

## Chapter 11: People Power



*Sharing and Caring. Patrick Watts, left, lends a helping hand to his new friend Bobbie Reidl, as they share the experience of caring. Ashtabula Star Beacon photo.*

## Ash/Craft Workers of the Month, Year

Workshop specialists at Ash/Craft Industries nominate a worker out of their work groups to be worker of the month, and the production manager and the director of adult services pick the worker of the month and then, the worker of the year. The winner receives a certificate and a bonus and the worker of the year also receives a plaque with their name engraved on it.

*November, 1981. Winners of worker of the month at Ash/Craft Industries include (left to right) Mike Sabados, Julie Morse, Virginia Soliday and Otis McMillon. Larry Korland, Adult Services*



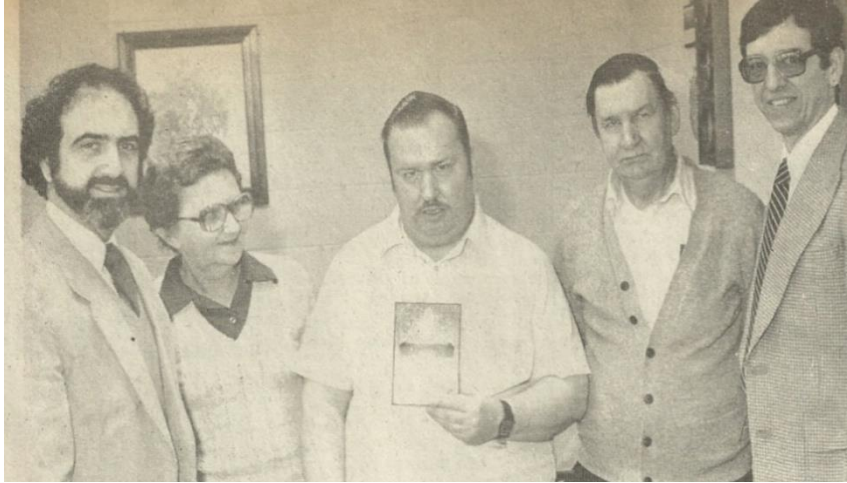
*Director, congratulates the employees. A dance for the employee followed the presentation. Photo by Pat Brink.*

## Kim Covert, 1981, Ash/Craft Worker of the Year





## Paul Connors, 1984 Ash/Craft Worker of the Year



*Ash/Craft Industries Worker of the Year Paul Connors of Conneaut (center) was honored in ceremonies at Ash/Craft Industries Friday. Shown left to right are Larry Korland, director of Ash/Craft; Grace Connors, Paul's mother; Paul Connors, Paul's father and Reverend William Offutt, chairman of the board for Ash/Craft. Paul Connors from Conneaut, has worked*

*at Ash/Craft since 1967. Photo by Robert Higgs. April 2, 1984*

## Susan Eaton, Worker of the Year



*Worker of the Year. Receiving the worker of the year award for Ash/Craft is Susan Eaton, center. Presenting Susan with a \$50.00 check and awards are Michael Parmigian, second shift production manager, left, and Ken Wiegand, first shift production manager. Susan works in the industrial sewing department at Ash/Craft. Photo by Scot Fagerstrom.*

## Mary Licate, 1987 Worker of the Year

For the past ten years that Mary has worked at Ash/Craft, she has won several Worker of the Month awards and also received a proclamation from Senator Robert Boggs and the Ohio State Senate.

Her Workshop Specialists point out her superior work speed and the amount of quality work she produces. She is skilled in sewing on commercial sewing machines and expertly performs numerous inspection jobs. "Mary is considered a total asset to Ash/Craft Industries and represents the very best qualities of the Ash/Craft work force, and its value to the community," the Ash/Craft community newsletter story said. Donna Cleveland, Workshop Specialist wrote the story.

## Karen Miller, 1988 Worker of the Year



Top Worker Honored. Karen Miller (left) has been named as the Ash/Craft Worker of the Year. Karen and her supervisor, Ruth Freidstrom, collate industrial manuals. March 19, 1988. Ashtabula Star Beacon photo by Jim Matthews.

