

ACCENT_{on}KIDS

A Publication of Franklin County Children Services

Spring 2015



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Protecting Children by Strengthening Families

ACCENT on KIDS

A Publication of Franklin County Children Services

Spring 2015

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Franklin County Children Services

- Community Outreach
- 855 W. Mound St.
- Columbus, OH 43223
- Phone: 614-275-2523

This publication is available online at
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FCCS Calendar of Events

April

Child Abuse Prevention Month

FCCS works to raise awareness about child abuse and educate the public about how to prevent and report it.

Pinwheels for Prevention

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

Wear Blue Day

April 8
Wear Blue to support the prevention of child abuse. Take a group photo on April 8 and email it to FCCSoutreach@fccs.us and you may see your photo on the FCCS Facebook page.

Child Abuse Prevention Breakfast

April 15
7:15-8 a.m. Silent Auction of Youth Art
8-9:30 a.m. Breakfast and Program
Aladdin Shrine Center
(3850 Stelzer Road, Columbus, OH)

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

Kinship Family Support Group

April 18
The quarterly support groups focus on different topics relevant to FCCS kinship caregivers. These meetings may include topics such as budgeting and concerns about parenting children in kinship care.

Volunteer Reception

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

The FCCS volunteer department will honor volunteers and mentors for all that they do for FCCS children.



May

National Foster Care Month

Nationwide, there are more than 400,000 youth currently in foster care. They will eventually be reunited with their families, placed in kinship or adoptive homes, or age out of care.

FCCS Graduation Celebration

May 13
FCCS is holding a graduation party for agency youth who are graduating from high school.

Simba & Malaika Mentor Mixer

May 29 - 6-8 p.m.
(855 W. Mound St. Columbus, OH)
Learn more about FCCS's Simba and Malaika mentoring programs at this fun event and talk to current mentors. Call (614) 275-2690.

June - August

Sunny 95 Neighborhood Block Parties

June-August
FCCS will share parenting tips and more at the Sunny 95 Block Parties throughout the summer.

FCCS's FamJam @ Mayor Coleman's Neighborhood Pride Block Party

August 29, 10 a.m. - 2 p.m.
Columbus Commons
FCCS and the city of Columbus invite you to a free, family enrichment festival.

To keep up-to-date on FCCS events and activities, like us on Facebook or visit
www.franklincountyohio.gov/children_services.

April is Child Abuse Prevention Month

Pinwheels for **PREVENTION**[®]



April is **Child Abuse Prevention Month** and a time when FCCS educates the community about child abuse by hosting a community breakfast and planting blue Pinwheels for Prevention as an awareness campaign. The agency's **Child Abuse Prevention Breakfast** will be held on Wednesday, April 15 at the Aladdin Shrine. This event, hosted by Children Services and its Citizens Advisory Committee, honors those who have promoted child abuse prevention and those who have overcome its effects. College scholarships will be awarded to youth; an outstanding child protection caseworker will be honored; and youth and families will be honored for making positive life changes.

By Pam Prosser

Bethany Workman is now a caseworker at Franklin County Children Services. But 10 years ago she was a teen under the agency's care and living in a foster home. "Thanks to the support of my caseworker and foster family, I was able to see the many opportunities available to me," she said.

In 2005, Bethany received a special FCCS recognition for her accomplishments and was awarded the Rising Up and Moving On award at the agency's annual Child Abuse Prevention Breakfast. She went on to college, got her degree and now gives back by helping families and children under agency care. "I have a unique perspective in understanding what the families I work with are going through." This is one example of how one individual helps prevent child abuse, but there are many ways that caring community citizens can help protect abused and neglected children. FCCS receives thousands of reports of child abuse each year and served more than 31,000 children and their families last year.

Once again, FCCS is partnering with the Ohio Children's Trust Fund to promote the **Pinwheels for Prevention** campaign. This effort will enhance awareness about child abuse by displaying blue pinwheels throughout the community. These spinning childhood toys draw attention to both the harsh realities of child abuse and the hope of changing the lives of children for the better. The color blue has become an iconic symbol of child abuse prevention. FCCS also encourages all Ohioans to join the state child welfare agencies that will **Wear Blue on April 8** as a show of support for the cause.

Children Services will stress to the central Ohio community that prevention depends on finding solutions to the problems that cause child abuse. With the help of local and statewide organizations, FCCS prevents child abuse through education, information, help for parents under stress, and successful intervention programs.

