

ACCENT_{on}KIDS

A Publication of Franklin County Children Services

AUTUMN 2013



INSIDE:

- 🎉 **FGCS Celebrates Children at COSI**
- 🎉 **SAFE Teams: Ensuring the Safety of Children**
- 🎉 **Simba Celebrates 25 Years of Mentoring**
- 🎉 **Holiday Wish Celebrates 50 Years**



Protecting Children by Strengthening Families

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Franklin County Children Services

- Community Outreach
- 855 W. Mound St.
- Columbus, OH 43223
- Phone: 614-275-2523

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FCCS Celebrates Children at COSI

By Joetta McCruter-Polk

Franklin County Children Services hosts its annual Children's Day at COSI celebration (333 West Broad Street - Columbus, Ohio) on Friday, September 27 from 5 to 9 p.m. This fun-filled night brings FCCS children and families together to enjoy all that COSI has to offer. Free passes are made available to FCCS families through a community partnership between Kroger, COSI and the Franklin County Board of Commissioners. "This sponsorship provides the agency with the keys to put parents and caregivers in the driver's seat to keep children safe, and Children's Day is a great night of fun," said Chip M. Spinning, Franklin County Children Services executive director.

Children's Day at COSI draws people from all over central Ohio each year as the community honors children and families. More than 2,500 FCCS families and their guests will enjoy free admission during this year's event. Many of those attending the event are children who are in foster care or are otherwise involved with FCCS, who typically would not have the opportunity to visit COSI. "We can't thank COSI enough and our sponsors, especially Kroger, for the opportunity to enjoy the science museum. This event gets better every year for local families," said Bruce Cadwallader, FCCS community outreach director.

There is much for children and their parents to look forward to again this year. In addition to COSI's exhibits, there will be kid-friendly performances from Columbus' Favorite Arnett Howard, Bob Piascik, Mackee the Magician and The Shazzbots Duo, as well as a banjo sing-along with Ray Pauken. Children won't want to miss the visits by our city's most popular mascots. Parenting tips and community resource guides will be available at the FCCS information table. Every child that attends will also be able to participate in door prize drawings. The drawings will be at 6 p.m., 7 p.m., and 8 p.m. In addition, eight bicycles (donated by Bike Lady Inc.) will be given away.

For free passes, FCCS clients may call (614) 275-2523 or contact an agency staff person. Admission is available to the general public at the box office at the reduced rate of \$10.95. Parking is \$5.00. For more information, visit www.franklincountyohio.gov/children_services.



Arnett Howard (right) shares the stage with a trio of youngsters while entertaining during Children's Day 2012.

SAFE Teams: Ensuring the Safety of Children

By Cynthia Greenleaf

Thanks to its new SAFE Teams review process, Franklin County Children Services is doing more than ever to ensure the safety and well-being of central Ohio's children. Short for Supported Assessment For Effective Team screening, SAFE Teams is a diverse group of FCCS Intake staff that meets twice daily to review challenging, complex reports made to the agency's 24-hour child abuse hotline.

During a typical session, team members review calls, discuss the facts and ensure that any reports that require further assessment and investigation are promptly screened in and the appropriate course of action is taken.

"The strength of SAFE Teams is the group decision-making process — having a team of people with different and varied levels of experience talk these issues through," said Deanna Herold, the FCCS Intake social program administrator who oversees the daily group sessions. "By talking it through together, maybe we can see that something significant is happening in a home that we otherwise would have missed."

The SAFE Teams panel is comprised of half a dozen FCCS Intake staff and typically includes an administrator, several supervisors, caseworkers and a screener who answers the child abuse prevention hotline. Calls selected for SAFE Teams review fall into a few categories: they can be high-risk situations, complicated scenarios, questions of proper jurisdiction, or just cases where an FCCS supervisor or caseworker wants to get a second opinion from

their colleagues before proceeding.

With child safety as the utmost priority, SAFE Teams pay careful attention to the agency's most vulnerable population — children who are 3 years old or younger. Any time a call comes in with an alleged child victim in this high-risk category that is not screened in for review, SAFE Teams automatically takes a closer look, to confirm that this was the right decision. According to Lara LaRoche, FCCS director of Intake, Investigation and Assessment, "Through SAFE Teams, we have been able to slow down the screening process to give careful thought and attention to these very vulnerable populations."

