



MRDD Ombudsman is your listening ear

Do you have a problem or complaint about something the Butler County Board of MRDD is doing? You can call the MRDD Ombudsman, Jack Pealer, for assistance. Jack can be reached at (513) 867-5924 or 1-800-874-0268, by email at jackp@butlermrdd.org, or by mail by writing to: Jack Pealer, Ombudsman, Butler County MRDD, 441 Patterson Drive, Fairfield, OH 45014.



The Ombudsman is interested in fairness with which services are provided to people with disabilities. He is willing to listen and offer guidance about problems people have with services provided or paid for by Butler County MRDD. He is able to hear complaints and questions from people who use services, from family members, or from other citizens. The Ombudsman is independent of any operational part of the MRDD agency.

The Ombudsman can look into complaints to seek informal resolutions, when people complaining don't want to pursue formal methods. He can advise people about how to use formal complaint or appeal processes, and he can make suggestions to the MRDD agency or any of its affiliated organizations about possible resolutions of complaints - especially those that involve policies, procedures, or practices and may result in unfair treatment.

The Ombudsman is not a personal advocate for individuals with disabilities and is not an automatic defender of the actions of government. Further, the Ombudsman cannot make decisions for the MRDD program or its affiliated agencies, or reverse decisions that have been made. Nor can the Ombudsman reverse any decisions of appeal boards or hearing officers.

Together we are the Community is edited by Wendy Planicka, Butler County MRDD's Communications Coordinator. Send story ideas or other suggestions via email to wendyp@butlermrdd.org or call 513-867-5962 ext. 21. For accessibility issues or concerns, contact Karen Whalen, Director of Quality Assurance and Medicaid Services, at 513-867-5671 or email her at karenw@butlermrdd.org

2008 Community Recognition Dinner

Check inside for the nomination forms for the 2008 Community Recognition Dinner, taking place March 9 at Receptions in Fairfield.

The deadline for nominations is February 1!



Butler County Board of
Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities
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TOGETHER

we are the

COMMUNITY

a newsletter about Butler County Board of MRDD programs, supports and staff



Autism training for parents, staff

For two days in early December, 135 people received training on the P.L.A.Y. (Play, Language, Autistic, Youth) Project. The participants were staff and parents from Butler, Hamilton, Clermont and Warren County Boards of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities and from Lakota, Fairfield and Sycamore school districts.

The P.L.A.Y. Project is a community-based autism training and early intervention program dedicated to empowering parents and professionals to implement intensive, developmental interventions for young children with autism in the most effective and efficient way. Dr. Rick Soloman, the medical director for the P.L.A.Y. Project, came to Butler County to run the training sessions.

The goal of the P.L.A.Y. Project is to help parents and children learn through play by providing effective, low cost, interventions they can use at home. Day one of the training taught parents and staff the basics of the P.L.A.Y. Project and the concepts of playing with a child on the autism spectrum. Dr. Solomon also taught parents and staff how to assess a child's developmental needs.

"The P.L.A.Y. Project model is relationship-based and teaches adults how to better interact with children," said Mary May, Education Program Supervisor for Butler County Board of MRDD.

On day two of the training participants viewed videotaped play sessions between children and their parents and assessed the learning and developmental strategies used. The P.L.A.Y. Project methods can be used with any child who is demonstrating developmental needs, May said.

Another benefit of being involved in the P.L.A.Y. Project is that the Butler County Board of MRDD is provided with a valuable on-going relationship with Dr. Soloman.

"We can submit videotapes to him and either he or the employees in his practice will analyze the tapes and give feedback to guide us in developing an intervention plan for a child," May said.

P.L.A.Y. Project training is a crucial tool for Butler County MRDD Early Intervention Specialists to

have, especially as the instances of autism in the county continue to rise, May said.

"We have a team of early intervention specialists who deal with children on the autism spectrum. If we implement the components of the P.L.A.Y. Project as early as the first 15-18 months of a child's life, then that child's life will be drastically improved," May said.

Most importantly, is the training provided to parents to understand the importance of early intervention. Research has proven that cognitive learning will happen if the relationship between child and adult is established early, May said.

"We are training families to understand the true power they have," May said.

Links for autism information

For more information about autism, visit these web sites:

- www.autismsociety.org
- www.autismspeaks.org
- www.butlermrdd.org
- www.cincinnatichildrens.org
- www.fightingautism.org
- www.firstsigns.org
- www.ocali.org
- www.playproject.org

Also, the Ohio Center for Autism and Low Incidence (OCALI) is collecting information about the experiences children and young adult with autism have in school and in their transition out of school to employment, college/training and community life, and their residential options, health care and financial management needs.