For more information on the prevalence of child abuse in Franklin County go to www.franklincountyohio.gov/children_services. **Call the FCCS 24-hour Child Abuse Hotline at (614) 229-7000 to report child abuse.**

FCCS Expands Community Partnerships

By Deborrha Armstrong

Safety, permanency and well-being are the core elements of Franklin County Children Services' mission to protect children and strengthen families. In 2015, the agency plans to expand upon the work being done in these areas to benefit children throughout their journey in the child welfare system and when they leave. This will involve partnering with the community to develop innovative ways to serve the agency's growing population of adolescent youth and children and families impacted by violence and trauma.

"With a major focus on wellness or well-being, we hope to improve outcomes for our adolescent youth by linking them to appropriate services to meet their needs and connect them to bridges of support to help them successfully return to the community," said FCCS Executive Director Chip Spinning. "This may require looking at our youth through a different lens, helping them realize their purpose and value, listening to them, and developing coaches to provide needed guidance. I believe there are many opportunities and partnerships we can explore."

Spinning said another area of focus this year will be strengthening the agency's kinship program which is valuable to the well-being of children and families. Results show that

it's better for children and lessens their trauma when they are placed with someone they know rather than with strangers. It is significant that in cases with kinship care, children are more likely to be reunited with their families compared to those in other types of care. Kinship is another way to build and maintain permanent connections for children.

The agency will also continue its cutting edge examination of how trauma or adversity impacts the well-being of children. Through the Gateway CALL federal grant, FCCS is working with partners to improve screening procedures at Intake and provide for comprehensive trauma assessment services for children. These assessments will help improve access to services for behavioral and mental health conditions.

To successfully move forward with efforts to ensure safety, permanency and well-being of Franklin County's children, the agency relies upon community partners, caring individuals and its professional staff. "The work of child protection is very challenging, especially for our staff on the front line," said Spinning. "Therefore, staff retention will remain one of our continuing areas of focus for 2015 and beyond."

Social Workers Pave the Way for Change

By Julia Foster

Social Work Paves the Way for Change is the theme of 2015's National Social Work Month, which is celebrated in March. Franklin County Children Services takes this opportunity to recognize its staff of child welfare professionals. The staff at FCCS is made up of 366 caseworkers and 416 support staff members. Of these 782 staff members, 202 are licensed social workers.

Caseworkers are at the forefront of child welfare, advocating for the safety, permanency and well-being of children throughout Franklin County. The caseworkers at FCCS truly do pave the way for change by going above and beyond their call of duty. For example, when Brooks Jaccoud, an FCCS caseworker, had a teen on her caseload with no primary support system and ready to graduate, she was determined to give him the meaningful graduation he deserved. Not only did she attend his graduation ceremony, she also purchased a cake and planned

“I felt like I was his primary support system. I got through to him when no one else could.”

a celebration. “I felt like I was his primary support system. I got through to him when no one else could,” Jaccoud explained. “He was an exceptional kid, not that I wouldn't have done it for any other child, we just had a connection.”

Support staff at FCCS, in departments ranging from kinship to legal, work with children and families in many different ways. The staff at FCCS offer parents support and guidance as they navigate through the process of their individual cases, work to place children with relatives or family friends when they are unable to safely remain in their homes, and offer mentors to children involved with the agency, as well as many other services. No matter what area FCCS staff members work in, they all play a crucial role in protecting children and strengthening families. “What I like about my job is that there is always an opportunity to help someone,” said Charlita Diggs-Randle, client rights officer.

FCCS Caseworker Advocates for Teens

By Marion Thompson

Throughout his career as a child welfare professional, FCCS caseworker Craig Patrosky has worked with teenagers and he revels in being their advocate.

“It's my passion,” he says. Having worked in the field for 19 years (more than 15 with FCCS), Patrosky has developed great skills in navigating through systems, relating to teens and finding the best ways to get them the services that they need. He spends long hours most days making visits to homes and facilities both in and out of state. Patrosky finds the hard work fulfilling, adding “I wouldn't want to do anything else.”

Being a child advocate is second nature to Patrosky who grew up in a household with social workers. His father was the

director of a social work agency in Pennsylvania and also spent time as a caseworker with FCCS. “I remember going on outings to roller skating rinks and other places with the kids my dad worked with and coming with him to the office when I was a kid,” he said. “That made me want to help people, so being in social work is like being in the family business.”

