

September 2009



From *our* homes to yours



A Newsletter for the Families & Guardians of Individuals Supported by Erie Homes for Children & Adults, Inc.

What Makes EHCA Unique?

from the desk of Paul Carpenedo, Executive Director



In this issue, I would like to write about what makes EHCA unique. Most non-profits like EHCA are not part of a larger state or national corporation but are independent and locally controlled by a volunteer Board of Directors. Such non-profit agencies are definitely not the same and may be significantly different from each other. What makes EHCA unique?

One of the more unique attributes of EHCA is the amount of nursing and therapy services available in the agency's group homes. In most agencies' group homes, the availability of nursing is very limited, and one nurse may be responsible for 20 or more houses. EHCA has a staff of 18 nurses. Individuals who need physical, speech and/or occupational therapy receive these specialized maintenance therapies right at their group home.

SNAP (Social Networking Among Peers) within the Options Program is also unique, as its services are designed for individuals to participate with their peers in small groups to do a variety of activities from attending a ball game, to going on a camping trip, to participating in a bowling league, all of which are intended to help the individual develop and improve social skills.

The MOVE Program (Making Opportunities for Volunteerism and Exploration) may have been the first non-facility based adult day program anywhere. It provides a number of opportunities to develop a variety of skills for individuals who may not be ready or appropriate to participate in a vocational program. In addition, the MOVE Program designs and produces artwork made from dried flowers and also makes paper, dog biscuits and greeting cards.

An emphasis on arts programming allows individuals to participate in performance and visual arts who would not otherwise have such opportunities. The Dance Program, conducted in collaboration with Dafmark Dance Theater, is in its ninth year. Participants in several EHCA programs including residential, MOVE, and the School Age Program have all had opportunities to participate in the arts.

Many individuals supported in the residential program have had the opportunity to participate in vacation trips. These have ranged from overnight trips to places such as Niagara Falls, Cleveland, Pittsburgh, and more extensive trips to places such as Disneyworld. The logistics of planning and carrying out such trips for individuals who are non-ambulatory and medically fragile is amazing. EHCA employees also raise most of the funds for these trips since a large part of the vacation expenses are not reimbursable through government funding sources.

Project First Step and its Doula services are unique, and we have found no program that duplicates this service anywhere in the country. Trained Doulas work with expectant mothers who have many needs and are considered at high risk to have a child with a disability. This unique program has been so successful that 94% of the babies born are born healthy and without a disability, a statistic that rivals healthy births for the general population.

Last and latest is the OASIS Program (Opportunities and Advancement for Students with Intellectual Disabilities for Self-Actualization). The first class of six students with disabilities completed a one year certificate college level program in food service at Mercyhurst North East. They are going on to positions within the restaurant and hotel industry and are trained to work in positions such as prep cook, pantry cook or baker's assistant. We are very pleased that Mercyhurst College is continuing this program, and applicants are now being enrolled for the second program to begin this fall.

When the time comes for a family to choose a provider of services, it's helpful to know what makes that provider unique.

A Lesson in Arthritis

from the desk of Mary Jo Fulton, Director of Nursing and Health Services

Arthritis is a disease that affects the joints, an area of the body where two bones come together. In arthritis, the joints become inflamed and painful. Many of our individuals we care for are beginning to feel some of the effects of arthritic changes. Arthritis affects over 46 million people or almost 22 percent of the population in the United States. Over a quarter of a million children suffer from arthritis. Americans spend over \$85 billion on medical care for arthritis treatment alone.



There are over 100 different types of arthritis. The most common types of arthritis are osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis and gout. Osteoarthritis is also referred to as degenerative joint disease. Arthritis results from the overuse of joints and can be the result of obesity, aging or demanding sports. It can occur early in life in athletes. It usually affects the joints that bear weight, like the knees, hips, feet and spine. It generally comes on slowly as the cartilage begins to deteriorate. Cartilage is the slippery material that covers the ends of the bones and serves as the body's shock absorber. As the cartilage wears away, it does not cushion the joint as it needs to, resulting in pain with each movement. Often times a grating sound can be heard when the roughened cartilage rubs against the bones. Bone spurs or bumps may form on the ends of the bones especially on the hands and feet. The symptoms include a deep aching pain in a joint or joints, redness, warmth, fatigue, difficulty bending, morning stiffness, or swelling of a joint.

