



# 17th Annual Pat Kisser Conference

Take a wellness  
journey!



Mental Health &  
Recovery Board  
OF ASHLAND COUNTY

March 25, 2026  
Ashland University Convocation Center

**Making Ashland  
Healthy Again**

For more information, please contact  
Mental Health & Recovery Board  
1605 County Road 1095  
Ashland, Ohio 44805  
Tel: 419/281-3139

Or visit our website  
[www.ashlandmhrb.org](http://www.ashlandmhrb.org)

# CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

<b>8:00 - 8:45 AM</b>	<b>Registration/Sign-In</b>	
<b>8:50 - 9:00 AM</b>	<b>Welcome, Housekeeping, &amp; Conference Purpose</b>	<b>CODE: _____</b>
<b>9:00 - 10:15 AM</b>	<b>Opening Keynote: Melissa McRae, DO The Collapse of Care -- and the Quiet Power of How We Live</b>	<b>CODE: _____</b>
<b>10:25 - 11:15 AM</b>	<b>Morning Breakout Session #1</b>	
	<b>A. Home as Healing: A Practical Theology that Fosters Spiritual Wellness- Josh Sumpter</b>	<b>CODE: _____</b>
	<b>B. Personal Medicine - Deb Brookshire and Shannon Smalley</b>	<b>CODE: _____</b>
	<b>C. Rest to Be Your Best: Optimizing Sleep for Work-Life Balance - Hunter Edwards</b>	<b>CODE: _____</b>
<b>11:25 - 12:15 PM</b>	<b>Morning Breakout Session #2</b>	
	<b>A. Yoga &amp; Mindfulness-The Quiet Power of Everyday Care - Jenn English</b>	<b>CODE: _____</b>
	<b>B. Fit Body, Fit Brain - Elsa Rasper</b>	<b>CODE: _____</b>
	<b>C. The Power of the Gut – A look at what we eat, the gut microbiome and our health - Denise Reed</b>	<b>CODE: _____</b>
<b>12:15 - 1:15 PM</b>	<b>Lunch &amp; Visit Vendors</b>	
	<b>Afternoon Breakout Session: #1A</b>	
	<b>A. Yoga &amp; Mindfulness-The Quiet Power of everyday Care- Jen English</b>	<b>CODE: _____</b>
<b>1:15 - 2:05 PM</b>	<b>B. Beyond the Vest -Sgt Angie Hamilton/Deana Skelton</b>	<b>CODE: _____</b>
<b>2:15 - 3:05 PM</b>	<b>Concluding Plenary Panel</b>	<b>CODE: _____</b>
<b>4:00 PM</b>	<b>Complete Evaluations for Certificates</b>	

# CONFERENCE HISTORY

In the early fall of 2007, discussions between Consumer Advocate Patrick Risser, other advocates, and consumers of mental health services, and Steven Stone, the Executive Director of the MHRB of Ashland County, focused on the development of a regional conference that would promote the hopeful and genuine concept of recovery and mental health. While there were numerous conferences around the State, there was a lack of events focused on recovery in the Ashland area. Within months, the small group discussions became a formal steering/planning committee for the fledgling conference. One of the differences between the steering/planning committee of R.S.V.P. and other conference committees was the strong presence of current and past recipients of mental health services. As was stated often, who better to plan a conference focused on helping persons struggling with mental health than those struggling?

After months of discussion, planning, and deliberation, September 2008 saw the 1st Annual R.S.V.P. Conference come to fruition. Over 125 people attended, and the feedback was very positive. Each subsequent year, the steering/planning committee has grown the conference by inviting speakers who believe passionately in recovery and speak to targeted audiences within the community needed as partners for a recovery-oriented system of care to be realized.

This year is the 16th Annual Pat Risser R.S.V.P. Conference, and the Mental Health and Recovery Board of Ashland County couldn't be more enthusiastic about the group of individuals gathered to present. The combination of testimonials from individuals in recovery, solid research that supports healing and trauma-informed care, and innovative methods to encourage and ensure recovery are sure to make this year's conference as successful as ever.



