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VERPLANK IS SET TO ENTER HALL OF FAME

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THE OKLAHOMAN



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Just dream jobs?



David Bloose, a 27-year-old with autism, paints discarded computer parts July 21 at Autism Oklahoma in Oklahoma City. [PHOTO BY STEVE GOOCH, THE OKLAHOMAN]

With limited assistance from state, careers remain elusive for many adults with autism

BY LUCILLE SHERMAN
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Sometimes, when David Bloose is painting or working on computers, he wears what he envisions an installation technician or TV repairman would wear, a hard hat.

Bloose is 27 and lives four houses down from his parents in Yukon. He spends time teaching himself the mechanics of computers, taking them apart and turning their pieces into art by placing them on a canvas and painting them.

Some of his art issues warnings, such as one piece that's covered with sad faces and tells PC users to refrain from upgrading to Windows 10 because it will result in hours on hold with technical support.

He also includes humor in some of his artwork, such as a mousepad he painted to say "I should have gotten that warranty upgrade."

When Bloose was 3, doctors diagnosed him with autism. They told his mother, Dee, he was one in 20,000. Today, 24 years later, one in 68 children is diagnosed with autism.

Despite the growing number of cases, Oklahoma ranks low among states in providing services to children diagnosed with autism, according to Autism Speaks, a nonprofit autism advocacy organization. Even fewer services, opportunities and support exist once they turn 18, autism advocates say. Nationwide, an estimated 50,000 people with autism transition into adulthood each year.

As a result, people like Bloose have a difficult time finding jobs and pursuing careers.

While Oklahoma does provide some state financial aid to people with autism, advocates say it can take too long to receive, sometimes as long as 12 years, a state official confirmed. Even then, the state doesn't always provide aid if the person's IQ exceeds 70. Forty-four percent of children with

SEE AUTISM, PAGE 2A

Love County sheriff is hiding case information, relative says

OSBI, MISSING COUPLE'S FAMILIES OFFER REWARDS

BY ANDREW KNITTLE
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ARDMORE — The embattled Love County sheriff is impeding the investigation into the disappearance of a teenager and her boyfriend three years ago, the young woman's cousin said Friday.

The last person to see Molly Miller, 17, and Colt Haynes, 21, before they went missing was Sheriff Joe Russell's nephew, James Conn Nipp, 25. The couple disappeared after the car they were in was chased by law enforcement near the southern Oklahoma town of Wilson.

Paula Fielder, Miller's cousin, said she thinks the sheriff, who was arrested recently on unrelated charges, is hiding information. The sheriff's office was one of the agencies involved in the investigation before it was taken over a year ago by the Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation.

"I have recently spoken with him, and he knows full well ... what happened to Molly and Colt. From his past actions, nothing tells me that he would not know," Fielder said during a news conference at which the OSBI announced it was offering a \$10,000 reward for information about the missing two. Families of the couple are offering an additional \$35,000.

Russell, 62, was arrested July 19, accused of allowing his son to sell drugs out of the sheriff's home. He also was accused of harboring a fugitive from justice, allowing his son's former girlfriend

