

ACCENT_{on}KIDS

A Publication of Franklin County Children Services

FALL 2014



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Protecting Children by Strengthening Families

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FCCS to Hold Children's Day Celebration at COSI

By Pam Prosser

In honor of all children, Franklin County Children Services is hosting its annual Children's Day at COSI celebration on Friday, September 26, from 5 p.m. to 9 p.m. at COSI, 333 West Broad Street.

Children and families under agency care will receive passes for free admission and refreshments, thanks to corporate donations from Kroger and others. FCCS is able to offer this event to children, some of whom may not typically have the opportunity to visit COSI, because of a partnership between COSI and the Franklin County Board of Commissioners to hold this Family Friday Night event.

In addition, all community children attending can enjoy prizes offered in drawings (including bicycles donated by Bike Lady Inc.), exciting stage

performances, and visits by some of central Ohio's favorite local mascots. COSI's hands-on educational exhibits and a movie will be available free of charge.

There will also be musical performances by local entertainers the Shazzbots Duo, Arnett Howard, Bob Piascik, Mackee the Magician, games and activities. For more information, visit franklincountyohio.gov/children_services.

Children's Day at COSI is also open to the public for a discounted admission rate of \$10.95. Parking is \$5.



FCCS a Leader in Helping Children and Families

By Pam Prosser

For more than 30 years, Franklin County Children Services has been a leader in child welfare. FCCS has been recognized statewide and nationally for initiatives like a 24-hour hotline to accept and respond to reports of child abuse and neglect, providing services to troubled youth, and successes in placing children in adoptive homes.

According to Intake, Assessment and Investigations Director Lara LaRoche, "We are currently in the midst of a child welfare reform and FCCS is helping to shape this important shift in how we respond to allegations of child abuse and neglect." The new approach keeps permanency for every child at the forefront and treats the family as the expert on themselves. The child welfare professional then works with the family to create a plan that will best suit that family's needs.

"We believe that children grow and develop better when they are with their family and in their community," said LaRoche.

Over the past five years, FCCS has developed and implemented various initiatives to provide permanent, stable homes for children while strengthening the family unit. The key initiatives include:

Differential Response – Recognizes that no two families are alike and how they are approached needs to be different. It provides the flexibility of two pathways to assess the safety of children. The pathways are traditional response used for reports of severe abuse and neglect and alternative response for moderate risk cases.

Permanency Roundtables (PRT) – Group service team meetings focus on expediting permanency for children 12 and older. They create permanent connections for children through reunification with parents, kinship placements, adoption or guardianship. Outcomes thus far have been promising with children who have had PRTs receiving permanency at twice the rate of those who have not.

Team Decision Making (TDM) – Facilitated meetings with families, the service team and a family community support person, all gather to plan for the safety of children. Since 2010, more than 1,071 have been served through TDMs with 70 percent able to remain in their own home or placed in kinship care.

Group Supervision and Case Consultation

– This involves multiple staff members, which allows for various perspectives in developing solutions to complex case challenges.



SAFE Teams – This group of Intake staff meet twice a day to review, discuss and make screening decisions on complex reports made to the agency's child abuse hotline.

Gateway CALL – A large-scale agency initiative with other community partners focused on ensuring that children have access to trauma screenings, assessments and treatment for trauma and related-behavioral health needs.

FCCS Intake Casework Supervisor Jamie Nance-James has worked at FCCS for the past 11 years, most of that time working directly with children and families as a caseworker. "I have noticed a change in how we work with families. It's more about the entire family and not just focused on the child," said Nance-James.

Nance-James says that financial stress is common among her clients. "Our agency understands the effects that low income has on families and I'm very proud that we hold job fairs for clients. I've seen parents get jobs this way and they are so excited."

Other areas where FCCS is a leader include the expansion of the Kinship Program; working with community partners to provide foster care; understanding the effects of early childhood brain trauma; developing the Zero 2 Three Initiative to promote healthy development in babies; and supporting successful volunteer and mentor programs.

2014 FCCS LEVY Campaign: Moving Forward

It's official – the Franklin County Commissioners have approved placing Franklin County Children Services 1.9 mill renewal levy on the November ballot. This levy generates about \$46 million a year, more than 25 percent of the agency's budget. Passage of this levy will not increase property tax cost for homeowners. The costs to owners of a \$100,000 home will remain at the current \$54 per year.