Rheumatoid arthritis is an autoimmune disease that affects 1.3 million people in the US, most of them women. As an autoimmune disease, it attacks the body's own tissues. Rheumatoid arthritis causes pain, swelling, stiffness and loss of function in the joints, most commonly in the wrist and fingers. Over time, chronic inflammation can lead to severe joint damage and deformities, leading to gnarled looking hands and feet. It often starts between ages 25 and 55. The disease may last for only a short time, the symptoms might come and go, or it can last a lifetime. The cause of rheumatoid arthritis is unknown, but for some reason, the body's cells recognize a protein as a foreign intruder. Experts feel that the immune system becomes confused and begins attacking the normal joint tissues, which triggers more inflammation and destruction. Rheumatoid arthritis generally affects the joints but can also cause problems throughout the body, including the mouth, eyes, heart and lungs.

-see Arthritis, page 5-

From the Editor

I am pleased to introduce myself as this edition's editor...and as the new Communications Specialist at Erie Homes for Children and Adults! It is an honor to bring you these informative articles and updates, and I also welcome any feedback and suggestions for the next edition.

Please feel free to reach me at 454-1534, extension 157, or via e-mail at fritz@ehca.org.

As I embark on this newest adventure in my career, I am proud to share my journey with all of you. I look forward to hearing from you or meeting you along the way!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Emily Fritz".

Emily Fritz, Communications Specialist

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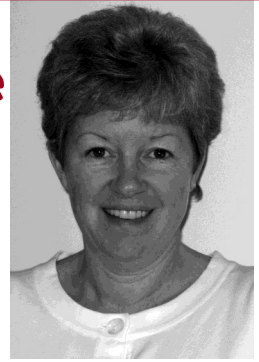
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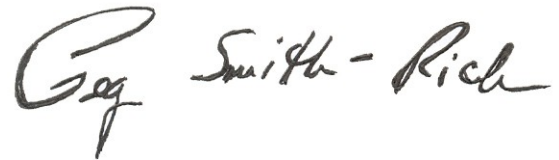
Technology Changes Improve Quality Care

from the desk of Peg Smith-Rich, Director of Residential and Program Services



As of July 1, 2009, we have had a number of system changes with the Office of Developmental Programs. In the past, once someone lived in our residential group homes, all services – Physical Therapy, Occupational Therapy, Speech Therapy and Behavioral Therapy, plus assistive technology, were covered in our daily residential rate. As of July, services have been “unbundled” and are listed separately in the ISP (individual support plan) with units of service approved. For the past few years, we have tracked “units of service” with the therapies, so we were able to comfortably project how much therapy your family member would need for the upcoming year. At some point, if your family member would need additional units of service/therapies, the team would meet, and the Supports Coordinator would make a revision to the current ISP. This change is mostly behind the scenes, and there should not be visible changes with services to your family member. We hope the transition is seamless.

One quite exciting area for EHCA is that we will be converting most of our paper documentation to electronic records. The company we are working with is Resource Systems and the product is CareTracker. It is a touch screen computer system that was designed to make it easy for employees to record goals, programs, health care items, observations, behaviors, and seizures, amongst many other items. A team from EHCA visited two agencies who are using the CareTracker system, and we were quite impressed with their electronic records. Improvements we are looking forward to are: increased accuracy with documentation, reducing time spent with documentation, improvement with quality of care, improved communication with program and healthcare changes, and the ability to monitor compliance. The Program Specialist and Nurses will be able to run reports instantly that now takes time to collect the information and data. This will allow us to monitor healthcare concerns, etc. more quickly. We are presently working with the CareTracker team to customize what documentation we will want on the system, and we are developing a timeline for implementation. Our maintenance department is currently installing the kiosks in the homes, and we are estimating a “go live” date in September/October.



On the Dance Floor

The 2009 Kings and Queens Partners in Dance final performance was held May 28, at the Saint Benedict Community Center and welcomed 23 EHCA dancers to the dance floor for an audience of approximately 125, with special guests from Perry Elementary School. The dancers, who are participants with the MOVE program, enjoyed being able to move to music in dance that was adapted to their needs.

Pictured here are: Dafmark Dance Theater dance instructor, Shelly Walker, and Luke Cattau.



OASIS Graduates First Class

On Thursday, July 15, six students received their certificates from a year-long culinary program at Mercyhurst-North East. The classes were offered through a partnership with the college and EHCA, called OASIS. Students have already begun successful placement in entry-level culinary occupations.

Pictured left-to-right, graduates are: Amber Hellman, Vinnie Loomis, Dominic DiPlacido, Stephanie Konen, James Froncek, and Tom Carlucci.

Dance and the Environment—School Age Program

from the desk of Hope Ruedy, Director of Community Services



Through grants from PNC Foundation, ArtsErie and Eriez Magnetics, EHCA was able to enhance our school age summer camp program with a picnic twice a week, dance and environmental program. Every Tuesday throughout the summer, the students have lessons with a Naturalist of the Tom Ridge Environmental Center (TREC) on some aspect of the environment and our interdependency, such as the study of plants, trees, insects, animals, landforms, water, and wind. Lessons are held in various locations at Presque Isle, where students return on the following Thursday to develop the movement and dance which corresponds with that week's lesson. Shelly Walker, a dance teacher who also works with our MOVE program, spends Tuesdays and Thursdays with our students and helps with the dance portion of this program.

