

2008 ESDY Award Winners

ESDY AWARDS FOR 2008

PRESENTED at the 11TH ANNIVERSARY OSDA CONFERENCE

What is an ESDY Award? It is an award presented at the annual conference of the Ohio Self-Determination Association. In order to be nominated for this award, you must be a person who has played a role in advancing the concepts of self-determination. Nominees are then evaluated based on creativity, how they have supported the principles of SD and their contribution made toward systems change.

THE ESDY AWARD WINNERS FOR 2008 WERE AS FOLLOWS:

2008 Steven Cooley Award:

Ruben Garcia

Ruben Garcia has been a self-advocate for over 30 years and has also been an advocate for individuals with DD and without. He was one of the founding members of People First of Ohio and People First of Lucas County. He also received a special recognition from the Lucas Co. Bd. Of MRDD for his presentation of the "Rights Brothers," which aims to help develop and teach self-advocates about their rights and responsibilities. In addition, he worked for the ARC of Lucas County. In 2001, he was chosen as self-advocate of the year and received 2nd place from the Public Images and Ohio Dev. Dis. Council. One of Ruben's associates on the DD Council stated "I am very proud that Ruben Garcia is receiving an ESDY award. . . Ruben seems to be the first person to come up with suggestions and share his opinions. He was very effective when he was the Chair of DD Council's Leadership Development committee. Ruben also has a great personality. He never is shy about sharing a story or 'showing the ropes' to a new self-advocate."



Evelyn Bachman

ESDY award winner Evelyn Bachman works as a court-appointed attorney and has served many consumers of Wood County over the years. Muffy Hartman of the Wood County Board of MR/DD recalled one particular story that is indicative of Evelyn's services over the years. Soon after a gentleman entered services in Wood County, it was discovered that family members had taken advantage of him. With a prominent local attorney as a witness, the individual had signed off on a house left to him by his mother. Evelyn became involved and took the family, title office, and witnessing attorney's office to court. Thanks to her coordination and constant vigilance, an out-of-court settlement was reached, and the gentleman was able to remain in his home. Evelyn remained involved in his life and truly went above and beyond the call of duty in fighting for the individual's rights, ensuring his dreams were realized, and always remembering him as a special person with great capability. Her actions have shown her to be truly deserving of this award.

Linda Kunick

Linda Kunick has shown incredible dedication to her work in advocacy and has taught so many about self-determination. She never tires of working with self-advocates and professionals to achieve a greater insight and understanding of how to respect, listen to, and support people with disabilities. Linda founded the “People Aren’t Jars” committee, a subgroup of Leaders in Action, the self-advocate advisory group to Hamilton CBMRDD. Linda also founded People First of Monfort Heights. She is a past president of People First of Ohio and was a founding member of the organization. Linda has also worked as the Statewide Co-Coordinator of Partners in Policymaking, and as such, has traveled to Columbus to testify about affordable and accessible housing to the Futures Committee, and also traveled to Washington to speak with state representatives. Additionally, Linda developed a presentation that teaches people with disabilities they should not be afraid to come forward and speak up for what they truly believe, and that self-determination is not just about choice, but having the self-belief and confidence to make the best choice for yourself. Linda is a shining example of what professionals can accomplish, and has had a definite impact on the understanding of what self-determination means.



Willie Jones

Willie Jones has been an advocate for people with developmental disabilities for nearly 30 years as a trainer and consultant on issues related to the field. Willie entered the developmental disabilities field upon graduation from Kent State University. Now a licensed social worker, Willie’s most noted accomplishments have been in the development, training and implementation of positive behavior supports. He developed “Personal Supports and Strategies,” a positive approach that promotes and supports the principles of self-determination. Willie is an owner/founder of Cornerstone Professional Group. He has traveled across the county to provide training and consultation to MR/DD service agencies in quality assurance, program development, human resource development, and staff training. Willie is a past board member of the OSDA and currently serves on the ODMR/DD Behavior Support Advisory Committee. He is also a member of the American Association on intellectual and Developmental Disabilities and PAR. Willie and his wife, Judy, reside in Canal Fulton with their two children. Monty Kerr, CEO/Superintendent of the Belmont County Board of DD, said “I respect Willie as much as anyone in our field because his priorities have remained with the people we serve. He constantly challenges us to do more and not be satisfied with the way things are.”



John Romer

As HCB Advocacy Support Coordinator, John Romer's life is supporting self advocates – he never pays attention to the clock or days of the week. He continually works to involve people with disabilities in the everyday activities of all citizens. John supports self advocates in speaking for themselves, and he is active on committees with the Cincinnati City Council, the public transit board, Cincinnati Human Relations Commission, and many more. In 2007, John brought together self advocates employed by organizations in Hamilton County and formed the Advocacy Leadership Network.

The group is taking advocacy to new levels in Hamilton

County, and John is always there to support them, transport them, or do whatever needs to be done. Brady Sellet described John as “an exceptional person. He never has a harsh word to say about anyone or any situation. . . He has this amazing charisma and passion for life that, in my eyes, makes John Romer one of the most outstanding human beings I have ever had the honor and privilege to know.”



Vic Leanza

Vic Leanza has been an advocate his whole life. While attending school in Shaker Heights, Vic fought against a school system that wanted to put him into a special class for his blindness. After a long battle, Vic was allowed to attend regular classes, excelled in his studies, and went to the University of Notre Dame, where he played in the marching band and received a special education teaching degree. Vic was hired by the Cleveland Heights school system and then went on to become a psychiatrist (with his own therapy practice), husband, parent, grandparent, mentor and counselor.