SEE MISSING, PAGE 12A

Whetsel says jailers are not to blame for suspect's death

BY NOLAN CLAY
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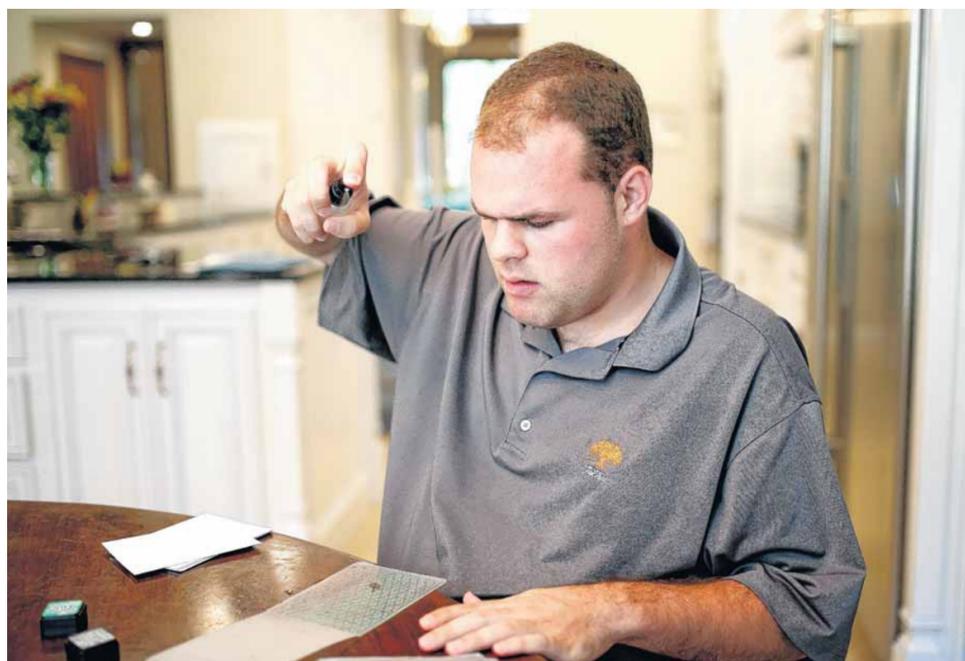
At an unusual news conference Friday, Oklahoma County Sheriff John Whetsel said jailers are not to blame for the death last month of a trespassing suspect.

Lorez R. Chambers, 43, died at a hospital June 19, 10 days after Oklahoma City police arrested him in the backyard of a residence. His family's attorney said the medical examiner's office has determined he died of blunt force trauma to the head.

Whetsel said: "Our employees are husbands and wives, sons and daughters, single parents, college students, retirees and just good employees who are dedicated to ... and have pride in the difficult jobs they do for below average pay every day.

"They should not be subjected to false allegations."

SEE JAIL, PAGE 12A



Michael Lemcke makes cards July 13 inside his Edmond home. Adults with autism face many challenges. [PHOTO BY BRYAN TERRY, THE OKLAHOMAN]

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TODAY'S PRAYER

Dearest Lord, You give power and strength to Your people; may we use those gifts wisely. Amen.

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WEATHER

A.M. STORMS

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Michael Lemcke smiles July 13 at his Edmond home while packing his lunch for the next day. Oklahoma adults with autism face challenges. [PHOTO BY BRYAN TERRY, THE OKLAHOMAN]



Go Code
TBLC

Enter the code at oklahoman.com to watch a video about Oklahoma adults with autism and the challenges they face

Autism: Services state provides aren't enough, advocates say

FROM PAGE 1A

autism have an IQ above 85, which is considered average intellectual ability, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The aid the state does provide isn't enough, advocates say.

Between doctor's visits, therapists, case managers, assistants and medication, it can cost families up to \$60,000 per year to have a son or daughter with autism, according to Autism Speaks.

"The state Legislature has never appropriately funded the necessary state match to meet the federal dollars allocated for this," said Erin Taylor, of the Oklahoma Developmental Disabilities Council, which coordinates state and private efforts involving those with intellectual and developmental disabilities. "In other words, this is a shortcoming of state government, not federal shortfalls."

Employment is key

At 27 years old, Kayla Fely receives Supplemental Security Income and state aid that pays for adult day care, but she still lives at home and her mother, Wanda, provides out-of-pocket funding to cover expenses that the state doesn't. Though her mother, who works for the University of Oklahoma's Center for Learning and Leadership, has given up on the idea of retirement, she hopes to find a program that will help Kayla become more engaged in the community someday.

"Employment is the key for everyone on the spectrum," Wanda said.

The spectrum is wide ranging, from mild to severe profound, and can impact communication skills, behavior and social interactions. Some adults with autism, such as Colorado State University professor and author Temple Grandin, speak publicly about their disorder while others lead misunderstood lives behind bars.

Some with autism prove to have exceptional talents in certain areas or interests.

