



# SHERRI BEVAN WALSH

## Summit County Prosecutor

### Newsletter

#### April 2009

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## Message from the Prosecutor



Prosecutor  
Sherri Bevan Walsh

Recently, a Kent State professor, Gertrude Steuernagel, was attacked by her 18 year old son, Sky Walker, who was diagnosed with severe autism when he was three years old. She later died from injuries sustained in the attack.

I was struck by this tragedy in many ways. As the mother of a child with autism, I was concerned about stereotypes that can be perpetuated by this type of event; as a mother and a prosecutor, I was concerned for Sky. I knew that he did not understand how he caused his mother's death. I knew that people

in law enforcement do not always know what to do when the disabled are involved in a situation such as this one.

I was glad to see that Sky was placed into an appropriate facility that will hopefully support him and his needs. The situation brings to the forefront how we must all learn about those with disabilities and in this case, autism. With one in 150 children being diagnosed with autism, law enforcement will encounter these people. Knowing some basic information and tips when interacting with someone with autism can minimize situations that can lead to misunderstandings.

Through my *Take Me Home* program, we work with law enforcement to further educate about autism. In the community, however, we must all fight against stereotypes against those with disabilities. The tragic death of Professor Steuernagel is rare, and certainly no more frequently than in the "normal" population. Understanding differently-abled people simply takes a few extra steps in life.

**Law enforcement: Please schedule a training today with my office by calling Leslie Knoblauch, 330-643-8741.**



Launched in 2007, Summit County's *Take Me Home* program is the only database in Ohio that contains individuals who would have trouble communicating in a law enforcement situation. The database contains pictures along with identifying characteristics that can be searched if someone is unable to say their name or address.

Coordinator Leslie Knoblauch, with my office, has been building the database by going to schools and adult day cares to enroll those who might benefit from the program. Currently, there are about 900 individuals, ranging from pre-kindergarten age to adults with Alzheimer's, registered in the program.

Take Me Home has become a model for other localities, receiving both local and national inquiries about how to start a program. Every police department in Summit County participates in the program and are members of the Advisory Board. We are proud of our program and will continue to look for ways to ensure everyone who can benefit has the opportunity to enroll.

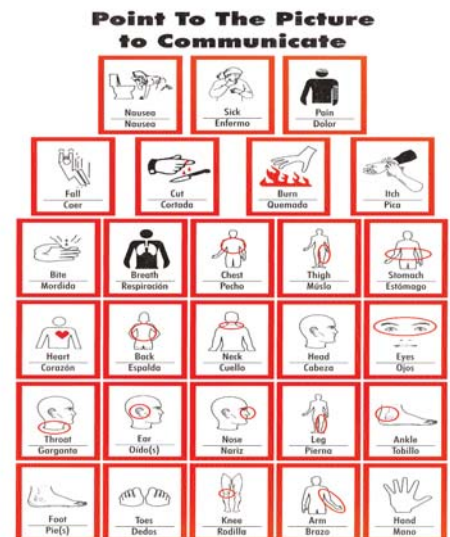
## New Communication Tool Available to Law Enforcement

Thanks to the **Hudson Community Chapel**, my office is now offering a new law enforcement tool for interacting with those with limited language abilities: picture communication boards. These cards assist with communicating with individuals who are non verbal or have difficulty speaking. The boards have pictures that communicate specific needs, such as asking someone what their address is, if they are in pain, or if they are lost.

The picture communication boards are a valuable tool for people who cannot speak because of a disability or limitation, like having a tracheotomy tube or language disorder.

Having difficulty communicating creates a barrier and tense situation for both officers and the person having trouble communicating. These boards can be of assistance when this type of situation arises, with full-color icons that are easily understood.

The standard format on the board is used in many educational and functional programs, such as preschools and places that provide therapies, so the icons are recognizable to those who need them.



A sample of some communication picture boards

Questions? E-mail Laurie Cramer:  
cramer@prosecutor.summitoh.net

We're on the Web!

[www.co.summit.oh.us/Prosecutor/Index.htm](http://www.co.summit.oh.us/Prosecutor/Index.htm)

## Top Cop

Chief John Smith

Springfield Police



Nominated by: Leslie Knoblauch

**Chief John Smith** was instrumental with helping us to coordinate training on our *Take Me Home* program to multiple local law enforcement jurisdictions. We were able to train officers in three different Summit County jurisdictions — Springfield, Uniontown and Lakemore — to reach as many officers within as few training sessions as possible.

Approximately 40 officers were trained on the database, how it works, and what to do in a *Take Me Home* situation. Officers were also trained on how to identify individuals with disabilities who may be registered in the database.