By ensuring a thorough, thoughtful response to FCCS's more complicated cases, the SAFE Teams process is helping the agency fulfill its mission of keeping kids safe and families strong. "The families we partner with deserve our best effort and this group decision-making helps us to be accountable and do our best," said LaRoche.

If you suspect a child is being abused or neglected, call the 24-hour FCCS Child Abuse Hotline at (614) 229-7000.



Simba Celebrates 25 Years of Mentoring

By Marion Thompson

Simba has helped to raise many young lions. In fact, this October, the Franklin County Children Services mentoring program will celebrate its 25th year of providing African-American boys under the agency's care with one-on-one support. Simba's mission is to give the youth confidence and guidance by matching them with African-American men who serve as mentors. Through these relationships, the young men can develop self-esteem, academic excellence and life goals so that they can become leaders and positively influence others.

While it began as a small effort, Simba has grown steadily over the years into a program with 53 youth currently matched with mentors. Plans for the future include expanding participation to 200 mentors and mentees within the next three years and instituting a rites of passage program.

Named after the Swahili word for young lion, Simba serves males ages 5 through 18 who have an open case with FCCS. It began in 1993, when FCCS staff member Karen Bell and community members, Kwese Kambon and Clifford Tyree approached former FCCS Executive Director Margaret Sandberg with an idea for nurturing young African-American men so that they don't fall

victim to negative influences such as drugs and violence. They proposed creating the Afrocentric mentoring program. "Simba gives the men in Columbus an opportunity to make an impact at the grassroots level by supporting the young men in our community who need it the most," said Simba Director Daryle Cobb. "The mentors are able to help guide, support and create positive pathways for their mentees."

Mentors meet with their mentees at least two times per month, often taking them on outings or just spending quality time together. While mentors are asked to commit to being part of the program for at least six months, they often continue working with mentees for years — the average tenure being two and a half years. Norman Brown, who was the first official Simba mentor, is still part of Simba. Some former mentees have also served as mentors, while others maintain contact with their mentees long after the youth have matured into adulthood.

For information on becoming a Simba mentor, visit www.franklincountyohio.gov/children_services or call (614) 275-2690.

Peer Support Lightens Load on Caseworkers

By Pam Prosser

Working with children who have lived through abuse can take its toll, even on the most experienced caseworkers.

“Nothing prepares you to see submersion burns on a child who was forced into a hot bathtub as a punishment,” says Franklin County Children Services Caseworker Supervisor Sarah Levels and a member (formerly the chair) of the agency’s Supportive Work Environment committee (SWE). “At FCCS we help children and families in crisis, but realized that when something stressful or upsetting happens to those kids and families, it also takes a toll on us.”

So SWE began looking into the effects of secondary traumatic stress on child welfare workers and learned that researchers have indeed found that by hearing first-hand accounts of traumatic experiences they themselves suffer. It was determined that secondary traumatic stress can be a cumulative response to working with trauma survivors over a period of time, or it may result from reactions to a particular client’s traumatic experience. SWE formed a sub-committee called the Peer Support Team and under the leadership of co-chairs Nichole Bruce, Rashandra Collier and Tiffany Richards, a team of FCCS employees was formed. Team

members took special training so that they could work with and provide support to colleagues experiencing secondary traumatic stress.

“We saw a need to create a network where employees can have a supportive outlet – a place where they can talk to someone in confidence...someone who understands what they are going through,” says Richards, a caseworker supervisor.

Collier, also a caseworker supervisor, says that secondary stress can arise at any time when someone is working with child welfare cases. “We create bonds with the families we serve. When they go through a domestic violence situation, it still affects us,” says Collier.

Bruce, who works in the agency’s Professional Development Department, is excited about the upcoming kick-off of the Peer Support Team effort for staff members experiencing secondary traumatic stress. “If someone is feeling like they need to talk to a peer, they can submit a request and one of the co-chairs will quickly contact a team member who will directly contact the colleague requesting the support.”

Keeping Sleeping Babies Safe

By Cynthia Greenleaf

It’s a heartbreaking fact: babies right here in central Ohio die every year because of unsafe sleep practices. Nationwide, according to the nonprofit advocacy group First Candle, of the 4,500 sudden, unexpected infant deaths (SIDS) annually, statistics show that as many as 80 to 90 percent are the result of unsafe sleep conditions.

