

## OUCARES partnership earns national award for autism training

The [Oakland University Center for Autism Outreach Services \(OUCARES\)](#) and partners at [Oakland County](#) and [Oakland County Parks and Recreation](#), have been recognized with an Achievement Award from the [National Association of Counties \(NACo\)](#).

The national awards program honors innovative, effective county government programs that enhance services for residents.

NACo selected the group as Best in Category for their collaboration on a unique training program where OUCARES staff members teach the park staff how to better recognize, understand and interact with individuals on the Autism spectrum.

“We have had a strong relationship with the county government and the parks and recreation department for several years,” said Kristin Rohrbeck, director of OUCARES. “The autism training program for park staff members just seemed like a natural progression of our partnership and everyone involved knew it would benefit the community.”



*An Oakland County Parks and Recreation staff member helps camper John with his helmet before embarking on their next activity during this year's OUCARES Autism Camp at Independence Oaks County Park.*

During this year's autism training, park supervisors learned to recognize common characteristics of autism spectrum disorder and how to communicate effectively by breaking information down into simple steps, keeping verbal statements short and maintaining a low voice among other strategies.

After the training, the park staff have a chance to utilize their new skills each year when they host an OUCARES Autism Camp at Independence Oaks County Park. Campers are picked up and bused to the park for activities including pontoon boat rides, fishing, an inflatable bounce house, tropical maze and dinosaur slide, nature center hike and naturalist class instruction.

Then NACo President Bryan Desloge said of the award announcement, “Counties overcome complex challenges, provide essential services and constantly do more with less. We applaud these Achievement Award-winning counties for outstanding efforts to improve residents' quality of life.”

Nationally, awards are given in 18 different categories that reflect the vast, comprehensive services counties provide. The categories include children and youth, criminal justice, county administration, information technology, health, civic engagement and many more. Each nomination is judged on its own merits and not against other applications.

The program was also cited by NACo as one of this year's 100 Brilliant Ideas at Work: <http://www.naco.org/brilliant-ideas/oucares-day-camp-and-staff-training>

NACo recognized this year's winners at its 2017 Annual Conference and Exposition in Franklin County, Ohio.



Campers and staff enjoyed pontoon boat rides during this year's OUCARES Autism Camp at Independence Oaks County Park.



Another activity at this year's OUCARES Autism Camp at Independence Oaks County Park was a giant inflatable dinosaur slide.

###

**About NACo:**

The National Association of Counties (NACo) unites America's 3,069 county governments. Founded in 1935, NACo brings county officials together to advocate with a collective voice on national policy, exchange ideas and build new leadership skills, pursue transformational solutions, enrich the public's understanding of county government and exercise exemplary leadership in public service. Learn more at [www.naco.org](http://www.naco.org)

**About Oakland County Parks and Recreation:**

Oakland County Parks and Recreation offers 13 parks and golf courses that provide healthy outdoor adventures on 6,700 acres. Year-round recreation includes more than 70 miles of paved and natural trails – all just a short drive from home.

**About OUCARES:**

The Oakland University Center for Autism Outreach Services (OUCARES) strives to improve quality of life for individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder, their families, and our community by providing quality and comprehensive programming for children, teens and adults. OUCARES is part of the School of Education and Human Services at Oakland University.