

ACCENT_{on}KIDS

A Publication of Franklin County Children Services

FALL 2015



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Protecting Children by Strengthening Families

ACCENT on KIDS

A Publication of Franklin County Children Services

Fall 2015

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FCCS Hosts Children's Day at COSI Celebration

In honor of all children, Children Services is hosting its annual Children's Day celebration at COSI, on Friday, September 25, from 5 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 generous corporate donations from Kroger and others.

FCCS is able to offer this event

to children because of a partnership between COSI and the Franklin County Board of Commissioners.

FCCS will also be on hand to provide parenting tips and community resource materials.

In addition, all 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 Arnett Howard, Bob Piascik, Mackee Magic Show, Supa Fun Trio, and Zayne Alexander Harshaw, along with games and activities. For more information, visit childrengservices.franklincountyohio.gov.

COSI is also open to the general public for a discounted admission rate of \$11. Parking is \$5. For information about COSI, including membership, please visit www.cosi.org.



FCCS Multicultural Team Presents at Statewide Event

Franklin County Children Services Multicultural Development Team (MDT) recently received statewide recognition by presenting at the Multiethnic Advocates for Cultural Competence (MACC), annual training conference. Focusing on the theme: *Path to Healing: A Business Case for Multi-Cultural Competence*, the team shared information regarding the impact its work has had on programming and the overall culture of the agency.

Established 22 years ago, MDT was charged to develop a process for the agency to conduct a self-assessment as to its cultural diversity and competency so that a plan could be put into place to implement and monitor improvements identified. The team, comprised of representatives from all areas of the agency and working collaboratively with the community, has consistently endeavored to achieve the following goals:

- To create an environment where varied cultures are respected and valued
- To foster an environment where race can be discussed openly without prejudgments, ridicule or hostility
- To promote an environment where co-workers can feel comfortable asking questions of each other to better facilitate service delivery

Over the years, there has been significant progress made in how staff interact with one another, children, families and community partners. Impacting this progress has been a wide-range of programs and training focused on populations served by the agency ranging from Somali and Latino to African-American and LGBTQI, as well as addressing issues such as poverty, unveiling racism and disproportionality.

Annual Art Show to Showcase Youth

By Marion Thompson

Youth involved in Franklin County Children Services Adoptions and Therapeutic Arts Programs will share their work during *I Dream a World*, an art show and silent auction which will be held from September 21 through October 2 at 855 West Mound Street. The show is open to the public and will feature more than 100 pieces, including paintings, sculptures, jewelry, mixed-media and more.

Creating art is a means of self-expression and healing for these youth who have experienced difficult circumstances. According to 15-year-old Devine, who enjoys drawing and painting scenes that symbolize current events, "It's a way to let out my feelings and be creative."

The youth look forward to the annual show. "It's nice to have people from all around see my work," said 16-year-old Romesha who has been involved with TAP for more than four years. While she had no experience with art prior to becoming part of TAP, Romesha now enjoys painting, sewing and working with clay.

The event is a favorite of FCCS employees as well as community members who flock to the show each year. FCCS Management Analyst Jessica Foster's cubicle is decorated with pieces she's collected over the years. "The artwork is shaped by the artists' experiences," Foster said. "I like that TAP helps them deal with things and it makes me happy to look at each piece."

Visit childrenservices.franklincountyohio.gov to learn more about the Adoptions and Therapeutic Arts Programs.



FCCS Youth Devine (above) and Romesha (right) express themselves through their artwork.



Kinship Conference Offers Resources

Kinship caregivers from Franklin County Children Services and the Ohio Grandparents/Kinship Coalition (OGKC) will meet at FCCS on Sept. 19 for the fourth annual Kinship Conference.

The event will run from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. at 855 W. Mound St. and is expected to attract up to 200 of Ohio's kinship caregivers and youth in their care.

Kinship care refers to situations where a relative or non-relative has taken over the care, nurturing and protection of a child. The definition for kinship caregivers goes beyond the scope of blood relatives and may include an adult who has a familiar relationship or bond with the child and/or family.

FCCS has previously sponsored kinship conferences, but this is the first year that the agency has partnered with OGKC to

recognize the important contributions of kinship caregivers who provide loving and caring homes to children. This event will provide information and resources kinship caregivers may need to help them care for the youth and for themselves.

Sessions will include Coping with the *Unique Challenges of Kinship Care* lead by internationally renowned speaker Dr. Joseph Crumbley; teen sessions with Carlos Christian of the Starts Within Organization; and Making Healthy Choices led by Kristin Torres from Syntero.

More information about kinship can be found on the FCCS website at childrenservices.franklincountyohio.gov or at the Ohio Grandparent/Kinship Coalition at www.ohiograndparentkinship.org.

