

ACCENT_{on}KIDS

A Publication of Franklin County Children Services

Summer 2015



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Protecting Children by Strengthening Families

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This publication is available online at franklincountyohio.gov/children_services

FamJam Promises Family Fun

By Bruce Cadwallader

You are invited to FCCCS's FamJam @ Mayor Coleman's Neighborhood Block Party on Aug. 29.

Franklin County Children Services and Mayor Michael B. Coleman's Neighborhood Pride program have once again partnered to present the 7th annual FamJam - A Family Enrichment Festival, on Saturday, August 29, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., at Columbus Commons (160 S. High St).

This joint collaboration between city and county offices, and donations from individuals and corporations, allow this event to be free and open to the public. Parking is available for a nominal fee at area garages and meters, or ride a bicycle, take the COTA bus or carpool to the event.

The Commons is a green space in downtown Columbus that features a large covered stage and plenty of grass. You can bring a chair or a blanket to enjoy the day on the lawn with us.

Families and children throughout Franklin County and their guests are welcome to attend. The day will be filled with entertainment featuring youth performances on stage, along with 75 community resource booths, free giveaways, bounce houses, face painting, free food while supplies last, and many more games and activities throughout the park. Children Services staff will have parenting tips, as well as information about adoption and volunteer/mentoring opportunities. An array of community organizations and exhibitors will be present to share valuable family information and prizes.



In keeping with Franklin County Children Services' mission to protect children by strengthening families, FamJam will allow participants to engage in educational and interactive activities as well as have tons of fun. Neighborhood Pride community partners will bring even more resources and a climbing wall from Columbus Recreation and Parks. Local police, sheriff and fire units will be on hand to meet the public and display some of their special vehicles. There will also be free carousel rides, a chance to walk through a COTA bus, a library bus and free health screenings. Whit's Frozen Custard will be giving out treats, while supplies last.

The Columbus Division of Fire will also provide children a chance to learn about fire prevention in their mobile safe house.

"This is a great family event in one large park that annually draws nearly 7,000 people. We want to thank local businesses, the Franklin County Commissioners and Mayor Coleman and his staff for one more year together," said Chip Spinning, executive director of Franklin County Children Services.

FamJam will occur rain or shine. For more information, call (614) 341-6085 or visit: franklincountyohio.gov/children_services or columbus.gov/pride. Check out our Facebook page for regular updates.



Scholarship Recipients Focus on Goals Despite Past Challenges Three FCCS Youth Strive for Success

By Pam Prosser

Three Franklin County Children Services youth, who have overcome difficult circumstances recently received college scholarships from the FCCS Children's Fund. The scholarships were awarded by FCCS and its Citizens Advisory Committee at the Child Abuse Prevention Breakfast in April. The 2015 college scholarship recipients are Shy'la Smith (4-year FCCS Jack Donahue College Scholarship); Ashley Hendricks (2-year FCCS Jack Donahue College Scholarship); and Yarenci Cisneros (FCCS Alvin Hadley/UNCF College Scholarship).

Shy'la Smith

Shy'la Smith has experienced some difficult circumstances during her life. "I didn't always have food in the refrigerator or nice clothes. But I was always told that you cannot succeed in life without your education," said Shy'la.

Despite her family's struggles and years spent in foster care, Shy'la remained goal-oriented and determined to use her past to encourage her to be successful. She is focused on getting a college education so that she can ultimately help those in need.

FCCS caseworker Rhonda Burnett has been impressed with Shy'la since the day she met her. "Shy'la has a realistic view on life, is motivated to excel academically, and is determined to help others," says Burnett. "Despite her traumas, she is always positive and confident about her future."

Shy'la has been accepted at Wright State University and plans to major in pre-med and minor in business. Her goal is to become a doctor and open a family practice, where she can help people in need and welcome foster youth to intern or work in her office.

Ashley Hendricks

Ashley Hendricks plans to attend Wright State University, where she will study primary education.

As a student at South High School, she served as senior class president and National Honor Society president.

