



Department of  
Youth Services

## Message from DYS Director Harvey Reed

DYS Celebrates Occupational Therapy Month

April 20, 2015

April is National Occupational Therapy Month, and DYS is celebrating! Though this profession promotes “Living Life to Its Fullest” all year long, April is when we pay special recognition and tribute to the profession and its practitioners.

Occupational therapy is the only profession that helps individuals across their lifespan to accomplish tasks through therapeutic use of daily activities (occupations). Occupational therapists enable people of all ages to live life to its fullest by helping them promote health, and prevent—or live better with—injury, illness, or disability.

Common occupational therapy interventions include helping children with disabilities to participate fully in school and social situations, helping people recovering from injury to regain skills, and providing supports for older adults experiencing physical and cognitive changes. Occupational therapy services typically include:

- An individualized evaluation, during which treatment goals are determined
- Customized interventions to improve the youth’s ability to perform daily activities and reach goals
- An outcomes evaluation to ensure that the goals are being met

Occupational therapists (OTs) have a holistic perspective, in which the focus is on adapting the environment and/or task to fit the youth, and the youth is an integral part of the therapy team. It is an evidence-based practice deeply rooted in science.

At DYS, OTs help youth cope with sensory or emotional challenges, improve social skills, develop adaptive functioning skills or build self-esteem.



Recently, a 19-year-old youth from Circleville Juvenile Correctional Facility (CJCF) wrote a letter explaining how the last nine months of OT has been a great benefit. “If someone challenges me to a fight or tries to pressure me into doing something dangerous, I can do the coping skills I learned in OT,” he wrote.

On a daily basis, the occupational therapist may be teaching one youth how to handle personal finances, assisting another youth with ways to complete school assignments, while teaching another youth parenting skills to be a good father.

Occupational therapists also assist youth with basic life skills, such as preparing a simple meal, doing laundry or completing a job application so that youth are more successful after leaving DYS.

Two occupational therapists and an occupational therapist assistant provide treatment for DYS youth in our three facilities. “We do a lot of hands-on activities with the youth,” said Joan Hedrick, an OT at CJCF. “You may see us doing puzzles with the youth, but we are not just playing. There’s a lot of strategy behind the activities we are doing,” she said.



OT staff also assists youth in the education setting. When youth get frustrated in class, Hedrick said she will invite the youth to her office to listen to music. “This will give them a chance to calm down and get back on track,” she said.

Hedrick knows that progress takes time and is confident that she is having a positive impact on the lives of DYS youth.

*Occupational Therapist Joan Hedrick plays a game of Mancala with a Circleville JCF youth. The game develops critical thinking skills: improved memory, problem solving skills.*

In another situation, Amy Luedy, an OT at the Indian River Juvenile Correctional Facility (IRJCF) and Cuyahoga Hills Juvenile Correctional Facility (CHJCF), said a youth was struggling to remember his social security number. “This youth was convinced that he could not remember it,” she said. “I gave him a few strategies and he came in one day and was able to recite it,” she said. “It’s amazing to see the youth realize their capabilities.”

In addition to Joan and Amy, Meredith McCartney is an occupational therapist’s assistant at CHJCF and IRJCF.

Please join me in thanking all of our occupational therapists for their commitment and dedication!