Holiday Wish Program to Spread Joy



For more than 50 years, Franklin County Children Services has been able to provide gifts to thousands of children each holiday season thanks to the generosity of community donors. These are children who may not otherwise receive any gifts. Last year, 5,621 children received gifts through Holiday Wish. From infants to teenagers, Holiday Wish was able to ensure that every child served by the agency who needed a gift for the holidays received one.

Unique to all other toy drives, Holiday Wish allows children's wishes to be granted. Through a one to one matching, donors are able to purchase a special gift (a \$40 value) for a child under age 11. Emergency toys are also needed for children who are linked with FCCS late in the holiday season. Monetary donations benefit children ages 12 to 18 who will receive gift cards. For more information on Holiday Wish, go to fcsholidaywish.franklincountyohio.gov or call (614) 275-2525 starting October 5.



Community Partner Helps Human Trafficking Victims

By Cynthia Greenleaf

Despite the misconception that it's something that only occurs in foreign, faraway places, human trafficking happens everywhere. Here in Columbus, organizations like the Central Ohio Rescue & Restore Coalition (CORRC) are working to combat this crime through public awareness, social services, law enforcement collaboration and legislative advocacy.



Human trafficking is when someone is “compelled to labor on behalf of someone else for financial gain, through force, fraud or coercion,” according to Michelle Hannan, the coalition’s manager and director of professional and community services at the Salvation Army, which oversees the CORRC.

While there are two main categories of human trafficking—sex and labor—sex trafficking is “the majority of what we see,” Hannan says, noting that CORRC has had 538 confirmed cases of human trafficking since 2008.

Trafficked youth have often been involved with child welfare agencies. “It’s really common for victims of human trafficking to have a history of sexual abuse,” Hannan notes. Frequently those who have been lured into trafficking have experienced a difficult home life, with little support or acceptance. “They’re looking for that elsewhere,” Hannan says. “Traffickers are really smart about

providing that.”

Sex traffickers often target children. “From our experience, most people who are trafficked in the sex industry were first trafficked as minors,” Hannan says. Runaway and homeless youth are at greatest risk, since “traffickers are preying on kids who are vulnerable,” she adds.

While sex trafficking is usually a concealed crime, arranged online and conducted in hotel rooms and private homes, there are signs that parents and caregivers can look for. According to Hannan, victims are often “branded” with a tattoo, whether it’s the trafficker’s street name or a street gang’s symbol. “If a youth has a much older boyfriend, that’s also a huge red flag,” Hannan says. A teen in possession of a hotel key card is another sign, since minors aren’t legally able to rent a room. Doing poorly in school, showing signs of physical abuse, or sexually transmitted infections are all additional clues.

Since law enforcement leads frequently come from the general public, combating human trafficking is something everyone can help with, according to Hannan. If you notice a teenager in the company of a suspicious adult or something else that doesn’t seem quite right, call the national 24-hour hotline for reporting possible human trafficking at (888) 373-7888. “Don’t be afraid to make that call,” Hannan says.

For more on how CORRC helps human trafficking victims, check out www.centralohiorescueandrestore.org.

Meet FCCS Adoptions Caseworker Kelly Crawford

By Marion Thompson

The foster care adoption process can be both challenging and rewarding. FCCS Adoptions Caseworker Kelly Crawford discusses what it takes to find forever families for agency kids.

Tell us a little about your career at FCCS.

I’ve been with the agency for 25 years. I began my career in ongoing case management working with adolescents and moved to the adoptions department 12 years ago.

What do you do as an adoptions caseworker?

I usually have 15 to 20 children on my caseload who are awaiting adoption. I contact agencies with potential adoptive parents around the country and send them information on children who are awaiting adoption. When there is a match, I visit with the families and children and monitor the situation. I’ve been able to place most of the children I’ve worked with.

What challenges do you face as an adoptions caseworker?

Placing sibling groups can be challenging, but we’ve had a lot more success with siblings over the past few years. Some older children who have moved around from place to place have a lot of anxiety about the adoption process, so helping them bond with a new family can be challenging as well.

What do you enjoy most about your job?

I’ve built strong relationships with the children who are awaiting adoption—a lot them call me Auntie—and I’ve become really close with their families. Sometimes it seems like they’ve adopted me along with the children.

I also love the peace that comes with finding a permanent family for a child. For example, I worked with a teenager who was nonverbal and on a lot of medication. Since he was adopted, he’s off all of his medication, is playing sports and has just blossomed. He’s doing so well that it makes me want to cry.

For more information on the FCCS Adoption program, visit childrenservices.franklincountyohio.gov.



Kelly Crawford

Former FCCS Foster Youth Lobby on Capitol Hill

By Pam Prosser

FCCS youth and former youth joined an Ohio delegation this past summer for three days on Capitol Hill. The group visited the United States House of Representatives requesting that HUD create a demonstration project that addresses the high rate of homelessness of former foster youth by adopting the Foster Alumni Supporting Housing program (FASH). The HUD-FASH program would serve these youth through a case management approach providing both housing assistance and clinical services. The primary goal of the program would be to prevent homelessness for this vulnerable population, and to lay the foundation for future housing stability and success in life. Eligible foster alumni would be those who are seeking higher education, job training or vocational education.

