

# OPRA 2006 FALL CONFERENCE AWARDS

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## DIRECT SUPPORT PROFESSIONAL AWARDS

### VERA HEISLER

Siffrin, Inc.

Vera Heisler has been working as a Direct Care Professional at Siffrin, Inc. for over 15 years. Vera works with four individuals at the Swiss home in Stark County, and is involved in every aspect of their lives. She has become family to these four men as well as to some of their own family members. This past August, one of the men at the Swiss home passed away. Although Vera was beyond devastated over losing John, she was there for John's housemates and helped them cope with their grief and sadness of losing their friend. John is still missed, and will always be missed by those who knew him, but Vera's care has helped them adjust to the fact that John won't be coming home. Although Vera is extremely busy with just keeping up with the activities and schedules of those that live at the Swiss home, she also volunteers to be on the Activities Committee, and helps plan and organize activities for everyone served by Siffrin. To note just one of Vera's many accomplishments, this year marked the eighth annual Atwood Lake Camping Trip which Vera helped start in 1998. Each year, the camping trip gets bigger and more extravagant than the last. Almost 40 people camped this year, and had a great time and wonderful experiences.



Vera Heisler doesn't do the things she does to get recognition or rewards, just as most people in this field; but she is one of the most deserving of recognition for all the time, energy, and love she gives and the way she enriches the lives of those she serves.

### ROBIN PARENT

Champaign Residential Services, Inc.



Robin is a dedicated, knowledgeable and reliable direct support professional who exemplifies what it takes to make a difference in other people's lives. CRSI has been extremely impressed with Robin's knowledge and dedication to her work. She was nominated as Employee of the Month in April 2004 took consumers on a special fun trip in 2004, received PATHS training and credentialing in 2005, and in 2006 she is quoted in a news story about a very special person with Prader-Wili Syndrome which was also picked-up by other news publications. In 2006, she volunteered to appear in a United Way Campaign video where she succinctly described the services and needs of individuals with MRDD conditions and thereby impacting community awareness and understanding.

Robin has exhibited a strong dedication to the life of our son and each individual she provides care for. Her hard work, and respect for each individual is apparent on a daily basis. She has enhanced the life of our son by her creative ideas to enable him to achieve his goals and succeed regardless of the challenges he must deal with having Prader-Wili Syndrome.

## TONYA ROGERS

Filling Memorial Home of Mercy



Tonya Rogers is a Resident Assistant at the Filling Memorial Home of Mercy. Since the day she began working with us over two years ago, Tonya has been a living embodiment of our mission statement: "Recognizing that we are all created in God's image, our mission is to support people with mental retardation and other disabilities to reach their greatest level of independence in a caring community of respect, dignity, and partnership." Tonya has been a tireless advocate for every resident at Filling Home. She has taken the time to get to know each individual as a whole person, not just as a set of impersonal' goals and programs' to be achieved. Tonya has discovered the abilities of many residents, sometimes underestimated in the past, to help care for their home and themselves. Instead of always "doing things for" residents, she ii does things with" them, using every opportunity to teach a new skill or recognize an emerging ability and enhance their capacity for independence. This manner of interaction does wonders for the residents' dignity and well-being! With Tonya, the residents' needs always come first and her superb attention to each individual makes them feel loved and cared for.

Many would shy away from the challenge of organizing social activities for over 50 people, many with complicated medical needs, but not Tonya! Without any prompting or requests from her supervisor, Tonya jumped right in and began organizing activities herself and later developed a "party committee" to get others involved. Tonya's caring, dedication, creativity and resourcefulness have been instrumental in bringing about a new atmosphere of fun, family, and togetherness at Filling Home. Tonya Rogers does things everyday that brings love and joy into the lives of the residents and staff of Filling Home, and though she may not want the recognition, she thoroughly deserves it!

