



# OhioSPEAKS

ADVOCATES FOR OHIO'S FUTURE

## Local Voices

### Jennifer Guthrie - Westerville

In 2004, due to complications from her mental illness, Jennifer could no longer work. Very reluctantly, she applied for and received Social Security Disability benefits. Through the treatment, support, and hope instilled in her by her counselor at a community behavioral health center in Greene County, she decided to return to school to pursue a master's degree in rehabilitation counseling. She graduated this past August and now works at COVA (Center of Vocational Alternatives) in Columbus. She assists individuals with mental illnesses in obtaining and maintaining meaningful employment. Without the treatment she received at the local community behavioral health center and the services she received from the Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation, none of this would have been possible.



### Andrea L. - Columbus

Andrea is a 49-year-old mother of three grown children who lives in Columbus. After working her entire adult life, Andrea underwent serious back surgery, resulting in the placement of rods in her spine - and the loss of her job. Upon being released from the hospital, Andrea was placed in a nursing home to begin her recovery process, but after four short months, her Medicaid was cut off and the nursing home where she was recovering could not house her any longer. With nowhere to turn for housing or employment, Andrea has been forced to take residency at the YWCA of Columbus. Thankful for a roof over her head, Andrea works every day of the week on the streets of Columbus, selling *Street Speech*, a newspaper dedicated to empowering the homeless of Columbus.

### Mary (Jayney) Wooley - Franklin County

Jayney's family has received support and assistance from the PASSPORT program for the past few years. She learned about PASSPORT after her 91-year-old mother broke her hip and could no longer live alone. A nursing home was not an appropriate alternative. Instead, the services her mother receives through PASSPORT allows Jayney to continue working and know that her mother is safe and happy at home. Without PASSPORT, Jayney does not know how she would be able to take care of her mother. Perhaps the greatest benefit, Jayney says, is peace of mind. When Jayney is at work, she doesn't worry about her mother's quality of care. A relationship has developed between the caregivers and her mother that they all agree comes as close to family as possible.

## Joe F. - Columbus

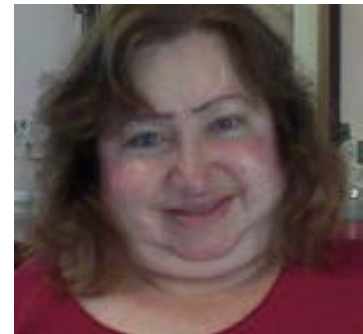
Joe is a 48-year-old father of two who for over 20 years provided computer and technical assistance to a variety of companies and customers. Life for Joe, while not always perfect, was good until he was laid off in 2009 as a result of downsizing. Never in his life had Joe even applied for unemployment, let alone other government subsidy programs. Having exhausted his unemployment benefits, Joe was forced to turn to a food pantry to keep food on his table for himself and his daughters. While visiting a local pantry, a volunteer advised Joe of a program called The Ohio Benefit Bank, which would allow him to complete and submit an application for Food Assistance and Medicaid for both him and his daughters. After completing an interview with a Job and Family Services Case Manager, Joe was approved for Food Assistance and Medicaid.



Shortly thereafter, Joe was seen by a doctor, who told him that only one-third of his heart was working and that in order for him to stay alive, he would need a heart transplant. Due to his rare blood type, Joe received a heart five weeks to the day after he was put on the National Donor List at the Cleveland Clinic. Though currently deemed disabled, Joe looks forward to the day when he can return to work and is now pursuing a degree in holistic medicinal practices. Joe attributes his life being saved to the volunteer at the local food pantry who connected him with The Ohio Benefit Bank, which enabled him to see a doctor for the first time in years. When speaking with Joe about what these programs mean to him, he said, "Folks have paid into these programs their entire lives and should not feel ashamed of needing them when the time comes."

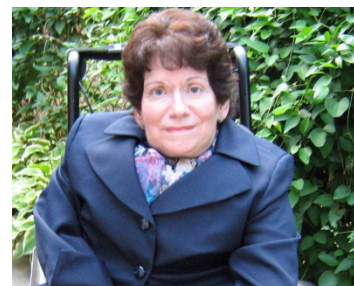
## Shelley Papenfuse - Toledo

Shelley is a person with a significant mobility disability and has been able to be a contributing member of society because she receives long-term care services through the Ohio Home Care Waiver (Medicaid) and personal care assistance from the Rehabilitation Services Commission. It is because of these services that she is able to work and contribute quite successfully to her community. Shelley is the current chair of the Ohio Olmstead Task Force and serves as the Disability Rights Advocate at the Ability Center of Greater Toledo. She studied psychology and social work at Bowling Green State University and family counseling at the University of Toledo.



## Kathy Cotman, Euclid, Ohio

Since childhood, I have had a neuromuscular condition which affects all of my muscles. I use a wheelchair, need assistance 24 hour assistance with all activities of daily living. However, with the support of my parents, family, and friends, and financial assistance from the Ohio Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation, I was able to attend Kent State University and earned a Bachelor of Science Degree in Biology.



