



Cheryl Ann Programs News Review

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Cheryl Ann's Mission has Expanded

It's Helping People Get the Most Out of Their Lives

Parents whose child has been diagnosed with a developmental disability often share that they have to go through a sort of grieving process, giving up the image of the "perfect" child that they may have imagined. They might feel sorrow, confusion and fear of being unequal to the task. They might be mystified by a new world of terms they don't understand and treatments they don't yet trust.

But the one thing they never have to feel is that they're in it alone.

Cheryl Ann Programs, with its history of over 60 years of service in Mercer County, stands ready to help families and individuals find their way to a fulfilling, productive life, regardless of their disabilities, their age or their circumstances.

"We want people to understand we're here to help people get the most out of their lives," said Shawn Thieman, superintendent of Cheryl Ann Programs. "We want to be seen as the professionals of helping people with disabilities throughout all the stages of their lives."

That has meant different things to the different generations

that Cheryl Ann has served. Today, Cheryl Ann's focus is more than ever on individuals. "We used to want to be a good program, and to offer a wide array of services," Thieman said. "Our mission now is based on individuals, finding the best way to serve them and their families. And we want people to understand we are here to help them throughout their lives. I want us to be seen as the experts in our field, but I don't want to sit back and wait on people to find us when they need services. My goal is that we're always progressive in finding ways we can reach out and be more effective."

Cheryl Ann can help families navigate the many choices of service providers that now serve people with disabilities in and around Mercer County (those providers were featured in the Cheryl Ann News Review in 2018). Its Service and Support Administrators (SSAs) can help discern what an individual wants to achieve, and find the providers that will help meet those goals.



Helping individuals live out their goals and dreams, supporting families, organizing speakers and conferences—it's all part of Cheryl Ann Programs' mission.

"Families can think of us as travel agents," said Beth Gehret, Director of the SSA Department. "We help people get where they want to go. We help them get connected with what they need."

That represents both a broad and a more focused approach, (Continued on page three)

One Focus is Helping With the Transition to Adulthood

Cheryl Ann Continually Asks, “What’s Next?”

Cheryl Ann’s service offerings have taken many different appearances over the years. We started as a school and eventually reached a point where we were able to transition the students we served to the schools in Mercer County. We grew adult services and built a



**Cheryl Ann
Superintendent
Shawn Thieman**

workshop and a community employment division that served nearly 80 percent of the eligible individuals in Mercer County. We worked with CA Group to help it devel-

op the knowledge and workforce to successfully take over those employment services. Looking into our past, it seems that we have been very good at building services and then entrusting them to trained entities that are able to keep them going, when changing circumstances made that the right choice for the people we serve.

The question we have been asking ourselves lately is: “What’s next?” Cheryl Ann has a history of answering that question, ahead of the curve and in innovative ways. We want to continue to push back any boundaries that stand between the people we serve and the full, fulfilling life they want to live.

One way we’re doing that

today is by focusing on the sometimes tricky transition from school to adulthood. We knew that some of our school-aged individuals were having a difficult time adjusting to life after school so we increased our engagement with those individuals and their families. Karen Leugers coordinates the SALT (School to Adult Life Transition) program for Cheryl Ann. With Karen’s leadership, a SALT group meets regularly to educate families and to discuss their needs. She has also created a summer group program for young people that builds on the work being offered in our county schools. During these activities, we have seen and heard from many individuals and families that they would appreciate more community offerings in which people with disabilities could take part (outside of employment).

School-aged individuals with disabilities see a peer group that is involved in more activities than have ever been offered in the past: golf, bowling, soccer, swimming, drama productions, etc. While the offerings for typical youth have grown and expanded, the offerings for those with disabilities have not. We have recently started meeting to discuss the expansion of Special Olympics to the youth in Mercer County. If you have a desire help us in this venture, please contact me at 419-586-2369 or sthianan@mercerdd.org.

I am excited about the future of disability programs and offerings in Mercer County. Our area is well known for the wide range of opportunities we offer to youth. We want to help ensure that ALL youth (and people of all ages) have many opportunities to find their way into happy, productive lives.

Putting Good Information Out There

One of Cheryl Ann’s goals for the future is to do a better job of getting its message out to younger parents, said Cheryl Ann Superintendent Shawn Thieman. “By the time an individual with developmental disabilities is 25 or 30 years old, their families know us and are confident that we’ll be here for them,” he said. “But we’d like to alleviate some of the fears and anxieties of those families much earlier.”