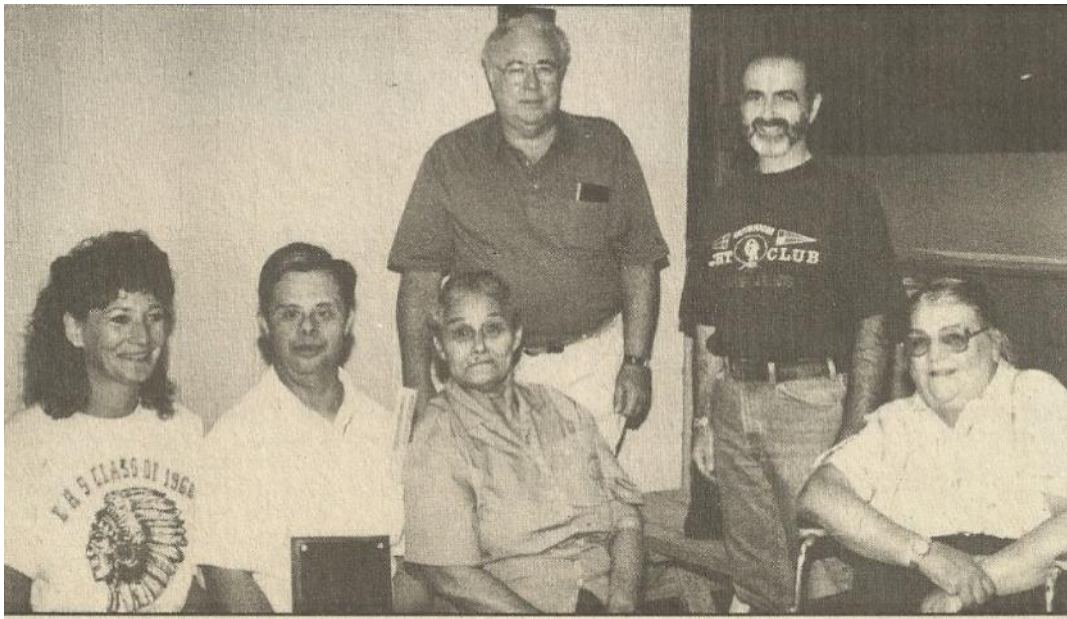


## Jeffrey Spencer, 1990 Worker of the Year

On August 27, 1990, the Ashtabula Sentinel reported that Ash/Craft industries had chosen Jeffrey Spencer as its Employee of the Year. The Employee of the Year is nominated from the group of winners of the employee of the month of the previous year.

Jeff's Workshop Specialists said that "Jeff has been in the workshop program since August of 1980. He has been very successful in many areas of work, and for the past two years he has been working in the transportation department washing and cleaning the buses that transport the other workers to Ash/Craft."

## Luis Rivera, 1991 Ash/Craft Worker of the Year



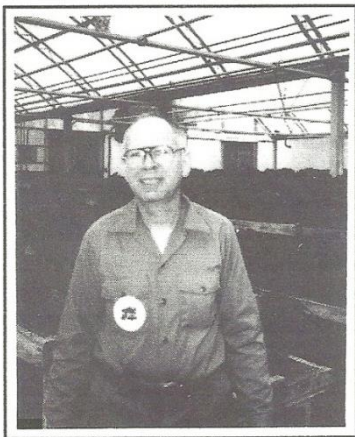
### *Ash/Craft Employee of the Year*

*Luis Rivera (second from left) was recently named Ash/Craft Industries Employee of the Year. A resident of Rome Township, he has been an employee of Ash/Craft since 1977. Celebrating with Rivera is (from left) supervisor Nancy White; Rivera's mother Modesta Marquez; board member Elva Roux; (standing from left) board member Bob Norton and Ash/Craft director Larry Korland. August 26, 1991. Ashtabula Star Beacon photo by Joyce Buell.*

## 1992 Worker of the Year



Larry Korland presenting Herbie McAvoy Worker of the Year, 1992.



## Jerry Russell, 1996 Worker of the Year

Jerry Russell, 48, who has worked in the Ash/Craft Greenhouse for 15 years, was chosen as the 1996 Worker of the Year. His workshop specialist said that he cheerfully does any job he is asked to do, and he can move from job to job and do them well.

