

A History of Serving Scioto County Residents with Mental Retardation and Other Developmental Disabilities

- 1953 Happy Hearts School (HHS) is established by group of concerned parents and other community leaders and housed in a building formerly used by the Y. M. C. A.
- 1961 Law places HHS under the authority of Child Welfare Board
- 1967 Ohio House Bill 169 establishes county boards of mental retardation
- 1968 HHS moves to the former Washington School Building in Portsmouth
- 1972 Scioto Residential Services, Inc. (a private company) opens the first local group home residence for adults with mental retardation
- 1972 The Scioto County Board of MR/DD helps form Scioto Training and Recreation, Inc (STAR), a separate not-for-profit business dedicated to providing work for adults with MR/DD in Scioto County.
- 1973 HHS is recognized as an educational program by the federal government
- 1975 Public Law 94-142 (IDEA) passes mandating educational programs be made available for all school-aged children with handicaps.
- 1976 HHS moves into the Garfield School building. The Adult Workshop Program has grown in numbers and is housed in the Washington School Building.
- 1986 Senate Bill 322 passes, becoming Ohio's Reform Legislation regarding rights of persons with MR/DD and provision of local case management services. Statewide, a call goes out for more residences for persons with MR/DD; more than 6,000 people across Ohio need appropriate homes.
- 1988 STAR Adult Workshop moves into new facility, its current location at 2625 Gallia Street, Portsmouth.
- 1988 Federal and state laws enacted mandating services for infants and preschoolers who are "at-risk" for developmental delays.
- 1988 The Referral and Educational Association for Child Health (REACH) is established. This is a coalition of over 40 Scioto County agencies and individuals who serve children aged birth through five who have or are "at-risk" of having developmental delays.
- 1989 Voters approve 2.6 mill continuing levy for the Scioto County Board of MR/DD bringing its local revenue up to state average for the first time ever, allowing for the hiring of necessary personnel, renovations of buildings for safety and handicapped accessibility,

and expansion of services to the increasing number of infants, toddlers, preschoolers, children and adults served.

- 1990 The Ohio Department of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities selects the Scioto County Board of MR/DD as Ohio's pilot construction project for an early intervention center.
- 1990: Supported Living Programs develop throughout Ohio to help people with mental retardation and developmental disabilities to live as independently as possible in their communities.
- 1990 The Community Employment Program (Advantage Job Services) for adults begins to place adults with mental retardation/developmental disabilities into competitive community jobs with appropriate supports.
- 1991 Americans with Disabilities Act effective. This federal legislation provides for accessibility, inclusion and equality in many important aspects of community life for people with disabilities, including access to telecommunications, employment, public places and transportation.
- 1991 Ohio's eligibility criteria for MR/DD services change to reflect the latest federal definition of developmental disabilities. More than 10,000 additional Ohioans are expected to be eligible for MR/DD services under this new definition, in addition to the 30,000 persons already being served statewide.
- 1991 Ohio Department of Education mandates that each special education student aged 16 and older (and to age 14 when appropriate) be provided an Individual Transition Plan aimed at increasing the likelihood of graduates working and living in the community.
- 1992 Ohio Senate Bill 156 and House Bill 387 pass into law, the former restoring board member terms to four years, reauthorizing the Ethics Council, and addressing board authorizations of funds, the latter (H.B. 387) clarifying certain personnel reforms.
- 1995 The Carousel Center Phase 1 is completed, being the first such comprehensive services center for at-risk birth through five-year-olds in Ohio. This state/federal and locally funded project includes collaboration of over 40 local agencies and is a model for such centers statewide. An award-winning documentary video produced by the Ohio Department of MR/DD about The Carousel Center is used statewide and nationally to explain Ohio's early intervention programs.
- 1995 The name of the school program is changed from Happy Hearts School to Vern Riffe School, in recognition of Ohio's long-serving statesman who championed legislation for better services and supports for people with disabilities.
- 1996 Following seven years of planning, the adult program changes to be more responsive to the choices, preferences and needs of the adults served, as opposed to providing limited

work and leisure alternatives found in a sheltered workshop setting. Self-directed work teams of staff begin providing support services designed to reflect the best practices state wide and nationally. Scioto is the first Ohio MR/DD program to fully implement the organizational changes toward this “person-centered” approach.

- 1996 The Carousel Center Phase 2 is completed with pediatric medical and dental services offered and further expansion of other early intervention and childcare services.
- 1996 The Southern Ohio Council of Government is formed. Originally nine other county boards of MR/DD were later joined by five others for the purpose of administering mandated services for which the cost was too burdensome for the small, poor counties of our region.
- 1997 STAR, Inc. marks its 25th anniversary of providing employment to Scioto County residents with MR/DD.
- 1997 All of Ohio’s county boards mark the 30th anniversary of their creation with S. B. 169 in 1967.
- 1997 Ohio begins to implement the Residential Facility Waiver, funding mechanism that permits Ohio to by-pass Medicaid rules and ties funds to beds owned by group home providers. Scioto County is one of the counties designated for the second wave of implementation. This waiver later becomes a major issue in Scioto County and across the state, when it is found to be inconsistent with Medicaid goals because it limits, or even eliminates, the recipient’s right to choose a living arrangement.
- 1998 The community employment component of adult services (Advantage Job Service) is awarded accreditation from the prestigious Commission on the Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF), and accolade it maintains through to the present day.
- 1998 Changes in Scioto County MR/DD’s services for adults to implement a more person-centered approach move into their second phase through the Service Coordination Pilot Project. This change includes converting case managers into Primary Service Coordinators, later called Service and Support Administrators when the state mandates these changes in 2001.
- 1998 Ohio House Bills 670 and 770 bring changes in special education funding in an unsuccessful attempt to bring Ohio education funding into compliance after the Ohio Supreme Court found it to be unconstitutional when ruling on the DeRolph case originally filed more than 10 years earlier. These changes do not include the SchoolNet funding initiative intended to bring public schools up-to-date technology. MR/DD schools are omitted from the project initially. Vern Riffe School receives an \$8,000 consolation award that provides for hardwiring the Garfield building so that classrooms may have Internet access.

