

achieva 

At the heart of
the disability
community
since 1951

70 YEARS
of Advocacy & Innovation
1951-2021

Summer Newsletter **2021**





70 YEARS

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A Statement By
RICHARD L. THORNBURGH

PARC
Action Plan
FOR COMM



Dear Friends,

Summer. It's a time of freedom, exploration, and growth. This year, it's especially suitable that summer coincides with the lifting of stringent COVID-19 mitigations. Many of us have felt restricted by pandemic restraints for far too long. Most of us long to return to normal, and this summer, it feels like we're just about there.

At Achieva, we support a diverse group of people who have been eager to welcome the next season of their lives. We're incredibly pleased to announce the adoption of an official person-centered planning tool that will assist each person in shaping an individualized vision for their future. Effective July 1, the rollout of the LifeCourse

framework sets the groundwork for all people to live, work, play, and follow their own life aspirations.

Within the pages of this newsletter, we highlight some uplifting stories about people who have made important person-centered choices in their lives, such as Jeana. Through the LifeCourse framework tools, Jeana envisioned and met several steps toward her vision for a good life. Similarly, Jason found his ideal job at the Melting Pot, reaching a long-awaited goal.

Also, we reflect on Achieva's rich 70-year history as a disability organization founded by and for people with disabilities and their families. We anticipate the

innovations and successes that lie ahead, as Achieva employees, trustees, and community partners collaborate to help create a community in which "all people with disabilities lead lives of personal significance."

Sincerely,



Stephen H. Suroviec
President & CEO





We're Diving Into LifeCourse

Nothing beats the anticipation of summer vacation! Beach lovers look forward to the feel of their feet in the sand, the crashing sounds of waves as they ebb and flow, and the mood-enhancing effects of radiant sunlight.

At Achieva, we “tested the waters” regarding person-centered planning. Taking person-centered actions and implementing authentic person-centered plans are underway in line with the first initiative of our strategic vision: “to create and nurture a culture throughout Achieva that promotes person-centered thinking, planning, and provision of support.” We anxiously awaited the official summer 2021 launch of the LifeCourse framework and tools, ready to dive in!

What is Charting the LifeCourse?

Charting the LifeCourse (CtLC) was created to help individuals and families of all abilities and all ages develop a vision for a good life. The framework allows users to think about what they need to know and do, identify how to find or develop supports, and discover what it takes to live the lives they want to live. The framework and tools will help Achieva assist the people we support to organize their ideas, vision, and goals while teaching them to problem-solve, navigate, and advocate for support.



charting the LIFE COURSE

Achieva has created a cross-program team of LifeCourse ambassadors that assesses each person who chooses Achieva. Guiding principles of Achieva's person-centered philosophy will be:

- Inclusive, creating a sense of belonging and helping each person achieve a life of personal significance.
- Having high expectations for each person and respecting each person's decisions about his/her own life.
- Focusing on individualized solutions rather than group solutions such as segregated programs.
- Of a holistic manner across all facets of life.

Even more exciting than the planning involved in one's long-awaited summer vacation is the joy of pursuing a life of personal significance!

The LifeCourse framework sets the groundwork for all people to live, love, work, play, and follow their life aspirations. That's a journey worth anticipating.

The Life Domains



Daily Life & Employment

What a person does as part of everyday life – school, employment, volunteering, communication, routines, life skills.



Community Living

Where and how someone lives – housing and living options, community access, transportation, home adaptations and modifications.



Healthy Living

Managing and accessing health care and staying well – medical, mental health, behavioral health, developmental, exercise and nutrition.



Safety & Security

Staying safe and secure – emergencies, well-being, supported decision making, legal rights and issues.



Social & Spirituality

Building friendships and relationships, leisure activities, personal networks, and faith community.



Advocacy & Engagement

Building valued roles, making choices, setting goals, assuming responsibility and driving how one's own life is lived.

