

ACCENT_{on}KIDS

A Publication of Franklin County Children Services

WINTER 2014



THANKS FOR YOUR VOTE!

INSIDE:

- 2014 Children Services' Levy Passed: Thank You!
- Help Grant a Child's Holiday Wish
- FCCS Celebrates National Adoption Month
- Wendy's Wonderful Kids Finds Forever Families



Protecting Children by Strengthening Families

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Winter 2014

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2014 Children Services' Levy Passed

By Deborrha Armstrong

Thanks to a community that decided to say "Yes" to children, the Franklin County Children Services 10-year, 1.9 mill renewal levy was approved by 70 percent of county voters allowing the agency to continue its mission to protect children and strengthen families. This is the second largest margin of victory in the history of Franklin County Children Services levies and the biggest win in 31 years.

Passage of this levy will not increase taxes. The owner of a \$100,000 property will continue to pay the current rate of \$54 each year.

"We appreciate the community's support for our agency and the work our staff does each day to ensure the safety and well-being of Franklin County's abused and neglected children," said Franklin County Children Services Executive Director Chip Spinning. "We were fortunate to have a wonderful campaign team led by Yvette McGee Brown and Doris Calloway Moore, who worked tirelessly to tell our story and gain support."

The agency was able to focus on many accomplishments during this campaign including an increase in adoptions for teens and siblings, more children being cared for by relatives, and a reduction in expensive out-of-home placements. In addition, the agency was able to demonstrate the effective and responsible use of tax dollars.

"Despite this being a difficult year for tax issues and levies, Franklin County voters have gone on record stating this is a community that is serious about taking care of its most vulnerable children," said McGee Brown. "When it comes to investing in children, we say 'Yes'."



"I'm glad the levy passed because Children Services has played a tremendous role in my success and offered a lot of opportunities like counseling and resources to go to school."

Rayshawn, 21, Senior at Central State University

"I knew the levy was going to pass because our community supports children. They know little kids need help when something happens to them. Without Children Services' help, our family wouldn't have been able to make things work."

Martha Renda, Kinship Caregiver of Three Grandchildren



"I definitely wouldn't be where I am now without Children Services. It's the people there who helped me take advantage of the best opportunities possible."

Travis, 20, Student at Columbus State Community College



Holiday Wish: A Tradition of Giving and Caring

By Elizabeth Crabtree

The holidays are a special time of year, steeped in family traditions and rituals some new and some passed down through generations. Many of those traditions involve spreading cheer and good will. Fortunately, some is bestowed upon children who need it the most through Franklin County Children Services Holiday Wish.

For more than 50 years, Holiday Wish has granted over 160,000 wishes. For many of these youth, it was only because of the generosity of the community that they were able to receive a gift for the holidays. Each year, more than 5,000 children submit wishes to Holiday Wish. Granting those wishes has become tradition for many local groups, businesses and individuals. Holiday Wish depends on the community to grant specific wishes of children ages 11 and under, sponsor teenagers so the agency can purchase them gift cards, and donate toys for children who come to the attention of the agency late in the season.

Holiday Wish also depends on the time and efforts of community volunteers. Last year, 95 individuals volunteered nearly 400 hours of their time ensuring donations went from being received by FCCS to landing in the expectant hands of agency children.

Linda Campbell, a foster and adoptive parent, works at Nationwide Financial as a manager for the case management proposal writers. For the past three years, she has brought a team of 15 Nationwide associates to volunteer at Holiday Wish. They spend the day organizing and categorizing toys and filling children's gift requests.



Foster and adoptive parent Linda Campbell (front row, far right) and her team from Nationwide Financial volunteer every year to package gifts for Holiday Wish.

"This is a labor of love for me. As a foster parent, I understand the need for these gifts," said Campbell. "This is more than a gift; it is confirming to children who have gone through hard times that they are cared for."

Campbell is pleased with the support of her coworkers and her employer who gives them time off work to volunteer at Holiday Wish. "We think that it

is the most fulfilling volunteer activity that we have experienced as a team. It is one way of making a difference in the world to children who need it the most," said Campbell.