With November quickly approaching, the Committee4Children (C4C) is working diligently to inform the community about the importance of Children Services and how successful the agency has been at protecting children and strengthening families.

The C4C is comprised of approximately 30 leaders representing a broad spectrum of people from neighborhood, business, social service and faith communities. Members include Chair Yvette McGee Brown, Treasurer Paul Anderson, Steve Allen MD, Rabbi Harold Berman, Ruth Cavin, Paul Coleman, Rhonda Fraas, Michelle Heritage, Dale Heydlauff, Mary Jo Hudson, Larry and Donna James, Gale King, Rev. Frank Luchsinger, Joe Mas, Michelle Mills, Curtis Moody, Rayshawn Parnell, Charles Perotti, Deborah Pryce, Jim Ryan, Robert Schottenstein and Jeri Block, Bruce and Joy Soll, Abdikhayr Soofe, Rev. Keith Troy, William Wilkins, Shadya Yazback and Campaign Manager Doris Calloway Moore.

The committee has numerous activities planned to educate and engage people in the campaign. Those who wish to volunteer and learn more about the levy campaign can visit the website at committee4children.com or email Committee4Children Campaign Manager Doris Calloway Moore at doriscmoore@gmail.com.

Grandparents Revel in Caring for Grandson

By Cynthia Greenleaf

It didn't take long for George and Marcia Haughn to bond with their grandson Titan. "We just fell in love from day one," George recalls. When Titan was born prematurely and drug exposed in April 2013, the Haughns dropped everything to spend countless hours at the hospital with him, rarely leaving his side. Titan, named by his aunt for the "war he went through getting here," according to Marcia, was finally able to come home with the Haughns when he was five weeks old.

The Haughns, who live in Ross County, are one of hundreds of Franklin County Children Services' kinship families. Often in a time of crisis, these families have stepped up to care for their relatives' children on a temporary or permanent basis.

For the Haughns, who now have permanent custody of Titan, there was no question that they'd be there for their grandson when his mother wasn't able to care for him. If anything, the Haughns feel like they've found their calling. "We have such a purpose," Marcia says. It was a definite sign, George says, that when the call came with the news that it was time to bring Titan home from the hospital, his cell phone rang and they rarely, if ever, have reception in the rural area where they live.

Titan, now 1, shows no trace of the life-threatening health issues he battled as a newborn. This sweet-natured toddler with sparkling blue eyes and a mop of curly hair is currently thriving under his grandparents' watchful, compassionate guidance.

The Haughns, who are both retired, cherish the moments they get to spend with their grandson, a responsibility they say they would not have fully appreciated when they were younger. "We have



Marcia and George Haughn with their grandson, Titan.

the time to sit back and enjoy," Marica says. Seeing Titan develop into an intelligent, inquisitive child is an absolute pleasure for this couple. "It's something new with him every day," George says.

Caring for a lively toddler has clearly energized this older couple, according to Laurie Sarsfield, the kinship caseworker at Franklin County Children Services who worked with the Haughns. "He's given them a new lease on life," she says. The Haughns readily agree. Being able to raise his grandson is a blessing that he'll never take for granted, George says. "It's like getting a second chance."

Kinship Care Program Offers Support to Families

Kinship care provides a familiar, comforting place to go when a child can't safely remain with their mom or dad. Placement with a relative, such as a grandparent, aunt or uncle, is an increasingly common scenario, both at Franklin County Children Services as well as at countless other child welfare agencies nationwide. In fact, more than 2.7 million children are currently in kinship care across the United States, an increase of nearly 18 percent in a decade, according to the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Here at Franklin County Children Services, 1,450 children were placed with relatives in 2013. Since 2009, there has been a 69 percent increase in the number of children placed in kinship homes instead of in foster or group care.

When a child can't safely stay with their parents, kinship care is often the least disruptive option, preserving a sense of identity as well as vital connections to culture and tradition. To help make this transition an easier one for both the child and the relatives providing care, FCCS offers a range of kinship support services. Each family is assessed individually to ensure their specific needs are being met, according to Megan Stevens, who supervises the kinship program. "The goal is to help the family adjust to the new and challenging family dynamics and encourage stability and self-sufficiency," Stevens said.

