

Harvesting Capabilities - Sharing Hope

Jeff Morehead and Mike Hines were drawn together by their physical disabilities -- both men faced daily challenges. As they talked about their difficult and sometimes discouraging days, they agreed that other people in their community could benefit from a support group to share experiences, and provide mutual help and encouragement.

So, in 2007, Jeff and Mike founded "HandiCapable" with the mission of focusing on *abilities*: the *ability* to work, the *ability* to learn new skills to learn from one other. The HandiCapable support group started with ten attendees and soon doubled in size. At their monthly meetings speakers recounted their personal experiences with a disability. Others provided information about different types of disabilities and available services.

Fund raising projects followed -- an annual chili cook-off, bake sales, and hosted community dinners. They attended a grant writing class and joined the mayor's committee to help improve handicap accessibility in the City of Peru.

The effort was gaining momentum; their mission was to change attitudes from handicapped to handi-*capable*. Some members acquired handicapped vans, essential in leading a full life outside of their homes. Others started writing books about their experiences. Co-founder Jeff Moorhead said, "We encouraged others to gain strength, confidence, independence, and strive to make disabilities into possibilities."

In 2008, HandiCapable received a \$1,500 grant for computer equipment from the Miami County Community Foundation. Using the equipment they started a database project that employed some of their members. The group continues to benefit from ongoing grants from the Dukes Health Care Foundation of Miami County Inc.

The organization was successfully raising awareness and doing good work in the community, but it was time for a new name. The word "handicapped" had become outmoded, making 'HandiCapable' feel out of touch with the times and hindering their efforts to secure grants. A



Carol Biddle and Jeff Morehead



2008 brainstorming session drew on Miami County's strong farming heritage and rebranded the organization *Harvesting Capabilities*. St. John's Lutheran Church on Main Street in Peru donated office space to Harvesting Capabilities. "HC" based their operations there until moving into their new facility in 2015.

Peru needed a place for the public to donate clean, gently used household goods and clothing. In response HC opened their thrift shop on October 5th, 2015. The HC thrift shop generates needed income while providing a place for members to learn new skills.

"I didn't have a background in retail," said Carol Biddle, "We've learned to research the value of donated items, and know what things to accept, and what to turn away." Carol also recognizes the importance of being sensitive of the feelings of those who bring their treasures to the store. "Most items are used. Only a few times we've had to turn things away," she said.

The new HC facility also offers adaptive medical equipment, both new and lightly used. Equipment is offered at a reasonable price, and is available to anyone with a short term or long term need.

HC has one paid staff person through Experience Works and nearly thirty volunteers handling transactions, keeping track of aluminum wheelchair ramps granted through the Dukes Healthcare Foundation, and providing services to seniors and the disabled. "Dorothy Dennis is 82 and is here every day," said Biddle "I call her the Mother Theresa of Indiana".

Carol Biddle, President of HC, is a constant source of inspiration. Along with Vice President Cheryl Lee, Secretary Linda Gustin, and Jeff Moorhead, they have turned a small group into a charitable organization that not only supports those with a disability, but provides medical equipment, aluminum ramps, and elder support for the entire county. Mike had the vision, Carol pushed it along, and Linda was the cheerleader.

The Miami County Community Foundation (MCCF) awarded HC its largest grant in 2015: a \$10,000 Impact Grant for startup expenses at the new facility, and a \$5,000 Sustainability Award, a permanent endowment fund, providing annual monetary distributions for maintenance and support. The MCCF is pleased to support Harvesting Capabilities in pursuit of their mission to provide both a voice and a range of opportunities and services to community members with a disability.

"To learn more about Harvesting Capabilities, or to see how you can help, visit the store at 231 N. Grant Street in Peru and visit: <http://www.harvestingcapabilities.com>