Nationwide is one of many businesses that encourage and support their employees to give back to the community. Many businesses support Holiday Wish by holding toy drives for their customers or matching funds raised by employees to purchase gifts.

To donate to Holiday Wish, call (614) 275-2525 or donate online at franklincountyohio.gov/fccsholidaywish.

Help Franklin County Children Services



Grant a Child's
**Holiday
WISH**

Call **HOLIDAY WISH** at **(614) 275-2525**

There are several ways you can help:

- Sponsor one or more young children at **\$40 each**
- Sponsor one or more older youth at **\$50 each**
- Make a donation of any amount to sponsor a youth
- Donate new toys of any kind
- Make a donation online: (Donations may be tax deductible)
franklincountyohio.gov/fccsholidaywish

Email us at: holidaywish@fccs.co.franklin.oh.us

Follow us:   

Family Adopts Four More on Adoption Day

By Julia Foster

“The more the merrier!” has always been Rick and Bobbi Boone’s motto.

That’s why there was no hesitation when the couple was given the opportunity to adopt four of their foster children. On November 20, the Boones gave Aiden, 8, Abby, 6, Adam, 5, and Miah, 1, their forever home. This was done as part of Franklin County Children Services’ National Adoption Day event, which honors November as National Adoption Month. The Boones were one of eight families finalizing the adoption of 15 children at this 14th annual event in Franklin County Probate Court.

For the couple from Hebron, Ohio, there was no question that they’d adopt their foster children when the option became available. The couple had previously adopted four of their other foster children. “How can you just look at these kids and say ‘No’ when you know they love you more than anyone else. They are our kids, not just our foster kids,” Bobbi explains. “All of them need love. They didn’t do anything wrong. They just want love.” Having their adoptions finalized at FCCS’s National Adoption Day event was a perfect opportunity for the Boone family because the event promotes finalization of adoptions and celebrates adoptive families.



Rick and Bobbi Boone with their children.

National Adoption Day is celebrated in all 50 states. According to nationaladoptionday.org, National Adoption Day has helped nearly 50,000 children in foster care be adopted into their forever homes. This year, approximately 4,500 children were adopted nationwide through these events.

Managing eight children is no easy feat, but for the Boone family love and cohesion is what makes it possible. “We treat them all the same [as we would our biological children] and they treat each other the same [as they would their biological siblings],”

Bobbi says. “They’re healthy, they’re happy. We’re a family.”

One of their four biological adult children, Tabitha Wilson, not only got the couple involved with foster care, but became a licensed alternative caregiver to provide her parents with help and support in raising the younger children. She and her daughter, Kimber Wilson, have become a huge part of the children’s everyday life.

Finalizing the adoption of Aiden, Abby, Adam and Miah has changed the Boone family’s life in a positive way. Rick feels the joy of adopting every day. “The best part of adopting is the love, the smiles, and the children’s excited eyes when you’ve taught them something new,” he said.

Mentors Make a Difference for Family

By Joy Xaybandith

A few hours each month DOES make a world of difference in the lives of children served by Franklin County Children Services. This is especially true for the Kromer family. Maternal grandmother, Peggy Grubb, has legal custody of her grandchildren, Eric, 7, and Heather, 12. In 2009, the family was referred to the FCCS Volunteer Department during which time Heather was matched with her first mentor. Eric watched his sister go off to experience new adventures with her mentor, while he waited patiently until he was 6 years old and eligible to have his own mentor. Today, Heather and Eric are matched with mentors, Mandy Brown and Rob Toonkel.

As Eric recently waited for his first official outing with Toonkel, he said “I think it’s going to be fun hanging out with Rob!” After Eric left with his mentor, Grubb enjoyed sitting back and watching Heather as she danced with a Wii video. Grubb said, “I couldn’t do



Mentors Rob Toonkel and Mandy Brown enjoy FCCS’s Children’s Day at COSI with their mentees Eric and Heather.

this if Eric was home. It really does take a village to raise a family. It takes everyone working together.”

