

On the Sunny Side of the Street

Angie Borgerding Finds a Place that's Just Right for Her

This summer, Angie Borgerding plans to visit Las Vegas. It will be her first time on an airplane, and she's very excited about it.

But Angie already knows that as much fun as it is to go off on an adventure, it's just as wonderful to come home.

For the past two years, home for Angie has been a cozy, two-bedroom apartment in Coldwater. It's close to her sister's house. It's on a quiet street. In town—and this is something that only a kid raised out in the country can appreciate—are wide, level sidewalks where she can easily walk or ride her bike. It's just perfect for her.

"The first time I saw this apartment, I said, 'Wow!'" she said. By then, Angie, who is now 47, had been living away from home for a

few years. In her first apartment, she had a roommate, an arrangement that worked well for both women at first. But after a while, Angie said, "I knew I would like to have my own space."

That is something she would like to pass along to young adults and their families who are looking for the right living situation: it's okay to try new things, to say yes to new surroundings and situations, and to realize that people grow and evolve through the years. A housing arrangement that works well might be a permanent answer, or it might be a stepping stone for something else.

Angie's first home was with her family, of course, on a farm outside of Fort Recovery. She was raised with love along with five siblings. Angie was happy living with her mom and dad. But when her mother died in 2012 and her dad began to experience health issues, Angie knew it was time to think about her own future.

She talked it over with her family and with Kelli Thomas, her SSA at Mercer DD. Angie knew she wanted to live in Coldwater—the sidewalks! And also to be close to her sister, Deb. Angie's support system helped her find an apartment that was within walking distance to



Angie at the front door of her two-bedroom apartment in Coldwater.

Deb's house. She happily moved in with a friend.

Independent Direct Support Professionals helped Angie settle into her new home. Angie did a lot of the cooking; she always loved to be in the kitchen, and had learned a lot from her mom, a great cook. Her family helped her get to the grocery store and in many other ways. She got to know the community and could walk to the park.

The arrangement worked well for more than three years. Angie gained a lot of confidence. Then came the time she started dreaming about having a place that was truly her own.

It was another big adjustment, but people continued to support her
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**Learn more about
local housing options
for adults and how
we can help folks
find the home that's
right for them.
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The Meaning of “Progress” Always Evolving

Progress for people with disabilities has looked very different over the years. In the 1970’s and 80’s, much of this nation was developing segregated disability programs based in newly developed buildings dedicated to education and work opportunities.

Mercer County was no different, as we built our first large school building in 1976 and the workshop building followed in 1987. We were serving more people than ever before. Everything being built was considered an improvement to our service delivery system. We were experiencing . . . progress.



**Mercer DD
Superintendent
Shawn Thieman**

Thirty-four years ago, with the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), our nation committed itself to the elimination of discrimination

against people with disabilities.

This was when we began to view our programs and our roles a little differently. It was impossible to see at the time, but as we raised the bar and celebrated successes within these programs—we were changing. We began to dream bigger and find new ways for individuals to pursue their dreams of equal opportunity, full participation, independent living and economic self-sufficiency. Individuals with disabilities were showing that they didn’t require segregated countywide special programs—they needed independent supports to maximize community integration.

Community integration for people with disabilities is vitally important to the overall health and wellbeing of a community. As the name suggests, community integration refers to assimilating people with disabilities into the larger community. It enables persons with disabilities to fully participate in life at the same level as nondisabled individuals.

This participation can take place in neighborhoods, schools, workplaces, congregations, community centers and more. Successful community integration gives people with disabilities a strong community presence without reducing them to their disability label.

Progress for disability programs began looking differently as we moved toward the community integration principals. To do more in the community, we now need less building space—but more service delivery people.

We are working hard on both fronts. We constantly help in the recruitment and retainment of over 220 employees that our local contract agencies need to provide services. Also, we have worked closely with the Mercer County commissioners in recent years to repurpose our workshop building. They have recently finalized those plans, and we are excited at the prospect of sharing this property with Mercer County’s agricultural offices.

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in her dreaming and planning.

“I told her, ‘I think you should give it a try,’” Kelli said.

