



Our team of heroes

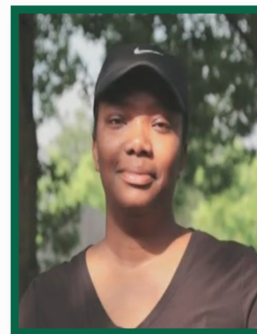
Never have the words to this Helen Keller quote been more evident than on Memorial Day, 2019. Helen said this, "Alone we can do little. Together we can do so much." Our Montgomery County management team at Choices could not have imagined how much they would do together when and after the tornadoes hit. Just how much they did resulted not only in support and safety for staff and clients, it earned them an award as the top team in Ohio for 2019, presented by the Ohio Provider Resource Association (OPRA) during its Fall Conference.

Seamlessly and courageously, our program directors, office administrator, maintenance team, fiscal office, billing and documentation staff came together to provide whatever support they could for individuals and direct care staff. The work they did started as the storms were hitting and went on for days, with little to no rest for some until everyone else was safe.

Program Directors were out in their own cars clearing streets of debris so that they could get to the people in their homes. They made arrangements at hotels for temporary housing, with some of those arrangements as far from our homes as Piqua. They took their own money to buy food. Program directors, maintenance and office staff came together well beyond working hours to load up a truck with what was left after the destruction of one home, taking what items they could to a temporary home, setting it up to look as much like the old home as possible. There was the fiscal director on vacation out of state communicating online with the office administrator to process payroll so that staff would not miss a pay check. There was billing done at home by staff so that funding would not be disrupted, and food stamps processed at home by staff so no individual would lose benefits. There was the office administrator alone for hours in an office with no power and no water, juggling emergency calls from staff on cell phones, then going home to work for even more hours to triage the most urgent needs. Not one life was lost ... not one injury... and services continued. The number one team in Ohio consists of our heroes of the storm. **Together they did so much!**

A hero among us

Pete Moore, Executive Director of the Ohio Provider Resource Association (OPRA) was among those celebrating Direct Support Professionals in the Dayton area after the May tornadoes, sharing this message with them at a community appreciation event hosted by the Montgomery County Board of Developmental Disabilities Services, "our heroes faced tragedy with strength and with dignity, but let us remember that what they did is not new to them. It is the backbone of what they do every day."



He could have been speaking directly about Dionte Cooley-Garrett, with one exception. When she became a DSP in February, 2019 she had no way of knowing just how soon she would be tested. How well she handled that test earned

her recognition as **DSP of the Year** for District 2, with her award presented by OPRA at its Fall Conference.

As the winds blew in the home where she was serving as a DSP, as the roof flew off, Dionte's actions were **D**irect, **S**upportive and **P**rofessional. As the storm tore the home apart and the smell of gas filled the air, she got three frightened men outside to their van. The van was also a casualty of the storm, covered in debris. Her own small car was covered in debris, even under the tires. She got them into her car, drove them through the debris-ridden streets, staying by their side. So much to happen in such a short period of time, from training to tragedy, to saving three lives and to touching even more lives now that she has been promoted to Program Administrator for our Broadbush home. Pete Moore certainly could have been talking about Dionte. With strength and with dignity, she did what DSPs do every day – and on some of those days, they save lives!

A year never to be forgotten *by Tom Weaver, Executive Director*

WOW! If I had to sum up 2019 in one word it would be just that – WOW! What a year it has been for us here at Choices and for our larger Dayton community. We were so fortunate that the Memorial Day tornadoes didn't cause any injuries or loss of life to those we serve, their families or our staff. It did leave many without power, water, access to transportation, and, in our case, the loss of one home that has now been replaced. More than 40 people we serve had to be temporarily re-located and what an outpouring of support from area hotels and motels in making accommodations for people in wheelchairs and with other medical equipment. We just can't say enough good about them! There was significant loss of food in refrigerators and freezers, paid for by those who live in our homes. With most of them having monthly incomes around \$800, the cost to replace food was an indirect but very real part of the damages.

