April is Autism Awareness Month

Please join Murray Ridge Center as we observe April as National Autism Awareness Month.

About 1 in 54 children has been identified with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) according to estimates from the Center for Disease Control’s Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring (ADDM) Network.

ASD is reported to occur in all racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups, and is more than four times more common among boys than among girls.

Autism is treatable, and early diagnosis and intervention can lead to significantly improved outcomes. Visit nationalautismassociation.org for more information.
According to the Mental Health, Addiction and Recovery Services (MHARS) Board of Lorain County, many people are experiencing stress and anxiety due to the coronavirus, and there is a great resource available nationally to help people cope with their emotional distress: the Disaster Distress Helpline, 1-800-985-5990. It is a 24/7, 365-day-a-year, national hotline dedicated to providing immediate crisis counseling for people who are experiencing emotional distress related to any natural or human-caused disaster.

This toll-free, multilingual, and confidential crisis support service is available to all residents in the United States and its territories. Stress, anxiety, and other depression-like symptoms are common reactions to an event like the coronavirus.

Call 1-800-985-5990 or text TalkWithUs to 66746 to connect with a trained crisis counselor. https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/disaster-distress-helpline
Exceptional Service Award

Do you know a Murray Ridge staff member whose work efforts reflect remarkable dedication and have significantly contributed to the well being of people with developmental disabilities? Nominate that staff member for an Exceptional Service Award!

If you are a community member; consumer; or parent, guardian, sibling or other relative of a Murray Ridge program participant, submit your nomination to Chris Vasco, Community Education/Volunteer Director.

Include a brief paragraph outlining your reasons for nominating the staff member. All nominations will be forwarded to the Board for consideration. The Board presents Exceptional Service Awards on a quarterly basis. If you have any questions, contact Chris at (440) 329-3734 or cvasco@murrayridgecenter.org

In early March, the Lorain County Commissioners proclaimed March as Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month in Lorain County. Several representatives from Murray Ridge were present to discuss the various ways the agency supports them each and every day.

Pictured from left to right are: Murray Ridge School student Tyrese Whitfield, Commissioner Sharon Sweda, Murray Ridge Superintendent Amber Fisher, Murray Ridge program participant Martha Lombeida, Commissioner Lori Kokoski, program participant Linda Wells and Commissioner Matt Lundy.

Cathie Leimbach Joins Murray Ridge Board

Vermilion resident Cathie Leimbach (right), President and Senior Consultant at Agon Leadership, is the newest member of the Murray Ridge Board. Shown during the swearing-in ceremony is Lorain County Probate Court Judge James T. Walther.
Top left: A project funded by Donors Choose entitled "Technology for the Win" was funded for Amy Daniels’s class. The class received two kids tablets to help students work on basic academic skills such as numbers, letters, shapes, colors, matching, etc., as well as fine motor skills.

Top right: Murray Ridge School had a very special guest visit with students -- Travis, who was available for adoption at the Friendship Animal Protective League. Therapists brought Travis in to help students from the classrooms of Lindsay Bookshar and Ryanne Gelp learn how to take care of animals and learn about the process of adoption.

Below left: Elyria Catholic basketball teams took part in a Hoops Shoot event at Murray Ridge School. A unique feature of this year’s EC girls’ team is the TWO sets of twins on the roster! Pictured are EC twins Abby and Ally Winnen (left and right), the Griffin twins, Kaylie and Stephanie (back) along with Murray Ridge School twins Audrey and Penelope Dodge (center).

Below right: Students from the classrooms of teachers Nicole Myntti and Julie Maurer collaborated to build sculptures out of marshmallows and spaghetti noodles. The students had a ton of fun!
Learning and Fun ‘at’ Murray Ridge School -
After the Closure

Murray Ridge School may be physically closed during the COVID-19 Pandemic, but learning is continuing thanks to the extensive efforts of school staff to keep connected to students and families.

According to Director of Education Dann Swift there are many ways staff, families and students are using technological options to maintain communication and continue with the school’s educational program.

“All teachers keep in touch with parents via regular phone calls, and the Remind phone app,” Swift said. “In addition to using online options such as Google Classroom and Zoom, work for students to do is being mailed home to their parents and guardians – and this approach seems to be working well.”

Swift pointed out that, because much of the school’s curriculum is adapted for students, teachers are already used to changing lessons to make them work.

Among the important educational approaches used with Murray Ridge students that is being maintained during the closure of the school is the concept of ‘social stories’ developed by the school’s speech department.

“What’s going on in the world may be confusing to students, and these ‘social stories’ talk about these current events in story form,” Swift said. “For example, one story might explain that there’s a big sickness in the world, and that’s why they’re not in school and that’s why they have to wash their hands so much. These stories really help students cope with the anxiety they may be feeling.”

