

OVRs Shared Living Stats!

37 Individuals served 2015/16

Longest Person Served: 29 Years!

Referrals for Shared Living Services come directly from Hamilton County DDS



OVRs's Shared Living Program!

Written by Kate Stark

Karen Kelly's work space at OVRs is filled with photos of people with their families. About to blow out candles on a birthday cake, playing games at Dave and Buster's, on the deck of a cruise ship in the Caribbean- you name it, and someone has probably sent her a photo where they're smiling with their family. These are all individuals Kelly has helped place in the Adult Foster Care program, or as it's now called, Shared Living. She has countless stories of lives turned around thanks to the program.

"It's been very successful because there are so many individuals that don't have family or their family doesn't want to be involved, so they just love being part of a family and going on vacations or celebrating birthdays."

Many of the 37 individuals currently enrolled in the program came to OVRS through either emergency or planned respite, meaning that they initially were looking for temporary housing apart from their biological family or caregivers. Providers are very open to taking an individual in for a few days, but many times the relationship doesn't end there. "Often they'll go in there thinking it's just a temporary thing, and then they become part of that family and like it so much that they call and say they want to stay."

These are bonds that stick, just like families who are biologically related. Kelly says that even in cases when an individual needs to move to another home- if more specialized care is required as a mental health condition progresses, for example- they often maintain the relationships established in their previous home.

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That's due largely to the high quality of people who work as providers in the Shared Living program, and the selective nature of the application process. Kelly says they get about 5-10 calls each week from people interested in learning how to become a provider, but they don't take just anyone. The process is rigorous. Those interested in becoming providers must pass an extensive background check, drug screening, driver's license record check, complete the same 8-hour orientation as OVRS staff, pass CPR and First Aid training, and take a 14-hour medication course before they can even be considered as a home for an individual.

"You have to have a love, a compassion to do something like this," explains Deborah Parham, one provider for OVRS. Parham lives with Vicki and John, and started working with OVRS at a workshop site in 2001. It was there that she first met Vicki. They arranged a trial weekend, and Vicki has been with her ever since.

A few years later, John came to their family from a group home. "I think he's been with me 10, maybe 12 years now," reflects Parham. "I don't even keep track anymore. We're just family. We do all kinds of things: travel, go to church together, Kings Island, the aquarium."



John, Vicki, Deborah and Karen

Individuals referred to the program must meet high standards too; if the individual has a criminal history or is likely to disrupt an otherwise stable living environment, they are not accepted in the Shared Living Program. "I always think, would I take that person in my house?" Kelly says. "We've already got a great, established situation here, and you don't want someone going in and disrupting the other people's lives."

That certainly wasn't the case with Vicki and John. Parham says they're "thick as thieves" and the three of them spend a lot of time together. "It's really the best thing I've ever done," says Parham. "Vicki and John have given me a more meaningful life. I know everyday that my life is productive because I'm doing something that's not about just me. I'm giving a quality of life to two people that I never would have been able to give to, or to share my life with- share my home with. Now, it's not just my home, it's our home."

If you would like more information about our Shared Living Program, please feel free to contact Karen Kelly at 281-6800 x114 or at karen.kelly@ovrs.org

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