Van Wert ADS has been busy this fall and winter! We had a great opportunity to thank veterans for their service by handing out 71 gift cards for Veterans Day and over 250 treat bags for Christmas at the VA hospital. We received a very nice letter from a veteran at the hospital to thank us for volunteering there. ADS members donated money to buy 24 Cups of Joe for a Joe, a charity that gives deployed troops a taste of home. We have also added volunteering days at the VA hospital as greeters. We continue our volunteer work with the humane society, the pet store, the nursing homes, the preschool, the food pantry, and a local church.

Our Healthy Fit Club is continuing to exceed expectations. Seven individuals participated in the Grand Lake marathon, liking it so much that they expressed interest in completing more races. We are dedicated to our classes at the YMCA and completing our exercise challenge while at ADS. We completed our second year of hikes and received our badges from the Allen County Trailblazers hiking program. We were able to experience the Nutcracker Ballet thanks to funds raised at our fall open house. We held a community scavenger hunt, giving us a chance to thank and give back to those who serve and support us in our community. We have started a community cooking program, where community members teach us how to cook their favorite dishes and we get to work on reading recipes and measurements. Missy has lead the effort to assist clients who want to learn to cook. Mike has continued teaching soft skills to help us work on skills that will help us get community jobs and already help us in our volunteering roles and community relationships. Alexis has continued to help us with our craft and wreath-making to help us raise funds for outings. Jake has helped us make wood crafts and has some neat ones planned for our next open house. We have gone on small group outings to festivals, a dog show, bowling, coffee shops, thrift stores, creameries, gardens, restaurants, garage sales, and have done lots of fun Christmas shopping while working on our budgeting skills.

Van Wert ADS is honored to welcome our new staff member, Jazzlynn, who has quickly become a blessing to us all. We have lots of exciting plans for our future and can’t wait to share them with you all. Please mark your calendars and join us for our Open House on March 5, from 4-6pm. Thank you for your continued support of our program! We could not do what we do without you!

Francie Carmain
MRSI Van Wert ADS Coordinator
A Message from the CEO

As 2018 is coming to a close I realized I have been in my current role as the leader of MRSI for one year. The time has gone by very quickly. Not a single day has been the same. Some days have gone by smoothly while other days have been more challenging.

There continues to be exponential opportunities for MRSI and other private providers to continue to grow and provide needed services to many individuals, yet this remains a challenge as well. The staff shortage for this industry continues to remain at a critical state. Our turnover rate continues to remain high but we are starting to see some positive progress with this as well. It continues to be challenging starting our Direct Support Professionals out at $10.00 an hour as this rate of pay is not competitive in our region. MRSI continues to evaluate what can be done to help reduce turnover rate and attract more applicants.

The Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities has been working with providers on this issue. In the later part of 2018, DODD implemented a competency rate modification for employees who provide homemaker personal care services. Employees will be eligible for a rate modification once they have successfully completed at least two years of full-time paid work experience providing direct services to individuals and they either successfully complete the DSPaths program or complete at least 60 hours of competency based training.

Director John Martin will step down from his position at the State level. In 2019, we will have a new Director. There are many questions as to who will be appointed to replace Director Martin and how this will affect all of us.

Electronic Visit Verification is scheduled to be implemented for some home and community based waiver providers in 2019. Electronic Visit Verification (EVV) is a federal requirement for all states to use to verify personal care services are being completed. EVV has been implemented for other state plan services in Ohio, i.e. Private Duty, State Plan Home Health Aides, State Plan Home Health Nursing. Agencies that provide services to individuals with developmental disabilities are scheduled to fall into the federal mandate by August 2019. Requirements for this compliance will not be funded by the State Department which means agency providers will take on all costs associated with this requirement. MRSI is currently preparing for the new mandate.

With all the challenges that have occurred and / or will be occurring in 2019, I have to say MRSI has made positive progress and will continue to move forward.

