

ACCENT_{on}KIDS

A Publication of Franklin County Children Services

SPRING 2014



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Protecting Children by Strengthening Families

ACCENT on KIDS

A Publication of Franklin County Children Services

SPRING 2014

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This publication is available online at
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What's Happening at FCCS?



March

Social Work Month

National Social Work Month is a time to recognize professional social workers who are on the front lines each day responding to critical issues such as child abuse, homelessness, poverty, domestic violence, mental illness and drug and alcohol addiction.

Volunteer & Youth Bowling March 22

FCCS hosts a free bowling party for agency volunteers, mentors and youth.

April

Child Abuse Prevention Month

Franklin County Children Services works to raise awareness about child abuse and educate the public about how to prevent and report child maltreatment. If you suspect a child is being abused or neglected, call the FCCS 24-hour Child Abuse Hotline at (614) 229-7000.

Pinwheels for Prevention

FCCS will plant thousands of blue pinwheels, symbolizing investigated cases of abuse and neglect, throughout the central Ohio community in an effort to raise awareness about the effects of child abuse.

Wear Blue Day April 9

FCCS will participate in the statewide Wear Blue Day campaign to support the prevention of child abuse. Wear blue, take a group photo and email it to FCCSoutreach@fccs.co.franklin.oh.us and you may see your photo featured on our Facebook page.

Child Abuse Prevention Breakfast April 16

7-8 a.m. Silent Auction of Youth Art
8-9:30 a.m. Breakfast and Program
at the Aladdin Shrine Center
(3850 Stelzer Road, Columbus, OH 43219)

FCCS and its Citizens Advisory Committee host this annual event that highlights child abuse prevention and the accomplishments of social work professionals, client families, youth and community advocates. For more information, call (614) 275-2523.

Volunteer Reception April 22

6:30 p.m.
The Ohio State University Union
(1739 High Street, Columbus, OH 43210)

The FCCS volunteer department will celebrate its 50th anniversary at the annual Volunteer Reception, where volunteers and mentors will receive recognition for all that they do for FCCS children.

2014 FCCS Levy to Support Children in Need

By Deborra Armstrong

The circumstances faced by families and children served by FCCS are as diverse and varied as this community. They may include:

- A child who dies at the hands of her mother's boyfriend whose abuse has gone unnoticed for months or was ignored by those who might have helped,
- Parents who love their children, but are incapacitated by addictions and mental health issues, and who want to change to keep their family intact,
- A toddler found wandering in the street in the middle of the night,
- A young, single mom, who with support from her caseworker and child's foster parent, overcomes her drug addiction and regains custody of her 10-month-old son, or
- A 16-year-old youth who experienced his first Thanksgiving dinner last year thanks to his best friend's parents who became his kinship caregivers.

Franklin County Children Services, the only agency in the community mandated to protect and care for the county's abused and neglected children and troubled youth, is gearing up for its 2014 levy campaign. The largest source of the agency's income, 72 percent, comes from two, 10-year property tax levies. One of the two, a 3.1 mill levy was passed in 2009 and expires in 2019. The other, a 1.9 mill levy expires at the end of this year.

The size of the levy has not been determined. The FCCS board will approve a millage recommendation and send the request to the Franklin County commissioners for approval.

"This levy will be absolutely critical to our success in providing vital services to children and families because without its passage, the agency will lose nearly \$47 million - more than 25 percent of our operating budget," said Executive Director Chip Spinning. "Although I know passing tax issues can be very challenging, especially during an economic downturn, I am encouraged by the

fact that Franklin County has proven to be a community that cares about kids."

Spinning also expressed his confidence in Yvette McGee Brown, a partner with Jones Day law firm, who has agreed to lead the campaign. A former Franklin County Court Juvenile Court Judge, Justice on the Ohio Supreme Court, founding president of the

"This levy will be absolutely critical to our success in providing vital services to children and families..."

FCCS Executive Director Chip Spinning

Center for Child and Family Advocacy at Nationwide Children's Hospital and former FCCS board member, she is aware of the importance of Children Services' role in the community.

"In my various roles serving this community and as an advocate for children for the past 25 years, I've been fortunate to observe the quality of services offered by Children Services and continue to be impressed with the dedication of the staff," said McGee Brown. "So I am especially pleased to serve as chair of the Committee4Children."