In Remembrance of Pat Risser, we have included Pat's last blog:



## THE "T" WORD

June 15, 2016

The word touching—I call it the "T" word—is almost as taboo as the "S" word—sex—rarely mentioned in the mental health system. A cloud of mystery surrounds both of these words, the saying of the words as secretive and closeted in fear as the practice of either of them. My longstanding personal interest in touching is partly because I have observed many patients I knew to be starved for touch and because of my own need for contact. I grew up "touch hungry" and either thrive or don't thrive depending on whether my touch needs are met.

It has been proven that touching is the most important sense at birth and infancy. Babies must be touched, held, and rocked, or they will fail to thrive. Rene Spitz, now famous for his research in this area, studied babies who were cared for in orphanages and found that babies who went without touching, though their environments were clean and they were otherwise cared for, suffered from marasmus, an extreme form of withdrawal.

Continue...

## Pat Risser's Last Blog, Continued...

Studies conducted in different cultures by various experts indicate that children grow up happy and well-adjusted in places where touching is the norm. Few studies have been done with adults, but one by James Prescott, a former official at the US Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, looked at the root causes of violence and found that cultures in which there was a great display of infant affection had low incidences of adult physical violence.

Touching has been frowned upon in the mental health system. Everyone knows that you don't touch psychiatric patients. Reasons given may vary from "you will send a patient into a homosexual panic," "patients do not want to be touched or hugged—they are too afraid," or "they will interpret touching as sexual." I contend that patients are never asked. However, one psychiatric nurse at Vanderbilt University Hospital in Nashville asked over 75 patients whether they would rather hold or be held. They all favored being held because they said they had had to be the nurturers. In a South Florida State hospital survey, persons were asked to identify what is helpful when they are upset to develop a de-escalation preference form. Many of the responses were, "I'd like to be hugged."

It is not just psychiatric patients who are not touched. Our American culture is a non-touching society. Barriers exist to open touching and hugging in public, though the practice of massage is now highly endorsed. We are brought up to believe that competition is more important than compassion; instead of being taught how to touch, we are taught how not to touch, and our textbooks say nothing about its importance.

When I recently visited the library to find books on touching, I found only two, and the critical book was written by Ashley Montagu, entitled, *Touching*, was not available. Still, none relate to the sensory need for touch or mention skin touching. On the other hand, Desmond Morris, a well-known anthropologist, states, "A single intimate body contact will do more than all the beautiful words in the dictionary. The ability that physical feelings have to transmit emotional feelings is truly astonishing."

A few physicians are beginning to focus on the value of natural approaches for healing. Hospitals are beginning to include artwork, murals, bright colored walls in children's wards; Hospice has created comforting environments for patients with cancer and has openly advocated for them to be touched. Humor, thanks to Norman Cousins, is recognized as a powerful healer. Pet therapy is being given a high sign of approval for persons of all ages; check out the number of pet magazines with many articles about the value of petting your pets. Other examples of progress include the development of Comfort rooms instead of Seclusion rooms in psychiatric hospitals. Touching is often "touched on" in all these new efforts. However, only a few people like Helen Colton, author of *Touch Therapy*, states how touch might affect our emotional well-being. She writes, "We cannot survive and live with any degree of comfort and mental health when we are not able to feel. A complete loss of our sense of touch can send us into a psychotic breakdown."

As a consumer survivor advocate, I write these words in hopes that other consumer/ survivors will join me to address the issue of touching and propose changes in mental health policies to promote healing touch. (It should be noted that "no touch" policies are rarely written; they are among the unwritten rules that are noticed only when someone has been touched, sometimes inappropriately, but often because of supervisory discomfort, not the patients).

I make the following suggestions of where we can start: (you may think of others):

1. We begin to use the words "person-centered touch" along with "person-centered language."
2. We promote the use of comfort rooms in hospitals instead of time-out rooms, which have comforting items in them, and where a person might receive a massage if requested.
3. We promote training materials for psychiatrists and psychiatric nurses that talk about the importance of touching.
4. We identify our own needs for touch and include wellness programs in drop-in centers that use the practice of touching.
5. We begin to feel comfortable asking people, "Would you like a hug," and feel comfortable giving one.
6. We ask someone, "May I have a hug?" when we need one, remembering that 12 hugs a day are recommended.

In conclusion, I hope that the above is "Food for Thought" and that we begin to recognize the need for "Touch for Health." Have you had your hug today? Have you been touched today?

