

ACCENT_{on}KIDS

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Protecting Children by Strengthening Families

Winter 2013

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New FCCS Office Opens in Whitehall

By Bruce Cadwallader

The new FCCS East office building, which opened this month in Whitehall, allows the important agency casework that supports families to be shared across an aisle instead of across town for more than half of the agency's staff.

That's one of the reasons the FCCS East office was planned, developed and built in Whitehall at the site of the former Main Lanes bowling alley at 4071 E. Main St. The 96,000-square-foot office building was christened with a public open house on Feb. 6, which included welcoming remarks by Franklin County Commissioner President John O'Grady and Commissioner Paula Brooks, along with Whitehall Mayor Kim Maggard and Franklin County Children Services Executive Director Chip M. Spinning. More than 200 attended the event and enjoyed tours of the building.

Spinning called the building a fresh start for the families served by FCCS. "This structure has been in the talking phases



FCCS Executive Director Chip M. Spinning

for years while the work has often been performed in smaller, outdated offices under non-ideal situations. It is now time to make it pay off in terms of better customer service and cost savings," Spinning said.

The three-story brick structure will also be more cost- and energy- efficient – saving the agency more than \$780,000 a year in the leases of two office buildings – and consolidate the work of more than 400



Children from Today's Child daycare sang at the Open House.

staff members under one roof. Situated along a major bus line and with expanded parking, FCCS East features updated meeting and visitation areas, green spaces including a

playground for children, and 24-hour intake services.

The agency moved employees from its East Region at 205 N. Hamilton Rd. and from its Central Region and Intake & Investigations office at 525 E. Mound St. Support staff and many members of the agency's legal department also relocated. The West Region office at 1919 Frank Rd. and the executive offices at 855 W. Mound St. will remain unchanged.

The consolidation in Whitehall is expected to save the agency in operating costs. It was built for \$17 million by The Daimler Group and designed by Moody Nolan architects.

This new office features green elements including LED lighting; high-performance glass; efficient restroom facilities such as hand dryers and motion-sensitive water sensors; and light and thermostat sensors which control light and heat when rooms are unoccupied.

This family- and environmentally-friendly building will enhance Children Services impact and presence in the Central Ohio community. "When people go up and down Main Street or pass through these doors, we want them to know FCCS is here to help," said Spinning.

**A Look at FCCS After Hours
Intake Staff Busy 24/7 Helping Children and Families**

By Pam Prosser

It's 10 p.m. and a Columbus Police cruiser pulls up to the Franklin County Children Services Intake office in Whitehall on the east side of Columbus. In the back of the cruiser are two children. The 8- and 5-year-old boys were found with their mother in a crack house that was just raided by police.

The Intake staff jump to attention to care for the scared children. The policeman tells a FCCS caseworker that the boys were found surrounded by drugs and needles – there was no food in the house. They saw their mother handcuffed and arrested.

It's late, but the FCCS Intake office is open 24-hours a day, seven days a week. The FCCS supervisor looks at the dirty and frightened children and places a call to an on-call nurse, who will give the boys a medical screening. A social service staff member quickly tends to the children. She puts them in clean clothes, gives them food, and checks for lice and bedbugs.

The nurse notices that the 5-year-old is acting strange and suggests that he be taken to Nationwide Children's Hospital to see if he has ingested narcotics. A caseworker accompanies him to the hospital.

The older brother is upset about being separated from his sibling and is comforted by another caseworker. When he calms down – reassured that his brother is safe – the caseworker asks him some questions about his well-being and living arrangements. This is called a safety assessment and one way the caseworker finds out where the children are living, their home and food conditions, if they attend school and doctor's appointments, and much more. She finds out that the boys have a grandmother who lives close by. This is good news. Safely placing children who are in this type of situation with relatives is FCCS's main goal. It's much less traumatic for the children than placing them in foster care.

The caseworker calls her supervisor and tells him about the grandmother. He says that the mother told the police how to contact her mother and that the grandmother was on her way. After she arrives she is interviewed by a caseworker, fingerprinted

and given a background check; another caseworker goes to her home and does a safety check. The grandmother is thrilled to see the boys and glad they are okay.



It's now 5 a.m. and the 5-year-old has returned from Children's Hospital in good health, the brothers have been reunited, and are sleeping on cots in the playroom. They know that their grandmother is here and they will be going home with her.