For example, one week they studied land masses with the Naturalist from the TREC by discussing how the water and sand can cause old land to change and new land to form. The following dance day, the students formed a dance by first walking in a shared small space, then made a wave motion holding hands and walking, forming a line and waving motion. Then half of the group became the land form by creating the landscape and the other half became the water and created a motion toward the land form.

When they returned to their classroom, they drew or wrote about their experience. On Friday and Monday, they did an art project corresponding to the lesson. For instance, when they studied wind, they made kites, pinwheels and windsocks.

The students have loved the summer program, and Shelly Walker has done a wonderful job of curriculum development, along with Maria Furno, the teacher. We have also been filming parts of the classes and dance to put a video together of the students that will be shown by the TREC.



The School Age Program participants gather together for a photo after their pontoon boat ride in the lagoons at Presque Isle.

Hope Ruedy

Volunteers Needed

There are several volunteer opportunities available at EHCA, and families like yours—who have been directly impacted by the mission of EHCA—can have a tremendous effect on the organization's success. Here are just some examples of how volunteers can get involved at EHCA:

- Speaking engagements and media representation
- Committee work (Public Relations, Community Relations, Ways & Means, Spring Swing)
- Event volunteerism (Agency Picnic, Annual Dinner, Highmark Walk for a Healthy Community, Spring Swing)
- Direct service at group homes or MOVE programs
- Agency skating parties, held monthly nine months of the year
- And more!

To volunteer, contact Emily Fritz at 454-1534, ext. 157, or via e-mail at fritz@ehca.org.

Arthritis

Continued from page 2

Gout, or gouty arthritis, is a type of arthritis that is caused by an accumulation of uric acid in the body; the needle-like urate crystals gather around your joints causing inflammation and intense pain. Uric acid is produced when you break down purines that are found in organ meats, anchovies, herring, asparagus and mushrooms. Uric acid levels can be checked by a simple blood test. Gout generally affects the large joint of the big toe, but can also affect the feet, ankles, knees, hands and wrists. This disease is more prevalent in men. One is more apt to develop gout if they use alcohol in excess, have hypertension, diabetes or hyperlipidemia. Gout also tends to run in the family. Treatment consists of taking NSAIDs (non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medications), Colchicine, and steroids. A medication called Allopurinol limits the amount of uric acid that is produced in the body and may reduce the risk of gout. Probenecid, another medication, improves the kidney's ability to remove uric acid from the body. As with any medication, there are side effects that can occur from taking them. NSAIDs are available over-the-counter, but the other two medications are available by prescription only. Dietary changes also can help to reduce the incidence of gout. Limiting the amount of red meat, seafood, alcohol and organ meats in the diet is also recommended. Eating more low-fat dairy products and complex carbohydrates, such as whole grain breads and cereals, will also be beneficial.

It is important that a physician be consulted for appropriate treatment of arthritis. A rheumatologist, a medical doctor who specializes in the treatment of rheumatic illnesses, is an excellent resource for those suffering from arthritis of any type.

Mary Jo Fulton, R.N., M.S.

Announcement/Reminder

Attention Parents & Guardians:

Please note that we are required to have the original Medicare and Medicaid card for every resident at the group home. They are needed when we take the individuals to a physician's office or to the hospital.

If we do not already have your family member's card, please make sure to get it to us.

Thank you for your help with this!

Agency Picnic: September 10

Theme:

Tailgate Party

When:

Thursday, September 10, 2009

Time:

4-7pm

Where:

Rotary Pavilion, Presque Isle State Park

Dress:

Your favorite team colors or jerseys



Erie Homes for Children and Adults, Inc.
226 East 27th Street
Erie, PA 16504
www.ehca.org



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EHCA is a non-profit, tax-exempt organization.

Gifts of cash or securities are tax-deductible to the full extent of the law and are deeply appreciated.

What's Happening

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 10

Agency Picnic at Presque Isle

4 p.m.—7 p.m.

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 15

Annual Dinner at The Kahkwa Club

6 p.m.—Social Hour

7 p.m.—Program & Dinner

For more information, please contact
Emily Fritz at 454-1534 or fritz@ehca.org.



The Annual Memorial Service, held on August 3,
celebrated EHCA's loved ones with a release of
250 butterflies.

The mission of EHCA is to assist people with disabilities to live rich and fulfilling lives. Each person with a disability should have the opportunity to make choices, to contribute to his or her own daily lifestyle, to obtain the best education/training available, and to enjoy a home-like atmosphere with quality caregivers.