Trajectory Across Life Stages

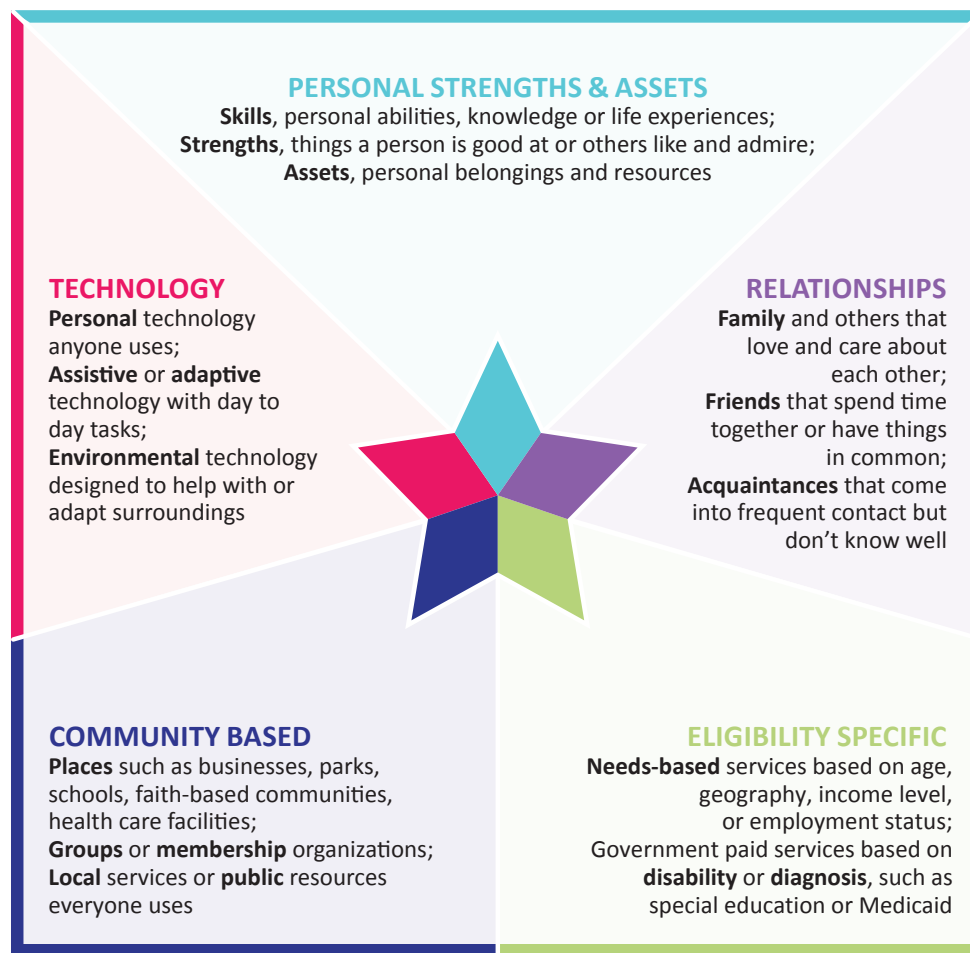


Life is a journey where each stage of life impacts the other and different life experiences bring us closer or further away from our “good life.” In the LifeCourse framework, we use the term “life trajectory”

to describe the path your journey takes. It helps a person to think about what has helped or hindered them in the past and what might work or may get in their way moving forward.

Everyone accesses a variety of supports to meet their day-to-day needs, support the achievement of long-term or short-term goals, solve problems, or enhance their quality of life.

The Integrated Support Star principle and tool can be used by anyone (individuals, families, or professionals) to guide their thinking about supports. It can be used for mapping current services and supports, problem-solving for a specific need, or planning the next steps. The star can help explore current needs, identify gaps, or plan how to access supports for the future.



LifeCourse Tools Helped Jeana Verbalize Her Wants & Needs

Research astonishingly suggests the average adult makes 35,000 decisions a day. It's likely that Jeana Slutter made significantly less before utilizing LifeCourse tools. Hesitant to make her own choices, she tended to select her responses to please others. Fortunately, implementing LifeCourse tools helped Jeana envision her "good life" and allowed Achieva employees to assist her in attaining that vision.



Recently, Jeana made some big choices. “Jeana lived in a home with older people nearing the end of their lives. She’s young and vibrant. She wanted to live in an environment that was happy. She wanted a quiet environment. She wanted independence,” said Teria Auman, Community Living Specialist at Achieva. The core set of LifeCourse framework tools confirmed that.

After a walk-through of three homes, Jeana selected a place that made the most sense to her in a familiar community. Her new home is conveniently located just blocks from her workplace at a fast-food restaurant. Her new landlord even granted Jeana’s request to allow her to bring her therapy dog, Jake.