If a need is determined, kinship families are able to take advantage of support groups, one-to-one counseling and community-based services such as parenting classes or after-school programs. Additional support may include receiving a bed or crib, respite care, food or clothing vouchers, rent, mortgage, or utility assistance. FCCS also offers an annual kinship conference, scheduled for September 20. This day-long event will be fun and informative, and offer a valuable chance for FCCS kinship families to network.

For more information on how Franklin County Children Services is supporting kinship families, visit franklincountyohio.gov/children_services.

TAP Nurtures Self-Expression in Youth

By Marion Thompson

It can be hard for young people to talk about who they are and what they're going through. This is especially true of those who are being served by Franklin County Children Services. The agency's Therapeutic Arts Program (TAP) enables youth to find positive and creative ways to express themselves through fine arts, such as drawing, painting, writing poetry and culinary arts. TAP has created a safe, supportive environment where kids can share their stories, develop their talents and learn to positively interact with the world around them.

The program, which holds weekly sessions at the Neighborhood House in east Columbus, primarily works with children between the ages of 13 and 18 in small group sessions, but also gives each participant individual attention so that they can develop their talents. Students are sometimes given specific directions for projects. "This helps them learn about structure and how they can complete the tasks they'll be given throughout life," says TAP Director Regina Douglas. But the youth also have opportunities to choose their own tools and techniques to create art as they see it. "If they tell me they can't do something, like drawing or painting, I say, 'Just try it. There is no right or wrong way to do it. Just do it your way,'" Douglas said.

The FCCS youth who come to TAP are often referred by caseworkers or others who feel they could benefit from being in a supportive, creative environment. "At TAP, we concentrate on the whole person, not just the artist," said Douglas.

TAP gives youth who have experienced abuse and neglect the ability to express themselves through the arts. FCCS Therapeutic Arts Coordinator Cheri Johnson said, "Art can help them work



TAP youth pose with *Forests of Freedom*, a mixed-media piece which they created together.

through difficult experiences, develop self-confidence and build relationships."

In addition to being an art space, TAP is a place where youth can discuss issues like conflict resolution, making good decisions, setting goals, and health and wellness. "We are helping teenagers prepare for life," Douglas said.

Upcoming Youth Art Show Promises to Uplift and Inspire

The community has the opportunity to share in the creativity and inspiration of children who are served by Franklin County Children Services during Youth Expressions through Art, an art show and silent auction which is being held October 6-17 at FCCS's 855 West Mound Street location. The event will feature work from adoptable youth and those who are involved with the agency's Therapeutic Arts Program (TAP).

According to Larry Whiteside, FCCS adoption publication specialist and event organizer, "The art show was created in 2000, as a method of introducing adoptable children to prospective parents. Youth from the TAP program began participating a few years later and the show has grown steadily ever since." The art show will feature more than 100 pieces contributed by 20 to 25 youth. Attendees will be able to bid on pieces including canvases, mixed-media, photography, jewelry, sculpture, abstract and recycled art. Proceeds will benefit the FCCS Children's Fund, which funds special opportunities for children involved with the agency such as extracurricular activities and summer camps.

The show is open to the public and has drawn the attention of employees, representatives from provider agencies, local government officials, and participants' family and friends. Thanks to a partnership between TAP and the Columbus Arts Council, more and more art lovers from the community attend each year as well. A special feature of this year's show will be a reception, during which the artists will be on hand to discuss their work.

The TAP youth are building on the momentum they've created by sharing their work with the community throughout the year. In April, several TAP artists contributed their paintings and jewelry to a silent auction held during FCCS's annual Child Abuse Prevention Breakfast. TAP youth also had the opportunity to share their work with central Ohio during this year's Columbus Arts Festival. The annual art show and silent auction will be the culmination of the TAP youth's year-long efforts.

For more information on the Therapeutic Arts Program visit franklincountyohio.gov/children_services.

