



Department of
Youth Services

Message from DYS Director Harvey Reed

Occupational Therapy Helping Youth at DYS

April is Occupational Therapy Month

April 4, 2016



Occupational Therapist Assistant Corrina Walton works with a Cuyahoga Hills JCF youth taking the Ohio BMV Permit Practice Examination. This first practice attempt permits open book (Digest of Ohio Motor Vehicle Laws) and guided assistance. Eventually the youth will progress to earn a passing score without assistance.

Many youth arrive at DYS behind in academic, social, and behavioral skills that are needed to succeed in school, the workplace, and the community. Often youth have experienced trauma that can negatively impact neurological development and easily trigger fight-or-flight reactions. These challenges must be addressed in order to help youth get on a more positive path. Occupational therapists work collaboratively with the behavioral health team and educational staff to give youth a boost where they are falling behind.

Occupational therapists are skilled at working with youth on school functioning, behavior, recreation, social skills, appropriate use of time, and preparation for adulthood. Through hands-on activities, these therapists help build up youths' abilities. The therapy is especially valuable in building positive pathways in the brain that improve behavior. Our therapists are able to work

with youth who are agitated, help them regain composure, and then talk about the situations that led to the agitation in the first place.

Their tools include everything from smell diffusers, music (rhythmic, classical, and nature sounds), calming videos, and games to help improve the youths' ability to focus. If a youth is angry, a therapist might have the youth use a sensory widget like a hand puzzle or stress ball to calm down. Sensory inputs help offset stress so that the youth can move beyond the agitation and have more clear thinking and positive behavior.

"It looks like we're playing, but we're building their neurological pathways," explains Joan Hedrick who works at Circleville JCF. "And the youth love it."

This form of therapy supports our schools. "It helps them to stay in class longer. We're able to break up their school day and remind them of how to self-regulate," said Rachel Snodgrass who works at Circleville JCF. "They get better at managing themselves in an environment that can be stressful."

Occupational therapists also help youth to learn and develop life skills. For some youth, this begins with basics like grooming and social skills. The therapists work with youth on skills including applying for a job, budgeting, taking public transportation, parenting, renting a first apartment, and more. This work supports our core value of providing youth everything they need to succeed.

Join me in thanking all of our Occupational Therapy professionals:

Joan Hedrick, OTR/L (Occupational Therapist), Circleville JCF

Rachel Snodgrass, MOT, OTR/L (Occupational Therapist), Circleville JCF

Amy Luedy, M.S., OTR/L (Occupational Therapist), Cuyahoga Hills JCF and Indian River JCF

Meredith McCartney, COTA/L (Occupational Therapy Assistant) Cuyahoga Hills JCF and Indian River JCF

Corrina Walton, COTA/L (Occupational Therapy Assistant) Cuyahoga Hills JCF and Indian River JCF