Jeana and Teria are having a great time furnishing the apartment! They made a wish list, then began shopping with Jeana’s hard-earned cash. Jeana picked a bed big enough for her and her furry friend. She tried to choose the first couch she saw; instead, Teria encouraged her to wait for “the right one.” Teria said the smile on Jeana’s face when she found her choice was priceless; Jeana exclaimed, “This is it!”

Jeana now has a say about everything in her new place. She selected her supervisor and her direct support professional (DSP). She also determined the location of the staff room in the basement. Keeping that room out of sight but within reach serves as a way to transition to the alone time Jeana is capable of but never had before.



“This is it!”

We have the feeling that Jeana has more independent decisions to make as she continues to live her life of personal significance. Stay tuned!



Autism Connection Welcomed to the Achieva Family

Autism Connection of PA affiliated with Achieva this past January. Autism Connection, celebrating its 25th year, combined with Achieva's rich 70-year history, offers a great depth of service to those with autism and other disabilities. These two organizations have collaborated on numerous projects over the past several years, so affiliating was a natural next step.

When you have questions about autism, contact help@autismofpa.org or give a call to 412.718.4116 and just ask!

Autism Connection of PA's mission is to be a lifeline and hub for families and adults, providing support, information, and advocacy. This is accomplished in the following ways:

Support:

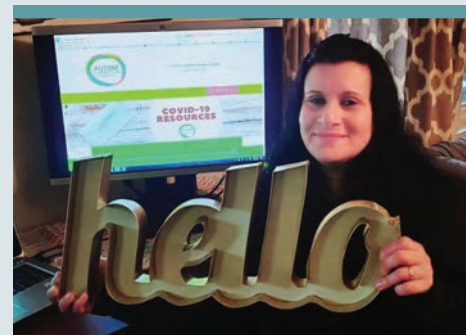
Autism Connection sponsors support groups across the state of Pennsylvania, including those for parents, grandparents, self-advocates, teens, adult self-help groups, and more. People who need help may ask questions via phone, email, and social media every day, finding comprehensive support before, during, and after a diagnosis. Through active listening, many problems are identified, and solutions worked through, keeping the person's needs, culture, and goals as driving forces for suggestions. No problem is too big or too small for them to handle.

Information:

Sign up at bit.ly/AutismConnectionNews to receive weekly autism news, helpful tips, resources, or new research findings. You will also learn about workshops presented on a wide array of topics. This past year Autism Connection transitioned to an online platform, providing the most access possible to those needing solutions to challenges life presents to autistic people. "Introduction to Autism" is taught at least quarterly, helping anyone new to the diagnosis, or new to learning about it, do their best to understand and support people. Speakers consist of community partner organizations on issues including medical, legal, employment, health, financial, and education topics.

Advocacy:

Autism Connection advocates on behalf of families and people with autism in individual cases and group settings. Because there is a variety of autistic representation at the board level, prioritization of needs are driven by the very people affected by issues that require attention. Advocacy ranges from showing people how to ask for what they need as self-advocates, helping people communicate with authority figures, finding lawyers, or writing letters or reports for medical needs or justice system issues.



70 YEARS

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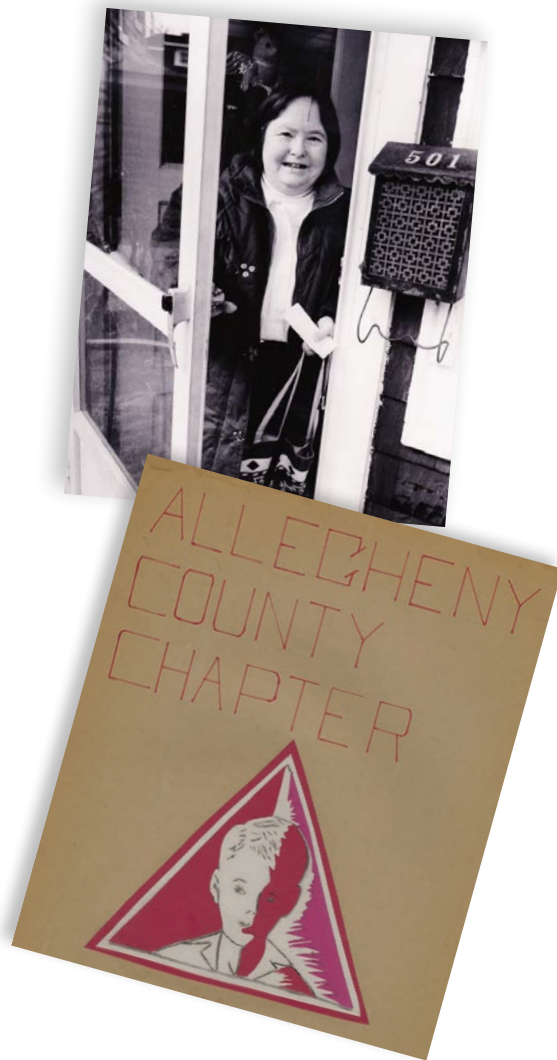
1951-2021

