

Cheryl Ann Programs News Review

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Ruth Kremer Receives Heckler Award

Tireless Advocate For Her Son, Kyle, And Others

All Ruth Kremer of Chickasaw wants for her son, Kyle, today is all she has ever wanted for him since the day he was born. "I wanted him to have every opportunity to have as much of a normal life as possible," she said.

Because of her advocacy for Kyle, her fierce defense of his right to the pursuit of happiness, and her work for other children with developmental disabilities throughout the county, Ruth was awarded the Albert Heckler Award in March. The award is presented each year by Cheryl Ann Programs to an outstanding parent volunteer/advocate.

Kyle, the youngest of Ruth and Virgil Kremer's six children, was born in 1984 with Trisomy 8p, a chromosomal disorder that would severely slow his development. "They told us it could be mild or severe, that he could live to be an adult or die in infancy," Ruth said. "We would have to take it one day at a time."

While Ruth had no experience in caring for an infant with developmental disabilities, she couldn't just wait and see what would happen to Kyle. She isn't

natured that way. At first she tried psychomotor patterning with Kyle. The family and a team of volunteers worked with the infant 12 hours a day, seven days a week, for over a year.

It didn't bring the results that she hoped. After a visit from Cheryl Ann's then-superintendent, Mike Overman, and staffer Chris Schulte, Ruth and Virgil decided to try Cheryl Ann. "The Cheryl Ann experience was always wonderful," Ruth said. Kyle was enrolled in Cheryl Ann's infant stimulation program. And Ruth met other parents who would become friends and allies in her efforts to improve and expand Kyle's life and that of other children like him.

Kyle entered public school at the age of six. Once he was outside of the loving cocoon of family life, Ruth had to step up her efforts to make sure he was being treated like the other children in his classroom, as much as possible. "She did everything she could to help Kyle over the years," said Cheryl



Ruth and Virgil Kremer and their family.

**Ruth never deviated from her goal for children with developmental disabilities:
"I want everything for these kids."**

Ann Superintendent Shawn Thiemann. "As Kyle grew up, she became very involved in the schools. She pushed for the rights of students with disabilities. She was not afraid to stand up for them."

She was also vital to ARC of Mercer County, organizing fundraisers and events for children, and bringing in speakers who could give families the information and encouragement they needed.

Helping Kyle became a focus of the Kremer household. "Our other kids had to grow up fast," Ruth said. "But I think it made us stronger as a family. Our kids grew up with responsibilities as we all
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Mercer County DD Board is Meeting Individuals' Needs

Statewide Coalition at Work to Fix The List

The waiting list in Ohio for Home and Community Based Services Waivers for people with developmental disabilities has been called complicated and confusing. It is not uniformly understood by many individuals served and their families. In order to clarify and simplify the process, a coalition of family members, provider agencies, and county boards of



Cheryl Ann Superintendent Shawn Thieman

DD has come together. This coalition, called Fix The List, aims to develop a functional waiting list for HCBS Waiver Services in Ohio. Coalition members have met monthly to

work on the issue, and in just over a year, have a proposed rule as well as an assessment tool. The website fixthelist.info contains videos from family members and individuals with developmental disabilities and a FAQ section to help everyone understand why these changes need to happen and what the proposed changes are.

There are currently about 200 people with developmental disabilities on the waiting list in Mercer County. Surprisingly, our current waiting list includes individuals from other counties. A larger portion of our waiting list is developed from children and young adults that we advised to sign up even though they had no immediate need but may anticipate a need in the future. The remaining individuals on the Mercer County waiting

list are individuals who have all of their needs met through Level One waivers or other local funds. Simply put: nobody in Mercer County has been sitting on a waiting list with an immediate need.

Every eligible person over 22 years old (and many over 18 years old) is offered a Level One waiver that allows for waiver services. The Mercer County Board of DD is fortunate to have the resources to provide for its residents with developmental disabilities in this fashion. Not every county in Ohio has the ability to offer waivers this way, and the waiting list played a much bigger role in those counties.

Some individuals can have their needs met without any Medicaid waiver involvement at all; local funding sources can meet their needs. A good example of this is with our nursing home residents. Most of them have their needs met by the nursing facility, but we allow some additional funds to those residents to obtain recreational support that they may need.

We do not feel that these waiting list changes will have much (if any) of an effect on the individuals whom we serve here in Mercer County. We address emergency situations when needed and have never placed someone on a waiting list when their needs are urgent. Our SSAs are available to help eligible individuals and their families understand the changes to the waiting list. We are excited about the proposed changes because we believe that it will be much less confusing and will help us to better plan for the future needs of those we serve.

Feel free to contact us with questions or concerns that you may have. Thank you for your support and understanding.

Ruth Kremer

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took care of Kyle and that in turn made them good parents, good people.”

Kyle is now 34 years old and lives with two housemates in a home in Maria Stein that was custom built for people with disabilities. Her son, whom she might have lost in infancy, now has a happy and fulfilling life. Kyle loves family events where he can watch his nieces and nephews run and play. Virgil and Ruth are planning to build their retirement home to be near Kyle.

Ruth's efforts over the years extended beyond Kyle. She served for 12 years (2004–16) on the Mercer County Board of DD, where she was an insightful advocate for the people Cheryl Ann serves.