# COURSE DESCRIPTIONS

Opening Keynote: 9:00 AM - 10:15 AM

## The Collapse of Care -- and the Quiet Power of How We Live

**Speaker:** Dr. Melissa McRae

Attendees will recognize that nutrition, sleep, movement, stress regulation, and social connection are foundational mental health interventions—not wellness add-ons or optional patient responsibilities. These elements are evidence-based, scalable, and essential to stabilizing physiology, reducing relapse risk, and preventing downstream mental health crises. Attendees will obtain information to help them make more informed decisions about their overall health and well-being.

### Learning Objectives:

#### 1. When the system is chaotic, patients pay the price.

Participants will recognize that when the healthcare system becomes fragmented and chaotic, patients bear the consequences through rising mental health struggles, chronic disease, and unmet needs. Many of today's clinical patterns are not personal failures, but predictable outcomes of a system built for crisis rather than regulation and prevention. Restoring care begins by returning physiology, nervous system regulation, and foundational lifestyle supports to the center of medicine.

Key takeaway: When care loses its center, patients lose stability.

#### 2. A regulated nervous system is the gateway to healing.

Participants will understand that the nervous system is the body's central communication hub, constantly shaping the conversation between the brain and the gut. When this communication becomes strained, digestion, mood, energy, and clarity all begin to falter. When it is supported and regulated, the body regains its ability to heal.

Key takeaway: A calm nervous system creates the conditions for recovery.

#### 3. The "basics" are the backbone of health care.

Participants will recognize that nutrition, sleep, movement, stress regulation, and social connection are foundational mental health interventions—not wellness add-ons or optional patient responsibilities. These elements are evidence-based, scalable, and essential to stabilizing physiology, reducing relapse risk, and preventing downstream mental health crises.

Key takeaway: You cannot medicate around sleep deprivation, inflammation, or isolation.

# COURSE DESCRIPTIONS

**Morning Breakout Session: #1A 10:25 PM - 11:15 AM**

## Home as Healing: A Practical Theology that Fosters Spiritual Wellness

**Speaker:** Josh Sumpter

This workshop explores “home” not simply as a physical dwelling or sentimental longing, but as a theological reality that shapes identity, belonging, and spiritual wellness. Participants will consider how spiritual wellness is cultivated when individuals experience home as attachment or belonging with God and others. Grounded in the biblical theme of home woven through the Bible, this session highlights how a theological vision for home paired with intentional spiritual practices will cultivate spiritual wellness for oneself and for others.

### Learning Objectives:

**1. Finding “home” may be the spiritual quest for wellness in the twenty-first century.**

Participants will understand how the metaphor of home will be used to describe one’s deep attachment to place, others, and God. Within the Christian tradition, the theme of home as both place and relationship merge in the scriptures, between the storied people of God and the divine. Thus, a theological understanding of home will not only shape one’s sense of belonging, but it can be the needed framing that shapes one’s notion of identity and spiritual wellness.

Key Takeaway: Spiritual wellness begins when we rediscover “home” as belonging with God and others, shaping our identity and sense of self.

**2. One’s sense of home is realized when one has agency in fostering it.**

Participants will understand their role in helping people to foster a sense of home in which one’s spiritual wellness can be strengthened. Individuals must be equipped with practical ways to foster a sense of home with God and others for one to enhance spiritual wellness. The need to develop spiritual practices and habits is inherent in fostering home. The following practices for fostering home will be discussed: Remembering Home, Responding to Struggle, Rendering Hospitality, and Reciting Testimony.

Key Takeaway: Spiritual wellness deepens when we intentionally foster “home” for others through faithful, embodied practices.

# COURSE DESCRIPTIONS

**Morning Breakout Session: #1B 10:25 - 11:15 AM**

## Personal Medicine

**Speaker:** Deb Brookshire and Shannon Smalley

Introduced by Dr. Pat Deegan, personal medicine focuses on an activity that a person does to obtain wellness, rather than something a person takes (e.g., medication) for wellness. The process “disrupts messages of chronicity and hopelessness, emphasizing hope and respect for resilience.” Shannon Smalley is a certified coach in personal medicine and will help participants discover their strengths and ways to utilize those strengths to promote wellness.