Holiday Wish Gifts that Keep on Giving

By Elizabeth Crabtree



"Thank you for my Easy-Bake Oven." This statement was almost missed as papers were being shuffled at the end of an interview. It was uttered by a young girl with big brown eyes right before she ducked behind her mother. The holidays were long past, but this young girl was still playing with the toys she had received in December.

Every year, Holiday Wish seeks the support of donors to provide gifts to more than 5,000 children involved with Franklin County Children Services. Many of these children live in difficult circumstances with caregivers who struggle to provide for their basic needs. Because of this, a new toy may be an unaffordable luxury.

The holidays can be a challenging time for families, especially those who are facing difficult home conditions. Nationally, there is an increase of domestic violence and substance abuse during the holiday season, which can often lead

to the need for FCCS intervention. One of the biggest stressors is how caregivers communicate to children that this year there will be no gifts. However, thanks to more than 1,600 individuals, groups and organizations who donate annually to Holiday Wish, this fear does not become a reality.

For many children under the care of FCCS, a gift from Holiday Wish is a physical manifestation of the ability to believe in others. It is also a reminder to caseworkers that FCCS is not a stand-alone agency, but exists within a strong community that supports the goals of keeping children safe and enriching their lives. To donate to Holiday Wish online go to franklincountyohio.gov/children_services or call (614) 275-2690.

Putting a Vision into Practice College-Bound Mentor Guides Youth to Success

By Chuck Cochran

Donna Albanese's vision for youth involved with Franklin County Children Services is for each of them to become successful, independent adults who are able to contribute to the community. As a college-bound mentor for Franklin County Children Services, she is working to make this vision a reality for one agency youth.

Albanese became involved with the FCCS College-Bound Mentoring program three years ago. She was attracted to the opportunity to help develop and mentor a youth involved with the agency. The idea of encouraging a youth to pursue a post-secondary education really spoke to her. During her time as a college-bound mentor, Albanese has found her experiences to be much more than what she originally had planned.

As with most agency volunteers and mentors, she has received more from her mentee than she feels she has given. She has appreciated building meaningful relationships with her mentees. "I enjoy the chance to find something in common with my mentee and build on this commonality to form a strong bond," Albanese said. "I marvel at the resilience of these youth and have learned many things from my interactions with them."

Albanese has been matched with her current mentee since October 2013. The youth has been faced with many challenges as a teen mother and student. She has sought advice and direction from her mentor, who is a great source of strength for her. Though Albanese wishes her mentee had things a little easier, she welcomes

being able to help her navigate her own life path and work toward a bright future.

"I get to be a mom and give her advice like I gave my own kids," Albanese shared. She can regularly be found providing child care for her mentee on the weekends so the mentee can focus on her goals.

FCCS staff who have collaborated with Albanese share that she is a wonderful role model to her mentee. She is described as someone who provides guidance and support while empowering her mentee to be self-sufficient.

Relationships are precious gifts for children involved with FCCS. Anyone interested in becoming a mentor, may call (614) 275-2690 or go to franklincountyohiogov/children_services.



FCCS College Bound Mentor Donna Albanese

OSU Cohort Helps Caseworkers Get Master's

By Bruce Cadwallader

Raising a family, working full-time, carrying a child welfare case load, and taking night classes for four years may sound tough. Yet for some, it has been a labor of love.

Groups of FCCS caseworkers wishing to expand their careers since 2003, have done just that with coworkers in a specially-designed college course that offers master of social work degrees from The Ohio State University, while studying two nights each week at FCCS's 855 W. Mound St. location. In effect, the university comes to FCCS for this cohort master's program which meets over a four-year term.

"Ohio State is the only college in Columbus that offers the MSW," said Shawney Johnson of FCCS's professional development staff. "You don't have to go to campus and it allows the added benefit of working with your peers."

"The agency also benefits from better-trained employees invested in their careers," she said. As a reward, those who pass the MSW receive an automatic increase in pay. Many go on to receive their licensing in social work and most have used the advanced degree as the next step in becoming supervisors and senior caseworkers.

Most of the costs of the training for caseworkers are covered under the agency's tuition reimbursement program. The first class of 20 employees finished their cohort class in 2007 with a cumulative grade point average of 3.74. There have been six other classes and 44 caseworkers trained in the program with OSU.