The good news for parents is that tragedies like these are almost completely avoidable if proper steps are taken. In recognition of September as National Infant Mortality Awareness Month, here are some key things to keep in mind when laying your little one safely down to sleep:

- Remember that safe sleep is as simple as ABC: babies are always safest Alone, on their Backs, in their Cribs.
- Babies need to sleep in their crib, not in your bed, on the couch or in a car seat. Keep your baby close to you, but separate. New parents are understandably exhausted, so be careful to put baby in his or her crib before you fall asleep on the couch or bed. Remember that an infant is up to 40 times more likely to die sleeping in a bed than in a safe crib.
- Babies should always sleep on a firm, safety-approved crib mattress with a tightly fitted sheet. Make sure your crib meets current safety standards.
- Avoid fluffy, loose bedding and bumper pads. While baby stores are full of these adorable accessories, they have been proven again and again to be unsafe.

- Babies should sleep in an uncluttered crib. Keep stuffed animals, multiple blankets, pillows or other items out of the crib. These things might seem cute and cuddly, but they have no place in a crib where they could suffocate a sleeping baby.
- Don’t make baby’s room too warm and don’t over-bundle your infant. A good rule to remember is that if you’re comfortable, the baby will be, too.
- Babies should sleep on their backs at all times, not on their sides or tummies. Remember: back to sleep, tummy to play. (Supervised tummy time is essential for a baby’s development, helping to make arm and neck muscles strong and healthy.)
- Don’t ever smoke – or let anyone else smoke – around your baby. The risk of SIDS dramatically increases when infants are exposed to secondhand smoke.

Please pass on this important safe sleep information to any parents you may know, expectant parents, or infant caretakers such as grandparents, babysitters, or daycare workers. You never know: by sharing these tips, you just might save a little life.

For more on infant safe sleep, including the latest research, parenting resources, and more, visit www.firstcandle.org. And for Franklin County Children Services’ official safe infant sleep parenting tip, visit www.franklincountyohio.gov/children_services.

Holiday Wish Celebrates 50 Years

Community Has Long History of Helping Children in Need

By Elizabeth Crabtree

By thumbing through reports in files, one can see the progression of the Franklin County Children Services Holiday Wish giving program over the past 50 years. One report mentions concerns over a lack of transistor radio donations. Others chronicle discussions about tape recorders, then CD players and finally MP3 players and iPods over the years. They all tell stories of gifts, donors and the more than 100,000 wishes granted during the program's tenure. These are stories about how lives are changed by the generosity of individuals.

It began 50 years ago with a perceived need. Children whose parents were unable to care for them often spent holidays at Franklin Village. While others decorated their homes with their families and dreamed of the gifts they would receive, these youth in Franklin Village missed out on the magic and wonder of the season. FCCS staff members turned to the community to help make the holidays special for these youth and a holiday gift-giving program was born. As the agency evolved, the name of the program changed throughout the years from The Christmas Program, to Christmas in the Village and finally to Holiday Wish.

Volunteers sorted and wrapped donations and set up a gift shop, where staff, caregivers or parents could select specific presents for youth based on their wish lists. As the program has expanded and changed over the years, the vision has not. Each child under the care of FCCS has a specific wish and Holiday Wish tries to grant that wish.

There have been some significant changes. The number of youth served has grown from 452 in the beginning to approximately 5,000, while the number of individual and group donors has increased from 327 to more than 1,500. At one time, trailers filled with gifts were parked in the Franklin Village lot. Now, Holiday Wish has its own space in the Family Center at FCCS's 855 West Mound Street location. The piles of wrapped gifts that were once arranged on the floor have been replaced by a carefully organized inventory of items gathered on individual shelves. Pencils and carbon paper records have been replaced by a computer program that tracks every donation and requests for specific items.

Often people who were served by Holiday Wish as children return as adults to recount their experiences and make their own donations. A staff member recalls attending a fundraiser, feeling a tug on her sleeve and having someone lean over and whisper confidentially, "This program gave me gifts as a child. I can never thank you enough." On another occasion, a donated gift included a note to the child that read, "I got one of these gifts when I was at Children Services, so I want to tell you that it will get better."

To children who may have little hope or trust in others, FCCS's Holiday Wish provides a message from the central Ohio community – "You are important, you are cared for and you are not alone." The message received from children and adults who benefited from the program is typically a simple "Thank You" for brightening up a difficult time.

For information on how you can become involved in Holiday Wish, call (614) 275-2525, email holidaywish@fccs.co.franklin.oh.us or visit www.franklincountyohio.gov/children_services.