Scott Wehr is the FCCS Social Program Administrator for Intake Off-Shift and is responsible for making sure things go smoothly with the 12 off-shift employees.

"We prioritize and work as a team. The off-shift employees are great at getting the facts and making good decisions to determine if a child is at high risk," said Wehr. "We are doing a lot of things at once and the key is to have the staff work as a team, doing multiple tasks and making sure that the children are healthy and safe."

The FCCS Intake and Investigations office received 30,285 calls of suspected child abuse in 2012. Of those, 12,508 were screened in and an investigation took place.

To report suspected child abuse, call the Franklin County Children Services 24-Hour Child Abuse Hotline at (614) 229-7000.

Intake and Investigations: FAQs

Open 24 Hours, 7 Days a Week - Child Abuse Hotline: (614) 229-7000

Franklin County Children Services is mandated by law to investigate concerns related to child abuse, neglect and dependency. Staff are available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, to respond to child safety concerns.

How Are Child Abuse Concerns Reported?
Calls placed to (614) 229-7000, the Franklin County Children Services Child Abuse Hotline, are answered 24 hours a day. Screeners ask pertinent questions about the circumstances surrounding the concern, document the call, then pass the information to an administrator who decides what response will be made. All calls are confidential.

How Does FCCS Respond to Reports of Child Abuse?
When an allegation of child abuse is made, a caseworker makes contact with the child, residents of the home, and witnesses to determine if a safety risk exists. With less serious allegations, an alternative response that does not label victims or perpetrators can be used. Once initial information about the child's safety is acquired, an assessment of the family's circumstances is completed and a wide range of interventions and linkages to community support can be made.

We Are Child Welfare Professionals

By Bruce Cadwallader

The problems of society are reflected each day in the work of child welfare professionals and are highlighted during March – National Professional Social Worker Month. At Franklin County Children Services more than 30,000 referrals are received each year for child abuse, neglect, domestic violence, substance abuse, verbal abuse, inadequate housing, and financial distress.

FCCS trains hundreds of caseworkers each year as part of a statewide regional training hub, said Alison Rodgers, director of professional development at FCCS. “To work here caseworkers must complete 102 hours of core coursework and 36 hours of training annually,” said Rodgers. Through university partnerships, some come from college already trained.

Because Franklin County Children Services is the only agency in Franklin County mandated by Ohio law to provide for the protection and care of children, it employs more than 300 caseworkers to conduct investigations and assessments of families in need. More than one third of those caseworkers also have advanced degrees and licenses in social work. They carry on the task of finding help for children of abuse and neglect.

“Our child welfare professionals are people who care about others, who want to strengthen families and relieve suffering wherever possible,” said FCCS Executive Director Chip M. Spinning. “They work long hours to deal with unimaginable drama everyday and many earn advanced degrees in their fields while on the job.”

Despite the challenges, fortunately many dedicated individuals decide to take on this challenge. Each person has their own unique reason for choosing this field of work. Several new FCCS caseworkers had their reasons.

“Since I was a little kid, I have wanted to work for Children

Services,” said Whitney Jones, a new FCCS caseworker at Intake. “To work with children and families is really my passion.”

Before coming to FCCS as an Intake caseworker, Cody Hilyard interned with another county child protection agency where he enjoyed interacting with the families and linking them to community resources. One lesson he has learned already is that you have to have patience in this line of work. “You have to take in the successes no matter how big or small and find something positive every day.”

Whether it is visiting with clients or referring families to community providers, caseworkers follow the agency’s guiding principles – pursue excellence, provide effective and timely services, be fiscally responsible, culturally competent, value and support each other, and improve the quality of life for families and the community.

Some, like Emily Wampler, a caseworker in the FCCS East Region, receive national recognition. Wampler was recently honored with the 2012 MSW Student of the Year award from the National Association of Social Workers’ Ohio chapter. This award is given each year to a master of social work student who demonstrates outstanding leadership and dedication to the social work profession.



Emily Wampler is an FCCS caseworker.

Wear Blue to Support Child Abuse Prevention

By Pam Prosser

The statistics can be overwhelming. According to the Annie E. Casey Foundation, in 2010, there were 9 victims of child abuse per 1,000 children in the United States – approximately 676,000 children. The same report cited Ohio as having 11 victims of child abuse per 1,000 children. In Franklin County, nearly 29,000 children are served by Franklin County Children Services each year. These children were seen for a variety of maltreatment problems including physical, emotional and sexual abuse and neglect.