- 1999 Scioto County MR/DD wins a public awareness award from Ohio Public Images for the “People You Know” television public service campaign.
- 1999 The Carousel Preschool is awarded the Irene Bandy Heddon Award for excellence from the Ohio Department of Education.
- 1999 The Carousel Preschool adds a fourth preschool unit.
- 2000 Across the state, the issue of the aging caregiver of adults with MR/DD is identified as a serious threat to the future of MR/DD services in Ohio. Scioto County joins the unified effort to educate lawmakers with the “It’s Their Turn Now” campaign that encourages an increase in funding so that waiting lists for residential services can be reduced.
- 2000 Scioto County MR/DD’s superintendent is invited to participate in a multi-entity committee aimed at guiding statewide Medicaid reform required to remedy the findings of a federal review. The Medicaid Strategic Planning Group works for the next several years to give county boards a voice in the state level changes that will have dramatic local impact for people with MR/DD whose services are funded by Medicaid.
- 2001 Stemming from the governor’s focus on families and children, the “Help Me Grow” initiative restructures the early childhood service delivery system without input from county boards of MR/DD. The close alliance of early childhood service providers manifested as REACH, allows Scioto County to make the transition with minimal disruption to families, a process that is completed in 2003.
- 2001 Ohio House Bills 94 and 405 are signed into law. Touted as Medicaid Redesign, these laws promise to cause the most sweeping changes in funding and service provision for adults with MR/DD since the creation of 169 boards in 1967. Scioto County MR/DD sets about implementing the requirements including hiring additional staff and improving its infrastructure.
- 2002 Scioto County MR/DD is awarded a two-year accreditation under the new review system implemented by the Ohio Department of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities.
- 2003 Vern Riffe School has been host to its first artist-in-residence Lauralee Webster, with funding provided through the Ohio Arts Council in cooperation with the Southern Ohio Museum and Cultural Center. The result is yards of murals marking the passing of the seasons, which cover the walls of the first floor of the school.
- 2004 REACH becomes the early childhood intervention program of the Scioto County Board of MR/DD.
- 2004 The Carousel Center Preschool receives a three-year accreditation from the esteemed National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC).

- 2004 In November, the program failed to pass a critical tax levy issue. Rising costs, including health insurance for staff and Medicaid waiver match, coupled with reductions in subsidy, were important factors in the agency's budget crisis.
- 2005 By January 2005, 26 positions were eliminated through attrition and lay offs.
- 2005 Also in January, long-time superintendent John Oakley retired and early childhood director Brenda Benson was selected to replace him. With the budget crisis continuing, Mrs. Benson took the important step of reducing program hours which resulted in across-the-board pay cuts for all staff except those in the bus drivers' bargaining unit.
- 2005 In August 2005, in a special election, new millage was approved by the voters for a term of six years and two old, continuing levies were combined into one. This issue was also approved.
- 2005 In October 2005, the program was awarded a three-year accreditation retroactive to December 2004.
- 2006 Due to the many cost reductions and service reorganization, and the influx of new tax dollars, full program hours were restored in January.
- 2006 The local Special Olympics program was restored, this time under the director Community Services. Plans were to gradually rebuild the program over the next few years. This same office undertook to develop a payee program for individuals who need help with money management, taking over these duties from an outside contractor.
- 2006 Innovative cost saving measures such as leasing buses and vans rather than purchasing them outright, contracting an CPA who was well known in the MRDD field as business manager to reorganize the fiscal office and update fiscal practices, and an energy conservation project with Ameresco were initiated. A new strategic plan was carefully devised with input from stakeholders.
- 2007 Board took over the acquisition and administration of employee health insurance to save money. The high deductible health savings account concept was implemented successfully.
- 2007 Exploration begins into the revamping of the salary structure. The traditional 'step' system, with built in annual raises for staff based on years of service has been deemed unsustainable. This would lead to the abolishment of the step system and the development of a new, comprehensive employee compensation program.
- 2007 STAR, Inc. took over the operation of the Board's Community Employment Program and yellow bus transportation was contacted out to Petermann, LLC, a respected Cincinnati company that specialized in the transportation of people with disabilities.

- 2008 As a result of hours of brainstorming and planning, the adult services program initiated the last phase of a long-term improvement plan to make it more appealing to service recipients.
- 2008 Finances for the Choice Housing, Inc. were reorganized and maintenance was contracted to STAR, Inc. This led to many improvements being made. Currently, the non-profit owns 17 properties which provide safe and affordable housing to individuals with DD.
- 2009 In the spring, the Board was forced to lay off of the Help Me Grow staff and the transfer the project to the South Central Education Service Center as a result of severe state budget stresses and policy changes. The Board continues to provide early childhood developmental therapy through three early intervention staff for children ages birth to three. The Regional Infant Hearing Program also suffered funding cutbacks, but continues to serve children ages birth through two who are deaf or hard of hearing in 11 southern counties.
- 2009 In July, the 'name change' bill was signed into law officially dropping the 'MR' from written law and rule, public buildings and public agencies. The Board is now officially the Scioto County Board of Developmental Disabilities. This was a change initiated by self-advocates in Athens County, who pursued it all the way to the state capital. However, Ohio is one of the last states to officially make the change nationally.