And that is what Angie decided to do. Already proficient at cooking and cleaning, Angie said she “took it to the next level” in her own apartment. She receives support from providers, family and friends. She’s grateful to Deb, who, when she’s cooking for her own family, packages individual meals for Angie that she can prepare quickly.

“Angie has so many people in her life, and each one plays a dif-

ferent role,” Kelli said. “She knows who to reach out to when she needs help.”

Angie has a busy daily schedule. She works every weekday at Pax Machine Works in Celina. She loves to bowl, go to the movies and the fitness center. She is very close to her family, with special love for her nieces and nephews, and little great-nieces and great-nephews: “They walk right up to me and give me a hug!” She likes to host family and friends at her apartment, “just to hang out.”

Dreams for the future just

naturally seem to flow at Angie’s place. She’s looking forward to the summer, where she can resume golfing with her partner, Kelli. “I really like it! I get some fresh air, get some sun,” she said.

There’s the trip to Las Vegas, of course, and another destination that she hopes to reach someday: Memphis, Tenn. “Mom had a huge crush on Elvis Presley,” Angie said. “I want to go to Graceland.”

But her best destination may be her own place. “It’s my house,” she said. “I feel comfortable here, and secure.”

Housing Options Take Many Forms

Housing choices for adults are as varied as the adults themselves. Individuals and their families can explore many options as they search for the very best place for each person, and Mercer DD is there to help.

Many options were discussed at a SALT (School to Adult Life Transition) meeting in October. Beth Gehret, Mercer DD's SSA Director, ran through a brief list of housing options to explore.

"All individuals are assigned an SSA who will work with them we hope for a long time. Their SSA will talk with them about what they want for their future," Beth told the family members at the SALT meeting.

"We promote as much independence as possible. We are always looking for the least-restrictive services that allow for maximum independence. We want to help your child gain more skills as they grow."

Beth added that "each transition from home (to a new living situation) is a unique process. Our SSAs start with an assessment. We look at the things that are important **to** the individual, and things that are important **for** the individual. These are not always the same things. We dig deeper: what do individuals want out of their life?"

Some local options include:

- Independent living. "There are 50 adults in our community who live in their own apartment or house. They live on their own and do not need a lot of help," Beth said.
- Independent living with drop-in support, usually four to eight hours per week.
- Ohio Shared Living, where the individual remains in the family home, and parents/family members or a shared living provider receive payment for the support



Everyone wants to find a home that's just right for them!

they provide to the individual.

- Congregate living with drop-in services. This could be two to three individuals living together. "They may function as a family," Beth said. "They share rent and utility costs, grocery shopping."
- Congregate living with scheduled daily support.
- Congregate living with 24/7 support.
- Intermediate care facilities.

ARC homes provide living situations for many individuals in Mercer County, said Gregg Rutledge, ARC Coordinator/Community Integration Specialist. ARC maintains 15 homes in the county and hopes to acquire more properties. ARC owns the homes, and individuals pay rent and utilities. ARC performs maintenance on the homes and provides lawn care and snow removal.

"We make sure ARC homes are safe and sound, with everything functioning well," Gregg said. ARC adds ramps and widens driveways to make its homes more accessible.

Most ARC homes are in Coldwater or Celina, because those locations are more convenient for most direct service providers. "Without the DSPs, we could not

do what we do," Gregg said.

Over the years, parents have come up with many ways to find housing for their adult children, unique to each individual's needs and wishes. "We can help," Beth said. "As people start to think and plan about their future (and future housing needs), be sure you talk to your SSA. We can help put people together who could be good roommates. We spend a lot of time talking with folks, to see where they're at.

"As a county board, we really value our folks living in the community, where they want, how they want: healthy, happy and safe," Beth said. "If you're thinking about helping your child make a move, talk to your SSA. The more time you can give us (before the planned move), the better."

This story provides a general overview of housing options—there's so much more information that we can offer to families! Contact your SSA to learn more.



Thanks to all who attended our Valentine's dinner on February 12. The gym was a Valentine wonderland! It was a special night of friends, food, and fun.



Volleyball Coming in Spring 2023!

We need athlete partners for our unified volleyball team this spring. Practices are held once a week.

If you enjoy the game of volleyball, consider being a partner alongside our Special Olympics athletes. Contact Sam Fledderjohann at sfledderjohann@mercerdd.org to learn more.

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