Heather loves having a mentor and looks forward to her time with Brown. “We have fun and I can call Mandy and talk,” she said. With insight beyond her years, Heather said about the mentoring program, “It gives Nana and Mom a break.”

The children’s mother, Angel, is an active and involved parent. Grubb is very supportive of her daughter, and looks forward to the day when Angel will be able to have the children back with her. In the meantime, Grubb is

very grateful for her grandchildren’s mentors. “The mentors have done things for the kids that I simply can’t do because of my age and health.”

For more information on being a mentor or volunteering with Franklin County Children Services, call (614) 275-2690 or go to frankincountyohio.gov/children_services.

Wendy's Wonderful Kids Finds Forever Families

By Marion Thompson

On September 24, 14-year-old Zach became part of a new family. The youth had spent a number of years living in foster care and residential placement facilities, before he was matched with his adoptive parents thanks in part to the Wendy's Wonderful Kids Program (WWK), sponsored by the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption. Through a foundation grant which is administered by FCCS and the Public Children Services Association of Ohio, WWK recruiters work to match children who have difficulty being placed in permanent homes with adoptive families. FCCS currently has three WWK recruiters on-site.

Like Zach, many children wait longer for adoptive homes because of their age, physical or emotional issues or because they want to remain with their siblings. Typically, working with 10 to 15 children at a time, WWK recruiters at FCCS establish a relationship with each child and learn about their personalities and specific needs to ensure that they find a home where the child can thrive. They also make sure that the child understands the adoption process and the benefits of having a permanent family. "Some children may not want to be adopted," says WWK Recruiter Maquel Scites. "So we let them know how important it is to have a family that they can count on now and in the future."

WWK recruiters dedicate the remainder of their time to searching for available homes. They contact people who are familiar with the children, such as relatives, friends and teachers in hopes of finding someone with a connection to the child, who is willing to offer a permanent home. If this is not possible, WWK staff work with other recruiters all over the country to find matches

with families who are eager to adopt and determine if they are able to meet the needs of a particular child. Once a child and family decide to pursue adoption, an adoption caseworker completes the placement process, while WWK recruiters serve as support for everyone involved.

In Zach's case, a family in New Jersey hoping to adopt a second child was located through an online recruitment database search. After several visits between New Jersey and Columbus, both Zach and his new parents developed a bond and decided to proceed with the adoption.

WWK sponsors recruiters throughout the U.S. and in Canada, and has served more than 10,000 children with 4,000 finalized adoptions as of January 2014. FCCS has been part of the program for 14 years. According to FCCS Assistant Deputy Director Kim Toler, "The agency's WWK program's goal is to find permanent adoptive homes for the children in the program within 12 months of their entering into agency custody. Our rate of success in achieving this goal is 75 percent, which is a good average."

Having lived with his new family for about a year, during the adoption process, Zach is well adjusted to his new environment and doing well in school.

FCCS is always looking for families that are willing to provide the security and safety that a permanent home offers to a child in need. To learn more about the FCCS Adoption Program and Wendy's Wonderful Kids Program, call (614) 341-6060 or visit franklincountyohio.gov/children_services.

Sidney is Available for Adoption

Sidney is a very sociable 16 year old. She considers herself a good comedian and would like to be an actress one day. A multi-faceted young lady, Sidney likes running track and writing poetry. She is also active in her church, where she particularly enjoys singing in the choir. Sidney is fond of most foods, except for vegetables. She is a very outgoing young lady and like a lot of teens, Sidney enjoys interacting with her peers. Fashion is a favorite topic for this self-described "girly girl." While Sidney would like to maintain connections with her five adult siblings, one of her greatest desires is to find a forever home. She is in need of an adoptive family that is patient and supportive of her goals. If you are interested in providing a home for Sidney or another child under the care of FCCS, call (614) 341-6060.



Family Fought Adversity to Reunite

By Bruce Cadwallader

In two years, Tina Bishara went from jail inmate to proud apartment dweller with two strong children under her wings and a renewed sense of accomplishment.

An FCCS caseworker, counselors and other support people lined the path on her road to recovery. In September, Bishara and her children won the Family of the Year honor at the annual Public Children Services Association of Ohio (PCSAO) Conference. She was nominated by her FCCS Caseworker David Payton.