## BRENDA HALCOMB

Society for Handicapped Citizens

Brenda Halcomb is a hardworking, dedicated, compassionate individual. She is dependable and values her job as a direct support professional. Brenda always has two or three people with her in the kitchen cooking and singing. Actually, it wouldn't be Brenda's kitchen if there wasn't some singing and dancing going on! There is rarely a dull moment for anyone when she is with us. She fills the room with her warmth and helps people have meaningful experiences in their lives. Brenda Halcomb is an excellent example of a direct support employee.

## CHARLES MCDANIELS

ResCare, Inc.

Chuck is a full time 3rd shift employee who has been with ResCare for over twenty years. In these 20 years Chuck has NEVER called off for any reason. He is an extremely dedicated employee who is always dependable and wiling to come in on short notice. He also volunteers his time to accompany individuals to the zoo, sporting events, and out to dinner. In addition, Chuck is a wonderful advocate for the individuals we serve. He is always there to help out to make sure people are given the opportunity to successfully participate in community activities. Chuck is very valuable to our organization and enriches the lives of those he serves.

## VERNA MURPHY

Toward Independence, Inc.

Verna Murphy has worked in the MRDD field for the past sixteen years in both a supervisory and direct support professional capacity. She has been a direct support professional at the Maryland Residence, a household consisting of four people, for the past three years. Ms. Murphy exhibits the kind of work ethic and positive attitude one wishes were characteristic of all staff members. She has done so much to enhance the quality of life for the individuals she serves. Verna's dedication, determination and willingness to roll up her sleeves and get things done are quite impressive. She creates a warm and inviting atmosphere at the Maryland Home and initiates fun and interesting activities for individuals to enjoy such as picnics and bowling, as well as trips that include going to the zoo, the park and shopping, going out for dinner, movie dates with friends and much more. Verna often adjusts her schedule to meet the needs of the individuals and to make sure they make it to doctor appointments and special activities. In addition, she helps the individuals with problem solving skills as a way to enable them to have more control over their own lives. She is a wonderful role model for other staff members because she always puts the individuals first. Verna deserves recognition for her contributions to the direct support profession. She works hard to help people experience an inclusive life filled with possibilities, meaningful relationships, and personal achievements.

# OUTSTANDING VOLUNTEERISM AWARDS

## GARNET BEAM

Toward Independence, Inc.



Mrs. Garnet Beam is truly an incredible human being. Garnet has so much energy and enthusiasm for life and has been a sincere supporter and friend to so many people with developmental disabilities. Over twenty years ago, Garnet felt called to teach a Sunday school class for adults with mental retardation at her church in Xenia, Ohio, and has done so ever since. She makes sure her friends have a way to and from church services and special church activities such as picnics and concerts even in her absence. In the worship service that follows her class, she is surrounded by her many friends, though some may sing a bit off-key or follow two or three words behind, that's okay with Garnet. She prays with people and offers them support and love. She celebrates birthdays with cards and gifts, takes individuals out to dinner or invites them to her home for dinner. She visits her friends in the hospital, praying with them and bringing flowers or gifts. She considers her friends a "blessing" and cherishes their presence in her life. Garnet has provided love and support for people through happy times, sickness and loss, and has been supported in return during her own personal losses and difficult times.

Though people have come and gone throughout the years, Garnet's unconditional love and commitment has always remained the same. Mrs. Garnet Beam is so much more than a Sunday school teacher.. . she is a role model and a true friend.

## CHERYL JARVIS

ResCare, Inc./Middleton Estates

Cheryl Jarvis has been a valuable member of the Middleton Estates "family" since 1991. She attends social events, shares her singing talents, spends time with folks and serves as a member of the Middleton Estates Volunteer Board. Five years ago, Cheryl asked for the opportunity to involve her students, from the Ohio Valley Christian School, in the lives of the ladies and gentlemen who live at Middleton Estates. The students began by coming to the facility to sing during the Christmas season, their enthusiasm, however, grew quickly and the time spent at Middleton Estates increased accordingly. Each season, as the students come to celebrate with us, their laughter and joy fills the air of our home uplifting us all. In the spring flowers are planted and at schools end we look forward to a special summer songfest with promises from the students to come again next year when school begins again. Autumn, of course, is pumpkin carving time and winter brings festive Christmas decorating. Their arrival is always anticipated and their presence always enjoyed. Cheryl's genuine commitment and caring throughout these past five years, as well as the joy of her students, has so enriched the lives of the ladies and gentlemen of Middleton Estates.