Child Abuse Prevention Month, held annually in April, is a time to recognize that everyone in the community plays a part in promoting the well-being of children and families. During April, Franklin County Children Services will work to raise community awareness about child abuse and to educate the public on how to prevent child maltreatment. The agency will host the annual Child Abuse Prevention Breakfast and participate in the Pinwheels for Prevention & Wear Blue public awareness campaigns.

Children Services has teamed up with Ohio Children’s Trust Fund to promote Pinwheels for Prevention – a campaign designed to enhance community awareness about child abuse and neglect. The campaign will encourage all community members to focus on child abuse prevention as part of an overall plan to break the cycle of abuse, by planting blue pinwheels throughout the month and wearing blue on April 10.



April is
**Child Abuse
Prevention
Month**

Children Services and its Citizens Advisory Committee will also host the annual Child Abuse Prevention Breakfast on Wednesday, April 10, at The Aladdin Shrine at 8 a.m. In addition to bringing together different segments of the community to learn about abuse prevention, Children Services will honor families and youth who have made great strides to overcome troubled and abusive pasts. College scholarships will be awarded to dedicated and deserving youth on the agency’s caseload. A child protection case worker will be honored

and community advocate awards will be given to groups and individuals who advocate on behalf of children.

Child abuse is a community problem and its prevention can only succeed through the involvement of social service agencies, schools, hospitals, religious and civic organizations, law enforcement, the business community, and private citizens.

In 2012, Franklin County Children Services conducted 7,401 investigations of abuse and neglect. Overall the agency provided services to 28,863 children. The Public Children Services Association of Ohio reports that in 2011 there were 100,804 new reports of child abuse and neglect statewide.

To report suspected child abuse or neglect, call the Franklin County Children Services 24-hour Child Abuse Hotline at (614) 229-7000.

**Data from Annie E. Casey Foundation, U.S. Department of Health & Human Services’ Children’s Bureau, and Public Children Services Association of Ohio.*

Caseworker’s Support Makes All the Difference

By Jason DeBord

During Kim Carter’s 25 years of serving children and families as a caseworker at Franklin County Children Services, she has made an impact on many people. However, there is one person she may have affected more than any other.

In 1996, Carter was working as an ongoing caseworker when she was assigned Donna Belcher’s case. Belcher had ongoing involvement with Children Services and her son was in foster care.

Belcher did not want Children Services involved in her life and she had a lot of resentment toward the agency. At the time Carter was assigned to Belcher’s case, there were preliminary plans to take permanent custody of Belcher’s son.

Carter saw past Belcher’s anger and hurt, and she began working to reunify Belcher and her son. When it would have been easy to believe that Belcher would never regain custody of her son, Carter believed that FCCS and Belcher could work through their disagreements. “I told her that I would help her get her son back, but she had to commit to working through her case plan,” said Carter. She slowly gained Belcher’s trust and, though she didn’t realize it at the time, began building a relationship that would last for years.

Carter managed Belcher’s case for the next four years. They worked through

Belcher’s financial problems and homelessness. Thanks to Carter’s support, this mother regained custody of her son, obtained a stable job and residence, and closed her case with Children Services. In Carter’s words, “She made a complete transformation.”

Belcher is grateful for Carter’s compassion and willingness to support her through the most difficult time in her life. “Had it not been for Kim, I can’t ever see me getting my son back. I had no more strength left to fight. I was beat,” said Belcher.

Carter understands how important it is to support people who are struggling with various challenges. Belcher has not had any more encounters with Children Services and her son, who was once a foster child, is now attending college.

At Franklin County Children Services’ recent employee reception, Carter was honored for her 25 years of dedicated service. Belcher, who still maintains an important connection with Carter, has never forgotten the support Carter gave her all those years ago, so she came to the reception to show her support. “In Kim I saw a person who was genuine, open-minded and had a heart willing to help,” said Belcher. “Of course you would want to keep someone like that in your life.”



FCCS caseworker Kim Carter (left) is congratulated on her 25 year milestone with FCCS by former client Donna Belcher.