The activities Jerry likes to do best include planting flowers in the Ash/Craft Greenhouse, going to dinner and attending church, drawing, and celebrating Christmas, his favorite time of the year. He lives in a residential home with seven other men and helps with the household chores at home.

## Working in the Community

About Completeness...

Paul Conner

by Russell Grippi

New Directions, Winter 1988

It took a while, but Mrs. Grace Conner's long years of planning and dreaming that her son Paul would someday hold a "regular" job in the community were realized when he began employment at Orlando Brother's Golden Dawn in Conneaut on October 9, 1986.

Paul is 40 years old and a product of Happy Hearts School and Ash/Craft Industries. He was a good student, learning the self-help and socialization skills so important to the Happy Hearts curriculum. After his graduation in 1971, Paul entered the sheltered workshop program at Ash/Craft. For 15 years, he "stuck to it," applying his talents, working as an assembler on general production. Paul also was taught woodworking skills in the woodshop. He operated drill presses and a variety of tools in the manufacture of wood products. All these jobs were done with great pride of accomplishment and to the fullest satisfaction of his supervisors.

Paul was indeed one of Ash/Craft's best workers. However, something was not complete in his life. You see, from the outset of his education and training, Paul was placed in a very sheltered and protected environment. This, however was not the case in his life outside Ash/Craft. He lived at home with his parents in Conneaut, and enjoyed the freedom of socializing with neighbors and friends and of coming and going about the community as any adult. He frequented local restaurants, was an accomplished bowler and member of a local bowling team. He enjoyed golfing, shooting pool, and sharing a beer on occasion with the "guys" at Pape's Restaurant.

Yes, Paul led an active life...an active life for any adult...but something was not complete!

When Paul was a young boy, Mrs. Connors set high expectations for him. "We treated him just as we treated our other children. He was included in all family activities and expected to carry his fair share of helping with chores around the house." Paul, through his mother's persistence, was the first person with mental retardation to receive the Sacrament of Holy Communion at his church. He participated in neighborhood activities just as other boys. He cut grass for neighbors and during winter months, shoveled their snow. Paul was always kind, always thoughtful and considerate.

During mid-1986, a new program called "Community Employment," was developed at Ash/Craft. The Community Employment representative, Troy Bailey, quickly enrolled Paul in the Program and worked toward finding him a community job. Paul's skills and desire for competitive employment were obvious.

Joe and Ron Orlando, co-owners of Orlando Brothers Golden dawn store were convinced by Mr. Bailey to give Paul a chance. The rest his history.

Paul now works full-time and has earned the respect of all his co-workers. He participates in the store's social activities, attending the store Christmas party and participating in the gift exchange. On the day of the last Super Bowl, Paul invited a group of friends from work to his home to watch the game. In preparation for their visit, he went grocery shopping with his mom.

Perhaps one of the nicest things to come of the experience is the feeling of "completeness" within Paul and his family. Admittedly, Paul's dad had a hard time dealing with the fact that his son was mentally retarded. For many years it was difficult for father and son to communicate or develop a close relationship.

Things have now changed. Paul and his dad have developed a deep bond of friendship. They golf together, have vacationed in Florida and even enjoy a good game of pool once in a while. As the other children have grown and left home, so too, has Paul grown. He carries his fair share of the responsibilities of the household and takes a great pride in buying items of furniture for all to use. He also contributes money for room and board.

Needless to say, Paul's mom has realized her dream. Her many years of hard work, patience, love, and caring clearly were worth the effort. She is so very proud of Paul and happy that his life is approaching completeness.

As to Paul's success on the job, the Orlando Brothers unequivocally believe Paul to be one of their best employees. "Wish we had ten more just like him. Paul is just like one of our family," said Ron Orlando recently.

Hats off to Joe and Ron Orlando for believing in Paul and giving him the opportunity to succeed. It has truly been a "WIN-WIN" situation for everyone.

## **Seniors Group at Ash/Craft Stresses the Positive**

March 8, 1992

Gladys Humes, instructor for the Seniors Group at Ash/Craft stimulates the minds of the students in the program by asking them questions. "If you could go anywhere in the world, where would you go?" is one of her favorite questions.

Emil Rice, 62, senior citizen in the program and employee in the workshop, said he would like to return to the Andover farm where he was born and raised.