More than 1,000 young people emancipate from the Ohio foster care system annually and many are transitioning into young adulthood without resources and relationships with adult mentors to provide guidance and support. FCCS Executive Director Chip Spinning says this is a critical time for youth and FCCS recognizes that. “We offer post-emancipation services and mentors to our youth. We also work collaboratively with many community agencies to serve this vulnerable youth population,” he said. Spinning supports the HUD-FASH program and feels it is needed to fill a critical gap in services in Ohio.

Wright State sophomore and former FCCS youth Joshua Hatch has seen the struggles of former foster youth. “I know



While lobbying for HUD-FASH, former foster youth and members of the Ohio Youth Advisory Board got United States Representative (D-OH 3rd District) Joyce Beatty to take part in an impromptu O-H-I-O. Pictured left to right are Shy'la Smith (recently emancipated FCCS youth), Beatty, Thomas Johnson (Montgomery County), and Joshua Hatch (emancipated FCCS youth).

some kids who had no support after they turned 18 and they ended up couch surfing, which is basically being homeless,” said Hatch. “I’m lucky that I have a good support system, including some family members and my FCCS caseworkers and mentor. I can always call any of them.”

Older Youth at FCCS: Easing Into Independence

By Julia Foster and Pam Prosser

Transitioning into adulthood can be especially difficult for teens involved with the child welfare system. To ease this often challenging transition, Franklin County Children Services provides services to help these older youth obtain the life skills and resources needed to succeed as stable, self-sufficient adults.

FCCS emancipation department’s eight caseworkers help teens who have turned 18 while under the agency’s care and are in the process of aging out of the child welfare system. Ready to assist with any possible need, these workers help older youth with such challenges as finding employment, learning needed life skills, setting up Medicaid or other health care coverage, furthering their education, and locating safe, affordable housing. Since none of this is easy, especially for former foster youth who have experienced significant trauma and adversity, the caseworkers are always prepared to provide wisdom, emotional support and friendly encouragement.

“We assist them with just about any challenge they would have,” said Edward Mills, FCCS’s director of emancipation. Individuals can receive these services until their 21st birthday as part of the agency’s post-emancipated youth services program.

FCCS holds regular life skills classes for youth in the emancipation program and hosts the annual Independent Living and Life Skills Development Conference—a three-day event held at Deer Creek State Park Lodge. At this year’s conference, 40 youth participated in workshops that engaged them in role-playing exercises for critical decision-making, problem-solving and team work. The highlight was a panel of young adults who had emancipated from FCCS care: Dominique Chapman, Princess Kuumba, Renee Morrison and Joshua Hatch. All four graduated from college or are currently enrolled.

Enhancing the lives of older youth goes beyond the emancipation department at FCCS. For teens wanting to pursue higher education, the volunteer department offers a college-bound mentoring program, linking youth to committed mentors who offer assistance with the college application process as well as ongoing support once college has begun.

To learn more about how FCCS helps older youth prepare for adulthood, visit childrenservices.franklincountyohio.gov. Information about the FCCS College-Bound Mentoring Program can also be found on the website or by calling (614) 275-2690.



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Anchor Furniture and TVs for Child Safety

Televisions and furniture can pose great dangers to children in their own homes, due to their potential for being tipped over. Toddlers are particularly at risk of tipping over items such as dressers, book shelves, flat screen and tube televisions. These objects can fall with the force of thousands of pounds. According to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), every 24 minutes in the U.S. a child goes to the emergency room because of a tip-over incident involving furniture or a TV. On average, one child dies every two weeks, as the result of one of these incidents and 81% of tip-over fatalities occur in the home.

Parents and caregivers can avoid potential tragedies by making sure that TVs and furniture are secure. Furniture should be secured with anti-tip devices which may be sold with new furniture or purchased at a home improvement or hardware store. Anti-tip devices should be installed according to the manufacturer's instructions.

Heavy items should be stored in bottom drawers or shelves to make furniture less likely to tip over. Stops can also be installed in drawers to prevent them from being pulled out completely. Objects such as toys, candy and remote controls should be removed from the tops of furniture and TVs so that children won't be tempted to climb up and get them.

According to Columbus Public Health, flat screen TVs should be



secured to the wall with a mount that has a safety certification by an independent laboratory (such as UL, CSA, ETL.) Televisions that are not wall mounted should be placed on furniture that is designed to hold them and anchored to the wall. Parents and caregivers can call (614) 645-7748 to order discounted TV tip-over straps from Columbus Public Health.

To learn about additional safety tips and download FCCS parenting tip flyers visit childrenservices.franklincountyohio.gov.