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Hamilton County Children’s Services Worker And Foster Family Receive State Recognition

Cincinnati (Sept. 17, 2009) The Public Children’s Services Association of Ohio chose a local social worker and foster family for state awards recognizing their outstanding work with abused and neglected children.

Gail Merkle, a four-year veteran of Hamilton County’s Department of Job and Family Services, was named the PCSAO Child Protection Worker of the Year and Robin and David Steele, a Winton Place foster family, were named PCSAO Family of the Year.

“It says a lot about the type of caring community we live in to have both the social worker of the year and the foster family of the year come from Hamilton County,” said Moira Weir, director of the Department of Job and Family Services. “I could not be prouder of Gail and more thankful to the Steeles for what they do on behalf of this community’s children. They not only stand as representatives of so many people in this community who help abused and neglected children, but they stand out because they go so far above and beyond.”

Merkle who works with dozens of abused and neglected children each year, was especially cited for her work with a 2-year-old foster child. The cute, playful boy suffered a life-threatening medical problem that left him blind. Doctors and nurses noted that his condition improved every time Merkle visited, so she made sure to educate herself on his medical condition and visit him every day, even if it was before or after her normal work hours.

"He is doing better -- walking, smiling and talking," said Denise Orchard, one of Merkle’s supervisors. "Although he is now blind with the prognosis of not recovering, he definitely knows Gail’s voice and lights up when she enters the room. I think this is what has kept Gail going emotionally. And through this, Gail continues to work with all the other families and children on her caseload, as she is not one who pushes her other responsibilities to the side."

The Steeles were recognized for fostering 34 children throughout the years, many of them medically fragile with very special needs. Their children often require constant medical, therapeutic and psychiatric appointments, making the Steeles frequent visitors to Cincinnati Children’s Hospital Medical Center.

The Steeles are also adoptive parents. They currently care for 10 adoptive children and two foster children.

“Robin and David Steele are not good foster parents, they are great foster parents... because of their love and attention, many of the children in their care have made amazing medical and developmental progress in spite of their medical issues,” said Anthony Trotman, Chief of Staff for the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services.

About Hamilton County’s Department of Job and Family Services

The Department of Job and Family Services administers federal, state and local programs for those in need. The Department helps with local child protection, elderly protection, child care, child support enforcement, workforce development, cash assistance, food stamp disbursement and Medicaid disbursement. Servicing Hamilton County since 1947, the Department helps hundreds of thousands each year and is accredited by the Council on Accreditation, an international, independent, not-for-profit child and family service accrediting organization.