A Link in the Chain

FCCS Crisis Center Supervisor: Cynthia Cunningham

By Marion Thompson



Cynthia Cunningham sits in the playroom at the FCCS Crisis Center.

Cynthia Cunningham feels she has the best job in the world. “I make sure that whenever a child leaves here, they’ve had such a good time that they don’t want to go,” she says. As a Franklin County Children Services social service aide, Cunningham manages the crisis center during the day shift. When children who are suffering the trauma of abuse or neglect are brought to the agency by caseworkers or police, they remain in the crisis center, while FCCS staff members locate safe places for them to stay.

Children can be at the crisis center for several hours, so the facility is designed to ensure their comfort and well-being. When they arrive, children are examined by a nurse and then given a hot meal or snack. Cunningham usually sits and talks with them while they’re eating, so that they feel more at home. If necessary, the children take baths or showers and she washes their clothes. One young man who came in with his four young siblings was overwhelmed at having clean laundry. Cunningham recalls him saying, “Thank you, Miss Cynthia. You didn’t have to do that, but you did.”

The crisis center also maintains an inventory of new clothes to fit children from birth through age 18. When each child leaves, they are given a backpack containing two new outfits, undergarments, a pair of pajamas and hygiene items. “Sometimes they get really excited about having brand new things of their very own,” said Cunningham.

Most of the children’s time is spent in the playroom which is stocked with toys, books and videos. It is a place where kids can feel safe. “I try to make it a calming, soothing environment,” said Cunningham. “I like to play a lot of Barney songs for them, because that makes them smile.” One of Cunningham’s philosophies is “there are no strangers here.” She tries to create a rapport with each child, often sitting on the floor to talk with them and giving them her full attention. “I use gentle tones and lots of smiles,” she said. “The best part is when kids who came in feeling sad and stressed, start to open up and enjoy themselves.” On one occasion, she spent several hours talking and playing with a young boy who has autism. He became so attached to her that he clung to her and wouldn’t let go until he got into the car to leave.

To say that Cunningham enjoys her job is an understatement. She loves making a difference for the kids who visit the crisis center. “These kids really do more for me than I do for them,” she said. “My job is very rewarding.”

While Cunningham is the primary manager of the crisis center during the day, other social service aides and Intake and Investigations staff are often called upon to help, especially if there are children who need one-on-one attention. Volunteers often visit the center to prepare meals, inventory supplies and help care for the children. For information on volunteering with Franklin County Children Services, visit www.franklincountyohio.gov/children_services.

FCCS and Girl Scouts Strengthen Girls

The Girl Scout mission is to build girls of courage, confidence and character, who make the world a better place. Sharing in this mission, Franklin County Children Services decided to partner with the Girl Scouts of Central Ohio and create its own troop two years ago. Troop #1523 is led by FCCS Volunteer Coordinators Melisa Anania and Monique McCrystal, as well as agency volunteers Chris Wanzer, Cathi Havens, Ginny Harper, Karen Lurvey and Rose Knaup. The 10 members of the troop, who range from 6 to 13 years in age, recently went from junior level scouts to cadets. In the troop, these young ladies, who have undergone difficult circumstances, have found a supportive environment where they can feel accepted and understood, while enjoying fun and enriching activities.

Troop members share a sense of sisterhood. They develop close ties through bonding experiences held throughout the year. From horseback riding to trips to the zoo and roller skating, the girls have had many opportunities to spend time together, be carefree and broaden their horizons – opportunities which they may not have had otherwise. “During each event, the girls have had huge smiles on their faces and enjoyed every moment,” said Anania.

CASA: A Valued FCCS Community Partner

By Bruce Cadwallader

Whenever a child is involved in a court case, they should never be left to fend for themselves. Often, a court appointed special advocate (CASA) steps in to act as their voice. The attorneys and trained volunteers at CASA, a non-profit child advocacy organization with office space in the Franklin County Courthouse, are used in about one-quarter of the cases involving children from abused, neglected or troubled family situations. Formed in 1977, CASA agencies have sprung up nationwide in 48 states with legal staff and volunteer mentors who act as the guardian ad litem (GAL) assigned to juvenile and domestic relations cases. There are 36 chartered CASA agencies in Ohio. Last year was the 20th year for CASA in Columbus.

“The one common factor most likely to predict the success of at-risk children is the presence of at least one consistent, concerned adult in their life.”

