



**Testimony on SFY 24/25 Operating Budget
House Finance Health and Human Services Sub-Committee**

Chairwoman Carruthers, Ranking Member Liston, and esteemed committee members,

I want to thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify before you today.

My name is Liz Owens and I am the CEO of The Alpha Group, and we are located in Delaware and provide services in 13 counties across the state. We are an organization that provides Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) services funded by Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities (OOD) for 450 Ohioans with intellectual and developmental disabilities. According to OOD's most recent Performance Score Card, we successfully place 107 individuals in various jobs such as laborers, janitors, and stock clerks with an average median wage of \$11.85 per hour. Our entire organization employs 120 staff. Approximately 24 of these employees provide VR services through OOD.

I am very supportive of the budget initiatives outlined by Governor DeWine and Director Miller for Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities (OOD). The changing labor landscape and accompanying shortage of workers, including job coaches, threatens our ability to achieve our mission of helping people with disabilities find great jobs in their communities. These budget initiatives, and the leadership of Director Miller, will support us to recruit and retain the staff needed to continue to provide vital employment services to Ohioans with Developmental Disabilities.

The Alpha Group refers to our Employment Division as Alpha Workforce Development. Our team provides supports to individuals who are interested in competitive community employment. We aid with all aspects of this process, including the early stages of interest in programs such as Project Search at our 3 host locations OhioHealth Grady Memorial and Marion General and Nationwide Children's Hospital or through Pre-Employment training with transition students within the schools. We also collaboratively with area businesses to create programs for adults to complete job trials through OOD. We assist with job searching, applications and interviewing. Once the job is secured, we provide on the job training and follow up to ensure success on the job. **Our goal is to foster independence and empower individuals to meet their goals through a combination of soft skill development and direct skill training. We believe the individual is in control as they travel on their path to employment; regardless of where they are on their journey.**

Attached is an example of the great work The Alpha Group's employment staff accomplished this year through services and funding from OOD.

In recent months, our organization has experienced the loss of our senior level and seasoned employees in this division. We tend to lose the degreed employees to similar organizations with different funding sources or to other fields entirely that can pay a much higher rate of pay. The hands on position of Job Coach is often imperative to the success of the individual on the job. We are in desperate need for these employees who are often earning at or less than the individuals they are working with and training on the job. Due to these struggles, we have a back log of individuals awaiting services to lead to their community employment opportunity.

We encourage the General Assembly to approve the Governor's budget proposal for OOD.

With your leadership, together we can ensure these services are available to the Ohioans that so greatly need them! **Thank you again, for the opportunity and privilege to bring my concerns before you and if I can ever be of any help in this process, please let me know.**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Liz Owens". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Liz" being more prominent than the last name "Owens".

Liz Owens
1000 Alpha Drive
Delaware, Oh 43015
740-368-5810 ext. 113

The Alpha Group Success Stories 2023

Greg Z

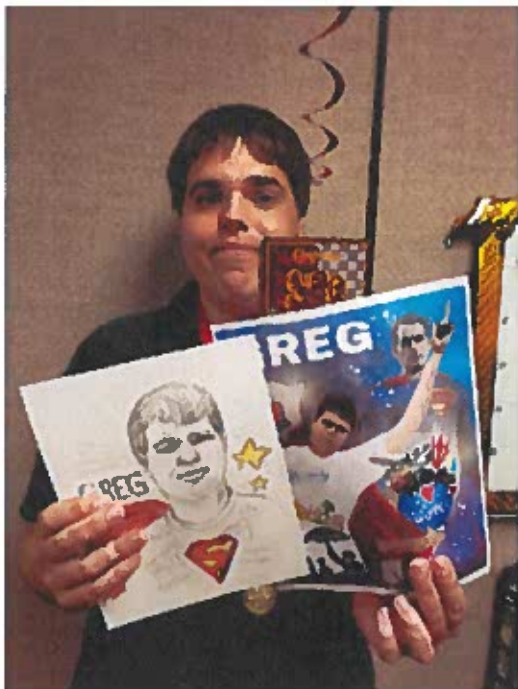
After High School, Greg attended the Alpha Workshop. During this time, he worked on piece work, cutting manhole covers and putting together different parts for a variety of contracts. When it came time for the Westerville office to open, Greg joined the Adult Day Program in Westerville to be more involved in the community and volunteer.

The relationship between Immortal Martial Arts and Alpha is the true definition of community integration. Greg began as a participant in strength training and kickboxing classes with our Adult Day Program in Westerville. Through his participation Greg's belief in himself grew as did his comfort level at the gym.

Prior to finding competitive employment in the community. Greg participated in our work readiness training program at Nationwide Hotel and Conference Center. He really enjoyed the Janitorial Internship that we created there, and it was evident that he is extremely detail oriented, a self-starter and worked at a competitive pace.

When the time came that Greg decided he was interested in a job, approaching Matt Brown at Immortal about the possibility of employment with the gym was the way to go. Greg has been successfully employed since March 2021. He provides cleaning and sanitizing of the gym and lobby area and takes great pride in his work. The community and support have played a large role in his ongoing success.

Since being hired, Greg has remained a dedicated and hard-working member of the Immortal Team and is a proud ambassador of the power of the community.



Delvin Hargrove

Delvin works in the Smith Dining Hall on the OWU Campus. He has been gainfully employed since August of 2021. Delvin has built good work relationships with his OWU/AVI Staff and he understands what it takes to be successful and work independently. Delvin keeps the Smith Dining Hall neat, clean, free from trash and ready for student dining. Delvin has overcome many challenges to become independent. Another way Delvin celebrates his independence is that he recently moved into his first apartment in the Delaware area.



Emalee Starkey

Emalee works for Ohio Health Grady in the EVS Department. Emalee was an Intern in the 2021-2022 Ohio Health Grady Project Search Program. Emalee was hired by Ohio Health Grady in February 2022. Emalee has been very successful transitioning from Intern to Independent Employee. Emalee monitors and cleans the 3 East Patient Rooms. Emalee loves her job and her paycheck. Emalee has plans to start working toward her driver's license and someday soon, move into her first apartment. Emalee lives with her family in the Sunbury area.



Heaven Floehr

Heaven was hired in October 2022 and is employed as a Full Time Nutrition Host for Ohio Health Grady Nutrition Department. Heaven completed the Ohio Health Grady Project Search Program in 2020. Heaven has held positions with Sarah Moore Retirement Home and Willowbrook Retirement Home. Heaven enjoys the independent and active work environment that Grady Nutrition Department provides. Heaven is currently working toward her driver's license, with an expected date of Mid-March 2023. Heaven currently lives with her family in the Delaware area but, with full time employment, has started to look for her first apartment.