The survey is to be completed by family members with individuals on the autism spectrum (ages 14 and older), individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ages 14 and older), and professionals that support individuals with autism spectrum disorder. The survey can be accessed from the Butler County Board of MRDD web site (www.butlermrdd.org) under the "Resources" tab.

Understanding, and preparing for, the autism increase

More and more we hear and see commercials and news reports about "autism." Autism has been around for many years, but because there has been an alarming increase in the number of people diagnosed with autism, there is an increase in information surfacing as well. The latest statistics from the Center of Disease Control cites that one in 150 children are born with autism. The Butler County Board of MRDD is charged with providing services and supports to people with developmental disabilities and this includes many individuals with autism. Therefore, it is an obligation of ours to be informed and to inform others about such disabilities.



This newsletter includes information to help raise your awareness about what services and supports we are currently providing. I've picked out ten things I want to share with you as the "top ten things you should know about autism." Those are:

1. Autism is a lifelong developmental disability. It is a neurological disorder with no known cause or cure. Usually, there are behavioral signs of autism early in a child's life, even before the age of two.
2. There is no medical test for autism. Diagnosis involves clinical observations, parent interviews, psychological tests, etc. Primarily, autism is diagnosed through the observation of behaviors.
3. Individuals with autism may have other developmental disabilities and problems, such as mental retardation, seizure disorder, fragile X syndrome, or tuberous sclerosis. Children may also have depression, anxiety, attention deficits, sleeping disorders, sensory issues, sleep problems, and gastrointestinal disorders.
4. No two people with autism are the same. Autism is considered a spectrum disorder with a wide range of characteristics and abilities. For example, one person with autism may be exceptionally bright and another person may be severely cognitively impaired. Other diagnosis on the spectrum include: Aspergers, Rett's Syndrome, Pervasive Developmental Disorder Not Otherwise Specified and Childhood Disintegration Disorder.
5. People with autism most generally have difficulties with social interaction, communication and significant sensory sensitivities. These difficulties have an impact on the person's ability to function and cope with everyday life.
6. The diagnosis of autism creates a "crisis" for families. The disability presents numerous problems for families. For example, there is no insurance coverage for programs and treatments, divorce rates for families is 80-85 percent, there is often a lack of services, including respite options, and the family cannot experience "normal" family life.
7. The increase in prevalence is real, and not just due to better diagnosis. Although increased awareness and diagnosis is a factor, these cannot alone account for the big increase in prevalence.
8. If current prevalence trends continue, the number of adults with autism who will need supports will triple in the next 20 years in Butler County and the total number for all ages could be as high as 1,300. This makes it even more important for citizens to understand autism and become committed toward finding and providing appropriate supports and services for individuals and families now and in the future. This is not just an MRDD problem!
9. Although there are no known cures, there are many behavioral and educational strategies with success in helping children with autism to develop more normally and to help adults become independent. Some "tried and true" strategies include providing routine and structure in the person's day, finding ways to "ease" the effects of sensory issues, building a good communication system for the individual, and one on one instruction. The earlier the intervention, the better the development of the child and the skills to build on for the child's future.
10. The best thing you can do when you meet or know a person with autism is to be committed to knowing and understanding the person "behind the autism."

Encourage others to seek more information, offer help to families, support research, and support programs and services for people with autism. Be a good example by demonstrating your value for and relationships with people with autism. Show others how people with autism are individuals with unique gifts and traits and how they should be valued citizens.

Christina Hurr

Chris Hurr, Superintendent

'Twas the season for holiday giving

During the month of December the Butler County Board of MRDD buildings were a flurry of activity with donations and volunteer activities. These pictures capture a few of the activities happening around the agency and the community.



Members of the Pi Kappa Phi fraternity at Miami University Oxford donated \$812 to the Bereavement Fund. The fraternity's brothers raised the money by participating in Push America, a nationwide philanthropy and disability awareness program. Accepting the check is Butler County MRDD Board Member Dennis Rogers.



Members of the GE Carolers visited each adult center on December 11. Here the volunteers are pictured with individuals who attend the Middletown Center.



Cincinnati Christian School in Fairfield Township is partnering with Butler County MRDD's new Heart of the Art program. The high school students come to Liberty Center monthly to create artwork with individuals from the Hamilton and Liberty Center. The unique opportunity allows for friendships to form. Butler County MRDD's Community Integration Department and CCS art teacher Michele Rivera organized the effort.



For the second year in a row, Spalon S Marie in downtown Hamilton offered free haircuts in December. Pictured is Deb Amon, who attends Liberty Center, getting her hair cut by Stephanie Gabigin.