



# Iowa Department of Human Services

---

Kim Reynolds  
Governor

Adam Gregg  
Lt. Governor

Jerry R. Foxhoven  
Director

December 22, 2017

W. Charles Smithson  
Secretary of Senate  
State Capitol Building  
LOCAL

Carmine Boal  
Chief Clerk of the House  
State Capitol Building  
LOCAL

Dear Mr. Smithson and Ms. Boal:

Enclosed please find a copy of the report to the General Assembly relative to the Mercy Autism Center – Autism Spectrum Disorder Report as required by 2016 Iowa Acts, Chapter 1139.11.

Please feel free to contact me if you need additional information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Merea Bentrott".

Merea Bentrott  
Policy Advisor

MB/av

Enclosure

cc: Kim Reynolds, Governor

# Iowa Department of Human Services



## *Mercy Autism Center Pilot Project Annual Report*

December 2017

# Mercy Autism Center Pilot Project Annual Report

## Executive Summary

Mercy Medical Center declined to accept the SFY17 and SFY18 allocations from the Autism Support Program Fund for the Mercy Autism Center Pilot Project due to programming and staff changes within their organization. The Mercy Medical Center no longer directly provides specialized autism services and does not have the staff capacity to continue the pilot program.

## Introduction

The Mercy Medical Center Autism Pilot Program began operation in 2012, pursuant to 2012 Iowa Acts, Chapter 1133, Section 128, paragraph 23A. The legislation stated the following:

“Of the funds appropriated in this section, \$25,000 shall be used for the public purpose of providing a grant to a hospital-based provider headquartered in a county with a population between 90,000 and 95,000 in the latest certified federal census that provides multiple services including but not limited to diagnostic, therapeutic, and behavioral services to individuals with autism spectrum disorder across the lifespan. The grant recipient shall utilize the funds to implement a pilot project to determine the necessary support services for children with autism spectrum disorder and their families to be included in the children’s disabilities services system. The grant recipient shall submit findings and recommendations based upon the results of the pilot project to the individuals specified in this division of this Act for submission of reports by December 31, 2012.”

## Program Overview

The program received allocations of \$25,000 annually with similar authorizing legislation in SFYs 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, and 2018. Mercy Medical Center has submitted annual reports every year of operation as required by the legislation. The reports describe the activities undertaken by the program to develop a coordinated system of service for children with a diagnosis of, or at risk of, a diagnosis of autism.

In 2016, Mercy transferred autism evaluation services to Hills and Dales which also provides applied behavior analysis (ABA) services in Dubuque. Mercy has remained involved services to children with autism in the Dubuque area through the provision of speech and occupational therapy services as well as emergency and pediatric services, but has not provided autism evaluation or ABA services since June 30, 2016, and chose not to accept further pilot project funding effective July 1, 2016. The program submitted a final report, summarizing tasks completed during SFY16 and identifying the reasons for discontinuing the pilot program.

## Summary of Program Activities 2012-2016

Mercy Medical Center-Dubuque convened a work group of local stakeholders, providers, family members, and legislators to guide the development of the pilot program. The work group also collaborated with the University of Iowa Child Health Specialty Clinics' Regional Autism Program. A plan was developed for a collaborative community-based system of care to serve children with a diagnosis of autism and their families.

The provision of Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA) services by Board-Certified Behavior Analysts (BCBA) was a key recommendation of the group. Grant funding supported the delivery of ABA services through the Mercy Service Club Autism Center at Mercy Medical Center-Dubuque to children who did not have funding through insurance coverage. Funding for this purpose was no longer needed after the implementation of the state-funded Autism Support Program in 2013. The project also worked to integrate autism services into educational settings through collaboration with local and area education agencies and training of educational staff and families.

Early identification, evaluation, and intervention for children with autism was implemented through training on recognizing early signs and symptoms of autism and referral processes for evaluation and treatment services delivered to primary care providers, family members, child care providers, and other stakeholders who work with young children in Dubuque and surrounding counties.

The funds supported training for Mercy Medical Center hospital staff and other community providers on methods for working with children on the autism spectrum to improve their health care experience and that of their families. The goal was to develop an "autism friendly" hospital. Crisis prevention services for children with a diagnosis of autism were also funded to help families and providers develop interventions to reduce crises due to challenging behavior.

## **Conclusion/Recommendations:**

Bobbi Schell, Director of the Mercy Service Club Autism Center, expressed Mercy's appreciation for the support they received from the Iowa DHS, the Iowa Legislature and the Governor for this project. While Mercy Dubuque is no longer able to utilize the funds available, Ms. Schell and her associates believe that their experience can be replicated by other communities to bring together and coordinate local resources to better support the needs of children with autism and their families.