Her team, the Committee4Children (C4C) will be comprised of community leaders, corporations and interested citizens working to help assure passage of the levy. The C4C website, committe4children.com will be updated as the campaign progresses.

FCCS continues to experience an increase in demand for services. Reports made to the agency's child abuse hotline last year reached another record high of 31,798 - an increase of 25 percent since 2010. The agency also completed 12,381 investigations.

FCCS: Working Within the Community

By Bruce Cadwallader

At Franklin County Children Services, we practice speaking to the community as much as we rely on listening to the community's need for help in protecting children.

Last year, our speakers bureau logged in 99 presentations and public displays, one of our efforts in educating the public about what we do. This year, we hope to do even more!

We've already presented to prestigious local groups, such as the New Albany Kiwanis Club, the Whitehall Chamber of Commerce, child care centers and civic associations. Requests for speakers, presentations, booth displays and literature can be emailed to FCCSpeakersBureau@fccs.co.franklin.oh.us.

FCCS also works to educate the public about important issues facing families and parents by providing online parenting tips, updates on our website, social media tools such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube and we present informative newsletters

monthly and quarterly. You can check them all out or sign up to receive our newsletters at franklincountyohio.gov/children_services.

FCCS also participates in a variety of community events throughout central Ohio. They include:

- Child Abuse Prevention Breakfast
- April's Child Abuse Prevention Month and Pinwheels for Prevention Campaigns
- Mayor Coleman's Neighborhood Block Party and FamJam, a family enrichment festival
- Neighborhood block parties with Sunny95 radio station
- Festival Latino and the African-American Wellness Walk
- Children's Day at COSI
- National Adoption Day



Child Abuse Prevention Efforts Bring Awareness

By Pam Prosser

Childhood should be a wonderful time filled with carefree days, laughter and the love of parents. But for many children it's only a dream. These children are suffering from an epidemic of child abuse and neglect. According to the National Children's Alliance, in 2011, an estimated five children die every day from abuse and neglect in the United States. In Franklin County, about 30,000 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 and 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 9.

Children Services and its Citizens Advisory Committee will host the 20th celebration of the Child Abuse Prevention Breakfast on Wednesday, April 16, at the Aladdin Shrine Center at 8 a.m. A silent auction for artwork created by FCCS youth will be held from 7 – 8 a.m. In addition to bringing together different segments of the community to learn about child abuse prevention, Children



APRIL is
**Child Abuse
Prevention
Month**

Services will honor families and youth who have made great strides to overcome troubled and abusive pasts. College scholarships and other achievement awards will be given to dedicated and deserving youth on the agency's case load. A child protection caseworker will be honored and community advocate awards will be given to groups and individuals who advocate on behalf of children. For more information, call (614) 275-2523.

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 2013, Franklin County Children Services conducted 7,706 investigations of abuse and neglect – 6,014 for physical abuse, 1,465 for sexual abuse and 227 for emotional abuse. Overall the agency provided services to 30,264 children.

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

Thomas Family Feels Kinship with FCCS

By Marion Thompson

Emma Thomas has been a fixture at Franklin County Children Services for more than 30 years, while her 17-year-old granddaughter Carla has felt a part of the agency for most of her life. It started when Thomas saw a commercial on TV asking for volunteers who were willing to work with abused children. Since that time, she has not only volunteered with the agency in a number of capacities, she and Carla have also benefited from the services FCCS has provided to her as a kinship caregiver.

Thomas has mentored 17 children throughout the years, often introducing them to special experiences like going to the movies and volunteering. Currently, she is a member of the Citizens Advisory Committee, which provides opportunities to children involved with the agency that are outside the scope of the traditional foster care experience. Thomas has received numerous awards for her efforts including being named FCCS's Most Inspirational Volunteer and receiving a commendation from former Governor George Voinovich. She routinely can be found helping out at agency events such as the Holiday Visitation. According to Malaika Mentoring Program



(From left) Emma and Carla Thomas

Continued on Page 5

Caseworker Spotlight: Tammie Carroll-Smith

By Cynthia Greenleaf

For as long as she can remember, Franklin County Children Services West Region caseworker Tammie Carroll-Smith has felt compelled to give back. “I always had that drive to help others,” she says.