### Learning Objectives:

1. Participants will gain a basic understanding of Personal Medicine.
2. Participants will gain an understanding of the use of Personal Medicine in recovery.
3. Participants will experience the process of beginning to utilize Personal Medicine in working on a personal issue.

**Morning Breakout Session: #1C 10:25 - 11:15 AM**

## Rest to Be Your Best: Optimizing Sleep for Work-Life Balance

**Speaker:** Hunter Edwards

Rest to Be Your Best: Optimizing Sleep for Work-Life Balance explores how quality sleep fuels focus, emotional stability, productivity, and overall well-being. It explains how poor sleep affects stress, decision-making, and relationships, while highlighting common habits that disrupt rest. Participants learn simple, evidence-based strategies to improve sleep routines, protect their energy, and create a healthier balance between work and home life.

### Learning Objectives:

1. Develop an understanding of how sleep influences daily performance, cognitive functioning, and overall well-being.
2. Identify and implement at least one evidence-based strategy to improve sleep quality and support consistent, healthy sleep habits.

# COURSE DESCRIPTIONS

## Morning Breakout Session: #2A 11:25 - 12:15 PM

### Yoga & Mindfulness: The Quiet Power of Everyday Care

**Speaker:** Jenn English

This session explores how small, everyday choices can quietly support physical, mental, and emotional well-being over time. Drawing from lived experience, Jenn English shares how yoga became less about a class or a mat and more about how she moves, nourishes, and cares for herself in daily life. Rather than focusing on big changes or rigid routines, this session highlights simple, accessible ways to support the body and nervous system without adding more to an already full schedule. Participants will leave with practical ideas they can begin using immediately.

#### Learning Objectives:

By the end of this session, participants will be able to:

1. Recognize how small, everyday choices can support well-being without major lifestyle changes.
2. Explore how yoga principles can be applied to daily life beyond formal classes or structured exercise.
3. Identify simple, accessible movements and awareness practices that can be used throughout the day.

## Morning Breakout Session: #2B 11:15 - 12:15 PM

### Fit Body, Fit Brain

**Speaker:** Ella Rasper

Mental health and physical health are interconnected, yet physical activity can be overlooked as a component of emotional well-being. This presentation explores the evidence and impact of physical activity on mood regulation, stress reduction, anxiety, depression, cognitive function, and overall well-being. Attendees will gain an understanding of the physiological and psychological benefits behind exercise, as well as different types of exercise—including aerobic training, resistance training, yoga, and mind-body approaches—and how each uniquely contributes to emotional wellness.

The session will also highlight the essential role that physical and occupational therapy professionals play in guiding individuals through safe, sustainable fitness journeys. Strategies will be shared for initiating exercise routines, overcoming common barriers, grading activity levels appropriately, and promoting long-term adherence. Participants will leave equipped with actionable tools to support integrating movement as a meaningful and therapeutic component of mental health care.

#### Learning Objectives:

1. Understand the evidence linking physical activity to improvements in mental health
2. Comprehend the role of occupational and physical therapists in facilitating participation in pain-free physical activity and exercise

# COURSE DESCRIPTIONS

**Morning Breakout Session: #2C 11:15- 12:15 PM**

## The Power of the Gut - A look at what we eat, the gut microbiome and our health

**Speaker:** Denise Reed

What we choose to eat has a significant impact on our health. Lately more and more research has been emerging about the gut microbiome's impact on inflammation, disease management, and mental health. One way to influence positive growth of the gut microbiome is through food. This presentation will explore current research regarding the relationship between foods consumed, the gut microbiome, and our health.

### Learning Objectives:

**1. Exploring the gut microbiome**

Participants will learn basic information about the gut microbiome. Discussion will focus on a brief description of the gut microbiome, factors that influence the fragile nature of the microbiome, and why we should pay attention to this active environment found in our bodies.

**2. Participants will discuss how the gut microbiome communicates with the rest of the body.**

Participants will gain an understanding of how the microbiome communicates with other organs in the body, such as the brain, and the impact this has on overall health.

