



"Amazing. Every. One."

Organization's public awareness campaign promotes the full lives of people with disabilities

When the Americans with Disabilities Act was passed in 1990, it marked a movement toward greater degrees of accessibility for people with disabilities. Doors were widened, curbs were cut, and mobility became a little easier for nearly everybody. Unfortunately, legislation doesn't affect attitude. Changing attitudes is a lot more difficult and requires more time and patience. The Stark County Board of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities (Stark MRDD), located in Canton, Ohio, takes the challenge of changing attitudes very seriously.



(left to right)
Mark Baker, Stark MRDD Superintendent/CEO H. Michael Miller, and Mike Miller pose in front of the "Flower Power" van at a recent art exhibit at Anderson's Creative Studio in Canton.

Stark MRDD launched a full-scale awareness campaign. Previous years had garnered Stark MRDD media awards for their work, but 1995 saw the Abilities Awareness Program really grow to fruition. In fact, the organization won the 2007 Ohio Public Images Award of Excellence for Overall Awareness Efforts. It did this by partnering with community organizations such as The Workshops, Inc., which, along with Stark MRDD, invests time, financial resources, and talents in promoting the abilities of individuals served by community agencies. Stark MRDD's Abilities Awareness Program uses nearly all methods and media possible to communicate issues to a wide audience. Stark MRDD has been involved in TV, radio, sponsorship, leadership, business, and any

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Putting Out the Good Word: Some Information about the Promising Practices Series

We are offering a series of short articles on a variety of promising practices that CARF surveyors have observed during surveys from 2004 to the present. There is no particular order that we will follow in presenting this series of short reports. The purpose is not to rate one organization over another, but to encourage U.S. and Canadian community providers to dialogue with one another and to encourage creative solutions to individual service designs and organizational business practices and thereby achieve effective and positive results in each organization's community.

Although there are indeed a number of ways to approach

other venue that gives prominence to the lives and issues of people with disabilities.

Stark MRDD learned that you get more bang for your buck if you invest in event marketing instead of general marketing. Consequently, Stark MRDD and The Workshops have created partnerships with area media and businesses that have greatly benefited individuals with developmental disabilities. The goal has been to make community friends. For example, Stark MRDD and The Workshops served as major sponsors for the Stark County BIA Home and Garden Show and Lifestyle Expo, promoting the idea that people with disabilities enjoy gardening, cooking, and other general lifestyle activities. Stark MRDD's persons served actively participated in these events alongside their typical peers. Stark MRDD also co-sponsored with The Repository, the local newspaper, an American eagle balloon for the Pro Football Hall of Fame Festival Grand Parade 2007. Fifteen of Stark County's Special Olympians proudly marched in the nationally televised parade.

Not content to just do sponsorship, Stark MRDD does its share of creating, hosting, and promoting events. Stark MRDD served as host and co-sponsor of Gifts Galore, an event presented by The Arc of Stark County, Inc., which draws several thousand citizens every November. Stark MRDD and The Workshops host the Great Pumpkin Race in October. Plain Township Rotary is the title sponsor, but Pepsi®, Subway®, Chick-fil-A®, Shearer's®, and other local businesses also sponsor the event. In addition to bringing in hundreds of racing enthusiasts for the 4K and one-mile events, the Great Pumpkin Race again allows individuals to participate as any other athlete would in a race or a walk. This event serves as a fundraiser for the Special Olympics and raises awareness for the organization.

Stark MRDD also sees great value in serving as leadership in the community. Many staff members hold leadership roles in service clubs and organizations such as Rotary Club, Kiwanis, Pilot Club, Jaycees, and Leadership Stark County. Working with these professional organizations gives the organization many opportunities to present individuals as strong, capable workers and highlights the amazing jobs they perform on a daily basis in many different work settings.



Stark MRDD Special Olympians and staff members marched in the Professional Football Hall of Fame Festival in partnership with the local daily paper, The Repository.

To top off all the local events, Stark MRDD and The Workshops also use traditional media to convey their nontraditional message. Public

conformance to a standard, what makes organizations given an exemplary rating stand out is their professional and strategic response to an observed service or business need, always designed with input from their stakeholders and based on those individuals' quality expectations.

We hope you enjoy the series. We encourage you to contact the identified representative in the article to get more information about their services.

Promising Practices issues now archived online!

Do you remember a past article coming out that you'd like to forward on to a colleague? Did you just join Promising Practices and want to see issues we covered in the past? Well, now you can! Old issues of Promising Practices are now available online. Visit archived issues at www.carf.org/newsletter and follow links to past issues. Past issues are categorized by topic so you can easily find articles of interest.

service announcements, featuring the accomplishments of individuals served, run on cable television. These announcements were so well done that they earned the Ohio Public Images Award of Excellence. In addition, each year the organization produces not only a printed community report, but also a video community report for community presentations. The video community report gives the organization the opportunity to “bring people inside our walls” at least via video if not for actual tours. This report is produced in five formats for ease of accessibility: print, audio interpretation, DVD, CD, and VHS. Recently, the organization produced a 30-minute cable television show featuring individuals in various work settings describing the types of work they were performing. This video is a prototype for what is hoped to become a weekly cable television series sponsored by local businesses.

All of this multimedia savvy means that Stark MRDD has to maintain a fresh brand that reflects its true vision. Its new logo, which replaces the one it had used for 39 years, features four different-colored icons, representing diversity, with arms spread to form a circle. Each person is an individual who also belongs to a larger network and community. The tagline, “Amazing. Every. One.” completed the branding. It just comes right out and says what Stark MRDD believes: that every person is amazing and comes with talents, abilities, gifts, and a spirit that can be recognized and honored by community providers, families, and the world.

With a solid image to reflect its passion, Stark MRDD redesigned its website. The new website contains all the public service announcements and other video media developed by Stark MRDD. There is a video presentation of the rights of Ohioans along with a sign language version. Visitors can find a blog and a variety of downloads.

Stark MRDD achieves all this sponsorship, media, and press with two full-time staff members and many volunteers. With anywhere from 50 to 60 volunteers for a big event to just one regular volunteer working one day a week, support for the programs is incredible. Staff members work hard to recruit and train volunteers, in addition to working toward getting donations of radio time and print space.

The professionals at Stark MRDD recognize that marketing and public awareness are day-to-day challenges and at the completion of each event, a post-mortem is held to see how the event or activity can be improved. The organization has been honored many times with awards for its public awareness efforts, but every staff member and volunteer involved recognizes that there is still much to do to overcome the attitudinal barriers that still exist in our communities. The organization is continually looking for new and exciting ways to present individuals who are “Amazing. Every. One.”

For more information, contact Pat Fehlman, director of public information, community education, and volunteer resources, at (330)

479-7872.

The PSAs may be viewed at www.starkmrdd.org.

For more information please contact Reneé Bibby at rbibby@carf.org or (888) 281-6531.

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