“There were setbacks, but Tina overcame those and began to utilize the people around her and to really understand what it means to have a mental health diagnosis,” Payton said. “Tina has accomplished so much in two years and we should all take notice.”

Bishara’s children were never far from her. A brother and sister-in-law stepped in as kinship caregivers to provide a supportive and loving home for about 18 months. It gave her time to assess her medical and mental needs, seek the advice of a legal guardian and accept employment as a customer service representative for a telephone answering service.

“She began to smile and take pride in her appearance,” Payton recalled. “Tina began to trust the people around her – most importantly her brother Alex and his wife, Sandy.”

With the aid of a legal guardian, Bishara started building trust with her children. She worked to obtain and decorate an apartment in her own style. She began having home visits with her children and in February regained full custody of Samuel, 14, and Jasmine, 11.

“I couldn’t have done it without all the support from Children Services as well as my other caseworkers,” Bishara said after winning her award, which included signed proclamations from Ohio Governor John R. Kasich and members of the Ohio Senate, and a check for \$500.



Tina Bishara (second from right) and her children pose with FCCS Caseworker David Payton (right).

“Things are in place the way they were meant to be. David’s been a wonderful caseworker,” she said. “Samuel’s playing football at his high school and Jasmine is enjoying school as a 5th grader.”

Bishara’s advice for others facing an inquiry from child welfare officials is, “Put your trust in God, trust the agency and their guidance. They are not there to hurt you, but to help you.”

The PCSAO conference drew 400 child welfare professionals to Columbus to showcase regional success stories and to discuss financial support for family services. Other awards went to state legislators, kinship, foster and adoptive families, and the outstanding journalist of the year.

Families and Advocates Honored at Family Celebration

National Family Week (November 23-29) is a celebration that embraces the premise that children’s lives are better when their families are strong. It is designed to build community connections and honor those who strengthen families.

For the past seven years, Franklin County Children Services has worked with community partners in the agency’s Family-to-Family program to hold a celebration that honors families for their successes and recognize those within the community who help keep them strong. FCCS is partnering with St. Stephen’s Community House, Gladden Community House and Central Community House to host the annual Family Celebration on November 24 from 5-7 p.m. at St. Stephen’s Community House. Five families and five community advocates will be honored for their achievements. The families will be commended for overcoming challenging obstacles in their lives, and the advocates will be recognized for their work in building and supporting their local communities.

According to Megan Stevens, director of community development at FCCS, the event is heart-warming. “The families have worked very hard to realize their dreams, and the community advocates are truly passionate about supporting families,” she said.



FCCS Caseworker Spotlight

Rob Edwards has compassion for those in need

By Cynthia Greenleaf

Rob Edwards is all about engagement. This child welfare caseworker in Franklin County Children Services' East Region knows that there is nothing more important than establishing a meaningful connection to the children and families with whom he works. Forging this bond is critical, whether Edwards is reaching out to a frightened teenage runaway, building a trusting relationship with a domestic violence survivor or empowering an inexperienced father to be there for his child. It's about meeting families where they are and carefully listening to what they have to say, according to Edwards. "When families feel like they can express themselves, that's crucial," he says.

"If you put the right supports in place, no matter what they've been through [children] can succeed."

Edwards realizes that some families aren't going to readily reciprocate this engagement and that's OK. "Always respect others even if they're not being respectful to you," he says. In fact, one of Edwards' strengths as a social worker is always maintaining compassion and empathy for his clients, many of whom are experiencing difficult issues such as alcohol addiction, drug dependency and mental health concerns. "Most of our parents don't intentionally abuse or neglect their kids," Edwards says. Getting to the root of the problem often reveals parents who are struggling and need support to work through their often complex issues. "In most cases, parents truly want what's best for their child," he says.

"Getting to the root of the problem often reveals parents who are struggling and need support to work through their often complex issues."

Extremely conscientious and thoughtful, Edwards "takes absolutely everything into consideration" when figuring out how he can best help a family, according to his supervisor Tom Drumm. "Rob doesn't make a decision without considering all the information. He ensures every client gets to tell their story as they see it."