**3. Discovering the link between nutrition and the gut microbiome.**

Participants will learn how food affects the microbiome balance. During this time we will discuss how what a person chooses to eat may positively or negatively affect the microbiome, which then may impact that person's health. The speaker plans to share real patient examples of the relationship between nutrition intake, the gut microbiome, and disease management.

# COURSE DESCRIPTIONS

## Afternoon Breakout Session #1A 1:15-2:05 PM

### Yoga & Mindfulness: The Quiet Power of Everyday Care

**Speaker:** Jenn English

This session explores how small, everyday choices can quietly support physical, mental, and emotional well-being over time. Drawing from lived experience, Jenn English shares how yoga became less about a class or a mat and more about how she moves, nourishes, and cares for herself in daily life. Rather than focusing on big changes or rigid routines, this session highlights simple, accessible ways to support the body and nervous system without adding more to an already full schedule. Participants will leave with practical ideas they can begin using immediately.

#### Learning Objectives:

By the end of this session, participants will be able to:

1. Recognize how small, everyday choices can support well-being without major lifestyle changes.
2. Explore how yoga principles can be applied to daily life beyond formal classes or structured exercise.
3. Identify simple, accessible movements and awareness practices that can be used throughout the day.

## Afternoon Breakout Session #1B 1:15- 2:05 PM

### BEYOND THE VEST: Sheriff's Office K-9 Therapy

**Speaker:** Sgt. Angie Hamilton and Deanna Skelton

While often grouped together, Service Dogs, Emotional Support Animals (ESAs), and Therapy Dogs represent three distinct models of animal-assisted intervention. For mental health professionals, recognizing the unique benefits each provides is essential for tailoring treatment plans that leverage the human-animal bond effectively.

This session moves beyond the legal definitions to explore how these animals function as therapeutic partners. We will discuss real-world impact of these interventions as best seen in programs like the Ashland County Sheriff's office. Sgt. Angie Hamilton and her therapy dog Princess will discuss the vital emotional support they provide to students, community members and law enforcement personnel.

#### Learning Objectives:

1. The Three Pillars of Support: Define the functional roles of Service Animals (task-based), ESAs (presence-based), and Therapy Dogs (community-based).
2. Therapeutic Mechanisms: Explore the physiological and psychological benefits of animal interaction.
3. Client Outcomes: Discuss how different animals support specific goals - from fostering independence in PTSD to providing comfort in group clinical settings

Integrating Animals into Care: Identify which type of animal support best aligns with a client's specific therapeutic needs and lifestyle.

# SPEAKER BIOGRAPHIES



Dr. Melissa McRae

**Dr. Melissa McRae, DO,** is a board-certified family medicine physician, functional medicine pioneer, and founder of Vitality Natural Wellness and Solenne Health Services, advancing care models that combine root-cause medicine with elevated patient advocacy.

Known for her bold vision and deeply personalized approach to care, Dr. McRae serves leaders, innovators, executives, and individuals who are no longer satisfied with symptom-based medicine and are ready for true optimization. She blends advanced nutritional therapeutics, metabolic and genetic testing, bioidentical hormone optimization, gut and brain health strategies, and behavior-driven implementation to create powerful, sustainable health transformations.

At the core of Dr. McRae's work is a genuine love of medicine and a lifelong fascination with the extraordinary intelligence of the human body. After 12 years in traditional primary care, she recognized that the current healthcare model often limits time, curiosity, and possibility. Rather than accept those constraints, she built a new model—one rooted in longer visits, deeper listening, and a relentless focus on root cause healing.

Vitality Natural Wellness was created as a place where medicine is practiced with intention, innovation, and humanity. A place where patients are seen, heard, and guided toward becoming the healthiest versions of themselves. Under Dr. McRae's leadership, the practice has become known for life-changing, patient-centered care.

A dynamic speaker and educator, Dr. McRae presents locally and nationally on functional medicine, lifestyle medicine, hormone health, metabolic optimization, inflammation, and the future of personalized care. She has spoken at the American College of Lifestyle Medicine national conference and continues to train medical students, residents, nurse practitioners, and nurses. Above all, Dr. McRae exists in medicine to spark hope, unlock potential, and change what patients believe is possible for their health.



