



NONPROFIT THAT SERVES PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES NAMES NEW LEADER

***Jamie Steele, Who Has Dedicated His Career to People with Disabilities,
Takes Over at Ohio Valley Residential Services***

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE / OCTOBER 10, 2013

James W. Steele, who has devoted all of his professional life and much of his personal life to helping people with developmental disabilities, has been appointed executive director of Ohio Valley Residential Services, a nonprofit that serves people with developmental disabilities.

OVRS runs more than 20 homes in Greater Cincinnati for people with developmental disabilities and provides other related services. It has about 140 clients.

Steele, who also is known as “Jamie,” previously worked as executive director of Halom House Inc., which also provides residential services to people with developmental disabilities in Hamilton County.

During the selection process, the OVRS Board of Directors quickly recognized Steele’s commitment to people with developmental disabilities. Board member Carey Kruer, who was deeply involved in the hiring process, called Steele the “ideal candidate.”



James W. Steele

“Jamie had a record of success and background that matched our needs perfectly,” she said.

His personal connection to people with developmental disabilities began at age four when his brother, Andy, was born with a severe developmental disability. His brother was never able to walk or talk, but still inspires Steele – even after his death 14 years ago.

One day when they were children, the two were at a neighborhood park, Steele recalled in an essay. Steele got into the only fistfight of his life. Another child had been making fun of the way his brother looked and the sounds he made. “That day didn’t turn out so good for that kid,” Steele wrote. “My parents didn’t condone fighting and my mother made sure that everyone knew how disappointed she was with me in fighting.

“On the way home that day,” Steele added, “we stopped at the store and she told me I could have any candy I wanted.”

During the summers, the brothers attended Stepping Stones in Indian Hill, a camp for children with developmental disabilities. Andy was a camper; Jamie a counselor.

Ever since then, Steele has been in jobs where he serves people with developmental disabilities.

In college, he earned a bachelor's degree at the College of Mt. St. Joseph, where he focused on social work and religious studies, and a master's degree at the University of Cincinnati, where he concentrated on social work with an emphasis on administration.

Throughout his college years, he worked in group homes. During that period, he helped to de-institutionalize people with developmental disabilities, a trend that started in the 1970s. He helped the Resident Home Corp., now known as Envision, open a group home for people who had lived in an Ohio institution for people with disabilities.

After college, he worked as a resident assistant for the Resident Home Corp., as an employment counselor for Bawac, Inc. in Northern Kentucky, and as a social worker for the Drake Center, serving people with developmental disabilities in each of those roles.

Then, for 20 years, he worked as executive director of Halom House, which is based in Blue Ash. He oversaw its growth from one home with eight residents to 25 residents in various settings. During his time there, he performed the functions of every employee as well as fundraising, community outreach, political advocacy and human resources.

His move to OVRs was natural, not only because it's a bigger organization but also because the two nonprofits have similar missions, visions and values. In addition, the long-time executive director of OVRs, Michael DeFrancesco, who retired, had been a mentor to Steele, so Steele knew quite a bit about OVRs.

OVRs Board President Henry Bang said Steele not only brought with him fresh ideas and a strong commitment to people with developmental disabilities but also success with fund-raising that will help OVRs enhance its fund-raising activities.

Steele hopes to enhance the organization's current services and initiate new ones. "We can lead our industry by introducing innovative residential environments for the folks we serve," he said.

Many organizations, including OVRs, have group homes where about six clients might share a house. But in addition, OVRs has buildings with apartments, where two clients might live in an apartment, giving them more independence.

Another growth area for OVRs is foster care services. OVRs identifies potential foster parents, places clients in those foster homes and monitors those arrangements.

Steele, who lives with his family in St. Bernard, also founded and sings in a 10-year-old rock band known as "The Code." All proceeds from their performances go to nonprofits. The band has raised more than \$60,000.

Ohio Valley Residential Services, founded in 1973, is a private nonprofit, community-centered organization based in Cincinnati that provides housing and personal care for children and adults with developmental disabilities. It also offers foster care services. Its group homes and similar residences are located in Pleasant Ridge, Western Hills, North College Hill, Deer Park, Madeira, Westwood, College Hill, Madisonville, Kenwood, Norwood, Delhi, Cheviot and White Oak.