Emil is Gladys's right hand man, who helps her set up bowling pins and keep score. He helps wash dishes. He likes to play bingo and he said he usually wins, once winning 50 cents.

He has a good sense of humor. He says among the animals on his childhood farm were horses, cows, pigs, and elephants. Then he laughs. There were never any elephants.

As he and his family and friends grow older, Emil sometimes thinks about death. He worries most that he won't be able to come to work at Ash/Craft or remain a part of the Seniors Group where he has made many friends.



Gladys said the group stresses the positive things in the people's lives. She thoroughly enjoys working with the people in her group and they seem to appreciate her compassion. "We're more than delighted to have this program and the people who are in it," she said.

## **Ash/Craft Trains Jerry Kangas for the Future**

March 8, 1992

Jerry Kangas is 24. He went through Happy Hearts School and now enjoys working at Ash/Craft. Jerry's many abilities include material handling, heat sealing and heat wrapping, and he is already making plans for the time when he will work outside in the community. "Well, I've got two things on my mind; one is to be a janitor anywhere and the other is be a material handler," he said. "It's a lot of work and I love to work hard. It makes me feel good."

Jerry lives at home with his family and a German shepherd named Sheeba, which is his responsibility.

Jan Church, workshop supervisor, said Jerry is a hard worker who has great potential to succeed in the outside workplace. "He's going to make someone a good employee someday," he said.

Church said her job is twofold: She wants to teach the workers as many job skills as she can and build their confidence and self-esteem. Ash/Craft has deadlines, quotas, and high standards for quality work. "We do put out quality work here. One thing people don't realize is that we are a full-scale business, not crafts. I'm teaching job skills. The most important goal is that my people could someday work in the community. I have some excellent workers."

## Ash/Craft, Spire Partner Provide Opportunities

July 15, 2017



Ash/Craft workers Josh McGuire (right) and Jaye Wight (middle) begin tidying and mopping the restrooms Thursday at the Spire Institute’s Aquatic Center, while Ashtabula County Board of Developmental Disabilities on-site supervisor A.J. Petro (left) looks on. Ashtabula Star Beacon Photo by Justin Dennis.

Eileen Luebking vividly remembers the day when doctors told her that her son Josh McGuire would never be able to talk and they recommended that he be institutionalized.

Last week she proudly stepped through the door he held for her as she watched him get to work at the Spire Institute in Harpersfield Township. “Welcome to the Aquatic Center,” Josh said in the sober tone that makes his mother grin.

Josh traveled through an early nonverbal phase of his autism, but his years at Happy Hearts School enabled him to talk and develop practical skills. After he graduated from Happy Hearts, he went to work at Ash/Craft Industries. Now he’s one of three Ash/Craft janitors who maintain

the Spire Athletic facility part time through the week. He helps replace toiletries, empties trash, mops, and performs other maintenance chores.

Jan Church, Ash/Craft Community Employment Specialist, said the workshop can bring as many as 35 workers when Spire hosts a large sporting event. According to Jan, one such event sparked Ash/Craft's partnership with the Spire Institute when its usual contractors canceled the last minute and she scrambled to form a janitorial team under the pressure of a deadline. "Ever since then, our partnership with Spire has been phenomenal. It's given so many opportunities to people from Ash/Craft to go out into the community...and what a great place to be in, too. They get to see the athletes, talk to the athletes, and everyone is positive with us," she said.

Contradicting the doctor's dire predictions of his inability to talk, Josh has several words to say about his job. "I like to work as a team, working together and helping out each other with any tasks that they need done," he said. "I feel like it's a nationwide thing for us to help each other with just making sure everybody is neat and safe."

His mother Eileen said that her son has had several community placement jobs since he started at Ash/Craft, but his job at Spire has grown his sense of responsibility and pride. "She lets her pride in her son shine in her words. "Josh does better here than anywhere else," she said. "He sets his alarm by himself now. I don't have to get him up. He packs his own lunch. He's on the spot." She says that Josh is a solemn perfectionist who enjoys the punctuality and the routine of his regular Monday, Thursday, and Saturday schedule. He 's rarely late and doesn't call in sick much either.