What Patrosky enjoys most about his job is building

relationships with young people and helping them overcome difficult and tragic circumstances to realize their potential.

“Kids who are troubled often carry baggage from experiencing traumatic situations that are beyond their own control,” he said. “They need to have help in coping with these issues before they can succeed.”

Using patience and persistence has enabled Patrosky to see positive changes in young lives. “Seeing a young person move to the next stage in life with the skills that they need to succeed is what really makes it all feel worthwhile for me,” he says. “That can mean going to college or a trade school, getting a job and living independently, reconnecting with family members or just resolving whatever conflicts are keeping them from living happily.”



FCCS Caseworker Craig Patrosky

“Kids who are troubled often carry baggage from experiencing traumatic situations that are beyond their own control. They need to have help in coping with these issues before they can succeed.”

COVA Helps Young Adults Succeed in Life

By Cynthia Greenleaf

Imagine being an overwhelmed 18-year-old about to age out of foster care. You have no idea how to land a job, find an apartment, or even do your own laundry. If you're this scared teenager on the brink of adulthood, working with COVA could very well be the best thing that's ever happened to you.

Columbus-based Center of Vocational Alternatives, known as COVA, specializes in helping people of all ages overcome mental, emotional and other challenges in order to lead a productive life. One of many services it offers, COVA's aftercare program for emancipated youth helps those ages 18 to 21 learn how to live as successful adults with a focus on education, employment and life-skill development.

Established in 1994, this program has helped hundreds of young adults gain independence and self-sufficiency, including many who have aged out of Franklin County Children Services' care. COVA has been instrumental in providing services for scores of FCCS youth in need, according to Edward Mills, director of the agency's emancipation program. "COVA has really been a godsend for a lot of our youth," Mills says, noting that one of COVA's greatest strengths is providing emergency support, such as when a young mother gets evicted and is suddenly homeless. In 2014, COVA assisted 84 individuals after they left Franklin County Children Services' emancipation program.

Gaining true independence is especially challenging for former foster youth who have experienced tremendous adversity. COVA's team of aftercare experts understand this and are always ready to offer encouragement.

COVA's aftercare program carefully tailors its services and resources to suit the individual needs of each young adult. The goal is always to meet youth on their terms, according to Jill Jones, the program's founder and director. "They can come in and out of services as often as needed," Jones says. "They come and go as it works for them."

When teaching life skills, COVA covers every topic imaginable: from cooking, cleaning and grocery shopping to opening a bank account, budgeting and being a savvy consumer. Much of what COVA imparts is common sense, those practical things a young adult without an engaged parent or positive role model might have neglected to learn. Setting smart financial priorities is one thing Transition Youth Specialist Don Clark frequently works on with his young adults, who often care more about texting their friends than securing food or shelter. "I tell them 'take care of the roof over your head first,'" he says. "Pay your electric bill before you pay your phone bill."

Finding stable, affordable housing is another challenge COVA addresses. One of the most significant issues impacting his youth



COVA youth transition specialists (left to right) Denise Williams, Laura Elliott, Kristin Camac, Jill Jones (director) and Don Clark

is finding appropriate housing. He noted that his team has relationships with property managers all over Columbus to help facilitate this process. Once housing is secured, COVA ensures that young adults know their rights as a tenant and are familiar with common courtesies, such as paying rent on time and listening to music at a reasonable volume, Clark says.

Compassionate and patient, COVA's aftercare counselors are attuned to the complex issues specific to youth emerging from the child welfare system. These young adults have often experienced significant trauma, complicated family dynamics, multiple foster care placements, and a host of other challenges and frustrations. With friends and family not always a positive influence, these youth tend to have a lack of "natural healthy supports" Jones says, which can be a huge barrier.

Boosting the self-esteem of former foster youth is an overarching theme in their daily work, Jones notes, adding that many of these kids lack confidence and simply expect to fail at whatever they do. "We work on building them up," she says.

While youth technically "graduate" from COVA once they turn 21, their aftercare counselors are always available for support and guidance. "If they have some issue, they know they can call," Clark says. He especially appreciates when they get in touch to say "Hey, I'm OK."

The transformation into a successful, self-sufficient adult can be an involved process, requiring much patience and perseverance. Gaining true independence is especially challenging for former foster youth who have experienced tremendous adversity. COVA's team of aftercare experts understand this and are always ready to offer encouragement. "When my youth get frustrated, I tell them 'don't feel bad,'" Transition Youth Specialist Denise Williams says. "It takes time to grow up."