Several of our staff lost homes or had damage, damage to cars and personal property, with some still recovering from those damages. We (*and they*) are filled with gratitude for other staff and friends who stepped up and made donations to support staff as they recovered from their losses. And then what do you say about staff? Some of them huddled with individuals in our homes as the storms passed over, keeping them safe, getting them out of homes as gas lines leaked, even as their own homes were being damaged and they didn't know about their own families. They never once, not one of them, put themselves before the people they were there to safeguard. In my book, there's one word for that – **HERO!**

I wish I could tell you all of the stories and introduce you to all of our heroes, but all of that would fill a book. And so within these few but important pages, we will share some of the stories and introduce you to some of the people and remind you that for each person you meet and each story you read, there are so many others whose heroism is measured in the lives they saved. They were there working 60-80 hours or more a week during recovery, staying with their CICL family members to not only keep them safe but to provide them assurance and continuity. There are the countless stories of all the phone calls to communicate with families, dealing with insurance, teaming with other service providers, calls to hotels/motels to find safe places, of racing to homes to help, getting out of your own car and clearing debris from streets to get to 'your CICL family' to make sure they were safe.

We really know from experience what Thanksgiving means, what true gratitude feels like. I am so thankful for and so honored to work alongside this remarkable Choices' team. They are the lifeblood, the heart and soul of who and what we are. I know that and so many around Ohio know that. My eyes glistened as I stood with 380 other people at the Fall Conference of the Ohio Provider Resource Association (*OPRA*) in Columbus as our team members received District and Statewide recognition for their heroic work in a time of crisis, and as some were recognized for years (*even decades*) of service. Read their stories on these pages. Maybe your eyes too will glisten just a little. That can happen when you walk with heroes.

Our hero 'Behind the Scenes'

Of all the things David Gleason gives to the people he serves in his role as Self-Advocacy Adviser, none rise above the dignity and respect he gives them, the quiet support he gives them behind the scenes as they become leaders in their own communities and in their own lives. His goal is to be as invisible as possible to those he supports. His success in meeting that goal led to him receiving the 2019 **Behind the Scenes Award** for District 2, presented by the Ohio Provider Resource Association during its Fall Conference.

He works in partnership with Choices In Community Living and the Greene County Board of Developmental Disabilities to provide support to individuals involved in self-advocacy. He makes copies, puts together manuals, schedules meeting rooms, answers questions, whatever they need, even making sure they get recognition for what they are doing. According to John LaRock, Superintendent of the Greene County Board, "David brings a unique perspective to his role as a facilitator for Voices of Greene County. His ability to create an environment that encourages individuals to realize they are active, contributing members of their communities is undeniable. He builds an infrastructure to get you to the door and then gets out of the way as the door opens and you begin to enjoy the fact that you have much to give and to receive from participating in community life."

The result can be seen in the work of the award-winning self-advocacy groups, Voices of Greene County and Voices Matter/Montgomery County, from an annual self-advocacy conference at Wright State University to a partnership between the groups and the Beavercreek Police Department that has resulted in presentations to police departments at the state level.

An outcome has been the chartering of the first Optimist Clubs in the nation led by people with I/DD, with David working behind the scenes with community Optimist Clubs and the self-advocacy groups. "David is the epitome of total heartfelt dedication to promoting self-fulfillment for individuals with developmental disabilities," shares Myron Rheame, who worked with David in chartering the Greenemont and Partners Optimists Clubs. "His commitment to bringing out the best in people is heartwarming on all levels. He has a natural affinity to focus on abilities as opposed to disabilities. He has an innate talent to provide relevant information in a communication style that puts everyone at ease and in a confident, comfortable mode."



Missy's time to shine

When you make it all come together – when you keep it all together in the most difficult of times and the people you serve remain your priority like Missy Puckett does, you become remarkable! You also receive well-deserved recognition from the Ohio Provider Resource Association (OPRA) as the 2019 **Front Line Supervisor of the Year** for District 2. District 2 is the 12-county region that includes counties served by Choices In Community Living. Unable to attend the award ceremonies in Columbus, she was surprised to have been nominated and to win. “I’m really surprised!” she said when she received her award from her supervisor Chrystal Chitwood. “To be recognized like this, it’s just unbelievable!”

Missy Puckett has been nothing less than remarkable every day for far more than 20 years, first as a Direct Support Professional (DSP) for our Frizzell home in Preble County and now where she serves as the program administrator for the home, overseeing the work of four DSPs. Four men live in that rural county home. Two have diabetes and rely on special diets and insulin pumps.

Missy has been with them all this time. They are her family. From shopping to banking to taking them on vacation, she is always there. She is in contact with their family members who rely on her as the men do. Committed to their health, she separates food into containers and labels them with the number of carbs so staff will know immediately how many carbs are in any food. Shelves are filled with food with labels. She will work seven days or seven nights at a time when the home is short-staffed.