After college, I worked for The Cleveland Clinic for 25 years. Through the Ohio Personal Care Assistance (PCA) program I received enough funding to hire attendants so that I could move from my parents' home to my own home in the community. I paid taxes, volunteered for organizations advocating for the needs of persons with disabilities, volunteered on church committees, and have always been a contributing member of society.

Over the past several years I have become progressively weaker and am no longer able to work. Since I am no longer eligible for the PCA program, I applied for and now receive financial support through an IO Waiver, Medicaid, and Social Security Disability. Even though I need 24 hour attendant care, I still do volunteer advocacy work and enjoy church activities, and I still live in my own home. As you can see, I benefited from several government programs. Each helped me to live independently and participate in the activities of my community. Without these programs, I would be isolated in a nursing home, cut off from the involvement in society which all of us are entitled to.

### **Crystal Young, Cleveland, Ohio**

My name is Crystal Young and I am a single mother to Mylan, My'leah, and Miracle. Miracle is a healthy, happy nine month old. She was born six weeks premature and spent two weeks in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit. The Help Me Grow program provided the support that I needed to make sure she would be healthy and strong. My'leah also participated in the program. I am happy to report that all three of my children are right on track developmentally and physically. Our case manager, Katie, has provided me with support to become a better parent, from how to handle My'leah's "terrible two's" or helping Mylan calm down around his younger sisters. Help Me Grow has been really important to my family.

But things were not always so easy - before My'leah was born, I was temporarily homeless and was in a transitional housing program through New Life Community. I am now living on my own and Help Me Grow has helped with clothing and furniture for my new home. I would recommend Help Me Grow, because it is more than just development - it is support for the whole family. Because we are low-income, my children are susceptible to more health risks and this program makes sure that we have all of our bases covered. Funding for Help Me Grow needs to continue in the next budget to support families like mine. When not raising my family, I write children's books. I spent three years studying biology at CSU and OSU and I hope to return to school soon to pursue a degree in Social Work or psychology.

### **Dianne Vranic, Elyria, Ohio**

When I first heard about the PASSPORT program, I had no idea that I would someday need this assistance for myself. I stumbled upon PASSPORT when I was looking for help to keep my mother living at home instead of spending the rest of her life in a nursing home. I could not believe that such a program existed that could assist us when we thought there was no help available. I am now 72 years old and am benefiting from the PASSPORT program.



When I applied for services I told the case worker that "if there is anything I can qualify for, PASSPORT is what I want". I have a wonderful personal care aide named Holly, who assists me in doing everything that I can no longer do for myself. When I was told that I had to have open heart surgery and would need to sleep in a recliner for the first couple of weeks after the surgery, PASSPORT assisted by providing a "lift chair".

I use PASSPORT transportation to safely escort me to all of my medical appointments. I also used PASSPORT's non-medical transportation when I needed to move into my own apartment and apply for Section 8 housing assistance. I was thankful that Holly was there to assist me throughout the whole process of packing and unpacking. "PASSPORT is the 'best kept secret in Ohio.'"

## **Sakeenah F.**

After a long-term mental health hospitalization, I was enrolled in Community Living. This program provided long-term outpatient care for individuals with mental illness. With this program, I had access to rent subsidies, outpatient psychiatrist visits, counseling, a caseworker and medication supports as well as the typical wrap around services provided by the central office. The wrap around services included social activities and transportation to my medical and other appointments. While in Community Living, my caseworker helped me to find a part-time job. I was able to hold this job for 7 years until I stopped taking medication and fell into a mental health crisis.

During this time, I lived on the street. I eventually received help and the Community Living team advocated for me to keep my apartment while I participated in inpatient treatment and respite housing services. Respite housing was essential for me to get back on my feet, because I learned independent living skills and medication management. Unfortunately, today there are no respite living programs like the one that was available to me, so many individuals re-entering the community from the hospital are not receiving this important service. Community Living has assisted me for 22 years. Recently, the program lost funding and stopped providing my rent supplements, wrap around services and reduced my access to psychiatric care. Funding for these programs need to be restored.

## **Additional Voices**

Karen Pozna from the Cleveland Foodbank has brought with her today some of the 5,000 stories they have collected at local food pantries and hot meal sites and she will be reading a few of the stories today. Each one expresses a deep sense of gratitude that this safety net service is available in Ohio.

### **Some excerpts include:**

"I have been out of work for two years and have two young children at home. We have lost our home and filed bankruptcy. This helps us fill in gaps between my husband's pay weeks and allows me to keep feeding my kids." Vineyard Community Church

"I am on a limited income and by the time I pay rent and utilities I do not have a lot left over for groceries. The food giveaways are a lifesaver for me. And with no raise in Social Security it is rough. We need these places." Ashland First United Methodist Church

"I come to the food bank because I recently lost my job of 12 years about 5 months ago. The food bank is a blessing for me. I also volunteer because I love to help people."