Here are few highlights from 2018:

- We are changing to a new online training program called Relias. This program offers more intensive trainings that will benefit our employees than our previous online program could provide.
- We have completed one full year of CPI training with our employees. This is a program that focuses on positive behavior support strategies.
- We have been completing online documentation on services and outcomes for over one year now.
- Our ICF home has installed a sprinkler system in the attic to meet the July 2019 Federal requirement.
- The ICF reimbursement system has been restructured by the State as it was outdated.
- Mercer ADS program has been restructured. Our individuals are getting out into the community more than they ever were and they are making connections with community members.
- We promoted one of our employees to be the Coordinator for the Mercer ADS program.
- We hired a new ADS Director to lead our agency day programs.
- Van Wert ADS continues to increase their community connections. Individuals are frequently volunteering at various businesses and they continue to focus on being physically fit.
- Mental health housing units are having a new security system installed in each 6 unit building.
- Van Wert held a soup/sandwich fundraiser and received over $4,300 for this event.
- Our Licensed home in Van Wert received zero citations during a review completed by the Department of Developmental Disabilities.
- Our ICF home in Mercer County received zero citations during a review completed by the Department of Developmental Disabilities.

I want to thank all the staff at MRSI. All of you work hard every day to ensure our individuals are receiving high quality care. I know it is not always easy coming into work especially on a holiday when I am sure you would like to be spending time with your own family. Likewise with the national staff shortage situation many of our employees are giving up some of their days off to ensure our individuals continue to receive quality care. Please know you are greatly valued and appreciated; MRSI would not continue to move forward without you and your dedication to MRSI.

- Janelle Wehrman, CEO
Award Winners

There were many nominations for the Mike Trace award and the nominations will be featured in the newsletters throughout the year. In this newsletter, we are highlighting the Mike Trace award winner and the winner of the OPRA Behind the Scenes Staff by including the nominations that were submitted.

Mike Trace Award Winner- Doug Ashbaugh

I would like to nominate Doug Ashbaugh for the Mike Trace Award. Doug has been a DSP with us since 4/14/2000. I nominate Doug because he has shown his dedication to MRSI. He is always at work when scheduled, he never calls off. Doug also sticks it out when the home is short staffed. Doug is willing to help out when he can and where he can. Since the recent loss of another staff member, Doug has taken on several more responsibilities such as grocery shopping. Doug is always positive and has an upbeat attitude while working. Doug is very deserving of this award and should be recognized.

Doug has worked in the most behaviorally challenging home MRSI operates his entire career. He works with individuals who have physical disabilities as well as individuals who are verbally and physically aggressive. He builds trusting relationships with the individuals we serve. He tries to stay out of negative drama. He is willing to do anything he is asked to do. Doug ensures the home is clean and often times goes above State and Agency expectations. He is not afraid to help out when a resident is in crisis. He seldom has any errors with his required documentation. He has demonstrated over the years he will apply any training he receives to the tasks/responsibilities he needs to carry out. He has been able to take individuals out in the community when other employees have not had any success; he is able to do this by building an ongoing trusting relationship with the individuals. He has demonstrated he is able to mentor new employees.

OPRA Behind the Scenes Staff Award Winner- Brooke Murray

Brooke Murray is an amazing “behind the scenes” staff. While she is a front line supervisor, what she does behind the scenes is what makes her stand out. Brooke is a very energetic and upbeat person that makes people smile wherever she goes. Brooke reaches out to various businesses to spread the word about who Mercer Residential Services is and what we do. After talking to Brooke and learning about MRSI, many of these businesses donate tickets or their time to our residents. Brooke also does a lot of research to find different activities and events for residents for little to no cost. Because of all of Brooke’s efforts, individuals served have been able to go to Reds games, Dragon’s games, Nickel World, Trader Joes, Scene 75, EnterTRAINment Junction, etc. While these things may seem like typical activities for some people, when you live in a rural town, these activities are rare occurrences. The Grand Lake Mariners donated their time to come out to our ICF to do a meet and greet. Brooke even got the local Santa Clause to do a surprise visit to our Christmas Party last year. SSAs have sent emails to Brooke’s supervisor boasting: “Over the past few months I have been impressed with her interactions with those she’s providing services, with her creativity of planning activities, with her dependability, and with her obvious heart for those she’s serving. She’s GREAT!!!!” Brooke truly makes a positive impact in the lives of individuals with developmental disabilities.
Holiday Decorating Contest!