At West Region for six years and at Lucas County Children Services prior to that, Carroll-Smith truly shines as one of FCCS’s regional caseworkers. Personable and patient, she enjoys connecting with families – getting to know what they’re facing and learning how she can best assist them. “I’m a relationship builder,” she says. “I like to help the families through the whole process.” And help she certainly does: Carroll-Smith clearly excels at being a child welfare caseworker. “Tammie is superb with family engagement,” according to her supervisor Tesfa Chevers. “She definitely wants the best for her clients and advocates very strongly for them.”

A Lorain County native, Carroll-Smith first learned about the child welfare system when she saw her three young cousins come into care. She was just a kid herself and was wondering why this was all happening. “At the time, I thought ‘How could we not take care of them?’” she remembers. While her cousins were later placed into an adoptive home, Carroll-Smith realized early on the importance of kinship care and how permanent placement with relatives might have made a difference in her cousins’ lives.

Inspired by that early experience, Carroll-Smith is a fierce proponent of permanency and keeping kids connected to their families. This energetic caseworker is well-known among her colleagues for her efforts in going above and beyond for the children on her case load, ensuring that they maintain vital connections to their relatives whenever safely possible. For Carroll-Smith, who has four children of her own, there is nothing more important than family. “That’s your heritage,” she says. “Your family is you. That laugh, that dance, favorite food, the way you talk...”

One of her greatest permanency success stories involved five sisters who were all in foster care. For the four years she had this particular case, Carroll-Smith searched tirelessly for a way to

keep these girls together and connected to their extended family. Carroll-Smith even showed up at a family reunion, in the hopes of finding appropriate relatives with which to place the sisters. Thanks to Carroll-Smith’s tenacity and commitment to family, the five girls are now permanently placed with two family members and able to maintain their critical sibling bond. While the experience was challenging and quite time consuming, it was also empowering for Carroll-Smith. “If I can do that case, I can do any case,” she says, laughing.

In her day-to-day interactions, maintaining empathy is paramount for Carroll-Smith: she never forgets that she could easily be in her client’s position. “That person may be you some day,” she says. This compassion paid off recently when she helped a mom with a newborn who was struggling with drug addiction and had lost custody of her three previous children. Displaying her typical persistence, Carroll-Smith helped the mom get into rehab, secure child care and land employment. The mom has a fresh start now because Carroll-Smith was able to “help her believe in herself,” she says.

One secret to Carroll-Smith’s success: she is always honest and up front with the families on her case load. “I want them to know what’s going on,” she says. She’s also a skilled caseworker because of her straightforwardness: what you see is always what you get. This consistency and dependability are traits her families no doubt appreciate. “I am the same today, tomorrow and two weeks from today,” Carroll-Smith says, laughing.



Tammie Carroll-Smith

Thomas Family (continued from page 4)

Director Monique McCrystal, “Emma brings a youthful and passionate energy to agency events.” Thomas plans to continue serving the children in her community for years to come. “Once you start helping with children, it’s easy,” she says. “It becomes a lifelong calling.”

When Thomas became the primary caregiver for her two grandchildren, Carla and Antonio, 15 years ago, FCCS was there to help her, just as she has helped others. “I don’t know what I would have done without Children Services and God,” she said. The agency provided services to the family ranging from seminars to clothing vouchers to supportive friendships. “FCCS never turns us away,” she said.

Carla has also found support and nurturing through her relationship with the agency. “Children Services helped me find myself,” she says. “They’ve given me many life experiences and shown me things that I never knew I liked.” Carla has taken part in many seminars and leadership training programs, while part of the agency’s Youth Advisory Board. She recently participated in a panel discussion with Rise Sister Rise and the Girls Self-Esteem Workshop. She has benefited from having several FCCS mentors throughout her childhood. In 2010, Carla was named Outstanding Mentee by the Mentoring Center of Central Ohio. She routinely volunteers at FCCS events and is eager to become a mentor herself in the future. Carla has also made a lasting impression on agency staff. FCCS Communications Director Deborra Armstrong, who first met Carla at age 5 said, “I’ve watched her mature into an articulate young lady who has developed into a leader.”

“I don’t know what I would’ve done without Children Services and God.”

Emma Thomas, Kinship Parent and Mentor

Volunteer Empathizes with FCCS Children

By Joy Xaybandith

How many can honestly say they understand what children and families go through when involved with a child protection agency? How many have been separated from their loved ones and had to stay with strangers? Carole Yoder is among a small number of Franklin County Children Services volunteers and mentors who have lived through the same experiences as the children they are mentoring.