Simba Mentor Calls Youth “The Greatest Kid in the World”

By Elizabeth Crabtree

Those who attended a particular Columbus Clippers game last summer might have seen a young boy singing his heart out to “Take Me Out to the Ball Game” with a hot dog in one hand and a cola in the other. These baseball fans would not have known that his mother was heading off to prison that week or that he was being bullied in school. This was due in part to his time with Franklin County Children Services Simba Mentor Mark Jackson who proudly refers to this youth as, “The greatest kid in the world.”

Jackson started working with his 13-year-old mentee almost a year ago and knew he was a special young man from the moment they met. “We went out to McDonald’s and he asked to get something extra to take back for his sister. He is used to that caretaker role,” said Jackson. When someone asked who he was, it seemed only natural to call his mentee the greatest kid in the world.

“The look on his face when I said that,” Jackson recalled. “He just beamed.” The impact of this title combined with Jackson’s friendship have been significant. The youth’s grandmother claims that he has thrived under Jackson’s watch. His grades have improved and his teacher has noticed better behavioral choices.

It has not always been easy. When his mentee was being bullied at school, he called on Jackson for help. “He told me that I would be a better mentor if I was not working so much,” said Jackson. So without hesitation, Jackson quit his second job. Now Jackson talks with his mentee on the phone daily and for a while was visiting every night to check in. The bullying has gotten better and this young man has continued to blossom.



Simba Mentor Mark Jackson

“One of my proudest moments as a mentor was taking him to visit with a special needs adult and together they built two model cars,” said Jackson. “I watched this young man spend two hours slowly helping this adult put his car together step by step.” When it was completed, the car created by the mentee was beautiful and the detailing was excellent. In a last act of kindness, the youth traded cars so that the adult could have the nicer car.

Jackson is truly a hero in the life of this youth, a youth who now introduces himself as “The greatest kid in the world.”

Simba Program Announces New Director

Franklin County Children Services’ Simba mentoring program for African-American youth recently appointed Daryle Cobb as its new director. Cobb, who has been with Children Services for more than 20 years, is no stranger to giving back himself. He is a longtime mentor with Big Brothers Big Sisters of Central Ohio, and former Mentoring Center of Central Ohio Mentor of the Year. Cobb believes that giving young people an opportunity to be introduced to something different can greatly affect their lives. “Providing a child or young adult a new life experience can help change their perspective on the future,” said Cobb.

Simba, Swahili for young lion, is a mentoring program that matches African-American male youth under the care of Franklin County Children Services with African-American men. Simba mentors have the opportunity to guide boys toward the development of their self-esteem, academic excellence, career goals, and plans for their future.

To find out more about the FCCS Simba program and other agency volunteer opportunities, go to www.franklincountyohio.gov/children_services or call (614) 275-2690.



New Simba Mentoring Program Director Daryle Cobb

FCCS Welcomes New Board Member

The Franklin County Board of Commissioners recently appointed Tammy H. Wharton to the Franklin County Children Services’ Board of Trustees. Her appointment will be for four years effective in January, 2013.

Wharton is the Chief Executive Officer of the Girl Scouts of Ohio’s Heartland Council which serves more than 40,000 Girl Scout members.

Her initial connection with the Girl Scouts began in 2001 where she led the organization’s fund-raising and public relations efforts. In 2005 Wharton left to become the Executive Director of the Columbus Literacy Council. Then in 2007, she was asked to return to the Girl Scouts to help lead it through the successful merger of three councils. Wharton became CEO of the newly merged council, Girl Scouts of Ohio’s Heartland, in 2008.

Wharton’s background also includes experience as a synchronized swimmer for The Ohio State University and the United States National Synchronized Swimming Team. She holds a master of science degree in human services from Capella University and an undergraduate degree in communications from The Ohio State University.

“I am honored to be appointed to the FCCS Board and look forward to serving our community’s youth who benefit from this much needed agency,” said Wharton. “I hope to expand my knowledge of Children Services and help advocate for the children and families who benefit from the exceptional work this agency provides.”



New FCCS Board Member Tammy Wharton

Huck House: A Refuge for Teens in Trouble

By Cynthia Greenleaf

A welcoming refuge for teens in crisis, Columbus’s Huckleberry House (Huck House) has provided a safe space for runaway and homeless youth ages 12 to 22 for more than 40 years. Through its family support program, this Weiland Park-based nonprofit also counsels parents and children, helping them address the underlying issues that initially led to the family’s crisis situation.

Huck House’s crisis program team leader Melanie Gunther and her dedicated team of 17 staff members ensure that every youth who comes through Huck House is in capable, compassionate hands. “Our employees really care about the kids that we serve,” Gunther said.