## ROBERTA VANGUNDY

ResCare, Inc.



Roberta Van Gundy always goes above and beyond what is expected of her job duties. This past Christmas, Roberta's son was stationed in Iraq and in spite of not being in the holiday spirit she put aside her own feelings and set out to make the holidays special for those we serve. Giving of her own time and money, she first decorated the outside area and then her own office. I watched as her festive spirit ignited and spread throughout the facility as if it were something magical, until truly Christmas came alive for each and everyone at Middleton Estates. This is just one example of how Roberta gives of herself.

Every summer, she gives a week of her own time to be a traveling companion with one of the individuals we serve in Northern Ohio so they can visit with family and friends. She always makes sure there are plenty of blooming flowers planted outside her office, to bring a little color and delight to our world. On a daily basis, many of the consumers visit the office to share either joys or sorrows with their friend, Roberta, as she demonstrates attentive and genuine concern by taking time out of her hectic schedule. Several people love to feed the birds, so Roberta makes sure there is an adequate supply of bird feed at all times.

She is always seeking out innovative ideas to enhance the lives of those we serve, this year she has diligently participated with fundraisers so Middleton Estates can have a formal catered Christmas dinner for all the staff and residents. These are only a few of the wonderful things Roberta does to demonstrate her commitment to the mission of our organization and especially to lift spirits and boost the morale of those we serve.

## JOY DEPIETRO

Siffrin, Inc.

Joy DePietro has been with Siffrin since March of 1990 working in the Finance Department. In July of 2005, Joy moved into the position of Administrative Assistant. This position involves running the front desk, serving as receptionist, and essentially keeping the central office operating smoothly for the people we serve as well as the people we employ. What people don't always know is all that Joy does 'behind the scenes' to support those we serve which goes above and beyond the expectations of her job. For many of the people served by Siffrin, Joy isn't just any person at the other end of the phone; she is a friend, confidant and soother of frazzled nerves. It is certainly comforting when someone on the other end of a phone line knows your voice, knows your name, and sincerely cares about you when you are having trouble or just need to talk.

One example is Elaine, a proud mother of three cats. Elaine and her roommate saved for years to purchase their own home so that they could be pet owners. Understandably when one of Elaine's cats was ill and had to undergo treatment by the veterinarian Elaine was a bundle of nerves and needed someone to talk to; Joy was that person. Once again Joy was the person on the other end of the line when Elaine called to share the good news her 'baby' was home! If you visit the Siffrin office you will see that Joy keeps a framed photograph of Elaine and her cat, Oreo, on her desk. Joy was doing much more than simply answering the phone for Elaine.

The second example is Bob, a young man who is battling alcoholism and suffers from traumatic brain injury. Joy works tirelessly with this gentleman to help him understand that his life can be more and that he can overcome his battle with alcohol. With the support of his entire team and with at least daily calls for encouragement to Joy at the front desk, Bob has managed to move into his own mobile home, become a pet owner and is slowly learning to take responsibility for his life and the choices he makes.

Joy is truly so much more than just another voice on the other end of the phone. She is a sincere soul who makes a real difference in the lives of those we serve!

# OUTSTANDING TEAM AWARDS

## MOHAWK TRAIL

Koinonia Homes, Inc.

