

Making Connections to Help Children Grow

Sandy Dorsten has Made a Career of Listening, Caring

There are intangibles that come with a job that never show up on the job description. There are dimensions to a program that go beyond its charter. There are ways of being in an office that have no place on the organizational chart.

There are people who understand, intrinsically, the mission that makes up the work, and put themselves into the work, and advance the work, without ever letting the work obscure their vision or dissipate their compassion.

And that, plus the Scotcheroos that she always makes to give to her co-workers on their birthdays, sums up the career of Sandy Dorsten.

For more than 25 years, Sandy has been the Program Supervisor of Help Me Grow in Mercer County. Help Me Grow is a statewide voluntary program that identifies and offers assistance to families who are expecting or have children age newborn to three, when those children show signs of developmental delays, or whose families are struggling in other ways.

The Ohio Early Intervention Program supports children and their families where there is an identified or suspected developmental delay, or a diagnosis that has a high probability of resulting

in a developmental delay.

The Home Visiting Program is a parent support program for expectant mothers and new parents that encourages overall healthy child development, healthy relationships, healthy choices, and positive outcomes for families. A family can participate in both programs.

Help Me Grow has had several “homes” in Mercer County over the years. (See *timeline on page two.*) Since 2016, it has been part of Mercer DD through its Early Intervention program.

Through all those changes, there has been a constant with Help Me Grow, and that’s Sandy. She was employed with the ESC when the program was housed at OUR Home. And for the past five and a half years, she has been on the staff of Mercer DD with Help Me Grow.

And here’s what you have to understand about Sandy: she gets along with everybody. She listens to everybody. She has nurtured a wide network of providers and programs, experts who might have answers, and natural-born helpers like herself. Through her



Collaborating with co-workers is one of the many gifts that Sandy Dorsten (second from left) brings to the table.

Sandy Dorsten has nurtured a wide network of natural-born helpers who want children and families to grow and thrive.

years working in and through the agencies in Mercer County that were built to help children, Sandy has herself built a shelter for them. In that shelter, they can grow.

“If I walk into your home, or you call me on the phone, I’m going to listen to what you have to say first,” said Sandy, in describing how she works her gentle magic for families. “Even if I have a plan in mind, I may have to wait with that, because if you just told me ‘I’m out of formula,’ or ‘I just found out my child has autism,’ I am going to stop and listen. I am (Continued on page three)

We Support the Fair, Always a Fan Favorite

The weather is starting to break and many of us will be looking forward to this summer with a bit of added excitement. Festivals, parties and special events are being planned with little or no fear of cancellation or limited attendance.

It will be refreshing to return to the days of old when our biggest concern was the occasional rainstorm that might disrupt our summer activities. Oh sure—\$4 gas and the prospect of locked-out Major League baseball players might have impacted some of our



**Mercer DD
Superintendent
Shawn Thieman**

plans, but there are plenty of other activities and local baseball games that we can attend.

I was able to attend the Sponsorship Appreciation Banquet for the Mercer Coun-

ty Fairgrounds recently, and I couldn't believe the number of activities that are scheduled for 2022 fair week and throughout the year. The Board of DD has been supporting the Mercer County Fair and our local DSPs by purchasing fair tickets and food vouchers for several years. Many individuals whom we serve at the Board of DD love to attend the fair; this year we hope to expand our support by also offering food vouchers to eligible individuals.

We are always looking for innovative ways to help our clients attend community events. Transportation is often a barrier that stands in the way of individuals

attending events. We plan to have some college students available this summer to assist with these efforts. Please speak with your SSA if there are activities you would like to attend.

In case you are concerned about that rainstorm—stop by our offices and ask for a Mercer DD golf umbrella. We will be giving them away until they are gone.



Help Me Grow Finds a Home at Mercer DD

Help Me Grow began statewide in the early 1990s.

When Help Me Grow was introduced in Ohio, the Mercer County Educational Service Center was the administrative agency, but it was housed at OUR Home.

There, it was a one-stop support center for families, with Help Me Grow, Mercer County WIC, Family and Children First, and Family Crisis Network.