And the kids that they serve really add up – Huck House annually helps hundreds of teens and parents. In 2012, 539 youth took advantage of crisis shelter services, while 139 families received counseling. The nonprofit also runs a street outreach program, helping youth in their own neighborhoods, in schools, at recreation centers, or wherever else they might hang out. Huck House’s team of outreach workers is trained to help with school issues, offer job advice, or assist with counseling or housing needs.

Whether at Huck House or out on the street, one of the biggest challenges of working with teens in crisis is gaining their trust, according to Gunther, so establishing that initial rapport is essential. “If you trust us and allow us to enter ‘your space,’ we will do good work,” she said.

While Huck House’s mission is to aid teens coping with a crisis, the nonprofit also concentrates on mending fractured families. According to Gunther, this big-picture approach to family reunification is essential, since “nothing will change if just one

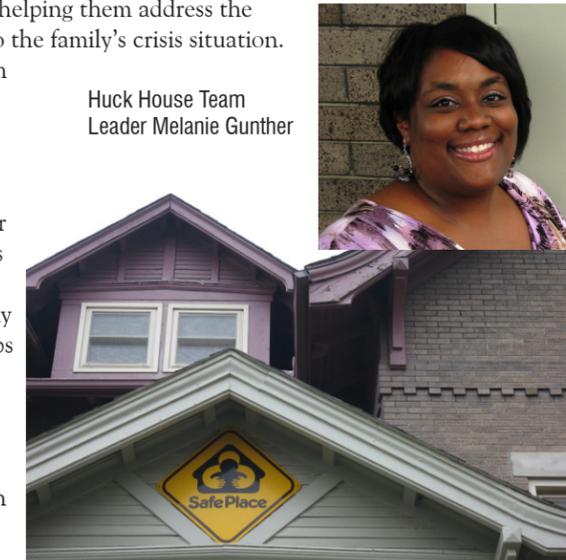
person is working on it.” Huck House has seen tremendous success reuniting teens with their loved ones; in 2012 alone, 75% of teens returned to their families, a close relative, or a friend after receiving services.

Poor communication is one of the most frequent issues that Huck House encounters with teens and their families. When a problem is allowed to build up over time without talking about it, there is usually “an explosion” that results in a crisis situation, Gunther says.

Huck House’s ongoing goal is to empower teens and their parents, giving them the tools to establish healthier relationships. The first steps? Removing the all-too common stigma from mental health counseling while setting realistic expectations. Gunther wants families to

know that it’s entirely normal to have issues every now and then. “It’s OK to fuss and fight sometimes,” she said. “It’s not going to be perfect all the time.”

Know a teen in trouble? For more information, call Huck House’s 24-hour crisis hotline at (614) 294-5553 or refer them to Huck House’s 1421 Hamlet St. location on the near north side of Columbus. For additional information on how Huck House helps youth and families, and how you can give back to this worthwhile organization, visit www.huckhouse.org.



Huck House Team Leader Melanie Gunther

Give Your Child Positive Messages...It Works

By Leesa Evans

Wow. Way to go. Marvelous. Super work. You tried hard. Good for you. Bravo. I like you. You made my day. Dynamite. How smart. You're growing up. What a good listener. Bingo. I respect you. You're a treasure. You figured it out. Let's hug. You belong. How nice. I'm proud of you. What an imagination. You mean a lot to me. I love you!!

Parental encouragement through simple words helps children to navigate the world while they are growing and changing. Verbal encouragement is critical because it confirms to a child that they are loved and that the adults in their life want them to succeed. When parents encourage their children through positive words it gives them the tools needed to accept challenges and grow into confident adults.

Often children exhibit behavior so that a parent will notice. If parents only respond to negative behaviors then a child is likely to exhibit more negative behaviors. Encouragement of good behavior leads to more good behavior. Be positive and supportive to help children gain self-confidence. Telling your child encouraging words will send the important message that you support his efforts and are proud of him unconditionally.

Positive parenting is a crucial part of preventing child maltreatment. Children desire a secure relationship with their parents and believe it or not they ultimately want to behave appropriately. Unconditional love and support are key motivators



to helping children reach their desired goals. These goals are more easily achieved when parents are able to offer positive verbal encouragement to their children. For more parenting tips, go to www.franklincountyohio.gov/children_services.



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