To preserve historical context, some language within this message is deemed inappropriate by today's terms, which helps illustrate the progression of the disability rights movement.

The Beginning of a Movement (1950s/60s)

With the lack of support in the community and lack of accessibility in schools, a group of parents from Allegheny County and a professor from the University of Pittsburgh created "Friends of the Mentally Retarded." With no staff and no funding, they reached out to other families and began to develop their own schools that met in churches and

synagogues so children who were turned away by their local school district had day programs to attend. Soon after, Friends changes its name to the "Allegheny County Chapter of the Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children" (ACC-PARC). Local family members visited state institutions and exposed horrific living conditions.



Civil Rights are Human Rights (1970s)

While disability activists mobilized to remove barriers, both physical and social, parents fought so all children with disabilities would have a right to public education. Locally, ACC-PARC contributed to securing the PARC Consent Decree of 1972, which guaranteed for the first time anywhere in the United States the right to a “free and appropriate public education” for children with intellectual disabilities. In addition, notice and due process hearings must occur in order to change the “educational assignment” of a child with an intellectual disability. ACC-PARC also worked with the state legislature to

eliminate parental liability fees for adult services and to halt involuntary sterilization. Nationally, activists were working to get the Rehabilitation Act and The Education for All Handicapped Children Act (later renamed to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) passed.

Optimism is Renewed (1980s/90s)

In the 1980s, ACC-PARC changed names to “ARC Allegheny” and began innovative programs such as Project ESPRIT, which supported parents with intellectual disabilities raising at-risk children, serving as a national model. Parc-Way Industries launched its Cleaning and Janitorial Services,

a service Achieva continues to this day. Nationally, tireless efforts were made to draft legislation for a comprehensive disability civil rights law. Advocates from ARC Allegheny and other organizations from around the country were instrumental in encouraging the United States Congress to pass and President George H. W. Bush to sign The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) into law.

With an optimistic view of the inclusion of people with disabilities into society following the passage of the ADA, ARC Allegheny broadened its mission to embrace community inclusion for all people with significant disabilities. To further support people with disabilities and their families, a new program, The Family Trust, was created.





A New Name for a New Millennium (2000s)

The new millennium brought a new name for ARC Allegheny. With the expansion of services and supports for people with disabilities beyond Allegheny County by affiliating with The Arc of Beaver and Community Endeavors, the decision was made to reorganize as ACHIEVA. With the new name came a new organizational structure, where 18 names and programs were consolidated as four organizations under ACHIEVA: ACHIEVA Support, ACHIEVA

Family Trust, The Arc of Greater Pittsburgh, and ACHIEVA Resource.



Achieva Looks to the Future

A decade later, Achieva expanded and affiliated with The Arc of Westmoreland and, earlier this year, Autism Connection of PA. Achieva Early Intervention began providing services in Westmoreland and Washington County, Achieva Family Trust provides Special Needs Trusts across the

state and has 3 regional trust liaisons, and The Arc of Greater Pittsburgh continues to advocate for families and people with disabilities, ensuring equal access to healthcare through a pandemic and advocating for community-based supports and the closure of state institutions. A brand refresh removes the all-capitalization from Achieva to provide a more friendly and inviting brand. Throughout its 70 years, Achieva has been committed to the support and inclusion of people with disabilities. We can't wait to see what the future holds!



For less than \$1 per day, YOU can make an impact!

In honor of Achieva's 70th Anniversary, you are invited to join Achieva's Monthly Giving Club! Your commitment today indicates your desire to be a part of a dedicated group of individuals who want to make an impact on the lives of people with disabilities and their families. The goal for Achieva's 70th year celebration is to welcome 70 generous donors into our monthly giving club.

Together, we can help people lead lives of personal significance. Register now and be a "star" in the lives of people with disabilities!