Janna Warren (MSW, LSW) was one of the first to graduate and is now a supervisor at East Region. "I found the program to be

very helpful. I completed my undergraduate degree at OSU also, but found my master's program to be a much smaller, cohesive group and therefore a very different experience. Having classes at 855 allowed us to work, then hustle to class as opposed to driving to campus and fighting for parking," Warren said. "There was flexibility that allowed us to take a class on campus if we wanted. I also enjoyed meeting coworkers from different departments and forming relationships with them that I still draw on."

"Ohio State is the only college in Columbus that offers the MSW. You don't have to go to campus and it allows the added benefit of working with your peers."
Shawney Johnson, FCCS Caseworker in the Professional Development Department

Intake Supervisor Amy Wood (MSW) added, "The OSU program was awesome! It was a challenging program, but the convenience of taking classes at the agency and attending classes with the same amazing people each quarter made it easier for me. The cohort

truly formed a bond. It is hard to believe at one time in my life I was a wife, mom, worked 40 hours a week, did a 20-hour a week internship and still attended a class or two all in one week." Since getting her MSW, Wood has been promoted to a supervisor and has supervised in three different areas (Intake, Screening, and now the Pre-Placement Unit).

Wendy Hite (MSW, LSW), a child caseworker supervisor with 20 years at the agency, jumped back into a classroom after one of her friends convinced her there would never be a perfect time to resume her education. She performed internships, called field placements, in alternative response units and as a social worker in the emergency room at Mt. Carmel St. Ann's Hospital to complete her master's work.

Seven FCCS Teens Attend Ohio Teen Institute Conference

By Julia Foster

The Ohio Teen Institute (OTI) is an annual week-long, leadership conference where high school students from across Ohio come together to encourage positive leadership throughout their schools and communities. During the conference, teens go through a series of workshops and small group activities where they are equipped with the knowledge and abilities to not only make positive choices for themselves, but promote positive decision-making to their peers. OTI focuses on training and educating teens to enable them to develop skills to make drug-free and healthy lifestyle decisions, while they mature into responsible adults.

Seven FCCS teens were given the opportunity to attend this year's OTI conference at Heidelberg University. Three of the teens were chosen to serve as youth staff members, which is a leadership opportunity offered to only 20 teens attending the conference. Teens interested in being on the youth staff must have attended the conference two prior years and submit an application to OTI. More than 100 teens applied to be youth staff this year.

OTI was an opportunity FCCS teens enjoyed. A highlight of the trip was being part of small groups, known as family groups. They valued the support and friendship these groups offered. The teens also enjoyed being able to interact with other teens and share their feelings about choosing to stay drug and alcohol free as well as issues they face with peer pressure. "It's a really good conference and I would recommend going to any youth. Everyone is friendly and welcoming. No one judges here," commented one conference attendee.



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Encouraging a Child's Learning through Play

Play is one of the best ways a child can learn and it is essential to their development. According to teachpreschool.org, "Play can enable young children to explore, examine, question, predict, test, investigate and manipulate." It also helps them increase social, emotional and physical skills. Parents play a major role in promoting their children's learning through play.

Here are some ways parents can create an environment that encourages learning through play.



- **Stimulate a Child's Imagination:** According to Kidshealth.org, "Pretend play lets a child try out new roles for themselves (like superheroes, princesses, wild animals or even parents) and allows for creative problem-solving." Go along with their flights of fancy. For example, if your little girl is pretending to fly, marvel at how high she is in the sky. Choose toys like dolls and arts and crafts that require children to use their imaginations. Read to your child. Reading allows a child to visit new places and meet new people using their imagination.
- **Encourage Critical Thinking:** Provide games and puzzles that enable children to solve problems and learn how things work. Also try brain teasers and puzzles, as they require critical thinking and mental exploration.
- **Choose Hands-On Toys:** The American Occupational Therapy Association suggests using toys such as Legos, Play-Doh and board games to enable children to develop hand-to-eye coordination and dexterity.
- **Give Them Room to Play:** Life can be very busy for children these days with school, homework, extracurricular activities and parents' hectic schedules, so parents need to create a work/play balance for their children. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends giving children ample time for unstructured play. Having the opportunity to run, jump and explore his or her environment is essential to a child's development.