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REM Ohio Recognizes the Important Role Foster Mentors Play During National Foster Care Month

AKRON, OHIO - There is no limit on caring. Most people are familiar with the need for foster care for children. But how many realize that there are adults with disabilities who need a foster home as well?

Through hardships or circumstances beyond their control, a growing number of adults with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities find themselves in need of “a family home”. For these adults, their fondest wish is for a stable, nurturing home environment, and quality care to meet their special needs.

Local human services provider, REM Ohio, has made it a part of their mission to carefully select families in typical neighborhoods and match individuals with developmental disabilities to community families as part of their Adult Foster Care program. With the approach of National Foster Care Month in May, REM Ohio intends to take the time to acknowledge the hundreds of foster families and other caring individuals who have opened their hearts and homes to an adult living with disabilities.

Currently, REM Ohio’s foster care program has more than 200 Adult Foster Program participants with developmental disabilities placed in community family homes in Northeast Ohio. For the individuals supported, they achieve what they need most—a connection to a home and community, and the services they need to live as independently as they can. For the foster families, they gain a new family member, a friend, and someone whose personal gifts and charm can add a whole new dimension to their family lives.

“Individuals who chose to live in an adult foster home often maintain close relationships with their biological families, but the foster-mentor plays a very important support role in their lives”, said Carla Parker, state director, REM Ohio. “Adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities require special care and an extraordinary commitment from their foster-mentors. Foster care home participants in general thrive in these settings because they provide the safety and stability of a family home by caring committed foster-mentors.”

Many of the adults served by REM Ohio’s Adult Foster Care program participate in day programs or work at jobs and are able to have a high quality and variety of life experiences. But regardless of their abilities, REM Ohio has found that foster-mentors, like Kim Koprivec, Kathy Zeisig and Linda Shuster, have forged meaningful relationships with the individuals in their care, making them a part of their home for years, if not decades.

- Koprivec has been a Foster Mentor for past 20 years and was recently recognized by Stark County Board of MRDD as Foster Caregiver of the Year.
- Zeisig has been a Foster Mentor for 25 years.
- Shuster has created a home for the same people who have been in her care for over 20 years.

“The key characteristic needed to be a successful foster-mentor is the ability and desire to provide the type of individual care and encouragement that adults with disabilities need,” continued Parker. “We feel that all of our foster mentors are deserving of recognition and praise for the care they give to the individuals in their personal home, as well as the positive impact they have on our communities.

About REM Ohio

REM Ohio provides an array of high-quality services for people with developmental disabilities and other complex conditions throughout the state, with a state headquarters located in Akron, Ohio and regional offices in Cleveland, Columbus, and Cincinnati. The company currently employs 324 part time and 605 full time employees. The individuals and families supported by REM Ohio have a variety of needs, all of which are met within the communities where they live, work and play. Because each person's needs and preferences are different – an often change over time – REM Ohio offers a range of community-based residential and non-residential programs and supports.

REM Ohio is a member of The MENTOR Network, an organization dedicated to providing high-quality community-based services to adults and children of all abilities. Founded in 1980, The MENTOR network has evolved from a single residential program to a national network of local human services providers, offering an array of services to adults and children with developmental disabilities, acquired brain injuries or other catastrophic injuries and illnesses; youth with emotional, behavioral and medically complex challenges; and elders in need of home care.