“These are difficult times, but we’re doing whatever we can to work with students and their families to meet their needs,” Swift said.
Having a Meaningful Day during Ohio’s Stay-at-Home Order

The Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities (DODD) recently published some suggestions as to how those affected can best cope with the current stay-at-home order.

Offering someone a meaningful day means supporting people with developmental disabilities to explore their interests and how they are connected to other people through those interests.

A meaningful day is about self-empowerment, learning, and developing skills, with a goal of helping people realize who they are, what they are capable of, and how they can connect with other people.

Even under the stay-at-home order, a meaningful day made up of planned and purposeful opportunities is possible. An important thing to remember is that these experiences should be goals bigger than just filling time.

Being at home can still offer the opportunity to:

- explore new interests, hobbies, and ideas that have never been explored before, via the internet, streaming, phone calls, etc.;
- develop or maintain skills, abilities, and possible opportunities for supported or competitive jobs;
- explore or maintain skills, abilities, and possible interest in post-secondary educational opportunities or volunteer activities;
- experience virtual companionship with friends and peers;
- learn or develop new skills to support and increase independence;
- and find new skills or interests by creating a discovery journal, which can help people express thoughts and feelings, as well as find and define goals and ambitions.

The article also included a variety of more detailed suggestions through drop down menus labeled: Discover Meaningful Opportunities; Engage in Physical Activities; Try Art & Creative Projects; Explore New Interests and Virtual Opportunities.

To access this article and information in the various drop down suggestion menus, go to: https://dodd.ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/dodd/about-us/resources/resource-meaningful-day-coronavirus

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders Spring Series, Breaking Down Barriers Wrestling Fundraiser Cancelled

The four-week program on Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD), scheduled for late April, has been cancelled due to the COVID-19 Pandemic. This important program, taught by Murray Ridge Developmental Specialist Kathy Bevaque, is usually held twice per year (spring and fall) - so stay tuned over the coming months for an announcement about the fall session dates.

In addition, the annual Breaking Down Barriers fundraiser for Murray Ridge Center, scheduled for early May, has also been cancelled — however, representatives from Mega Championship Wrestling have said that the 'show will go on' again in 2021. More details on this will be announced next spring.

According to Brody’s article, former U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy said, “Helping another person can be an incredibly powerful experience that not only forms a connection between people but also reaffirms to ourselves that we’re bringing value to the world. Reach out to your neighbors and ask how they’re doing, how you can assist in a big or small way. Many people will be struggling during this crisis. They won’t have the help they need, the income or emotional support to get through it.”

Dr. Stacy Torres, a sociologist at the University of California, San Francisco, likewise, urged people to “do whatever you can to connect with people while staying within recommended guidelines, like donating to soup kitchens not just money for the food but for the person who delivers it. We’ve got to do anything we can remotely.”

Brody’s article also quoted Michele Weiner-Davis, a relationship expert from Colorado as saying, “Offering to help others, reaching out, adopting the Buddhist perspective of focusing on the here and now, can inoculate a person against anxiety. If you do nothing else, ‘Pick up the phone, call someone and ask how they’re doing.’”

Dr. Torres advised: “The old-fashioned telephone is very important. You can hear something in a person’s voice that can’t be detected in an email.”

According to Dr. Murthy, “we’re wired for human connection that can counter the damaging biological effects of stress and anxiety. Yet, face-to-face relationships have already been undermined by electronic ‘conversations’ during which human needs and feelings are less honestly conveyed. We may talk more to one another’s answering machines than we do to each other.”

Dr. Murthy also indicated that conversations needn’t be long to have a positive impact. “It’s not about finding more time, it’s about making the time we have available better quality. Eliminate distractions when talking — no multitasking. A five-minute conversation when you have someone’s full attention can make a big difference to how a person feels” he said. “The sound and tone of a person’s voice provide rich input into how someone is doing.”

To read the entire story, go to: https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/23/well/family/coronavirus-loneliness-isolation-social-distancing-elderly.html
News You Can Use

Two April resource fairs scheduled by Connecting for Kids (CFK) to highlight local providers and services for families who have a concern about their child, were recently postponed due to the COVID-19 Pandemic. Please check the CFK website for further event updates.

During the pandemic, CFK will be providing various other online resources for families and kids, including:

- Virtual Facebook Live Speaker Series (on topics such as, Disabilities and Distance Learning Dilemmas and Top 10 Tips to Help Your Child Focus at Home)
- Virtual Zoom Coffee and Chat: How to Survive When Everything is Upside-Down for Families of Children with Moderate-to-Severe Disabilities
- Music Therapy & More

For more information, go to connectingforkids.com