Why Should I Give Monthly?

Year-Round Impact

When you give monthly, you are making an impact in the lives of people with disabilities every day.

Consistent

Monthly giving provides a consistent and reliable source of funding to help those in need.

Convenient

Donations are automatically withdrawn from your bank account.

What Impact Will My Donation Make?

\$100 Help a person celebrate her abilities!

\$70 Help a person find a home of his own!

\$50 Help an advocate fight for change!

\$25 Help a child prepare for preschool!

\$10 Help a young adult succeed at work!

“Discovery” Leads To Employment Success

70 might be Achieva’s lucky number. As our 70th Anniversary is celebrated, Employment Supports is marking a record year with over 70 job placements! One of those successful placements occurred for Jason Jones. Jason has been with Achieva for years in different capacities, including a job with Cleaning & Janitorial. He’s fond of cleaning and organizing and has a love of music and animals.

Jason completed a profile via the Discovery Program, created a visual resume, and participated in customized job development; his goal

was to work in a restaurant or with animals. He was patient through the whole process until finally an ideal job at the Melting Pot was brought to his attention. The Melting Pot is a one-of-a-kind dining experience where guests are treated to dinner, fondue style.

Jason’s positive attitude, boundless energy, and determination to meet his goals secured him the job. During busy weekends, and throughout the week, Jason spends most of his time polishing the silverware and fondue forks that are essential to the Melting Pot experience.

Caitlin Shean, Jason’s Employment Specialist doesn’t think she’ll be needed for long. She typically checks in on him at the beginning of his shift, then he completes the work independently. Jason agrees, adding “I am almost completely independent at work!” Caitlin added, “Jason is always in a positive mood and always happy to work and be at work. He keeps me laughing!”

When asked what he likes about his job, Jason responded, “Everything!” He exclaimed, “There is a lot of energy at the Melting Pot and everyone is friendly.”



Achieva helps job seekers identify and maintain a job in the community that matches the job seeker's interests, strengths and skills.

Call 412.995.5000 or email employmentfirst@achieva.info to learn more.



A young man, Ben, is standing outdoors next to a large black sign for Duquesne University. He is wearing a green t-shirt with a graphic, khaki shorts, a blue watch, and a white baseball cap with 'DUQUESNE' on it. He has his right arm resting on the sign. The sign features the university's logo, a stylized 'D' inside a square, followed by the words 'DUQUESNE' and 'UNIVERSITY' in a serif font. The background shows a brick building, trees, and a street with a traffic light and a 'Bus Stop' sign.

Ben is realizing his dream of attending college at Duquesne University's Compass Program.

Planning for College With Achieva

Are you the parent of a child with an intellectual disability? Do you wonder what life will look like after high school? As you consider your child's options, we hope a college-based education will be among them.

Students with intellectual disabilities attending inclusive college programs are a growing population.

Achieva is working collaboratively with the Pennsylvania Inclusive Higher Education Consortium (PIHEC) and its 32-member colleges and universities like Duquesne to increase opportunities for students with intellectual disabilities to attend college. Working together, Achieva and PIHEC will guide colleges and universities in the creation of inclusive and supportive environments where academics, social experiences, independent living, and competitive -integrated employment can be made available to the 14,000 young adults ages 18-26 with intellectual disabilities in Pennsylvania.

As one of Pennsylvania's largest providers of services for children and adults with intellectual disabilities, we created the Planning for College

with Achieva Initiative so that the students and families we serve will be prepared to take advantage of these opportunities. Planning for College with Achieva provides information, resources, and technical assistance to college-bound students and families.

For students and families, Achieva offers information about:

- How to pay for college
- Using an IEP to pay for college
- Dual enrollment in high school and college
- Post-secondary (college) programs in Pennsylvania and other states

We also offer individual consultations with students and families that include:

- IEP review and collaboration with the IEP team
- College-focused transition goals
- Skill-building recommendations specific to the college experience
- Introductions to program directors and college admission teams
- Assistance with the application process
- Information about funding
- Connections to families and students with intellectual disabilities currently attending college

If it's related to college planning, Achieva can help! For additional information, please email or call Karen Oosterhous. koosterhous@achieve.info or 412.995.5000 x606.



Achieva produced and distributed ten podcasts for family caregivers on topics that help them be resilient. Following is an excerpt from the 'Care to Listen' Podcast, Episode 5, written by Reverend Sally Jo Snyder.

