



# Cheryl Ann Programs News Review

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## Cheryl Ann to Seek out New Activities

### New Staff Member Will Be Liason for Fun, Friends, Learning

When you ask Samantha Fledderjohann what she'd like to try in her new position as Peer Support/Recreation Specialist for Cheryl Ann Programs, the answer is simple: everything.

"We're in a trial-and-error period right now," said Samantha, who hit the ground running on July 1.

But the only error may come from not trying. Samantha intends to offer activities for all ages, tastes and interests, and see what makes the most people the most engaged and happy.

"My goal is to offer new activities and options for the families of Mercer County who receive services, and maybe for some who don't," she said. "Anything we offer would follow three guidelines: Does it promote inclusion? Does it promote the building of friendships? Does it promote independence?"

The goal is to increase recreation, leisure and learning opportunities for young people with disabilities, said Shawn Thieman, Cheryl Ann Superintendent. That includes exploring ways for young people to get involved with local activities as well as Special Olym-

pics, either as individuals or through league play.

Through her work, Fledderjohann will increase Cheryl Ann's outreach and give young people with disabilities an avenue to the activities they most enjoy. "It's time for us to be bigger than what we have been, to broaden our reach," Thieman said. "We want to start meeting people in a different way, helping them connect with their communities. We are hoping this new initiative will serve many people."

One of Fledderjohann's first tasks was to send a survey out to parents of children eight years old and up to gauge their interest in various activities. "We asked people to rank their interest in all kinds of options, things like a hiking club, a fishing club, all kinds of athletics (golf, power-lifting, soccer, dance, yoga, basketball, track & field), and other clubs and classes, like a cooking class, a baking club, and a book club," she said.

If there are activities that draw a lot of interest, *(Continued on page three)*



**Samantha Fledderjohann hit the ground running at Cheryl Ann Programs.**

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# We Hope to Identify Lots More Opportunities

The Mercer County Board of Developmental Disabilities places a priority on choice. Much of what we do begins with asking questions of the individuals and families that we serve. We ask things like, “Where do you see yourself in five or 10 years?” “What do you like to do?” and “Who would like to work/socialize with?” The answers to



**Cheryl Ann Thieman**  
Superintendent of Schools

those questions are typically not too surprising and often sound like the responses that anyone else would give. The biggest difference, however, is that many individuals

would like to have more activities and community offerings.

Parents report that their children with special needs are often at home and have fewer options of activities that they can participate in. The other topic that comes up regularly is that of relationships and community inclusion. We feel that all people, and especially those who are challenged with developmental disabilities, benefit from a full and balanced life. That means the opportunity to try new things, explore new places and meet/bond with new people.

Those are human needs that we all share. I am very pleased that we have taken some steps to address those needs at Cheryl Ann. As you will read in this issue, we have recently hired Samantha

Fledderjohann as our Peer Support/Recreation Specialist.

It did not take Samantha long to begin asking her own questions. She has already developed some activities and it is her priority is to access the strengths of our citizens and community businesses. She looks forward to using public parks, movie theaters, libraries, fitness centers, and many other venues as places to offer activities.

We value the caring people and the wonderful communities of Mercer County. We will continue to reach out and work with our partners to further develop these types of offerings. Feel free to contact us if you have any strengths or hobbies that you would like to share. Our whole community will benefit from such generosity.

## Lots of Life Options for Young Adults to Explore

As Cheryl Ann and others are working on recreational and leisure options for people with disabilities, many other organizations are making sure that young people with developmental disabilities have options in education.

SALT, Cheryl Ann’s School to Adult Life Transition program, offered a panel discussion earlier in the year where parents could learn more about programs and classes that are tailored to older students with special needs. These programs are especially important as students look to transition out of school and into their lives in the community as young adults. The SALT session showed that there are many opportunities available locally for them to explore possibilities for their future.

Cheryl Ann’s Karen Leugers organized the speakers.

Cheyenne Bruns, a teacher with the transitional program at

Coldwater Schools, said that her classroom is a place where students can sort out “the in-between time, the time between school and adult life. Every child has to face this time, whether they have a disability or not.”

She told parents that her approach is “not one-size-fits-all. No two students are ever the same; no two situations are ever the same.”

She also urged them to talk to their sons and daughters about the future beyond school long before graduation day. “When do you start talking about this with your child? The eighth grade,” she said. “Start saying to them, ‘Let’s think about the end goal. It’s never too early to think about your future—you don’t have to wait until you are 18.’”

