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Bexley's Katherine Yoder to receive MLK Commission award

COLUMBUS - Bexley resident Katherine Yoder will be recognized Thursday by the Ohio Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday Commission during the 36th annual Ohio Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Commemorative Celebration. Yoder is among seven individuals and one organization to be honored for their work to serve others and lift the oppressed in communities across Ohio. Typically held at Trinity Episcopal Church in downtown Columbus, this year's event was prerecorded and can be viewed at das.ohio.gov/mlk beginning Thursday at 11:45 a.m.

"As governor, I believe that we must keep the teachings of Dr. Martin Luther King of equality, unity, and justice at the forefront of everything we do," said Governor Mike DeWine "It is a privilege to recognize the outstanding service and achievements of Ohioans whose deeds and actions are consistent with Dr. King's teachings of non-violent social and economic change."

The 12-member [commission](#) advocates Dr. King's principles of nonviolent change and the pursuit of racial, social and economic justice, and annually presents the awards in January leading up to the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday.

"It is an honor to serve on this commission dedicated to keeping Dr. King's dream alive in Ohio," said McKinley Brown, chair of the commission. "After a year of such great social change and needed conversations about where we stand in advancing toward equity and understanding, I am especially pleased to recognize these Ohioans who are advocating for a better future."

Yoder received the Social Justice Award, which recognizes significant contributions to achieving justice for individuals or communities, including contributions made through the legal, legislative and governmental systems as they apply to the more vulnerable elements of our society.

She is Executive Director of Adult Advocacy Centers, which serves adults with disabilities who are alleged victims of, or witnesses to, a crime. Led by Yoder, the organization has undertaken several initiatives to ensure equal access to services when there are allegations of a criminal component. Statistically individuals with disabilities are at a higher rate of victimization, yet there are few victim service programs specifically created for adult crime victims with disabilities.

The Adult Advocacy Centers have created the first specialized forensic protocols for adults with disabilities. The protocols are a collaboration with national, state, and local partners, and it is being lauded as "best practice" for its ability to consider an individual's disability, mental health disorder, assistive technology, language capacity, and cultural background. The curriculum is designed to help forensic interviewers gather information from alleged victims in the most reliable and legally defensible manner.

A recently released forensic interview protocol is designed to interview individuals with disabilities who do not speak. This is the first specialized training that establishes baselines for individuals with non-traditional communication methods. The training has sparked international interest.

To help combat the COVID-19 pandemic, the Adult Advocacy Centers supported the recruitment of volunteers to create masks with a clear panel for individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing. These masks were sent throughout Ohio to individuals, facilities, schools, and hospitals. They also created an Amazon Wishlist for individuals living in the State of Ohio's psychiatric hospitals and developmental centers and created a resource guide for Ohioans with disabilities to support health and safety during the pandemic.

Yoder's nominator praised her accomplishments as aligning with Dr. King's principles of expanded rights, promoting justice, and deterring violence by seeking to educate and inform individuals with disabilities to support inclusion and nonviolent interactions.

The Ohio Department of Administrative Services provides administrative support to the Ohio Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday Commission.

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