Communication and the Power of Story

"It takes two – in communication there must be at least one person who communicates and at least one person who listens ... both are essential to having good communication.

Whenever my mother held a baby and the infant would begin to babble and coo, she would exclaim, "Are you going to tell me a story? Tell me what you know?" I don't know how profound or how deeply insightful were the coos, yet I do not doubt they were important and were definitely necessary. We are born with a need to communicate, to connect, to be noticed and to be heard. Both the teller and the listener benefit."



“As caregivers, we create the safe space and the trust point for the beloved in our care to speak their truth and tell of their experiences ... all of it – the gain, the pain, and the strain. We must be open to listen to and respond to each excited tale of wonder and every sob of woe. We listen to all that is shared because the all of it are the whole reality of our beloved.

Every good story deserves a good listener. Imagine all the bold and bright stories our beloved one holds and awaits the presence of another to share their tale. When that moment is provided, direct your awareness and set your focus upon the person. Television off, radio off, computer off, cellphone off (or put away) ... the only thing to be on is your attention to the person before you.

I agree with the opinion that “the biggest communication problem we have is we do not listen to understand, we listen to respond.” Communication that works and produces is a question of ego. Are we humble enough to focus our attention on our beloved and make our intention be the needs, experiences and stories of those in our care?

The cause and effect are this: Listening is essential to communication and communication is essential to relationships. To add one more – listening and communication are foundational to our caregiving relationships and responsibilities.

As in most things of value and importance, it takes our time and our effort. The good news is “communication works for those who work at it.” As in each action practiced and completed by a caregiver ... it is a labor of love.”

The ‘Care to Listen’ project was made possible via a grant from the National Library of Medicine.

**Listen on your favorite
podcast platform or at
achieva.info/caretolisten**

A photograph of a middle-aged man with a beard and mustache, wearing a light blue t-shirt, sitting in a wheelchair. He is smiling and looking towards the right, where he is holding the hand of another person whose arm is visible. The background is a soft-focus outdoor scene with trees and foliage, suggesting a park or garden. The lighting is warm, possibly from the sun being low in the sky.

Trust Us to Achieve More Today, and in the Future

Planning for the future is vital for everyone, but it's essential for people with disabilities and their families. Preparation is key to meeting all critical needs.

Special needs trusts allow you to protect your assets while remaining eligible for Medicaid, Waiver Services, and Supplemental Security Income (SSI). Achieva Family Trust offers three types of special needs trusts. Each allows you to preserve your funds so that you can pay for necessities - like home modifications, adapted vehicles, electronics, clothing, and supplies - while maintaining eligibility for lifelong supports and services.

What is a Pooled Trust?

A Pooled Trust is created to enable a person with a disability to protect their assets while still preserving their eligibility for essential lifelong supports and services. The trust assets are “pooled” for investment purposes, but accounted for individually. Upon the death of the beneficiary, remaining funds are transferred to the Charitable Residual Account to benefit people with disabilities across Pennsylvania.

What is a Payback Trust?

A Payback Trust enables a person with a disability to protect funds received from a lawsuit or settlement while still preserving their eligibility for essential lifelong supports and services. Upon the death of the beneficiary, trust assets must first be used to “pay back” the state(s) for any Medicaid services provided.

What is a Third Party Trust?

A Third Party Trust is funded by family and/or friends of the beneficiary, either during their lifetime or through their estate plan. This type of trust has the greatest flexibility because the money belonged to someone other than the person with the disability. Following the death of the beneficiary, trust assets are distributed according to the terms of the will or trust document.



We're here for you when you want to talk about setting up a special needs trust.

Call us today for a no-cost consultation at
412.995.5000 x565 or email us
at familytrust@achieva.info

Save The Date

Monday, September 20, 2021

**Achieva's 23rd Annual
Million Dollar Golf Outing**

Join us for golf and prizes at Valley Brook Country Club's pristine 27-hole course. To become a sponsor or participate, contact Jodie Tabano at 412.995.5000 x526 or jtabano@achieva.info.

Monday, December 13, 2021

Achieva's Awards of Excellence

The annual event honors a group of extraordinary people that go above and beyond on behalf of people with disabilities. For additional information or to nominate someone, contact Peggie Watson at 412.995.5000 x420 or pwatson@achieva.info.

Please refer to Achieva's website for current event details at achieva.info/events.

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