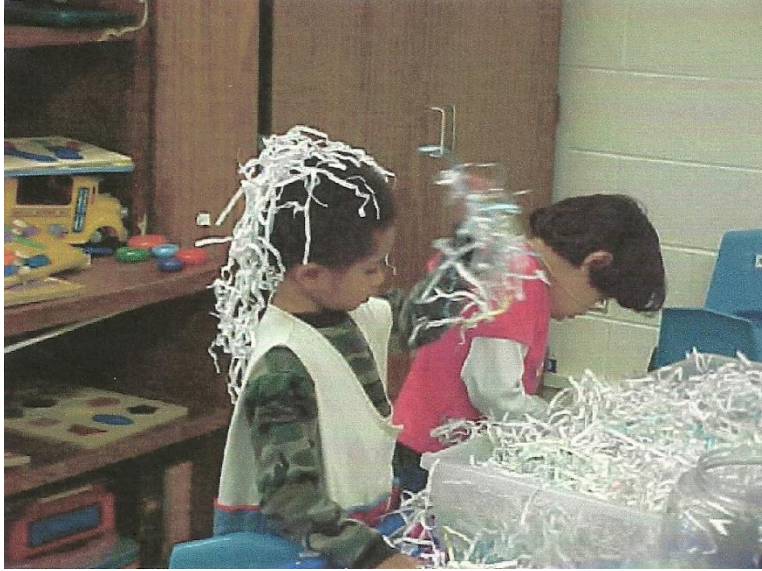
"I have to be there. It's my responsibility," Josh says.

"Sometimes he gets a gleam in his eye and a smile. That's rare for Josh because he's so serious. He just loves it," Eileen says.

A.J. Petro, Ash/Crafts on-site supervisor, has also watched Josh McGuire grow into a confident person since he started his Spire job. "He's really taken ownership. He takes great pride in what he does," she said. According to Supervisor Petro, Josh and the other Ash/Craft workers make minimum wage at Spire, but unlike the usual temporary jobs, the consistent community placement is in itself worth much more. "Many businesses in the community aren't ready or confident enough to accept the challenge of developmentally disabled employees. "It takes a lot of time and energy on the company's part to be willing to make that commitment," she said.



## Happy Hearts – the First Steps on Life’s Stairway of Possibilities



Let’s have a party with paper shreds, Throw paper knowledge in our heads!

### Ricarda (Nici) Reynolds Gets Her Wheels

1985

Sometime in 1985, Happy Hearts Physical Therapist Debbie Hills and Sandy Reynolds, the mother of 13-year-old Ricarda (Nici) Reynolds who has cerebral palsy, had a conversation. Debbie wanted to make sure that Nici’s mother approved of her plan of getting an electric wheelchair for Nici and that her family supported the idea. She had to be certain that Sandy Reynolds and her family could make the necessary adaptations to her home to accommodate the electric wheel chair.

Sandy Reynolds welcomed the idea of an electric wheelchair for her daughter and assured Debbie she would help get her daughter wheels. Debbie Hills began what turned out to be a nearly two-year project to get the federal Medicaid system to approve and authorize purchasing a wheel chair for Nici.

Finally, Nici settled into her new electric wheelchair which propelled her into the world of opening doors and also opening vocational opportunity for her. At school, Nici can deliver messages and notes throughout the school. She can move around the classroom and her school building to interact with her teachers and peers. She can visit her friends. All of these new

opportunities helped Nici develop her self-esteem and confidence and move ahead in her personal development. Her wheels have opened the road to future opportunities for her.

## Growing Up Happy Hearts: Megan Bailey

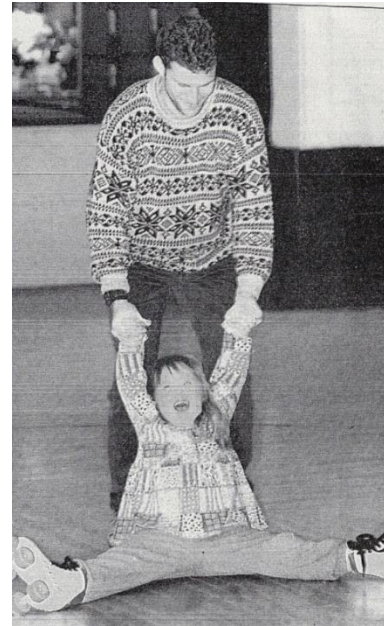


*Megan Bailey examines her gift from Santa during the 1987 Happy Hearts Christmas party.*