Residents and staff teamed up to decorate for the holidays! The locations that participated in this all did a wonderful job decorating for the holidays. Below are the narratives that each location wrote to describe why they chose to decorate the way that they did.

3rd Place Winner- Mercer ADS

Welcome to our North Pole. As you can see, Santa and some of his reindeer are prepping for their Christmas Eve run! Walking farther into the magical forest you will see that the magic isn’t just contained to the inside of the workshop. If you look hard enough, you might just catch some elves enjoying a snowball fight.

As we enter the workshop, you can see all the preparations that have been done inside as well. Stockings are hung by the chimney with care, while the presents are ready to be passed about.

Santa’s elves have worked hard this year on spreading community cheer. We are known as Santa’s helpers as we spend many hours a year volunteering at the Humane Society, local food pantries, and other community events. We do the best we can. Helping those in and around our community is what we do the best! We enjoy spreading cheer for all the boys and girls that are near.

We hope you enjoy your time in our Winter Wonderland. Take your time looking closely at all the pictures and artwork. Notice the creativity and thought that went behind each and every piece. And as always, live in the Christmas spirit!

2nd Place Winner- Gay St.

The residents and staff discussed what they enjoyed about Christmas and what great memories they had growing up. Putting up and decorating the Christmas tree with our family and decorating the house with Christmas spirit was just the beginning. Hanging stockings on the fireplace mantle so when they woke up in the morning, the stockings would be filled with candy and surprises. Leaving cookies and milk out for Santa was a must. We couldn’t forget to go outside and decorate with lots of bright lights and decorations so everyone could enjoy. Being outside then brought up the many memories of playing in the snow, making snow angels, snowmobiling and letting snowflakes land on our tongues. This is how we decided to decorate for Christmas this year. Traditional Christmas memories and Winder Wonderland/Let it Snow. Christmas decorating and activities for 2018 has begun, let the fun begin!!
**1st Place Winner - Wayne St. Group Home**

The first place winner was the Wayne Street Group Home! The staff that won the drawing for 8 hours of vacation time was Sarah Hromish. Wayne Street’s narrative on why they chose to decorate the way that they did:

The residents wanted everyone that entered WSGH to feel like they were at home. Every window, wall, and heart has been touched with Christmas. All residents and staff participated in decorating the house. Decorating the house was a very exciting time for the residents and staff because it brought everyone together as a family. As you walk into our home, we hope you feel the festive, warm Christmas spirit that welcomes the residents and staff each time they come home. Merry Christmas!
Mercer ADS

This year for Christmas, ADS consumers received MRSI zip-up sweatshirts as a gift. The sweatshirts were given to our consumers from MRSI staff. Each consumer had the chance to unwrap their gift on December 14th and they continued to sport their new jackets every day following. The consumers were very thankful for their gifts and expressed their gratefulness to all staff.

Mercer ADS had another fun day of cooking in December. This month, the consumers chose to make cream cheese stuffed French toast, egg casserole with peppers and onions, fruit and chocolate milk. Our consumers and staff were also asked to wear their pajamas and enjoy our Polar Express theme day.

We were all smiles for Christmas! Our consumers enjoyed decorating for the Christmas Challenge that was held between all MRSI sites. Mercer ADS staff and consumers worked hard by hanging lights, making crafts and paper chains, decorating our new tree and creating our own mantle and fireplace for our stockings. We even enjoyed creating a snowman and penguin out of cups to greet people as they entered into the waiting area at MRSI.

