

## AGENCY ACCOLADES - PONY BIRD, INC.



With fourteen facilities throughout Jefferson County, **Pony Bird** offers a wealth of opportunities to **enrich the lives of individuals with disabilities** at every age and stage of life. The agency provides dozens of services within **four core programs** – Community Living, Community Support Services, Employment Services and Family Support/Leisure. Prior to its founding in 1977, no organization existed to support **independence and opportunity for non-ambulatory, medically fragile individuals** in Jefferson County. The agency has continued to adapt and grow, most recently merging with NextStep for Life.

*"Together, our agencies offer 60 plus years of combined experience providing exceptional support and services for those with intellectual, physical, developmental and other disabilities. After extensive due diligence to explore the benefits of a merger, it was clear we could be stronger together, improve efficiencies, eliminate duplication of services and offer more to Jefferson County residents with disabilities. The Jefferson Foundation was instrumental in this, allowing us to provide a true continuum of care for individuals and more support for their families."*

*- Sara Sucharski, Pony Bird CEO*



Sucharski said funds from the Foundation helped procure crucial **consultant support for legal, IT and strategic planning** to ensure the merger's success. Jefferson Foundation grants have also supported Pony Bird's Community Living program, medical services, multiple capital projects and technology. In particular, **medical services** have been a significant focus of Foundation grants due to the

gap in funding from state and federal sources. These services include traditional medical services, nursing oversight, and coordination of medical care/transportation to specialists and doctors for Community Living clients. **Since 2014, the Foundation has contributed \$2,829,872**, empowering the agency to **serve more than 1,100 individuals annually** – many of whom benefit from multiple programs.

"The Jefferson Foundation allows us to provide the **quality facilities and programs we are known for at Pony Bird**," Sucharski said. "The state funding we receive only covers the basic level of care and doesn't provide investment in upgrading our facilities, the full range of medical services needed, the latest technology to assist our clients or **truly individualized, dignified care**. The **Foundation has touched just about every area of our programming**. I can drive from north to south throughout all of Jefferson County and see projects that the Foundation has funded."

One such project is the agency's **newest Community Living home in De Soto**. Comprised of two six-bed homes, twelve individuals moved here in 2016 to better meet their needs. These homes provide more space for therapeutic support and medical services. "People tend to have this concept of a sterile room, where the individual is sitting or lying in their bed all day," Sucharski said. "That is the exact opposite of what Pony Bird provides. This isn't just four walls that people are living in – it's a **very warm, home-like setting**. We're actively supporting our clients to be as independent, safe and healthy as possible. **Without the Jefferson Foundation, this wouldn't be feasible.**"



Currently, **four residential communities with nine separate homes** throughout Jefferson County **serve 70 people**. These consist of apartment complexes, traditional communities and group homes. Support provided to each individual varies drastically depending on their needs – ranging from total care to minor check-in support. Residents can stay with Pony Bird for as long as they choose, as the agency believes in a **“forever home” model** and champions choice.

Pony Bird’s **Community Support Services** also include a variety of day programs, ranging from **life and social skills classes, therapeutic treatments and volunteer outings**. Program examples include cooking classes, budgeting classes and daily volunteer opportunities with 20 partner organizations throughout Jefferson County. Clients volunteer in groups of 4-8 and participate in garden maintenance, assist local animal shelters and even **participate in two internal businesses** delivering fresh towels to Pony Bird facilities and selling treats to staff.

Beyond these offerings, Pony Bird assists clients with multiple needs through its **Employment Services**. Support includes resume and cover letter assistance, job readiness training, job discovery, job coaching and high school transition programs. **More than 30 companies throughout Jefferson County employ Pony Bird clients**, ranging from national chains to local establishments like Mercy Jefferson, Pasta House, Schnucks and Jefferson College. “Our goal is to give individuals pride in what they’re doing and to show that **people with disabilities are not only capable but can thrive and give just as much, if not more than, typically abled employees**,” Sucharski said.

**Leisure activities** for Pony Bird clients include opportunities for more than 300 individuals with disabilities to develop athletic skills through **competitive sports** such as pickleball, swimming, track & field, softball and more. Leisure services also empower clients to **develop social skills and build friendships** through supper clubs, movie nights, and even weekend trips to a variety of locations throughout the U.S.

The agency actively serves clients’ family members and caregivers, too, through its **Family Support programs**. Offerings include an Early Entry program to welcome and support new families, funding for home respite, a **KidStart Disabilities Awareness Training Program** for childcare centers and schools, and more than 300 therapeutic items and toys in a **free lending library** for parents and therapists.

**“The Jefferson Foundation has made a tremendous impact** on our organization, not just for those we serve but also for their families and caregivers,” Sucharski said. “The Foundation has ensured **our clients and their families are valued and equipped for success**. They have strengthened not just Pony Bird but our entire community through their generosity. The **Foundation is truly a pillar of the community** that lifts up agencies like Pony Bird and those we serve to achieve success.”



## CLIENT TESTIMONIALS

*“Because of Pony Bird, my daughter is finding and developing a great sense of purpose!” - Jefferson County Resident*

*“It’s my favorite day of the week when my Pony Bird friends bring me my meals. I treasure this day because I get to see all the wonderful Pony Bird people who do so much for me.” - Jefferson County Resident*

*“It was a joy to visit Pony Bird and meet a few very special individuals. The residents here have high needs but have exceptional care. I recommend this agency to any family for their loved ones. Your mind will be at ease knowing that they are being cared for, not just housed. I was lucky enough to meet and speak with two residents who exuded contentment. The staff at Pony Bird should be commended. Money is not why they are there.” - Pony Bird volunteer*