*Megan Bailey, 7, receives a gift from Santa Claus during a Christmas party at Happy Hearts School on December 22, 1994. Students from Conneaut High School sponsored the party. Warren Dillaway took the photo for the Ashtabula Star Beacon.*

*March 5, 1995. Happy Hearts primary students went roller skating at Kings Roller Rink in North Kingsville with some assistance from Conneaut JOGs classes and volunteers Megan Bailey has some trouble balancing on her wheels, but Chris Cavert helps her land softly. Jim Mathews, Star Beacon photograph.*



*Prom Royalty, May 12, 2009*

*Prom King Adam Henson  
and Prom Queen Megan Bailey.*



*May 28, 2009. The Happy Hearts School 2009 graduates are back row, left to right, Michael Bailey Jr.; Robert Seaton; Adam Henson; and Nicole Lambert. Front row left to right Kyle Lawver and Megan Bailey.*

## **Student of the Month**

Ashtabula County Sentinel

August 6, 1990

Kingsville...If help is what you need, you can count on Michael Zajac, a 20-year-old work-study student who was elected as "Student of the Month," by the Ashtabula Exchange Club. With an almost perfect attendance record, Mike exhibits the qualities of a caring, dedicated worker who strives for excellence on the job at Happy Hearts School.

One of eight children, Mike is a native of Niles, Ohio, where he attended Fairhaven School until he transferred to Happy Hearts last September after the death of his father. He presently resides in Kingsville with one of his brothers, his sister in law, and their two children.

In only seven months, Michael has adjusted well to his new environments and has learned to do a thorough job all work study tasks assigned to him. He also works as a teacher's aide in one of the primary classrooms and serves as a "sales rep" for the print shop recently initiated by the work study group.

Because he shares so willingly of his time and talents. Mike will be greatly missed by both teachers and classmates when he graduates this coming May. We also thank the Ashtabula Exchange Club for giving Mike this honor.

## **Happy Hearts is Helping Fred**

March 1992

Fred's mother, Janet, talks about the difference Happy Hearts has made in his life. "We were lucky we had Fred when infant therapy was just starting," she said.

His family is impressed with his reading and math, but most appreciative of the improvement in his communication skills through speech therapy at Happy Hearts. His mother Janet said, "The thing I appreciate the most is being able to communicate with him. When he used to come from school, he did not volunteer information about his day or activities, whereas now, he is more open and able to communicate his thoughts."

This ability to communicate has allowed Fred and his family to develop their relationships more fully.



Fred has taught his family many things in return.

“I think the things I’ve learned from him are just an appreciation of the little accomplishments he has done,” Janet said. Janet said disabled people sometimes get negative reactions from the public because people don’t understand them. She believes it is good for mentally retarded and developmentally disabled people to be a part of the community.

## The Learning Circles

Story by Carl E. Feather(with apologies for slight alterations!)

Monday March 14, 2006



*Early Intervention is an important part of the work done at Happy Hearts. Bonnie Bashaw, an Early Intervention teacher, teaches Laura Koeth the concept of “pull” using Play Dough. Above right, Leslie Skidmore works with Gail Millard and her son Zachary at the Millard’s home. Bottom right, Marilyn Miller presents a decision-making challenge to Joshua Garrett, a preschool student. Ashtabula Star Beacon photos by Carl E. Feather.*

The Early Intervention program at Happy Hearts provides services and referrals even before a child is born. The goal is to provide assessment and intervention so children with developmental issues can move into either a traditional public school program or one of the Happy Hearts satellite programs in public school districts

“The earlier we can catch children, the better we can serve them,” says Happy Hearts Director of Education Michael DeMarino.

“By getting them early they may not be delayed by their disabilities later on,” Bonnie Bashaw, an Early Intervention specialist said. Bonnie Bashaw is a 16-year veteran of special education and works with the Help Me Grow System, a program for Ohio’s expectant parents, newborn infants, and toddlers that provides health and developmental services. The goal is to help these children start school healthy and ready to learn. Every week Bonnie Bashaw spends about 3 ½ days in the classroom and 1 ½ days on the road working in the homes of clients. Many of the home-bound students are medically fragile and can’t attend the school. Her classroom-based students receive two hours of instruction twice a week. “I run a fairly structured room,” she says as she and her assistant Darlene Stough helps three students work with gobs of Play Dough. The play helps develop motor skills, eye-hand coordination, attention spans and language. Consistent, scheduled play time helps give structure to the program.