In October, Mercer ADS started their own book club. On a weekly basis, our consumers visit Celina, Minster, Wapak and Saint Mary’s libraries. While at the libraries, they spend their time looking at books and magazines, listening to staff read stories and they even get their own library cards.

Our volunteering opportunities have expanded over the past few months. While we have continued to volunteer at the Humane Society and The Call Food Pantry, we have also been spending some of our time volunteering for the Angel Tree Program as well as Agape Food Pantry. The consumers have learned to sort clothes, bag clothes and stock the shelves of food.

While exploring Auglaize County, our consumers had the opportunity to visit the Saint Mary’s Art Show. During the show, the consumers viewed different artwork made out of different textures and colors.

Maureen Hughes
ADS Director
Van Wert Residential

**Park St.:** The ladies from Park St enjoyed a mild temperature evening in December with a visit to Smiley Park in Van Wert. The children’s garden was beautifully decorated with lights. Park Street ladies and staff enjoyed a Christmas party with pizza, opening gifts, and an ornament exchange! Fun for all!

- Heidi Leendecker, Park St. Home Coordinator

**Level Ones:** Rob had a pre-holiday visit from Olaf and the Grinch! Santa, Mrs. Claus, and one of their elves also stopped by along with friends from the Ohio City Fire Department.

**Gay St.:** Gay St residents had a great time going to Franke Park Fantasy of Lights. They got to visit Santa and enjoy some hot chocolate and popcorn. Then they continued to look at all the Christmas light displays. They also went to Delphos to the Kiwanis Club Hometown Christmas. They walked around downtown and looked at the decorations and enjoyed all the festivities. Then the ladies got to enjoy the Santa Parade. On the way back from the Delphos Parade the ladies were excited to end their fun night at the Jennings Road Church of Christ's Live Nativity Drive-Thru. Gay St. residents also supported and cheered on their team at the Van Wert/Crestview basketball game.

- Jeneane Garwood, Gay St. Home Coordinator
MRSI's Community Corner

While there were many birthdays in the last quarter of 2018, there were 2 people that celebrated big birthdays!

- Nick Huber turned 30 in December
- David Phipps turned 50 in December

Van Wert County Program Director Courtney Althouse married Sam Shehata on December 29th.

Alexis Ramsey got engaged to her longtime boyfriend, Robert, over the holidays!

Congratulations to the both of you!!

Employee Corner

- Van Wert County Program Director Courtney Althouse married Sam Shehata on December 29th.
- Alexis Ramsey got engaged to her longtime boyfriend, Robert, over the holidays!

Congratulations to the both of you!!

MRSI has had 4 new hires at the end of 2018:

- Emily Denney - Mercer ADS
- Anastasia Corp - WSGH
- Jazzlynn Cobb - Van Wert ADS
- Tina Shugart - TEGH

Welcome to all of the new employees!
Press Release

Mercer Residential Services Adult Day Service Program under new management

Maureen Hughes has been appointed as the Adult Day Service Director. Maureen is responsible for all operations of our ADS program for the Mercer / Auglaize / Darke County Region as well as the Van Wert Region. Maureen is a graduate of Ashland University. She has been working in the social service field since 2012 and first began working with individuals with intellectual disabilities in 2013. Maureen resides in Versailles with her family.

Jennifer Bishop has been promoted as the Adult Day Service Coordinator for the Mercer / Auglaize / Darke County Region. Jennifer has been with MRSI since 2013 and began her career as a Direct Support Professional at the Wayne Street Home. She later transitioned to the ADS program in Celina and Van Wert. She has an associate degree in medical office management. Jennifer is responsible for the daily operations of the program.

MRSI offers adult day support and vocational services in small group settings catering to the interest of the individuals served. MRSI encourages a personal approach, and enables a focus on learning and using new skills and knowledge. MRSI strives for the individuals to have greater independence, establish and / or maintain community membership as well as build lasting relationships.