The Mohawk Trail Team Members, Lakeisha Carter, Rob de la Cruz, Patrick Lynch, Tomica Palmer, and Barry Pleasant are the embodiment of teamwork. In November 2005, Koinonia Homes, Inc. re-established services for an individual with intense behavioral challenges. It required a tremendous amount of time and energy to develop and implement a comfortable home' environment and effective behavioral program. The complex twenty-two page behavior support plan required an additional 15 hours of training for the team to be fully prepared to serve this individual in his new home. The Mohawk Trail staff work together extremely well as a team, ensuring that the level of documentation is superior, providing effective support to the individual during behavioral crisis and ensuring that life skills are maximized. Additionally, this individual is supported by members of the team while at his job at a local grocery store. They are able to implement this challenging behavior support plan in full view of the public without drawing attention or diminishing his dignity.

This team is very attentive to details, alerting management to potential problems and subtleties that could result in behavioral crises. The Mohawk Trail team provides skill development in an extremely effective manner, ensuring that the individual they serve is able to participate in every aspect of care consistent with the mission of Koinonia Homes. The team members are always willing to help out with other programs when necessary. Their enhanced skills and contagious team spirit have positively influenced other members of the Koinonia staff. The Mohawk Trail Team shows not only a strong commitment to the individual they serve, but also to each other and the planning team supporting them.

# FRONT-LINE SUPERVISOR AWARDS

## CAROLYN ADAMS

SupportCare



Carolyn Adams has worked for Support Care for over twelve years and has been an invaluable asset to our organization. Carolyn currently works with four gentlemen whom she considers a part of her family and treats them as such. At every holiday, birthday, or any other significant life event, Carolyn makes sure that she and those she supervises recognize the occasion appropriately and with great ceremony. I am confident it is true that on more than one occasion she has made sure Thanksgiving or Christmas dinner is served to these four gentlemen before her own family gets to eat. And, she is always there to comfort and nurture an individual when life throws them a curve ball.

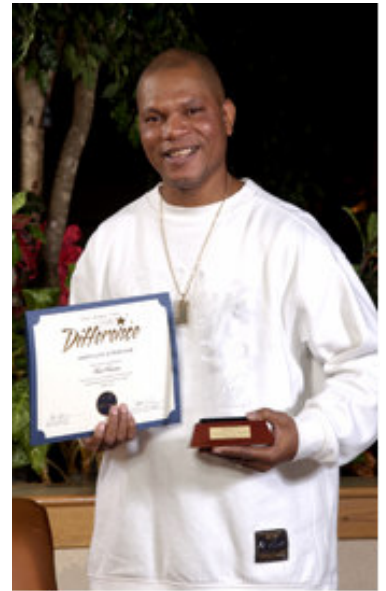
Over the years Carolyn has gone far beyond the expectations of her job to provide those in her care with consistent, thorough, and quality services. She runs a tight ship and the staff she supervises has great respect for her and strives to meet the high standards that she sets. Whenever a personal issue or tragedy strikes Carolyn or her family one of her biggest and most immediate concerns is how her absence will impact those she serves. She regularly puts their needs and wants at the top of her priority list. These four gentlemen are truly blessed to have Carolyn in their lives as we all are at Support Care. It is this true concern,

dedication, and passion to help people with disabilities lead full, productive, and happy lives which sets Carolyn Adams apart from others and makes her so deserving of recognition.

## FRED BOWERS

Supported Community Living

Fred Bowers has been an employee with this agency since March of 1990. For the past several years he has served as a front line supervisor for seven full-time staff members at a supported living location providing services to three gentlemen. Fred exemplifies the qualities of a great team leader and facilitates a smooth operating team environment that is highly efficient and effective. He is reliable and dedicated, treats the individuals he serves with the utmost respect and dignity, and is a fair and consistent supervisor. In addition, he maintains the highest quality of work performance and receives high satisfaction reports from the gentlemen he serves. Fred has organized and insured that the individuals he serves have taken a vacation at least one time a year for the past several years. He has gone on vacations with individuals to Florida, Tennessee and throughout Ohio. One of the individuals Fred works with is very particular about who works with him and Fred is one of the very few people who have been able to make a real connection. He is greatly appreciated and deserving of recognition for all he has given to our field.