“They need to know what’s going to come next so they can relax and learn better,” Bonnie said.

Developing a child’s communication skills is a key aspect of the work that Bonnie Bashaw and Darlene Stough do with the children. They teach basic sign language skills at outset. The first two signs the children learn are “more” and “please.” Then you do the two words together, “more please” Darlene said.

“It gives the children some quick success with language,” Bonnie adds. “The kids will naturally drop the signs and use language when they are ready.”

A key to the success of the Early Intervention program is parental involvement. Bonnie says they are constantly updated on the child’s progress and they involved in helping that child overcome developmental delays.

“We see what the child is doing and what they need to work on next,” says Leslie Skidmore, an Early Intervention Specialist. “We provide the family with activities and strategies to incorporate into their everyday lives. We try to break the skills down into little manageable pieces the family can work on step by step.”

Leslie spends three days a week providing EI services in the home. One of her clients is 22-month-old Zachary Millard of Ashtabula Township. The son of Bart and Gail Millard, Zachary was born at 24 weeks and weighed less than two pounds. He spent the first six months of his life at University Hospitals in Cleveland. Two weeks before he came home, an EI specialist from Happy Hearts started working with the Millards to help them obtain the services they’d need to get Zachary’s development on track.

Bart Millard says they were overwhelmed with all the issues stemming from having a premature baby, but the EI specialist helped them connect with services in the community.

At the outset, Leslie Skidmore made three visits a week to the Millard home, evaluating and monitoring Zachary's speech, language, motor, learning skills and socialization and emotional development.

Leslie now sees Zachary just once a week at home. She spends that time evaluating his progress, playing with him, and suggesting activities that will help him develop skills appropriate to his age. "While I am playing with him, I'm evaluating and giving Gail ideas as we go along," she says.

Some of the activities teach cause/effect concepts like placing an animal figure in a building to trigger a sound. Sorting all of the cows of a barnyard play set into a pile teaches categorizing skills. Leslie models the activities, and then encourages Zachary to imitate, and thereby learn the skill.

Zachary also goes into a Happy Hearts classroom once a week with Leslie and another student to provide socialization skills. But Skidmore says some of the EI students receive all their services at home. Regardless where the services are delivered, every 120 days, the EI specialist reviews the Individual Family Services Plan for the child with the family and sets new goals.

Unlike the other programs in the school, EI goes year around, essential when young minds and bodies are rapidly developing. The children simply can't afford to lose those 2 ½ months of professional contact to summer vacation. Leslie says that the majority of EI students served through Happy Hearts will move on to a public school classroom. At age 2 ½ the students are evaluated and at age three, further services can be delivered through a preschool program provided by the school districts where they live or at Happy Hearts. "Many of our kids go to their district's preschool or stay at home and get their services from the preschool in the district," she says.

### Functional Learning

Marilyn Miller and her assistant Abbey Fazekas teach one of the two Happy Hearts preschool classes. Like Bonnie Bashaw and Leslie Skidmore, Marilyn Miller also spends a day on the road doing home visits with parents. The preschool classroom is unique because, in addition to the eight students allowed by law, there are three "typical" students who do not need Happy Hearts services. Their parents pay a small fee for them to attend the preschool where they provide socialization and a catalyst for age appropriate activities.

Miller has been teaching 24 years. It's a tough assignment, given the high energy level and wide range of issues and needs represented in the population entrusted to her.

"We try to work one-on-one as much as we can," she says as several of the children swarm around her. "But there's never enough of us, we all keep busy. You can have 100 hands, but sometimes it's still not enough."

After breakfast, the children head to a classroom where Marilyn sits in a rocking chair with the children gathered around her in a circle. Students sign in by placing a card with their name and picture in a slot on the blackboard. Then Miller leads them through exercises that helps them learn the day of the week, dates, counting and the calendar. These kinds of activities are repeated



in other classrooms where students are drilled on the day of the week, the date, the weather, and seasons.

