

# Goal: Making the Fair Accessible to All

## Changing Table Available for Adults, Older Children

The Mercer County Fair is a place to enjoy the lights and sights of the midway, visit the livestock barns and commercial exhibits, eat great food and catch up with folks you haven't seen for a while.

It's been that way since it was founded in 1852. Now, Mercer DD is working with the Mercer County Fair to make the event easier to attend for people with disabilities.

This year, the fair will have an adult changing table, courtesy of Mercer DD. It will be located in the family restroom in the fair's commercial building. The table, for adults and older children, has power controls so it can be raised and lowered.

"Sometimes, people with disabilities have not been able to enjoy everything the fair has to offer, because there has not been a place where it's easy for their caregivers help them with restroom needs," said Mercer DD Superintendent Shawn Thieman. "So either they don't go to the fair, or they have to go home then come back. They

can't enjoy the fair like everybody else."

Mercer County Fairground Manager Cara Muhlenkamp said the fair welcomes the addition of the changing table, plus any insights that individuals with disabilities and their family members can offer to the fair. "We are happy to make relationships with people who are experts in that area," such as Mercer DD, she said. "As we sat around the table planning for the fair, we realized we don't know enough about this. We need to pull in people who understand how we can be better stewards of this and other events at the fairgrounds."

Cara said that the public can reach out to the fair through its social media channels or its website ([mercercountyohiofair.com](http://mercercountyohiofair.com)) with



**Mercer DD Superintendent Shawn Thieman meets with Fair Manager Cara Muhlenkamp. They want all county residents to enjoy the 2033 fair, August 11-17.**

suggestions on how to make the fair and other events more accessible for all. "Sometimes we can make changes right away," she said. "Sometimes we need a little more time."

When the fair is over, the adult changing table will be in use at Mercer DD's facility on Mud Pike west of Celina.

This ongoing discussion is part of a larger movement across the state to ensure that adults' needs can be managed more easily when they are out and about. Changing Spaces Ohio is a nonprofit that advocates for adult changing table awareness in public places throughout the state. (Find them on Facebook at Changing Spaces Ohio – *(Continued on page two)*)

**Be sure to come and see us at the Mercer County Fair, August 11-17! Look for our booth in the commercial exhibits building. We looking forward to seeing you there!**

# Wage Increase for DSPs Coming Next Year

Every two years, we Ohioans get to experience a statewide process called the biennial budget. I am not sure that I have learned to enjoy this process, but I have certainly become aware of its importance in my life. The budget process has large implications on Ohio's DD system--both statewide and locally.

The most meaningful topic of this year's approved budget is our success at gaining significant

increases to Medicaid reimbursement rates! The original version of the budget included large state appropriation increases to the average statewide hourly wage for DSPs in Ohio's



**Mercer DD Superintendent Shawn Thieman**

DD waiver system.

At the request from County Boards, the final version of the budget included a local appropriation from county boards of DD to increase the average statewide DSP wage by an additional \$1/hour. This means that the statewide average hourly wage for DSPs in Ohio's DD waiver system will increase to \$18/hour beginning January 1, 2024 and to \$19/hour beginning July 1, 2024.

Wage verification measures were also included in the final version of the budget to require DODD to submit annual reports documenting that increased wages are being paid to DSPs. The passage of these investments was no small feat and should be widely celebrated.

A few other highlights from the recently approved budget include:

- Language that permits,

rather than requires, DODD to charge a fee up to the current 1.25 percent of all Medicaid claims paid. This provision will permit wide flexibility so that fees collected can be used to provide technical and financial support to county boards related to waiver match responsibilities. This request from county boards was to allow for limited support in instances where a county board is at risk of fiscal emergency due to the increase in costs from the wage increase.

- An allowance permitting a certain number of county board members to participate and vote in board meetings through video or other telecommunication platforms. All board members must still attend a minimum percentage of meetings in person, and there must be a minimum number of board members present in person at any given meeting.