Cheryl Ann aims to be a trusted guide to individuals and families of all ages, and one way to do that, Thieman said, is help put good information out into the community through speakers and seminars. Cheryl Ann’s Karen Leugers organizes the monthly SALT (School to Adult Life Transition) series to bring families together to talk about their common issues. A session coming up on February 21 will cover the topic “From School to Work.” It will be held from 7–8:30 p.m. at St. John Lutheran Church in Celina and is open to all.

The SALT series is for families with high-school age children. We’d like to hear from other individuals of all ages and their families as well. Are there other topics that would be of interest to you? Are there speakers that you’d like to hear from? Are there challenges that you’d like to explore with other families in an open forum? Any other ideas? Let us know! Send suggestions to sthianan@mercerdd.org.

SALT (School to Adult Life Transition) Series

“From School to Work”

February 21, 7–8:30 p.m.

St. John Lutheran Church, 1100 N. Main St., Celina

All are welcome!

Cheryl Ann's Mission has Expanded

(Continued from page one)

said Phil Fullenkamp of St. Henry, who has served as the president of the Mercer County Board of Developmental Disabilities for over three years. The Board meets monthly and helps guide Cheryl Ann's mission. Years ago, Fullenkamp's sister, Mary Lou, was a student at the Cheryl Ann School. Fullenkamp said it was a big step for his sister to leave her home and learn in a school setting.

"It was great, and she thrived as a result of that," he said. "But now we've moved on to the next step. We have to be sure we're not trying to fit people all into one box. We want to be able to address all the different skill levels that people with disabilities might have. The fact that there are more options out there for them today means that we can help them find better matches."

It was groundbreaking in the 1950s and 60s for Mercer County to organize and open a school for children with developmental disabilities. Then as those children in Cheryl Ann School grew up, Cheryl Ann became a pioneer with an adult workshop that offered employment opportunities for people who might have struggled otherwise to find work. Cheryl Ann then since switched its focus to community employment, and similarly was at the forefront of a movement to get people out into the community to find jobs, housing and recreation just like anyone else.

Cheryl Ann no longer operates its school, and its workshop was privatized in 2017 due to new federal Medicaid regulations. It was a tough transition, all agreed—but the result has been more opportunities and more avenues for people with disabilities. "We've had more providers show

up on the scene, and as a result, we've seen people take the risk to try a new provider, maybe even someone they'd never heard of—and it's been world-changing for our folks," Gehret said. "There used to be one provider, which was us, and we thought we could do it all. But if people didn't fit into our model, it could be an issue. Now we have a lot more choices for people to try different things."

Cheryl Ann, which Thieman said was 15 to 20 years ahead of the rest of its peers in leading people into community employment, wants to continue to look ahead, look further afield, and look at all the possibilities for the people it serves.

"The underlying questions for us, regarding the people we serve, is how independently can they live? Where do they want to live? What do they want to do? How can we help them get there?" Thieman said. "We want to help individuals and families look at a variety of home providers, employment providers, recreation providers. It takes a lot of trust—and not every arrangement works well every time. We recognize that when we owned it all, we could control it all. But it's a new world now. We help people see that they don't have to be satisfied with a provider that's not providing quality care. That's empowering."

The result, many times, is a better fit for individuals because it's more customized, flexible and open. And they are happier because of it, Gehret maintains. "Among the individuals we serve, we're down to less than a handful of behavior support plans," she said. "We think that's because we're



The charge of the board has always been to support those folks in the community who have developmental disabilities. However best we can do that, that's our objective.

— Phil Fullenkamp

helping them got to a better quality of life."

That's gratifying to the individuals and their families, to the staff at Cheryl Ann, and to the dedicated volunteers who serve on its board.

"Our mission five to 10 years ago was to be the best program we could be. We've seen that mission change and grow," Fullenkamp said. "The charge of the Board has always been to support those folks in the community who have developmental disabilities. However best we can do that, that's our objective."

"Most of the people who serve on the board have a family connection to someone with a developmental disability. They know what it means to worry about a loved one and try to do what's best for that family member. We all want to help these individuals and their families. And after you've been on the Board for a while, you start to see the bigger picture, and you realize that it's really about a calling. There's a calling to serve, and we all feel a duty to help however we can."

THANK YOU *to* PEOPLE *of* MERCER COUNTY

*for approving our levy renewal
in the November 2018 elections.*

Cheryl Ann Programs aims to serve
all people with developmental disabilities
and their families. Your vote of confidence
will allow us to continue
with our mission.

Thanks!



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