For more on how COVA helps adults of all ages achieve their personal and professional goals, visit www.cova.org.

Cousins Make a Kinship Family of Ten

By Bruce Cadwallader

It wasn't easy at first, but Wendy Darst knew she couldn't let nine cousins, all siblings, stay in foster care. She took two girls and another cousin took in seven boys removed from a home with substance abuse issues and instability.

"I wanted them to personally know this is a forever house; this isn't temporary," said Darst. "We've had plenty of meltdowns, especially with the older one. I just kept telling her I'm not going anywhere and there's no window in this house where we send children back."

Arianna, 8, and Kaley, now 18, have come to know Darst as their "Aunt Wendy." Darst's fiancé, Greg, did not see it as a problem when she presented the idea a year ago. After all, each had three children from previous marriages. She was retired and he drove a truck on a local route so both had time to devote to the children's care.

"We are the prime example of a blended family," said Darst. The couple intends to adopt the children.

At first, it was a culture shock. The children did not know about rules, school and chores. It took counseling, strong willpower and a caring attitude to acclimate the children into their home. At bedtime, Darst said she had to ease into kissing the girls good night, which is her custom with all her children.

"I would just kiss my hand or fingers and place it gently on their cheek and say, 'We're glad you're here.' A month or two into it, Arianna just reached up and hugged me and kissed me back," Darst said.

Franklin County Children Services relies on kinship families – aunts, uncles, grandparents, cousins or even close family friends – to build a framework of support around children who, for one reason or another, cannot live with their parents. Sometimes, it's a temporary placement. Sometimes, it's a forever home.

"As a kinship worker I found that my job was made easy by the Darst kinship home. They ensured that the girls' needs were met and most of all that the girls grew to know the Darsts as a stable



The Darst kinship family

loving family," said FCCS Kinship Coordinator Patti Marcum. "Ms. Darst openly communicated with the kinship department, which allowed us to work closely with the family."

Darst took custody of Arianna and Kaley a year ago. "The kinship program did help me balance it all out and helped us budget our money," said Darst. They are now making plans to build an extension on the house and give the oldest girl a private apartment where she can learn independence while studying for college. Their other children range in age from 8 to 20, including one 16-year-old in a wheelchair with cerebral palsy.

To others considering a kinship arrangement, she offered that it may not be easy, but caregivers have to realize what these children have been through. "These kids have been through the kinds of times that some of us can't even imagine," Darst said. "You have to keep an open heart."

Kinship Care Expanded at FCCS

What started as a pilot program with one kinship worker in 2009 has now grown into a 29-member unit and an agency mission of compassion for children in need of a close and loving family.

In January 2015, the ProtectOHIO Kinship Strategy was rolled out to the final region at the East office, now resulting in all open, ongoing cases receiving consistent kinship supportive services agency-wide. FCCS Executive Director Chip Spinning wants the kinship program to continue its steady growth, ensuring that when children must be removed from their homes that the first consideration workers make is to have children live with kin when safely possible.

The reason for this is clear: Children are less traumatized when they are placed with relatives or other people they know. Also in kinship care, children are reunited with their families 92 percent of the time, compared with 74 percent for those in other types of placement. "The outcomes for children placed with kin are much stronger, whether it's educational, social or behavioral," said Spinning.

Although Kinship care is not new – the agency has relied on kin for years – the program is now expanding. Staff members complete home studies, but also work to ensure that kinship caregivers are aware of available resources, such as Ohio Works First, Child Only Benefits and Ohio's Kinship Permanency Incentive (KPI) Program.

For more information about kinship, call (614) 341-6161 or email kinship@fccs.us.

Reflections from My Place Youth

By Elizabeth Crabtree

“I want to be balanced,” is a phrase that many older adults may use. However, on this particular day it came from a young adult named Briana who is just out of her teenage years. “I wish I hadn’t wasted my childhood, because I did. My grandmother would tell me not to take my childhood for granted, it will be gone in the blink of an eye. And you know what? It was.” Her friend on the couch next to her nodded in agreement and seemed to lament this truth.

It was a cold winter morning, the snow had turned to ice outside, but the apartment was warm and this young woman had been in the middle of packing up her belongings to move out. She sat with her friend, Dominay, on the couch and occasionally they would burst into laughter with Dominay burying her face in the couch. They both responded that they were dog people, though Dominay said she liked cats as well. “I love dogs, I love everything about dogs,” Briana said as Dominay nodded, but then said she hated it when they lick your face. This resulted in another burst of laughter.