Education Director Mike DeMarino says these are practical functional ways to present academic subjects like mathematics, science, language, and social studies that the Ohio Department of Education requires the school to teach.



#### Practical skills

*James Kiser, a teacher in the advanced classroom, helps Vincent Fuller with a page of math problems.*

On the other side of the school, James Kiser's advanced students start their day working on a variety of tasks under his supervision. As with the other students, their day starts with breakfast in the cafeteria. Back in their classroom, each student tackles a different assignment. "You have so many different learning levels in each

room, Jim says. "It's a lot different from the normal education setting where everybody gets taught the same thing all day.

Ashley Kenyon was given a worksheet on which she had to write letters. That was followed by a sheet of math problems to do with a calculator. Michael Bailey practiced sorting tasks, one of the jobs at the workshop. "It's all hands-on, physically modeling, simulating jobs," James says.

Students are motivated by the praise of their teachers and the promise of rewards. For one student, that means a short nap. For another, it's a chance to browse through a stack of magazines.

Street and door signs students are likely to encounter in the real world are posted all over the classroom windows. Students are tested daily on word recognition using flash cards. Every day they are in class, the students are drilled on words like "hospital", "911", "railroad crossing," "police," "private," and "elevator."

Someday Michael may have a full-time job at Ash/Craft where these skills will help him earn a paycheck. It's Jim's job to make sure Michael and his other seven students will function at his highest possible level when at the age of 22, he enters the world.

## Special Story: Students Write Across Schools

### Pen Pals Unite



*Photo by Carl E. Feather, Ashtabula Star Beacon. After writing each other many months, students at Happy Hearts School and Kingsville Elementary met for the first time on Friday and spent the school day together.*

1993

After writing to each other from separate schools for about five months, students at Happy Hearts School, a school for students with learning and developmental disabilities, and Kingsville Elementary met for the first time Friday and spent the school day together. Since about December, seven fifth grade students from Kingsville Elementary School and seven students from the Intermediate Class at Happy Hearts School have been writing back and forth to each other. On Friday, these students met each other for the first time at the Happy Hearts classroom and spent the day together both learning and playing with each other.

Barb Turchetta, who teaches the Intermediate Class and her assistant Cindy McCall, helped the students write the letters. The letters are a way for the students from both the schools to learn writing and reading skills as well as social skills.

“I try to make education as functional as possible,” Barb said. “I try to let them use their academic skills in everyday life. For instance, learning to read and write in the context of letters to other children.”

Although meeting someone for the first time can be an intimidating experience, the students from both the classes warmed up to each other and overcame their shyness relatively quickly.

Barb said that it is normal to fear something that is different and sometimes children without handicaps can be frightened by children and people with handicaps. Spending time with people different than they are helps people accept and understand that everyone is different and to a certain extent all people have some sort of a handicap.

“When someone is different from us, whether they are black or white or fat or thin, or have handicaps, we tend to be afraid of each other and avoid each other. Why is that?” Teacher Turchetta asked the class.

One of the students pointed out that people are sometimes afraid of things they are unaccustomed to and don’t understand.

Teacher Turchetta said that teaching a heterogenous class which brings together children with or without handicaps in one classroom has been a dream of hers for a long time. She believes that bringing different kinds of children together in a classroom helps the children learn to understand and accept people different than themselves. Heterogenous learning only works when cooperative skills such as helping others learn are stressed in a classroom, she added.

Sometimes teachers are afraid the kids will not accept other children, but when you bring the kids together, they see that these are kids too and they aren’t afraid anymore and they don’t laugh at them, she explained.

According to Barb, the state is advocating more transitioning in the primary grades of children with or without handicaps at any early age. Children with handicaps will not be automatically separated from other children if they are able to function in the schools. She thinks that this is good for the child with a handicap and the other children in the class because it will teach them acceptance. “They will accept them because it will be a way of life for them,” she said.

There is a tendency for people to forget that children and people with handicaps are individuals who have specialized talents and personalities, she said. There is so much that all people can learn from those people who have handicaps. People need to open their minds to what they can learn from someone else. “I think that people sometimes think that because kids are handicapped they don’t have individual abilities and talents, Barb said. “But they do each have something to offer. Some of them are better on the computer. Others are better at writing. And they learn to help each other with these skills.”