## MARY JACKSON

Threshold Residential Services, Inc.



Mary Jackson has worked for Threshold Residential Services for over 20 years. During that time she has worked in every aspect of the agency. The last 6 years, Mary has worked in the capacity of Team Leader and supervises several residential locations. Mary will work over her required hours in order to assure that the individuals she serves have what they need and those she supervises have the supports necessary to do their jobs. Mary shows such dedication and compassion for all the individuals she serves. She is a strong advocate; spends her own personal time with individuals; takes people on vacation when no one else is available; includes them in her family holiday celebrations; and each year she takes a group camping to Cooks Forest National Park. There is not a single person she serves that does not speak highly of her and other individuals served by Threshold always have something great to say about her, as well. There has rarely been a supervisor as involved, loving and respectful to those she serves and to those she supervises as Mary Jackson.

## RENEE MONTGOMERY

Koinonia Homes, Inc.

Renee Montgomery is simply a breath of fresh air! She is an articulate, efficient, fair and well rounded individual. She is organized, creative, has strong leadership skills and is highly devoted to her job. She loves to help others do the very best they can and never lets anyone give up on themselves. She is not only an advocate for those she serves but, also, for those she supervises.

Renee has been the best supervisor I have met since working at Koinonia. Since she has come to work at our home everyone works together as a team rather than the "every man for himself" mentality. Renee takes time to explain things no matter how many times you ask her the same question. She has no problem getting her hands dirty and never ever talks down to anyone. These past six months that she has been with us at our home have been the best and as long as she remains my supervisor, I'll stay with Koinonia! Renee Montgomery deserves recognition as one of the most outstanding front-line supervisors we've ever had!



## KATHY LADD

Innovative Support Services, Inc.

Kathy began as a direct support professional with Innovative Support Service and has always gone above and beyond the expectations of her job. She went through the PATHS Program, both the CIP and CAP, is now a Skills Mentor for the program, and is on the State PATHS (OADSP) Board. Kathy's dedication to excellence and to those she serves helped her obtain a supervisory position with our organization and she continues to strengthen our company and enrich the lives of those she serves and supervises on a daily basis. This past year, Kathy went to Capitol Hill in Washington D.C. to speak with legislators about increased wages for direct support professionals in Ohio and across the nation. This was an incredible thing to do! Going to Capitol Hill and advocating for what you believe in can be a daunting undertaking even for an experienced professional who does this on a regular basis, but Kathy was there fighting for improvements to the field and for those we serve! Kathy Ladd is a sincere and caring person, extremely knowledgeable, and an incredible advocate. She most deserves recognition for her many contributions to our organization as well as the MRDD field.

## JASON RUST

Toward Independence, Inc.

Jason has fifteen years of experience in the field of MRDD. He worked for six years as a direct support professional before advancing to a caseworker position. Two years later he was promoted to a supervisory position. Jason is self-directed, self-motivated, and reliable. One of Jason's strengths is his commitment to building strong teams within the two homes that he supervises. Jason advocates strongly for behavioral supports as opposed to reliance on medications. He is willing to deal with challenging situations in order to see if individuals can function without or with reduced amounts of medications. With his focus on structure, routine and acceptance, along with his quiet authority he has won the respect of the individuals he works with as well as the staff members. Some have said they will do anything to help Jason because he is always there for them.

Jason's compassion is deep for the individuals whose lives are strongly impacted by things beyond their control. When one individual's health had deteriorated to the point where she could no longer live in a supported living situation and had to be moved to a nursing home, Jason spent many of his own hours being with her to make sure her transition was as easy as possible. Because of her sorrow it was difficult for him, but he provided her with support and contact until she adjusted and accepted her need for more advanced care. By building a routine and structure of expectations and consequences in an accepting environment, Jason has changed people's lives and made it possible for them to participate more fully in their community and enjoy a more stable home life. For many of the people Jason Rust serves, this has been the first time in their lives that they have been accepted and respected.