**Thank you, Top Cop!**

**Training on the *Take Me Home* program is only 45 minutes. Dispatchers can be trained in 15 minutes.**

**Please schedule a training with Leslie Knoblauch at 330- 643-8741 or Sharon McMurray at 330-643-7750 (dispatch).**

## That's Outrageous!



On July 15, 2007, Rene Morales, an illegal immigrant, attacked a 47 year old Stow woman after forcing entry into her

apartment. Morales forced the victim, who had Multiple Sclerosis, to engage in sexual intercourse inside the apartment. The victim stated in court that she recited the Lord's prayer while being raped. DNA was recovered from the sexual assault kit that clinched Morales as the perpetrator.

He pled guilty to one count of rape and one count of aggravated burglary. He was sentenced to 10 years in prison by Judge Rowlands and was classified a Tier III sex offender.

**Now that is outrageous!**

## Tough Prosecution Touts Most Successful Month To Date!

It wasn't our imagination that we were in trial a lot last month: we set a new record for trials in a one month period! In March, **25 defendants took their case to trial and 24 of them were convicted!** There was only one acquittal and, I have to add, it was after a BENCH trial.

These results are certainly impressive. The best I have ever seen. I also want to recognize our police officers for their contribution because without their hard work and investigatory diligence, these impressive results would not be possible. Congratulations to all of you, and thank you for your hard work! Keep it up and take pride in knowing that it is appreciated not only by me, but also by the citizens of Summit County who have a safer place to live because of you!

**Great work, Assistant Prosecutors and Police Officers!**

### Summit-Akron Leaders

#### Proclaim April as Autism Awareness Month

I was honored this month to receive a resolution passed by Summit County Council and a proclamation declaring **April as Autism Awareness Month** in Summit County and Akron from County Executive Russ Pry and Mayor Don Plusquellic.

April is considered Autism Awareness Month nationwide. A news conference to recognize the month and to present the declarations was held at the downtown library and brought together an impressive group of community leaders and autism advocates. There is still so much to learn about this disorder, and recognition of this type on a local level encourages opportunities to bring us together on an important issue.

I want to express my appreciation to Russ Pry, Mayor Don Plusquellic and my *Take Me Home* partner, Sheriff Drew Alexander, for working with me to coordinate having information on autism displayed at our libraries, as well as encouraging schools and faith-based organizations to incorporate autism awareness into their curriculums and services.

A special thanks to Russ Pry, who is designating federal money to the *Take Me Home* program to upgrade the Sheriff's Office's secured website to allow all Summit County law enforcement better access to the database. Providing direct access will allow for a more rapid response by law enforcement.



With community leaders, along with friends and neighbors supporting individuals with disabilities, we can take great steps toward awareness and offering support in our community!



# A Special Message from Sherri Bevan Walsh: Tips for Interactions with Persons with Autism

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Autism is a neurological disorder that is one of a group of disorders on the autistic spectrum of disorders. Other common disorders on the spectrum include aspergers syndrome, Rett's syndrome, which affects only females, and pervasive developmental disorder. Many of these disorders have the same underlying symptoms.

## **In general, autism:**

- affects four times as many males as females
- occurs in all racial and ethnic groups
- typically impairs a person's ability to communicate and understand others
- symptoms may range from mild (high-functioning) to severe

## **People with autism and other disorders on the spectrum may:**

- not understand what you say
- be non verbal, speak slowly or with difficulty or communicate with sign language, pictures or gestures
- speak in a monotone voice, with unusual pronunciations, or may have problems speaking at normal volumes
- avoid eye contact or try to avoid sensory input (flashing lights, sirens, crowds)
- repeat what is said to them
- run away from you unexpectedly
- appear agitated for no apparent reason
- engage in self-stimulating or repetitive behaviors such as hand flapping or rocking. These are soothing to the individual with autism
- not have a full understanding of the law or know the consequences of their actions
- may appear to be under the influence of narcotics or intoxicants
- may have another underlying medical condition, such as seizure disorder

## **Some tips when responding to a person with autism are:**

- speak calmly and use simple, concrete language
- allow time for responses
- do not block self-stimulating behavior (hand flapping, pacing, rocking) when possible
- give lots of praise
- offer alternate methods of communication, such as writing on a tablet, or using picture boards

**For further information about autism, go to [www.autismspeaks.org](http://www.autismspeaks.org).**



Summit County  
Prosecutor Sherri Bevan Walsh  
Sheriff Drew Alexander

## What is a Take Me Home Emergency?

*Receive a 9-1-1 call from an individual reporting a missing person who is in the Take Me Home database...*

**- OR -**

*An Officer finds a person who is unable to communicate their name and address...*

***Immediately call the  
Sheriff's Radio Room  
330-643-2181***

**The Sheriff's Office will access the *Take Me Home Database* and retrieve the missing person's profile. It can be faxed or e-mailed directly for assistance.**

*To learn more about how to handle a Take Me Home emergency, please contact Leslie Knoblauch (330) 643-8741, or for Dispatchers, call Sharon McMurray at (330) 643-7750.*