An optimist at heart, Edwards is always hopeful that his families are able to successfully work on their case plans and reunite with their children. Patience is paramount for this caseworker. "If 9 months pass and the parents are not doing what they're supposed to be doing, month 10 is a new month," he says. In the

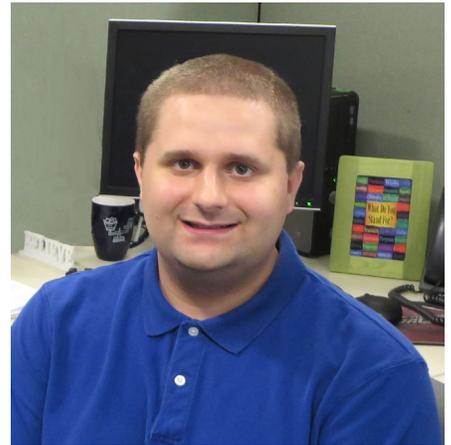
most frustrating of circumstances, where seemingly no progress is being made, Edwards tries to put a positive spin on the situation. "Instead of looking at what we can't do, I ask 'what can we do right now?'"

Edwards has a reputation for fearlessly taking on exceptionally complicated cases.

His Texas case is perhaps the clearest example of this. Once a month, Edwards wakes up before dawn, flies to Dallas and drives three hours to a remote town to spend time with a teen in a residential facility. It took time to develop a relationship, but Edwards has been able to bond with this young man and the two have become close. "He trusts me that when I say something, I will follow through," Edwards says. "I am fighting for his interests."

Always one to go above and beyond, Edwards doesn't just meet with this teen, but will take him on special excursions such as trips to the store. "It's a unique and special experience for him," Edwards says, adding that it's a valuable opportunity for this youth to work on his social skills and simply enjoy the chance to do something every teenager does. "I want to give him something positive and let him know that he's doing good work."

Being a positive, stabilizing influence in the life of a teenager is one of Edwards' richest rewards as a child welfare caseworker. "I always wanted to work with kids, particularly adolescents," he says. "I see the potential there. If you put the right supports in place, no matter what they've been through, they can succeed."



FCCS Caseworker Rob Edwards

Caseworkers: The Heart of FCCS

Caseworkers are the heart of FCCS. They provide children protection from abuse and neglect and work to ensure that children have safe, stable homes. Social work is an integral part in the health, well-being and safety of the children and families served. Intervening on behalf of a child when parents are having problems is often difficult and challenging and requires skill and sensitivity. Caseworker intervention frequently makes a critical difference in a child's life.



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Malaika and Simba Create Rites of Passage for Kids

Franklin County Children Services Simba and Malaika mentoring programs have developed a rites of passage curriculum for children ages 11-18. Simba and Malaika are culturally-specific mentoring programs matching African-American boys and girls under the care of FCCS with African-American men and women.

Recently several girls who have been involved in rites of passage had an opportunity to demonstrate what they have been learning at the Malaika annual retreat. Focusing on the theme of Umoja (Unity) and using nature as the backdrop, the girls learned about their roots and history, their present strengths and their future aspirations.

“I was pleased to see the older girls demonstrating leadership skills as they shared experiences with some of the younger girls,” said Malaika Director Monique McCrystal. “It’s been encouraging to witness their journey and change of mind-set during these seven months.”

The retreat was one creative component of the rites of passage program which focuses on adolescent girls and boys to provide support, guidance and nurturance to help them move into and celebrate the transition into adulthood. Since April, participants have been meeting monthly for creative and thought-provoking programming surrounding the principals of the Nguzo Saba, also known as Kwanzaa. These community principals focus on African

value structures such as Kujichagulia (Self-Determination) and Umoja (Unity). The program utilizes storytelling, journaling and service activities to expose the youth to new ways of thinking while learning resiliency, meditation, negotiation skills, group cohesion, connection with and promotion of culture and history, along with other critical life skills for survival and success.



Malaika mentees explore rites of passage during their annual retreat.