“Ruth asked the questions that nobody else wanted to ask,” Shawn said. “She was never satisfied until she understood the whole story. She wanted to put the pieces together. It was an honor for me to work with Ruth; if anybody wanted to know what it is to be an advocate for children with developmental disabilities, I would tell them about Ruth.”

While her path was difficult at times, she said, her motivation was simple: to help Kyle and other children like him have the life that they deserve. “If people would get to know our kids, they would love them,” she said. “I was always fighting for acceptance for them, fighting for people to see them as valuable. I want everything for these kids.”



Beth Bruns and James Dunlap have fun during a recent pajama day at Benchmark in St. Marys.

Benchmark Aims for Adventures, Attention

At Benchmark, Christina Murray, day services supervisor, has this directive for her staff members: “When we hit the door, we walk through it with a smile on our face. We know we’re going to do everything possible to make their lives better, because they deserve it.”

Christina was talking about the door to the day services room at Benchmark, which provides both day services and home services for adults with developmental disabilities.

The agency, at 1621 Celina Rd. in St. Marys, welcomes from 20 to 26 people into its adult day services every weekday, from age 18 to nearly 80. Once there, they embark on all kinds of adventures. Wednesday, for instance, is shopping day, which means everybody who wants to go along boards a van to a local store. Thursday is cooking day, and all who want to participate take part in a kitchen activity.

On other days, activities and adventures vary. “Our main goal is to help people get out into the community as much as possible,” Christina said. “We meet once a month to talk about where we want to go. Everybody gets to vote.”

Benchmark also provides transportation from members’ homes to its St. Marys facility, and back home again at the end of a five- or six-hour day.

Individual attention and services that are customized to the needs of the individual are also the priorities of Benchmark’s home care, said Brenda Severns, program manager of Mercer County.

The agency provides a range of in-home services, whether that’s 24-hour care or just dropping in to provide support as necessary, Brenda said. Additionally, Benchmark operates six homes in Mercer County where people with developmental disabilities live.

Brenda supervises about two dozen Direct Services Professionals (DSPs) who provide home care. She carefully matches them with individuals and families because a good fit is important, she said. “These are people who
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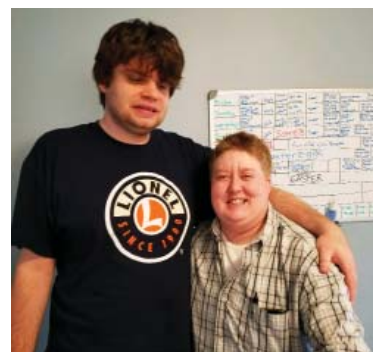
MRSI Provides “Great Services”

Over 40 years ago, a group of parents in Mercer County wanted to provide opportunities for their adult sons and daughters with developmental disabilities—and so they banded together to form Mercer Residential Services, Inc.

MRSI has now grown to provide residences and residential support services in Mercer, Auglaize, Darke and Van Wert Counties. It also operates an adult day services facility at 420 S. Sugar St. in Celina, as well as in Van Wert.

“We provide really great services for individuals—a lot of times, people hear about us through word-of-mouth” from happy families who use MRSI’s services, said Emily Hoelscher, MRSI’s director of operations.

Brooke Murray, who is MRSI’s community home coordinator, said that she loves her work because “you know that you’re making a difference.”



Miles Martin with Brooke Murray of MRSI.

As she is touching base with individuals in their homes, she and other MRSI staffers are working with them on skills that enhance their lives, she said.

“We work on doing laundry, hanging clothes up, cleaning the house. Not everybody likes to clean—but I crank up the rock music, and that makes cleaning fun,” she said. “We also go out to have fun. We go bowling or wherever they like to go. Or we pursue their interests; there’s one person who loves maps, so when we’re driving somewhere, he watches the map for me.”

Adult day services at MRSI is also a place where people can have fun and pursue their own interests, but
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Provider Profiles • 2018

Throughout the year we’re highlighting local providers and their services. We hope this will help our readers learn more about the network of care that’s available for people with developmental disabilities.

MRSI

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they are learning too, throughout the day. “We have ‘skill stations’ and perform education tasks during the day,” Emily said. “We do arts-and-crafts projects and exercise together, and we also work on skills like cleaning the tables and vacuuming.”

It’s important to take people out into the community where they can experience a variety of situations and activities, she said.

MRSI provides transportation from individuals’ homes to their center and to community activities. “To keep the people we work with independent and out in the community is huge,” Brooke said. “And that requires a different approach for everybody. You have to meet them where they’re at.”

Benchmark

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have to fit into the lives of our clients,” she said. “We require a lot of our DSPs, and we appreciate everything they do. We work hard, all of us, to keep the lines of communications open” among the staff and the families they serve.



Cheryl Ann's Annual Banquet

Cheryl Ann honored its employees celebrating milestone work anniversaries at its annual banquet in March. In the top photo from left are Shawn Thieman, Lynn Rupert and Nikki Schwartz, 10 years; Melissa Kaup and Jessica Heck-Stelzer, 15 years; and Deb Mescher, 20 years. (Not pictured: recent retiree Jean Garman.) Below, Ruth Kremer accepts the Albert Heckler Award from Shawn Thieman.

Cheryl Ann Programs
4980 Mud Pike
Celina OH 45822