

Changing Lives Is Not Canceled

Easterseals Embraces Telehealth, Safety Measures to Continue Mission

Easterseals is in the business of changing lives. In fact, it's our mission: Creating solutions that change the lives of children and adults with disabilities and special needs in the Ohio Valley. Despite service interruptions due to the COVID-19 pandemic, that mission continues. Our 30-member team has adapted to provide telehealth and virtual resources for families, and we've implemented additional safety measures to slowly resume face-to-face service. The little voices and familiar faces we've missed for months are beginning to fill the center one by one as we navigate safely reopening.

During the third week of September, we recognize National Rehabilitation Awareness Week, a celebration of the benefits of rehabilitation and capabilities of people with disabilities. It's also the perfect opportunity to remind the Ohio Valley of the important work we do. For 83 years, the Easterseals Rehabilitation Center has been part of this community. You may be familiar with Easterseals through Rosemary Front, Glynda Marie Walker, or Dr. Ellen Kitts and their decades of service. Maybe your child attended pre-K at the center when that service was offered. Perhaps the annual Easterseals telethon comes to mind or the common misconception that our services are limited to severe disabilities.

Allow me to reintroduce you to Easterseals as we know it today. An article in the *Chicago Sun-Times* concluded, "Easterseals is one of those important organizations flying under the radar of the public, though it really shouldn't." Let's change that. In the coming months, the Life section will feature more information about Easterseals' services in line with special awareness months, like National Physical Therapy Month in October and Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month in March. But first, it's important to know how we got here.

What's in a Name?

In 1907, Ohio businessman Edgar Allen lost his son in an accident due to a lack of local medical care. In response, he began fundraising to build a hospital in Elyria, OH. After the hospital opened, Allen was disheartened to see children with disabilities were often hidden from public view. He was inspired to form the National Society for Crippled Children, the first organization of its kind, in 1919.

In 1934, the organization launched its first "Easter seals" campaign to raise money for its services. Cartoonist J.H. Donahey designed the seal—a lily—based on the concept of simplicity, saying those served by the organization hoped "simply for the right to live a normal life." Donors placed seals on envelopes to show their support around Easter each year. The Wheeling Society for Crippled Children was founded in 1937, and embraced the symbol of its national counterpart. By 1967, the Easter lily seal was so well recognized that the organization formally adopted the name Easter Seals.

In 2015, the national Easter Seals organization rebranded its identity. Now known as Easterseals, the reimagined single name works to strip away misperceptions around "Easter" and "seals" while paying tribute to the organization's legacy.

Easterseals in 2020

The Easterseals Rehabilitation Center in Wheeling is one of 68 affiliates of Easterseals, one of America's largest nonprofit healthcare organizations. We help clients with developmental, physical, and emotional challenges through rehabilitative medical care and pediatric therapy. Our services include physical medicine and rehabilitation (PM&R), speech therapy, occupational therapy, physical therapy, early

intervention and child development through West Virginia Birth to Three, and autism services, including Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) evaluations and applied behavior analysis through Kendall Behavioral Solutions.

Unlike the former organization name suggests, our services benefit clients with a variety of needs and are not solely focused on physical disabilities. Clients may have minor developmental delays (learning, speech, fine and gross motor skills) or more severe diagnoses such as muscular dystrophy, neurological disorders, or cerebral palsy. Challenges may be related to a birth condition, injury, developmental delay, or illness. Whether needing assistance with walking, sitting, dressing, talking, feeding, writing, or other daily living tasks, our clients gain skills for greater independence.

The need for our services is evident:

- 1 in 4 Americans lives with a disability.
- 1 in 4 children enters kindergarten with a delay in speech, gross or fine motor skills.
- 1 in 6 children is reported to have a developmental disability.
- 1 in 7 public school students receives special education services.

In 2019, Easterseals provided more than 20,000 occasions of service within 17 counties in West Virginia and Ohio. Our therapists work with clients at the center, in schools, and in homes as part of the WV Birth to Three program. Of the more than 2,700 individuals we treat, roughly 93 percent are younger than 18.

If you're interested in services, ask your child's doctor for a referral to Easterseals.

Care Above Cost

On average, 60 percent of Easterseals' clients require financial assistance. We accept all commercial insurance as well as Medicaid and Medicare and offer a sliding fee scale to qualifying families. We believe that open access to our services is the best way to serve the most vulnerable members of our society. Without Easterseals, there would be no safety net for many of these families.

As a result, we provide \$300,000 in uncompensated care annually. Generous donors and a supportive community make it possible for Easterseals to serve our clients no matter what they can afford. We don't expect this to be a typical year for fundraising, but that won't interfere with our commitment to provide life-changing services regardless of a family's ability to pay. Easterseals has persevered through past pandemics, the Great Depression and Great Recession, and six wars, and together, we will endure the current crisis.