Josh Sumpter

**Executive Director,  
Office of Christian  
Ministry**

**Dr. Josh Sumpter, D.Min.,** is in his first year as the Executive Director of the Office of Christian Ministry and University Chaplain at Ashland University. Before returning to his alma mater, Sumpter worked for nine years as a biblical and ministry studies faculty member and chaplain at Waynesburg University (PA). Prior to academia, he served in the local church as a youth pastor and associate minister for 10 years in Ohio and Pennsylvania. He is a member of the Association of Youth Ministry Educators (AYME), Made to Flourish Pastor's Network, and attends Park Street Brethren Church in Ashland, Ohio. Sumpter resides in Ashland, Ohio with his wife, Jessica, and his three daughters.

# SPEAKER BIOGRAPHIES



**Deborah Brookshire**, MA, LSW, LPCC-S, CPT, has worked in the human services field 42 years, including working with at-risk children and their families, women in prison and their families, foster care and adoptive children and their families, and victims of childhood abuse and trauma. She also has served as Quality Improvement Manager in several agencies. She grew up in Chicago, has a Bachelor's degree in Communication from Clarke College in Iowa, and a Master's degree in Counseling from Ashland Theological Seminary. She has had extensive training in trauma, and the impact of emotional trauma on physical health. She has training in working with returning military and their families, first responders, and has been trained in EMDR. She currently is an outpatient therapist at Catholic Charities, and the Program Administrator for Pathways Peer Support.



**Shannon Smalley** has provided day care and foster care for more than 20 years. She has three adult children, and has adopted two special needs children. Shannon is experienced in working with others from varied backgrounds. She is a Certified Personal Medicine Coach, and is working toward certification as a Peer Supporter. She currently works for Catholic Charities in the Pathways Peer Support Program.



**Hunter Edwards** is a Licensed Professional Counselor at Ashland University Psychological Counseling Services with over five years of experience providing mental health services in Ashland County. He earned his Master of Arts in Clinical Mental Health Counseling from Liberty University and is committed to supporting the emotional well-being and personal growth of the individuals and communities he serves. Outside of his professional work, Hunter enjoys spending time with his wife and three young children and staying active through pickleball and golf.

# SPEAKER BIOGRAPHIES



**Jenn English** is a yoga teacher and longtime Ashland University staff member with more than 20 years of personal yoga practice. What began as a fitness class gradually became a way of living—one shaped by small, sustainable choices that support everyday well being. She leads weekly on-campus yoga classes and offers additional sessions for faculty and staff groups, athletic teams, student organizations, and wellness events. Jenn’s approach is grounded in lived experience and focuses on simple practices that fit naturally into daily life.



**Ella Rasper, MSOT, OTR/L, LSVT BIG® Certified**, is an Occupational Therapist at University Hospital’s Samaritan Rehabilitation Center, where she has been practicing since October 2024. She specializes in upper extremity injuries and pediatric developmental disorders. Ella is certified in LSVT BIG®, an intensive treatment approach designed to improve movement and function in individuals with Parkinson’s disease. She earned her Master of Science in Occupational Therapy from Gannon University in 2025. Her graduate thesis examined The Accessibility of Fitness Centers in Erie County, reflecting her commitment to community inclusion and health equity.



**Denise Reed, MS, RDN, LD** is a Clinical Assistant Professor and Director of the Dietetics Program at Ashland University. As part of the College of Nursing and Health Sciences she teaches courses focusing on nutrition and disease for students studying nutrition and dietetics, nursing, exercise science, and other pre-health degrees. Prior to working at Ashland University Denise was a clinical nutrition manager and critical care dietitian for many years at a Level 2 trauma hospital. She is also currently serving as a board member for IdeaWorks, which is a non-profit organization in Richland county focusing on providing access to nutrition education within the community. Denise is passionate about sharing her expertise on how what we eat impacts health and she values the opportunity to provide practical nutrition education to students, professionals, and members of her community.