Like Blöse, who graduated from Yukon High School in 2008. His senior year, an educational assessment concluded that he tested at a third-grade math level and a fourth-grade reading level. Six years ago, he asked for a 300-page computer book for Christmas. He read it all the way through. His mother said doctors couldn't understand it.

After discovering Blöse's love for computers, his mother decided to hire a computer tutor to work

with Blöse once a week. She recalled the time the tutor brought Blöse an old, broken computer and asked him to reformat and reinstall its software. When the tutor returned one week later, Blöse had done everything just as a certified technician would have.

Though Blöse is well versed on computers, it can take him a few minutes to verbalize what he wants to say, but the more he talks, the easier it becomes.

He elaborated on the work he did for his computer tutor.

"I recently did backing up a full disk image, which can backup all your data, documents, partitions, the operating system, everything into one compressed file," he said. "So that when restored, all the disk partitions, master boot record, and all your documents and videos are there from when it was created without having to reformat. It is really a lifesaver."

Experts say that the more adults with disabilities can communicate, the higher their chances are of succeeding.

"If they're able to carry a conversation, they're more likely to be able to be in the workforce," said Nancy Goosen, director of special education for Edmond Public Schools.

A study by Drexel University showed only 28.5 percent of students with an intellectual or developmental disability attend any post-secondary institution within six years of graduating high school. Another Drexel study estimated that between 50 and 75 percent of adults with autism don't participate in any type of paid employment.

The Oklahoma Department of Rehabilitation Services exists to help adults with autism transition into employment or post-secondary education by partnering with employers in Oklahoma, providing job coaches and assisting with job searching. Some parents argue, however, their work isn't enough.

As a nontraditional student, Blöse had limited options after graduation. In high school, he opted out of special education courses, and thus, he was able to learn in larger classrooms while teachers modified his work. Generally, university professors won't do the same. He could've gone to tech school, but there are limited class options for students with disabilities. At the time Blöse was exploring post-graduation options, the CareerTech center near his home only offered one class for students with disabilities:

janitorial maintenance. There are employment opportunities for him, but not in the career and technology industry he wants to be in.

States assist

Nationwide, companies like Microsoft, Hewlett-Packard and others hire adults with autism. Though they can be difficult to interact with at first, adults with autism are reported as being able to retain information, focus on long, repetitive tasks, especially those that are interesting to them, and having low turnover rates. Yet, many in Oklahoma still are unemployed.

In California, the state offers tax incentives to businesses that hire individuals with disabilities. Oregon works with each individual with autism to develop a personalized plan for their health and safety needs, interests, choices and goals. New Mexico's Department of Human Services has been recognized for their works to support employment for the disabled.

One service that Oklahoma does provide is the enforcement of the federal law that mandates schools provide transition services to students no later than their ninth-grade year. This typically entails assisting students in



Here are some of the discarded computer parts that David Blöse, a 27-year-old with autism, has painted at Autism Oklahoma in Oklahoma City. [PHOTO BY STEVE GOOCH, THE OKLAHOMAN]

attaining post-secondary education, employment and independent or group living. But these types of services aren't in every school district, and they don't reach everyone who needs help.

Patty Lane, a transition coordinator for Edmond Public Schools, works with high school students and their families to find education and living opportunities for students with disabilities after they graduate. Lane does what she can to prepare students and their families for life after graduation, but often, it isn't enough. There

are supported employment programs and job coaches, but not enough for the increasing number of adults with autism that need jobs.

"There's an awful lot that our parents need right now, and it's a little scary," Lane said. "We have families that are having to quit their jobs to stay home with their children."

For now, Blöse is involved in Bees Knees, an art and social club for adults with autism. And, he attends Swanky Camp, a summer art camp with Autism Oklahoma. Art remains a passion.

"He'll see someone come in, go over to them, take their arm and lead them around and tell them about the different pieces," his mother said. "Then, he'll take them to his and tell them the story about it."

But art is just a hobby for Blöse. What he really wants is a job. He's spoken about his dream careers, from working at DirecTV to being an installation technician, and he and his mother hope he can someday find work doing something he loves.

"I want to do something important," Blöse said.

THE OKLAHOMAN

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