- A new requirement for county commissioners to appoint a person eligible for services to all county boards. County commissioners have always been required to appoint one individual who is a family member of a person eligible for DD services, whereas this provision also requires county commissioners to appoint at least one person eligible for DD services. The probate judge may appoint at least one person eligible for DD services, which would satisfy the county commissioners' requirement to make such an appointment. The effective date of the new requirement will be July 1, 2025.

If anyone reading this knows of an individual eligible for county DD services who might like to serve as a County Board member, please contact me. Thank you.

## Making the Fair Accessible

*(Continued from page one)*  
Adult Changing Table Awareness.)

The adult changing table isn't the only addition to the fair this year for people with disabilities. Children age 10 and up can participate in opportunities to show animals in the junior fair, alongside 4-H members. They go through a half-hour education session where they learn about the animal they will show (sheep, rabbits or dairy). They then go before a judge with the animal and a 4-H member. Participants will receive a ribbon.

"We belong to the International Association of Fairs and Expos, and we are constantly hearing about what's working at other fairs and events, and we

feed off what others are doing" to improve accessibility at the local fairgrounds, Cara said. "We have goals that we are working toward that would be beneficial for people with disabilities."

Mercer DD has been a part of the fair for many years with a well-attended booth in the commercial building. Helping make the fair more accessible to all is the natural next step, Shawn said.

"Many of the people we serve love the fair. It's an exciting place for people with many different interests," he said. "Since it was first founded, the fair has showcased the best that our local communities have to offer. So what better place for us to lend a hand to make it more accessible to all people?"

# Welcome Aboard to Our New Mercer DD Staff Members!



**Amy Grieshop**

## **Amy Grieshop Service and Support Administrator (SSA)**

Amy, who lives in Maria Stein, is a graduate of Marion Local High School. She earned a bachelor's degree from Ohio State and a master's from Wright State University.

**Family:** Husband, Todd, and children Austin, Aiden and Allison.

**Favorite pastime:** "In my free time, I love to read. In summer and fall, my family and I like to camp."

**What's one thing you've learned about your job so far?** "I have been learning so much about OISP, waivers and what services are available in Mercer County. I still have a lot to learn but the SSA staff is so wonderful and supportive. They are always willing to let me observe and available to answer any questions I may have."



**Paige Clark**

## **Paige Clark Early Intervention Administrative Asst.**

Paige lives in Celina with her husband, Tyler, and her dog, Lucy. She is a graduate of Celina High School and Rhodes State College.

**Favorite travel spots:** "I love to go down to Gatlinburg, Tenn., during the summer or in October when the leaves change."

**What do you like to do with your spare time?** "Aside from this job, I craft (I have a small side hustle selling crafts) and I coupon (small side hustle on selling products I couponed at a discounted price from the retail stores)."

**What's one thing you've learned about your job so far?** "Always check dates, this is very important!"

## **Congratulations to Erica Lange, who has a new role in the SSA Department as Quality Services Manager**

Erica, who has been an SSA for five years, lives in Coldwater with her husband, Dylan, and three children, Jake, Reese and Abby.

As Quality Service Manager, she assists our SSA team, providers and the people we serve and their families with understanding and maintaining compliance to the rules and expectations set by the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities.

"I am a mother of a daughter with a developmental disability and have previously worked for one of our local provider agencies. This allows me to look through the lens of the parent perspective and provider perspective, as well as the County Board and SSA perspective. My goal is to be a support for all families and people we serve, providers, and our SSA team to help develop meaningful goals, increase skills and abilities, and move towards greater independence while meeting the standards set by DODD," she writes.



**Erica Lange**



# **ARC van goes vroom vroom**

Oh, it's a beauty! The ARC of Ohio in Mercer County owns a 14- passenger van that is wheelchair accessible. It can be used by providers, staff and individuals who have completed the necessary steps. To reserve the vehicle and/or schedule training to drive it, or just to learn more about it, call Kathy Coon at 567-890-0270 or email [kcoon@mercerdd.org](mailto:kcoon@mercerdd.org).

**Call Kathy Coon at  
577-890-0270  
to learn more!**

---

**Mercer DD  
4980 Mud Pike  
Celina OH 45822**