

Developmental Disabilities Board focuses on Early Intervention/Help Me Grow Services

March is Ohio Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month. The Ashtabula County Board of Developmental Disabilities is very focused on providing information to the community about the merits of early intervention services and the importance of treating children as early as possible.

The Mallory family of Kingsville receives early intervention services for their youngest member, three year old Savannah. According to Jane Mallory, Savannah's grandmother, "Given the fact that Savannah was born without sight, we knew we would need a lot of help so that we could help Savannah to grow, and learn."

Jane along with her husband and Savannah's mother Kylie were willing to provide whatever supports and assistance Savannah needed. The first step toward developing an individualized plan for Savannah was making contact with the Ashtabula County Board of DD. "From the beginning, we became a team whose main goal was to work together to meet the many challenges facing the littlest member of our family, Savannah."

The County Board assigns to Michael DeMarino, Director of Early Intervention Services, all eligible families and assessments are completed so programs and therapies can be implemented quickly.

The Mallory's received services at the center based program at Happy Hearts School. At the center they learned how to teach Savannah at home. Jane Mallory states "We learned how to teach Savannah at home, we learned what types of toys were right for a visually impaired child. We learned the importance of structure and how necessary some peer to peer socialization is for Savannah." Today, the County Board emphasizes the importance of parental inclusion. According to Mike DeMarino, "Parental involvement in the early learning process is so important. The Early Intervention Specialists, PT, OT and speech therapists role is to encourage parents as teachers. We want to meet families where they are at and help them to use the tools that they have at home to create a learning environment at home where the child is most comfortable.

Kylie Mallory, Savannah's mother, recalled "We all learned practical common sense solutions. Savannah had many special needs besides visual defects, she needed sensory support, occupational and physical therapy." "And a developmentally appropriate home and outdoor environment that helps her in developing skills", Jane Mallory adds.

Diane Keep, Early Intervention Specialist is assessing Savannah at each visit to insure that she is moving to the next level. "Savannah will be moving to preschool at Speech, Hearing and Rehabilitation on April 6.

For more information about the Early Intervention program please call (440) 224-2155.