Contact Cheyenne at

[cheyenne.bruns@mercercountyesc.org](mailto:cheyenne.bruns@mercercountyesc.org).

Wendee Bertke, the Career Pathway teacher at Tri-Star, said she was excited about all that Tri-Star will offer at its new facilities on Ohio 703 near Wright State University Lake Campus. Her  
*(Continued on page three)*



**Kathy Jeffries of St. Marys City Schools stands beside her display at the SALT meeting.**

# Cheryl Ann to Seek out New Activities

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she will try to get them organized with the help of the local community. “Our goal is to find people in the community, to seek out volunteers, and ask them, ‘What can you offer that can change a child’s life, or even just a child’s day?’”

Among that network, it will be important to include young people who are willing to spend time and get to know children and young adults with developmental disabilities. “The first part of my title is peer support, and that’s really important,” she said. “Our kids with developmental disabilities could really benefit from being with kids who don’t have the same issues. And kids without disabilities benefit from being around kids who do. They learn from each other.”

Fledderjohann, an Auglaize County native who lives in New Bremen, has a lot of connections in Mercer and Auglaize Counties already. She formerly worked for Catholic Social Services and is the varsity track coach at New Knoxville High School.

Part of her responsibilities will also involve fundraising to support local Special Olympics athletes and other programming. She’ll also be scouting locations, like local parks and school facilities, where events and activities can be held.

She has a broad vision for the position, with a lot of possibilities in mind. Already in July, she paid a visit to Miami County to explore a power-lifting program that might be adapted for young people with disabilities. She’s been talking with the athletic director at Wright State University Lake Campus to see if WSULC athletes might conduct sports clinics for children with disabilities. She helped organize a sensory-friendly showing of the film *The Lion King* at

Celina Cinemas.

“I couldn’t be more thrilled to have this position. I am really excited about what we can do here, and being given the opportunity to do it,” Fledderjohann said. “I feel like what we are going to do, all of us together, is going to impact lives in a positive way. That we are given the opportunity to invest in these kids – I don’t take that lightly.”

*(If you have an idea for events or activities for people with developmental disabilities, or a facility they could use, or would like to volunteer, please contact Samantha Fledderjohann at 567-890-0265 or [sfledderjohann@mercerdd.org](mailto:sfledderjohann@mercerdd.org).)*



**One of the first events scheduled was a sensory-friendly showing of *The Lion King* at Celina Cinemas.**

## Lots of Life Options

*(Continued from page three)*

classroom will be housed at Tri-Star.

“We hope it (the new location) will morph into some cool opportunities for students with disabilities,” she said.

She too said that there are many options available to students, but they need to tell her their preferences. “I tell my students, ‘I’m like a GPS. I’ll drive you where you want to go, but you have to give me the information. I tell them to be open and honest with me about their likes and dislikes,’” she said.

Contact Wendee at [wendee.berbte@mercercountyesc.org](mailto:wendee.berbte@mercercountyesc.org)

Kathy Jeffries, the director of Project Search for St. Marys City Schools, said that students in that program serve an internship at Otterbein Senior Life Community in St. Marys.

The program, which follows the school calendar, provides job training skills for youth 18–22 who are in their last year of school. Students work alongside Otterbein

employees who serve as mentors. The workday begins at 9 a.m. and ends at 2 p.m.

“The goal is when they are done in May, we are looking for a job for them in their community,” said Jeffries, adding that Project Search follows a nationally recognized curriculum.

“It’s not always easy for parents to help their children transition out of school,” she added, “so talk to people who can help you make an informed decision about what’s best for your student. Take a tour, call us, come see us in action.”

Contact Kathy at [kathy.jeffries@smriders.net](mailto:kathy.jeffries@smriders.net)

Also speaking at the meeting was Todd Hone, a parent whose son, Tim, went through Celina High School then Project Search.

“You can’t go wrong with any of these programs—it’s just about finding a good fit,” he said. “These kids have skills, they have abilities. You just need to talk to them and help them find the place that’s right for them.”



# Join us for the Cheryl Ann **BOOK CLUB!**



**Our first 8-week session starts Sept. 9  
and runs every Monday through Oct. 28  
4:30–5:30 p.m.**



**Zahn Marion Township Branch Library  
in Chickasaw  
Ages 12–Adult**

**All reading levels and non-readers  
are welcome.**



**Book selection: *Because of Winn-Dixie*  
(Books will be provided by the library)**



**Questions? Call Sam Fledderjohann at  
567-890-0265 or email  
[sfledderjohann@mercerdd.org](mailto:sfledderjohann@mercerdd.org)**

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