

## **DD Board says levy renewal essential to provide services**

- [By Jon Wysochanski jwysochanski@starbeacon.com](mailto:jwysochanski@starbeacon.com)

Voters will be asked Nov. 6 to approve a levy for the Ashtabula County Board of Developmental Disabilities that officials say is vital for continued payment for a variety of services.

Issue 2 is a seven-year, 0.5-mill renewal levy that generates \$483,000 annually and costs the owner of a \$100,000 home \$17.50 per year. Homeowners will not see a tax increase by approving it, according to Anne Zeitler, Board of Developmental Disabilities superintendent.

Although adult day programming is in the process of being privatized, and the Happy Hearts program is now run by the Ashtabula County Educational Services Center, Zeitler said the renewal levy being sought is needed to continue to pay for adult day programming as well as home visits, early intervention programming and residential, community support, investigative and transportation services.

The Board of Developmental Disabilities served 373 infants and toddlers in 2017 in early intervention through 1,600 home visits, and 216 individuals participate in Ash/Craft of whom 50 work in the community in a variety of roles. In 2017, more than 230 people received transportation to places of employment through the Board of Developmental Disabilities, and nearly 170 investigations into allegations of abuse of the developmentally disabled were conducted by the board's investigative services.

There has been some confusion as to why the board needs the money when it no longer runs Happy Hearts and when Ash/Craft is in the process of being privatized, Zeitler said. Although Ash/Craft will be privatized at some point, the Board of Developmental Disabilities still pays for the programming by providing a match for Medicaid waivers, Zeitler said.

Medicaid waivers, which clients receive for life, pay for part of the services for adult programs of which Ash/Craft is one example. The Ash/Craft program is about enhancing skills of the developmentally disabled to obtain employment in the community, Zeitler said.

The levy also funds residential services, which although not mandated are often paid for through Medicaid waivers, to help people live at home in their community with assistance rather than living in a larger facility. Medicaid waivers provide necessary funds to allow people to live residentially and work within their community, Zeitler said.

Community Services and Support, a mandated service, performs the administrative work and provides workers whose primary purpose is to link the developmentally disabled to support and services within the county. They are responsible for developing and monitoring plans to ensure needs are being met, Zeitler said.

Investigative Support Services, also a mandated service, conduct investigations into allegations of abuse and neglect for those with developmental disabilities.

"They are here to help ensure and protect the individual's health and safety," Zeitler said.

Heather Purdue, director of Community Support Services, said the Board of Developmental Disabilities provides a great deal of services to a large population of both children and adults and she hopes people vote in favor of Issue 2.

"All of the services, whether privatized or not, still need to be paid for the individuals we serve," Purdue said.