Yoder was only 2 years old when she and her younger brother were initially removed from their parents and placed in separate foster homes. She spent her childhood living with multiple relatives, foster homes and a couple of children's homes. For a short time, Yoder and her brother were reunified with their parents only to experience abuse by their father and again be returned to foster care.

When asked how she felt growing up involved with Children Services during the 1970s, Yoder said, "I felt I was not good enough to get a home." She internalized these feelings and concluded she must not be pretty enough or smart enough. No one was there to tell her it would all be alright. It was not until she was in the sixth grade when she met the Yoders who fostered and eventually adopted her that she found her support system.

The Yoders were strict, but caring and supportive. She learned from her parents how to study and work hard. After high school Yoder graduated from Ohio University cum laude in fine arts and currently works as a flight attendant for NetJets.

Growing up, Yoder thought she'd be homeless. Going to college and having a job was not on her radar. The Yoders were the first to

show her she had a chance at a life. "They wouldn't let me fail."

Now looking back at her childhood, Yoder has more respect for caseworkers and the tireless work they do for families. She wanted to give back to the community and thought being a mentor for an FCCS youth would be perfect. Yoder understands firsthand the range of emotions children feel and the patience they need from a caring adult. She looks forward to giving friendship and hope to the sisters that she and her fiancé, Joe Davis are mentoring. The two have been matched with their mentees for six months and have enjoyed the time they've had together.

When asked how she felt about her story being made public, Yoder's response was simple, "If it sparks one person to volunteer with a child, it's worth it."

For more information about volunteering and mentoring, go to franklincountyohio.gov/children_services or call (614) 275-2690.



Carole Yoder, FCCS Volunteer

Volunteer Program Celebrates 50 Years

By Leesa Evans

Franklin County Children Services' volunteers and mentors are some of the agency's most valuable partners. This year, the agency celebrates 50 years of volunteer services. In 1964, the agency created the director of volunteers position and appointed Nan Robbins to the role under the management of the Volunteer Services Advisory Committee. Robbins coordinated a handful of volunteers who did things such as tutoring and teaching piano lessons for the children residing at Franklin Village. A few years later, the community began expressing an interest in spending time with children. FCCS believed that mentoring relationships would be beneficial to the children served and therefore in 1969, Operation Friendship was created.

The Friendship Volunteer program evolved into a program where volunteers are matched one-on-one with an agency youth whom they spend time with at least once a month. Friendship volunteers give a child the opportunity to have a positive, meaningful and continuing relationship with an adult.

During the 1980s, volunteers began helping out at the agency's Crisis Center within the Intake and Investigations office. A few years later, the Simba program (a mentoring program that matches African-American men with African-American boys)

was developed. In the 1990s, the Malaika program (a mentoring program that matches African-American women with African-American girls) was born and in 2006, the College-Bound Mentoring program (where mentors help youth as they prepare for college) was developed.

Former Director of Volunteers Marilyn Jenkins feels fortunate to have been part of the volunteer department for 24 years. She has fond memories of being surrounded by dedicated staff, amazing volunteers and grateful children and families. "The program has certainly grown and changed since its start 50 years ago," said Jenkins. "However, the essence has remained the same. It's about caring people being matched with our children who desperately need a positive adult in their lives."

FCCS has nearly 500 volunteers and mentors. More than 400 children are waiting for a special friend and mentor to come into their lives. Help celebrate 50 years of building relationships for children in need. For more information about volunteering and mentoring, go to franklincountyohio.gov/children_services or call (614) 275-2690.

FCCS Partners with Local Justice System

By Bruce Cadwallader

With all the legal mandates facing the care and safety of children, Franklin County Children Services works hand in hand with local law enforcement and the courts to carry out its mission.

By law, FCCS collaborates with the Franklin County Juvenile Court, the county prosecutor, 36 local law enforcement agencies, the Capital Area Humane Society, Franklin County Department of Job and Family Services (which manages state aid to families) and Nationwide Children's Hospital on the investigation of child abuse and neglect.

To do that, all parties sign a memorandum of understanding outlining the duties each has in the investigation of child abuse in Franklin County under the Ohio Revised Code. This collaboration also helps eliminate unnecessary interviews of children who may be the subject of those reports.