# SPEAKER BIOGRAPHIES



Sgt. Angie Hamilton

**Black River  
Schools Resource  
Officer and  
D.A.R.E. Program  
Instructor**

**Sgt. Angie Hamilton** joined the Sheriff's Office in May of 1997. During her career, she has worked in the Communications, Enforcement and Administration divisions. She was assigned duties as the D.A.R.E. (Drug Abuse Resistance Education) officer in 2002 and as a S.R.O. (School Resource Officer) in 2007. Sgt. Hamilton has taught the D.A.R.E. program in Mapleton, Hillsdale, Loudonville and Black River Local School Districts. Beginning in December of 2011, Sgt. Hamilton became the S.R.O. and D.A.R.E. Officer for Black River Schools. She is also an A.L.I.C.E (Active Shooter) training instructor. Sgt. Hamilton is a member of the Buckeye State Sheriffs' Association, D.A.R.E. Ohio Executive Committee Member, Christ United Methodist Church and the Ashland County Republican Women's Club. She is married to retired Captain Terry Hamilton. Her hobbies include being with family, traveling, horseback riding, shopping, and scrap-booking. In 2024, Angie was promoted to Sgt. as the head of the D.A.R.E. and School Resource program.



K-9 Princess

**American Labrador  
Retriever**

On May 21, 2024, the Sheriff's Office's first therapy dog, **Princess**, was approved by Sheriff E. Wayne Risner (retired). She was sworn in as a K9 Deputy by incoming Sheriff Kurt J. Schneider (Jan. '25) to add a layer of protection while she is serving our community.

Princess's primary role is to offer emotional support to community members, school students, and law enforcement personnel, particularly following critical incidents. She works alongside DARE/SRO Sgt. Hamilton. They spend a majority of their time at schools, particularly Black River, as that is where Sgt. Hamilton is assigned during the school year. Princess has been called to assist with making victims feel better and has made appearances to brighten county employees' days. Princess also has a junior handler, Mary, that can assist when needed.

Since her introduction, Princess's presence has been particularly appreciated at numerous community events such as Touch-A-Truck, Safety Town, Ashland Library's Set, Stay and Read Program, DARE Graduations, Trunk or Treats, Veterans' events, SPED proms, and test de-stressing at universities.

Princess is a four-year-old American Labrador who is fully certified having completed her certification with Alliance of Therapy Dogs in May 2024. She began her training when she was very young and successfully passed each training level, which included puppy, intermediate, advanced, and therapy. Princess has achieved other milestones, including the American Kennel Club (AKC) Therapy Dog Status and Canine Good Citizen certifications.

Also, Princess was voted as the 2025 Canine of the year through the Caring Therapy Canines Therapy Dog Club, where she and Angie belong.

# SPEAKER BIOGRAPHIES



Deanna Skelton  
and Tazee

**President, Caring  
Therapy Canines.**

**Deanna Skelton** is a Senior Analyst at The J.M. Smucker Company, specializing in customer supply chain initiatives and playing a key role in driving supply chain performance while building trusted partnerships. In addition to her corporate career, she serves as President of Caring Therapy Canines. A certified tester for Alliance of Therapy Dogs, Deanna evaluates and mentors therapy dog teams, supporting safe and meaningful interactions in the community. She and her nine-year-old rough collie, Tazee, have completed more than 125 therapy visits, providing comfort and encouragement across a variety of settings.

Deanna is passionate about service, enjoys gardening, and actively supports youth development through 4-H.

## To register:



# THANK YOU!

The Mental Health & Recovery Board of Ashland County would like to thank all planning committee members and presenters who made this year's conference possible. Thank you to each of our attendees as well; we hope you had a good time and found these presentations to be thought-provoking and helpful.

## SELF-CARE DURING THE CONFERENCE

We are so thankful you have chosen to participate in the RSVP Conference this year. The day is packed with exciting opportunities for learning and networking. Please be sure to practice good self-care as needed throughout the day. The President's Room and other designated areas around the Ashland University campus are available where you can step out and get some fresh air when needed. We want you to have a positive experience at this year's RSVP conference. So, if you need to take a break and escape the hustle and bustle, please **\*BE WISE AND TAKE FIVE\***



## CONFERENCE EVALUATIONS

Please take a moment to complete the conference evaluation. You will receive an evaluation for each session of the conference. Your feedback is very important to us and will help shape future conferences. Thank you!

## OBTAINING CEUs OR CERTIFICATE OF COMPLETION

Up to 4.25 CEUs are available this year, or you can receive a certificate of completion by submitting your conference evaluation. Please submit an evaluation for each session to get CEUs for that session.