He also sits on the Sight Center's board, the YMCA board, and is a member of the Democratic club. In addition, Vic runs a sailing program for the blind and has traveled the United States and abroad. Self-advocate Mike Rich, Vic's foster son, said “Vic has touched the lives of many people with disabilities. They see what he has achieved and they see there is hope for them.” (*Pictured is Mike Rich accepting for Vic Leanza*)



James Henrie

James Henrie has truly made it a theme of his life to never give up. “I've had some bad things happen in my life,” James has said, “and even though there were times I wanted to, I never gave up.” As a young person, James lived in several group homes and foster homes. They were not always the nicest places to live, but he never gave up, even in the face of adversity. His positive and strong attitude has paid off. He mentors students at Hamilton and Ross high schools. James currently has his own DJ business, designs web sites, is a computer artist, and uses painting to express himself. If that is not enough, James is a job coach, a public speaker, an actor, and co-leader of the Empowerment People Reaching Out program. On top of that, he is currently looking for a full-time job. If you meet James, don't be fooled by his soft-spoken voice. He is a powerhouse of ideas, talent and self-advocacy.



Kathy Cotman

Kathy Cotman's story is one of self-determination for herself as well as a commitment to the advancement of self-determination of others. Although Kathy's parents noticed that something was different about her when she was one year old, Kathy was not officially diagnosed with Spinal Muscular Atrophy until she was a teenager. Despite physical limitations, Kathy graduated from high school and attended Kent State University, where she received a Bachelor of Science in Biology. In addition, she took statistics courses at Dyke College and a Cytotechnology lab course. After 25 years, Kathy recently retired from the Cleveland Clinic Hospital, where her daily work experience helped to improve employment possibilities for people with disabilities. Kathy's accomplishments include Founder and President of the Board of Trustees for Maximum Accessible Housing of Ohio and official Parish advocate for individuals with disabilities at St. Williams School in Euclid. Kathy is a charter member of Services to Independent Living. Additionally, LEAP approached Kathy and asked her to be on the advisory committee as an advocate for housing for the disabled. When talking with Kathy, a person would not know the extent of her limitations or that within these limitations lays her greatness. She is an example of the power of one person to make a difference in the lives of so many.



Ann Thomas

Ann Thomas has been an inspiration to self advocates, professionals and families for many years. She has traveled the United States to motivate and educate individuals with a disability on what is possible in terms of Self-determination. She has worked to move self-determination through many venues. She was involved with the establishment of the Knox County People First chapter. She continued to support self-determination as one of the founders of People First of Ohio. She has served on the Ohio Arc Board for families and professionals on self-determination. She has worked with the Ohio Department of MR/DD and advocated for People First language in public policy. In addition, she was appointed to the National Arc Board from 2001 – 2006 and presently sits on the board of the Arc of Ohio. She has served as president of People First of Ohio from 2001 – 2003. She continues her work and advocacy by spreading the word on self-determination. We are truly blessed to have Ann Thomas working in Ohio.

Jason Waugh

If a celebrity has visited the Cincinnati area, no doubt self-advocate Jason Waugh has made connections, found transportation and self-determined his way into the front row or backstage for a personal meeting and photo op. Just ask to look at his photo album and you'll see his smiling face next to the likes of famous musicians, actors and television and sports heroes. During the day, he's found working as a Billing Specialist Assistant, doing data entry for Inclusive Solutions. His supervisor states he is "tenacious and funny." When he wants to learn or try something new he doesn't give up. His dream is to learn more about Power Point on the computer so he can become a paid professional expert on self-advocacy. He is a true friend to those he meets and fully understands the meaning behind community. To wind down, Jason plays drums in a local band called the "Plastic Waste Band." Always ready to learn new work computer skills, help out a friend, jam with the band, and promote his love of Cincinnati, Jason promotes the true essence of the word self-determination.



Angela Williams

Angela Williams, who works for the ARC of Erie County, has been instrumental in promoting self-determination. With the ARC, Angela advocates for individuals who need assistance and promotes more natural supports versus paid supports. She also is involved in fundraisers and has developed a women's group that meets monthly. Angela is also an advocate, daily representative and, most importantly, friend of Gloria Tiller, who nominated Angela for this award. Angela was advocating for individuals when the two met and they quickly developed a friendship. Angela has been instrumental in assisting Gloria with starting her own t-shirt business. She has also attended meetings, assisted with paperwork, and arranged for Gloria to attend conferences and events to sell her shirts. As a natural support, Angela takes Gloria to medical appointments and was recently able to assist Gloria with finding and moving into a new home. Due to all the support Angela has provided Gloria, she has been able to cut down on her need for residential supports and can use her individual budget for other needs. In addition, Angela is always there for other individuals and is very persistent to make sure the needs or wants of others are considered. Gloria summed it up by saying "if anyone goes above and beyond the call of duty, it is Angela Williams."



Daniel Woell

Daniel Woell, Executive Director of Partners in Community, Inc., was nominated by the PIC team "for his eminent philosophy of self-determination." He provides daily encouragement to promote good health and independence in the lives of people that he becomes acquainted with. Dan has been an integral member of Partners in Community since 1991, where his background in mental health affords him the knowledge to appreciate the various challenges that we all may face during the various phases of our lives. His willing heart enabled many people to thrive in the community, at their place of employment, within their own home, and at their place of leisure. A proud member of the OSDA, Dan has reached out to many participants of the organization, including Tony Kuzma. Tony stated that Dan offers support to him by teaching him "how to speak out" and makes him aware of "what is going on in Ohio." Dan promotes self-determination in his every day practices and through his words that he provides at various training sessions. He is truly a natural advocate that easily influences others.



**Congratulations from OSDA to all of the
2008 ESDY Award Winners!**