Kathy Kerr, CASA Executive Director

In Franklin County, CASA Executive Director Kathy Kerr works with a small staff of five attorneys and support staff to fill the need between private attorneys and public defenders. Less than one-third of the agency’s \$700,000 budget comes from Franklin County, while Kerr is responsible for fundraising the rest through corporate donations, the Victims of Crime Act and activities. They have a golf outing in the summer and a breakfast in October to raise funds annually.

Anyone can make a donation online at www.casacolumbus.org.

“We’re only there to represent the child, not the family and not the courts,” Kerr said of CASA advocates. “The one common factor most likely to predict the success of at-risk children is the presence of at least one consistent, concerned adult in their life.”

CASA volunteers are needed now more than ever and the agency is desperately seeking male mentors, especially of different cultures, since 26 percent of their clients are male and 13 percent are African American. No special legal background is needed, but a two-year commitment to children is a must. Volunteers may also become civic ambassadors for the program or serve as a member of CASA’s Diversity Advisory Team.

According to Kerr, “Because of their passion and support, CASA of Franklin County will continue to help children who are experiencing the most horrific physical, emotional and sexual abuse imaginable.”

It costs approximately \$1,000 a year to advocate for an abused or neglected child in Franklin County.

The agency recently obtained a donation of \$31,344 from The Ohio State University from football bowl revenue sanctions imposed against Penn State and shared amongst Big Ten teams. That award was triggered by a sex abuse scandal in the football team’s coaching ranks. “The money is to be

used to enrich the lives of children,” OSU President Joseph A. Alutto said in granting the award. Another grant went to Nationwide Children’s Hospital Center for Family Safety and Healing, which offers services for victims of child abuse and domestic violence.

Kerr’s staff spends time with children and builds a case plan, much like the work of Franklin County Children Services child welfare advocates. Raising awareness of their organization and recruiting new volunteers is Kerr’s mission. She reports to a 17-person board of trustees.

“While a child may be placed in several different foster homes during their young life, the CASA is the person who consistently stays with them,” Kerr said. “Research shows that the children served by a CASA are placed in a safe and permanent home sooner, are less likely to spend time in long-term foster care, receive a higher number of court-ordered services and are more likely to be adopted.”



CASA Executive Director Kathy Kerr



Volunteer GALs must complete an extensive 40-hour training class and background check, but once in court, their opinion matters in the legal care of a child. A local judge holds a special swearing-in ceremony to make them officers of the court after their training.

To learn more about CASA, visit www.casacolumbus.org or call (614) 525-7450. Interested persons can also request to observe court cases and take the Voice of a Child Tour at the courthouse every third Thursday of the month by calling this number.

The annual CASA of Franklin County Speak Up for Children Breakfast will be held on Oct. 1 at the Columbus Downtown Hilton. The inspirational event is free, but donations are requested to offset the costs of working with more than 700 children every year.



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Bullying Can Be High-Tech Trauma A School Alert for Parents

The rising threats that the Internet and technology can pose to children are astounding. From online cyberbullying and sexting to Internet predators, the online dangers are lurking on your home computers and in your child's cell phone. Parents should familiarize themselves with the technology so they can prepare and protect their children from these dangers.

As many as one in four teenagers have experienced cyberbullying at some point, and 10% of teens have been victims of cyberbullying in the last 30 days, according to a recent study done by the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire.

Online bullying has a lot in common with the more traditional bullying in school and can include harassment, humiliation, teasing and aggression, Wisconsin researcher Justin W. Patchin said in a CNN Health story published in April. Not surprisingly, the victims of bullying know who the bully is 85% of the time.

"Attacks can happen at any time of day or night. The messages or images can be posted and distributed quickly to a very wide audience," CNN wrote.

Studies show kids who are cyberbullied are more likely to use alcohol and drugs, skip school, receive poor grades, and have low self-esteem. Recent attention has been drawn to cyberbullying after the suicides of numerous youth who were victims of this type of abuse.

Patchin advises teens who are bullied to keep the evidence, whether in an email or Facebook post, so that they can show it to adults they trust.

Parents can help prevent cyberbullying by being aware of what their children are doing online and by establishing rules about technology use. They should know the sites their kids visit and their online activities. It's also important to educate kids about the types of things that are okay to post online and the types of things that are not okay. Sharing an online password is a Big NO! This compromises control over what's posted on their pages and their online identity. For more information about teen bullying, click on www.stopbullying.gov.

See FCCS parenting tips about kids and technology and bullying at www.franklincountyohio.gov/children_services.