She keeps it together in the good and in the difficult times, even when most people might focus on their own needs. She is the caretaker for her mother. She needs two knee replacements. In the past two years she has faced the deaths of her only child and her husband. Through it all, she has not once missed being with the men. They hold her up as she holds them up. **A simply remarkable family!**

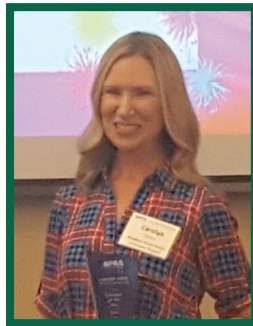
Thank you, Carolyn

Carolyn Hayes makes a difference every volunteer hour she serves. She has been volunteering for Partners For Community, Choices In Community Living and Resident Home Association since 2009. “She is an extraordinary volunteer who gives from the heart,” shares Cheron Barclift, Partners Volunteer Coordinator during some of Carolyn’s service. “She is the essence of unmatched volunteerism.” Our extraordinary volunteer was named District 2 **Volunteer of the Year** by the Ohio Provider Resource Association (OPRA) during its Fall Conference.

She first joined us with a group of community volunteers from her employer, LexisNexis. Her group volunteer work was so meaningful to her that she decided to join us as an individual volunteer. Ten years later, she has volunteered more than 1,000 hours. According to Independent Sector, the national coalition of nonprofits, foundations and corporations, one volunteer hour is valued at \$24.69. Carolyn’s service has added value of more than \$25,000 to people with I/DD.

She is our BINGO lady, volunteering more than 100 hours just at our Bingo games alone. She joins our team as a volunteer at events like our Fish Fry, Bowl-A-Thon and other community activities. She supports individuals participating in Special Olympics, helping wherever needed and serving as number one cheerleader.

She is part of a team alongside our staff, appreciated by staff and loved by those she serves.



Glen and Kristie Koker proudly show off their new Partners Optimist Club shirts during a recent meeting of one of our country's first Optimist Clubs led by members with intellectual/developmental disabilities. Chartered and supported by the Centerville Noon Optimists, with leadership from Myron Rheau, Optimist Ohio District Governor, our members have had a busy holiday season selling poinsettias, with proceeds to support their volunteer efforts in the community, especially in support of children. Our Club includes members with and without disabilities. Please contact David Gleason at dgleason@ciclob.com if you would like more information on becoming a member of our Partners Optimist Club or if you would like to provide support for their activities.



Choices In Community Living, Inc.

1651 Needmore Road
Dayton, OH 45414-3851
(937) 898-2220
(937) 898-3553 fax
choicesincommunityliving.com
www.partnersohio.com

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Welcome to the Board



Two respected community leaders are now serving as members of Choices' Board of Trustees. Sharon Hairston knows from personal experience just how important a mission-centered organization can be to families and to their family members with disabilities. "I was the parent of a special needs child," she shares. "Serving with Choices is an opportunity to give back and work with a very needed organization."

Serving on the Board's Finance Committee, she brings a depth of experience to her new role. She was a Board member with the Montgomery County Board of Developmental Disabilities Services for several years, serving as president at the end of her term. She is currently president of the Greater Dayton Regional Transit Authority (RTA) Board. She is also involved with Miami Valley Catholic Social Services and other community organizations. She brings expertise from her professional career as senior financial and administrative manager for CH2M Hill Mound, Inc. in Miamisburg.



"Being new to the Board, I'm sure I have a lot to learn," she notes. "One of the challenges I believe is before the Board is maintaining staff. I hope to be instrumental in establishing policies that will assist with that endeavor. Choices provides a much-needed service in our community that benefits clients and their families. Giving individuals the opportunity to live in our community in safe and nurturing environments is essential."

We welcome back Stephen McHugh to our Board, where he previously served for several years as president. He is an attorney with Coolidge Wall, focusing on local governments, real estate and zoning matters, labor law and compensation and more. He serves as Law Director for the cities of Beavercreek and Trotwood, as well as Butler Township. He is Labor and Employment Counsel for the City of Riverside.

Like Sharon, he is an active community volunteer. In addition to his commitment to Choices, he serves on the Board of Trustees for Premier Health and the Dayton Performing Arts Alliance.