

Great Lakes Collaborative for Autism is pleased to be a participating partner in #GivingTuesdayNWO, a matching grant program sponsored by Toledo Community Foundation and The Blade. Financial donations made to GLCA on **Tuesday, November 27, 2018**, will be eligible for up to \$500 in matching grant funds.

#GivingTuesday™ is an annual national day of giving that kicks off the holiday season while promoting charitable activities that support nonprofit organizations.

You can help GLCA on Giving Tuesday by donating on our website, or by delivering a check or cash to our office at 2040 W. Central Avenue in Toledo.

In addition to the matching grant, participation in #GivingTuesdayNWO gets GLCA entered into a random drawing in which one local nonprofit organization will receive an additional \$5,000.

Please join us on Tuesday, November 27 in supporting #GivingTuesdayNWO and pushing beyond limitations.

**#GIVINGTUESDAY<sup>™</sup>NWO**

Thank you.



upcoming events:

## GLCA Scholarship Programs & Breakfast

March 13, 2019

**9&wine** + **The Party IS**  
FORE autism

August 9, 2019

great lakes collaborative for

**autism**

2040 W. Central Avenue  
Toledo, OH 43606

LEARN MORE: [greatlakesautism.org](http://greatlakesautism.org)