At that time, Help Me Grow referred all children age birth to three in need of intervention to Mercer DD's Early Intervention Program.



Help Me Grow moves to Mercer DD in 2016.

In 2016, it was time to restructure Help Me Grow. All agreed to move the program to Mercer DD.

On July 1, 2016, Mercer DD became the administrative agency for Help Me Grow and the staff and office moved to Mercer DD. Families are referred to Help Me Grow by their child's physician, a hospital staffer, other agencies in the county, or by parents who call looking for help.

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going to find out what you need most right now. I can do my plan later. If a family doesn't have food and they don't know where to get it, if they're afraid of even making the necessary calls, I can walk them through."

Sandy works with families facing many different sorts of challenges, of many different economic and social backgrounds, many different needs. For Sandy and her colleagues, each plan is custom-made.

Once she has determined the family's needs, Sandy starts thinking of ways to meet them. That involves getting with her co-workers in Mercer DD's Early Intervention and Home Visiting programs, who are similarly committed to the county's children and helping them grow and thrive.

"Being at Mercer DD, working with the people here, is wonderful," Sandy said. "It's nice to walk down the hall and talk with the providers, with the service coordinators and home visitors—we're all working under one roof."

Help Me Grow includes home visits and phone calls, teaming up with families and accompanying them. "We do a lot of outreach, but we still have families who say, 'We never knew you were here,'" Sandy said.

Families experience the interwoven nature of the county's agencies, the care of the concerned people who work for them. "Family and Children First, Head Start, Preschool Special Education, Job and Family Services, OUR Home, Foundations Behavioral Health Services, Help Me Grow and Mercer DD—we all work together," Sandy said. "We start with where the child is at, where the family is at. And we make connections."

Sandy relies on her people skills, but she also understands guidelines, funding, program requirements and grants. She organizes her prodigious work commitments in a jam-packed calendar-planner that is with her most of the time, and relies on Outlook and other software.

"And sometimes it's just organized in my head," she said. "We've gotten more into online planning and documentation in the past few years. I've gotten more used to using my phone, because I'm working with young families, and they're more into their phones. They've taught me a lot."

Through Help Me Grow, Sandy works with families until their children turn three. "When a child is turning three, though I have to say goodbye, it's a celebration," she said. "I'm happy for them. Their child is moving on and the family is too. Their family is growing and they're moving on. It's like a graduation. We're always try to remind them of where they were, and how far they've come. It's exciting."

Sandy herself will be moving on, as she retires from her position in June. She and her husband, Steve, have two sons and three grandchildren. "Throughout the years, this has been a flexible job," she said. "If you needed to be off for your kids, you could get time off."

Once retired, Sandy hopes to read for fun, do some traveling, and spend more time with her family. "I'm happy and excited about retiring, but also feel like, 'Wow, it's



Sandy Dorsten (center front) is happy to compare notes with colleagues at Mercer DD.

really almost here," she said. "I love my job. I've loved meeting people along the way. I've always thought if I was lucky enough to get my time in, I'd pass this job along to someone else so they can enjoy it too."

That person is Dannielle Kelly, who has been working with Sandy for several years. Sandy has been going through files, many of which have been digitized. Mercer DD Early Childhood Services Director Melissa Kaup will also take on some of Sandy's responsibilities.

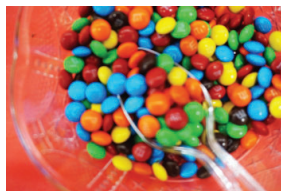
Sandy has been relentlessly positive through the years. She views her co-workers and the families she serves in the best possible light and feels at peace with the work she has done.

"Through the years, I've tried to stay true to who I am, throughout all the changes," she said. "I've enjoyed the problem-solving for families, going back and forth with them to figure out what they need."

"We're fortunate here that all the agencies and individuals in the county are really good and make up a really good support system. Learning from other people, making those connections—I'm going to miss that."

All You Need is

Sweet treats and happy thoughts abound at Mercer DD's Valentine's Day event.



Friends and family talked and laughed, made valentines together, and best of all, there were ice cream sundaes!



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