Many calls about suspected child abuse come from mandated reporters or people in a position of trust for children, such as doctors, nurses, school teachers and the clergy. "Mandated reporters in our community can report suspected child abuse or neglect to us or law enforcement," said FCCS Chief Legal Counsel Anne O'Leary. "It is important that all of our partners understand that we conduct different types of investigations and not just allegations concerning parents."

It is the police officers, prosecutors and the courts who decide whether to pursue criminal charges. Caseworkers and their

supervisors in conjunction with agency legal staff determine whether sufficient information exists to file an action in Juvenile Court.

"It's important that we agree to collaborate to ensure the prompt reporting of abuse and to conduct timely and thorough investigations."

Anne O'Leary, FCCS Chief Legal Counsel

"It's important that we agree to collaborate to ensure the prompt reporting of abuse and to conduct timely and thorough investigations," said O'Leary. "Our focus is child safety, though, and not the pursuit of criminal charges on any individual. That's a function for law enforcement."

FCCS is also collaborating in a pilot project with four other counties, the courts and social service agencies to study alternative methods of detention for youth. This initiative, underwritten by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, will be used to identify efficient use of community resources as an alternative to detention while still maintaining public safety. It is expected to reduce recidivism, save taxpayer money, eliminate racial disparities in detention and improve school completion rates.

"The Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative will help to reduce the unnecessary confinement of non-violent youth in our county," said the initiative's director, Subha Lembach. "What we've learned is that when we detain kids there is a significant impact on their lives and sometimes a negative impact on their behavior."

FCCS partners in the program with the belief that addressing improved services to at-risk youth early in the process, will benefit all families served by Franklin County.

Social Work Month Emphasizes All People Matter

By Joetta McCruter-Polk

The 2014 theme for National Social Work Month, held in March, is *All People Matter*. These words are true to form as the community gathers to celebrate and bring awareness to this 116-year-old profession, dedicated to improving the social conditions and quality of life for children and families everywhere. FCCS recognizes these advocates as professional social workers and caseworkers. FCCS caseworkers are on the front lines each day responding to critical issues of child abuse and neglect, physical and mental disability, alcohol and substance abuse and more.

The FCCS guiding principles state: We constantly pursue excellence, providing effective and timely services; we value, respect

and support each other; we're proud that our work improves the quality of life for the families in the community; and we are fiscally responsible and culturally competent. According to FCCS Deputy Director Tina Rutherford, the guiding principles are designed to aid staff in staying focused on the goal of protecting children by strengthening families. "Our caseworkers and support staff take pride in the fact that we are child welfare professionals," she said.

FCCS meets the needs of more than 30,000 children and families each year. "The needs of the community are served by 63 percent of our staff who work directly with children and families, while the remaining 37 percent work in administration or support roles," said Rutherford. The agency employs approximately 700 staff.

FCCS takes pride in hiring and retaining highly qualified professional and support staff to carry out its mission.





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www.franklincountyohio.gov/children_services



Keep Children Safe with the Right Car Seat

By Marion Thompson

There is a lot to consider when buying, installing and maintaining a car seat to ensure that your child is safe during travel. Make sure that you know what safety precautions to take before you select one from the shelf at your local store or order one online. Safe Kids Worldwide offers the following safety tips:

- Be aware of the **child passenger safety laws**, which vary from state to state and year to year. The Ohio law can be found at healthy.ohio.gov. Regularly review the laws so that you'll be aware of any changes that are made.
- **Check the label** on your car seat to ensure that it's appropriate for your child's age, weight and height. Use a front-facing, rear-facing seat or booster seat when appropriate.
- **Car seats have an expiration date**, which should be listed on the label. Make sure you are aware of this date so that you will know when it's no longer safe to use the car seat.
- If you choose to buy a used car seat, make sure you **know its crash history**. Only use a used car seat if you are able to discuss its use with the previous owner.
- Follow manufacturer's guidelines to install your car seat. **Have your car seat inspected** by a certified child passenger safety technician to make sure it's been installed correctly. Call **SafeKids Central Ohio** at (614) 645-7748 or visit safekidscentralohio.org to find a technician or car seat safety event in your area.



Visit safekids.org for additional information on car seat installation and safety.

The American Academy of Pediatrics also provides recommendations for car seat safety each year. Recommendations for 2014 can be found at aap.org. The organization has also developed the Car Seat Check App which provides expert advice on selecting the right car seat and installing it safely. It can be purchased via Itunes.com.