Dominay, who dreams of being an actuary because she loves math and the concepts behind it, said she wanted to be set. “I always want to have somewhere I belong. I want a place of my own and a way to get there.” Currently, both of them have a place of their own. They live at My Place, a transitional housing facility for teens who are aging out of the child welfare system. The room was cluttered with boxes as Briana was packing up her belongings and looking forward to some time off this weekend to finish up. She is excited about moving to her new apartment. She works third shift at a warehouse and has sole responsibility for managing



“I always want to have somewhere I belong, a place of my own and a way to get there.”

her finances, as does Dominay who works in a daycare facility. Both referenced their family when asked who the most influential people were in their lives. For Briana, it was her grandmother, who she referred to as being a wealth of good advice. Dominay said her adoptive parents were always trying to teach her a better way to live. “They never gave up on me,” she said with a smile.

Upstairs in another apartment, a similar sentiment was aired but this time about a caseworker. “During a down point in my life, my FCCS caseworker made sure I knew that there were people who cared about me. When others gave up on me, she didn’t,” recalled Kyra. When asked about a favorite memory, she recalled the day she met her adoptive parents. They went to Savannah, Georgia and then to Washington, D.C. It was an amazing experience for her. A bubbly young lady with a passion for kids, she dreams of having her own daycare and being a foster parent. She even took on the nickname Kyi because it was easier for kids to pronounce.

Though housed in the same building, these three young women each sat with a unique smile that lit up the room in their own special way. All three have great hopes for their futures coupled with uncertainty. Their messages to other youth is to follow your heart and your mind; work hard at doing what you do best; keep your head up; life is hard, but if you find the one thing that makes you happy, do it; and don’t let others put you down.

To volunteer, mentor or donate to support Franklin County Children Services youth like the three featured in this article, call (614) 275-2690 or email fccsvolunteers@fccs.us.

My Place

My Place is a program created to help teenagers ages 17 to 21, who are not yet ready to live on their own, but are in the process of transitioning to adulthood. They provide transitional housing while educating teens on skill sets that they will need to be successful on their own, such as budgeting and cooking. My Place has staff present at the apartment complex 24 hours a day and provides supportive case management for these teens. One of the most important services that they provide, according to FCCS Emancipation Supervisor Sarah Levels, is helping transitioning young adults identify who the supportive people are in their lives. “These relationships are critical to the success of our teenagers,” she said. “They need to know who in the community will be there for them when they need it.”



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Preparing Teenagers for Life as Adults

By Marion Thompson

The idea of going out into the real world and living independently can be both exciting and intimidating for teenagers who are about to leave home. Parents and caregivers can ease the transition by ensuring that their children are prepared to take on adult responsibilities and have some direction about pursuing future goals. Follow these tips to ensure your child is ready to leave the nest:

Household Management

Military OneSource stresses the importance of teaching teens about household upkeep. Make your teenagers responsible for maintaining household areas outside of their own bedroom. Have your teen join you as you pay monthly bills and manage your bank account. These experiences as well as shopping for groceries, doing laundry, cooking and making minor household repairs will help your teen feel confident and prepared when they are out on their own. "My children have always had chores," said FCCS Kinship Supervisor Arlene Stasheen. "When they complain about doing them, I tell them that I am teaching them life skills."

Driving and Car Maintenance

Teens should understand the responsibilities associated with owning and driving a car. Moneying.com suggests stressing the importance of having insurance and paying it on time. Teens



should understand the consequences of traffic and parking violations and be familiar with routine car maintenance.

Employment

Employers value experience. According to *Psychology Today*, young people who hold part-time jobs, volunteer or use their free time to increase their skills and develop talents have an advantage when they enter the workplace. Employers recognize that these youth know how to handle responsibility and interact with people on a professional level. Encourage your teen to take advantage of opportunities to explore the work world.

Education

Talk to your teen about their likes and interests and help them develop career goals. FCCS Adoption Caseworker Deric Cobb has taken this approach with his teenage son. "I've introduced my son to people who work in areas in which he's shown interest, so he can talk to them about what it takes to make it in their chosen field," Cobb said.

Stress the importance of maintaining a good grade point average, while pursuing enriching extracurricular activities. Help your teen as they determine what they would like to study, search for colleges and submit applications.