



BITTERSWEET

## About Bittersweet Farms

Bittersweet Farms is an Ohio-based organization that offers holistic programming for individuals with autism, utilizing a farmstead model. The organization was founded by Bettye Ruth Kay in 1983. In the 1970's, Ms. Kay worked as a teacher for Toledo Public Schools teaching a class of students with autism. It was during that time, where she found the most beneficial types of learning activities for her students were hands-on and in nature, such as farming. Ms. Kay spent time in England, where she learned of a farmstead program for adults with autism. This program consisted of daily activities including weaving, caring for animals, gardening and growing field crops, woodworking, and working in a print shop. She brought these ideas back to the states, where she began forming the programming for Bittersweet.

Bittersweet originated in Whitehouse, Ohio. **Resting on 80 acres of farmland, Bittersweet provides residential, vocational, and day programming options for individuals with autism.** The organization has since expanded to multiple locations throughout Ohio and is currently operating in Whitehouse, Pemberville and Lima. Their Whitehouse and Lima locations serve individuals 18 and older, and their Pemberville location serves ages 12-22.

The organization's mission is to positively impact the lives of individuals with autism and those whose lives they touch. Bittersweet engages in a model which employs meaning and motivation, aerobic activity, partnership and purpose, and structure and support (MAPS). This provides a community of interdependence and a holistic and healthy environment in which the potential of each participant is envisioned and developed. They believe every interaction is a lesson in reciprocal communication, relationship building, and mutual cooperation between staff and participants. All staff and participant relationships are built on dignity, respect and kindness and all of their habilitation programming incorporates these ideals.

In addition to their own programming, they offer training and consultation to others who are interested in developing programs similar to Bittersweet. They are proud to say they have hosted and trained individuals from all over the United States, Australia, Taiwan, and Italy.



Ukeru has completely changed my approach when supporting our residents. When someone is upset and becoming escalated, I don't find myself getting anxious and preparing for the worst. I am actively being a behavior detective and looking for the root cause of why the person's upset by gathering all of the clues in their environment. Once we know why they are upset, we have an answer for how to help them deescalate. When staff use this approach, they tend to have stronger relationships with the individuals.

**Renee Simon, Community Living Staffing Manager and Ukeru Trainer**



## Looking For Solutions

Bittersweet has utilized a restraint-free approach since the early 2000's. In 2016, they were searching for a tool to help increase safety for both staff and their participants. Additionally, they were interested in learning more about the implementation of trauma-informed care and becoming a more trauma-informed provider. Ukeru's trauma-informed philosophy and use of blocking equipment (for an added layer of safety) was appealing to them. They especially liked how Ukeru training digs into the "why" behind the behavior and helps staff to become more proactive versus reactive.

## Working with Ukeru

Bittersweet began working with Ukeru in July of 2016. Two of their longest trainers, Matt Wolfram and Nick Freyman have been certified Ukeru trainers for over 8 years. They have since added more trainers over the years to further support their efforts of getting their staff trained. Now, their entire organization has been trained in Ukeru, which includes upwards of 170 staff members.

The roll out of Ukeru took about a year. Their trainers began by training their leadership team in the philosophy portion of the training to help ensure buy-in from the top down. They then met with staff from each program to ensure they had all the additional support they needed to feel confident and competent. Ongoing, their trainers spend extra time in orientation with new staff to make sure they have the adequate training and support they need to support their individuals.

**"We made sure that leadership in all areas were on board, through training. Additionally, we purchased all necessary equipment for each area. We also increased our training refreshers and made the sessions available for all staff to come see us trainers for any additional training,"** shared Nick Freyman, IFC Director.

Thus, a huge piece of their successful implementation was making sure staff had ample training and resources. Additionally, Bittersweet has utilized the Ukeru team to work through challenging scenarios and has appreciated the team's availability to answer their questions over the years.

**170+**  
Staff Trained

  
Utilized in All  
Locations

  
Adequate Training  
& Equipment  
Provided

  
Utilized Ukeru Team  
for Questions &  
Support

**“** I love Ukeru and what it is built on. Ukeru training provides our staff with a very thorough understanding of why our individuals may exhibit behaviors based on their past experiences. I have been able to teach Ukeru for two years now and use it very often when mentoring our staff about the individuals we serve. The foundation gives a very human perspective on those we serve AND those we work alongside of. I have seen staff flourish in confidence and understanding with the help of Ukeru and all that it offers.

**Abbey Sehnert, IFC Staffing Manager and Ukeru Trainer**

**”**

## Results

The results have been incredible. Bittersweet has utilized Ukeru as a standalone crisis management system and has been able to manage challenging behavior, without having to go hands-on. Ukeru has increased safety within their organization and has helped to create safe and comforting environments for the individuals they serve. **“Staff have felt safer when utilizing the Ukeru pads. Our individuals themselves have been able to work through heightened situations as well,”** Matt Wolfram, Day Program Leader, proudly shared.

Wolfram continued, **“We’ve heard from staff that they seek out the pads in times of crisis situations and feel more confident knowing the pads are around for use.”** In addition to staff, their participants feel safer with Ukeru pads around as well. Wolfram explained, **“Our individuals will sometimes seek the pads in times when others are upset. Several of our individuals place the pads where they prefer them to be as well.”** This demonstrates that their individuals have a positive association with the pads and understand that they are used to keep everyone involved safe.

Ukeru has also transformed their culture to one that is trauma-informed for both staff and their participants. **“The biggest thing with adjusting our culture was looking at the trauma-informed piece of Ukeru. We adjusted our environment along with more intensive staff training to avoid re-traumatization,”** explained Freyman.

Bittersweet is an awesome example of how an organization similar to theirs can manage challenging behavior, without having to use restrictive practices. Freyman concludes by sharing a powerful testimonial, **“Teaching someone to work through difficult times (both staff and the individual) helps prepare them for the future. Restraint does not teach and will lead to future restraint. Teaching them coping and communication skills through Ukeru promotes growth.”**



**Increased  
Safety**



**Positive Feedback  
From Staff &  
Individuals**



**Increased  
Communication  
& Coping Skills**



**Stronger Staff  
& Individual  
Relationships**



**Restraint-Free  
Organization**



**Trauma-Informed  
Organization**