Ashley's accomplishments have come despite spending much of her childhood as the primary caretaker of her four younger siblings, before entering foster care two years ago. Ashley wants to succeed so that she can adopt her siblings after finishing school and securing a job.

Village Network caseworker Mandy Boetz says it has been a pleasure to work with Ashley and see her grow. "She is highly motivated by her past struggles and uses that to drive her forward," says Boetz. "Ashley is such a caring and empathetic young woman. She does anything in her ability to make others feel welcomed and is always willing to provide a helping hand to those in need."

Ashley reflects on the challenges she's faced with optimism and



FCCS scholarship recipients from left to right are Ashley Hendricks, Shy'la Smith and Yarenci Cisneros.

hope for the future. She says, "I'm happy that I've gone through difficult situations, because now I'm strong and openminded about what obstacles I might face in the future."

Yarenci Cisneros

Yarenci Cisneros' story is one of bravery and resilience. At a young age, Yarenci and her brother were abandoned in Mexico. When she eventually came to the United States, Yarenci's promising new life was instead filled with trauma and adversity. "I went through a horrible nightmare. I was abused and after years of pain, I finally spoke up," Yarenci remembers.

Despite having been through so much, Yarenci is not about to let her past dictate her future. As her FCCS emancipation caseworker Emily Wynn put it, "Yarenci has overcome more obstacles in her 18 years than many people will in their lifetime. But despite Yarenci's hardships, she has a very positive outlook on life."

Filled with ambitious plans for the future, Yarenci's life today is full of hope and promise. Yarenci will go to Columbus State in the fall and later plans to transfer to Ohio State. She plans to major in human resources and eventually wants to earn a master's degree in business administration. "I have worked hard. I have not let anyone or anything destroy my dreams. I will be a successful student who can look back and say 'I did it,'" says Yarenci.

To donate to the Jack Donahue Scholarship fund visit franklincountyohio.gov/children_services.

"I have worked hard. I have not let anyone or anything destroy my dreams. I will be a successful student who can look back and say 'I did it.'"

FCCS Caseworker Spotlight: Erin Chaffin

By Cynthia Greenleaf

While her job title is technically “caseworker,” Erin Chaffin sees herself as an advocate for children. This veteran Franklin County Children Services caseworker, who has worked at the agency’s intake and investigations office for 14 years, entered the social work field so she could better children’s lives. It’s this mission that motivates her on a daily basis, she says. “I feel like kids need a voice.”



FCCS Caseworker Erin Chaffin

Chaffin thrives in intake’s fast-paced environment. “I have a short attention span so I like that there’s always something different,” she says. “You never know what you’re going to get.” A typical day for Chaffin involves receiving a new case while making progress on cases already assigned to her. Working at Children Services’ intake office is a lot like juggling, she says. “You have to be able to keep your eye on the new thing as well as all the things you already have up in the air.” Chaffin says that the issues she sees families dealing with most frequently include heroin abuse and the challenge of finding affordable, appropriate housing.

Ensuring the safety and well-being of babies and toddlers is Chaffin’s area of expertise: for half a decade she has worked in an intake unit that focuses on helping Children Services’ youngest, most vulnerable population. When she gets a new case involving a young child, Chaffin is always up for the challenge. “I like the detective part of it,” she says. “Everything is a mystery. You have to

put all the pieces together to figure out what’s really going on.”

An additional difficulty is being unable to directly interview the children she’s trying to help. “[Babies and toddlers] can’t talk, so you have to depend on the people around them,” Chaffin says, noting that there is often conflicting information to sort through, to eventually get at the truth. “If you ask four people who watched the same thing happen, you’ll get four different stories,” she says. As a seasoned caseworker who has worked with hundreds of families, Chaffin largely relies on her instincts when she’s investigating possible child abuse or neglect. “I like to think that I can read people pretty well,” she says. “I go with my gut.”

When she meets with parents of newborns, Chaffin is a staunch safe sleep advocate, educating parents that babies are always safest sleeping alone in their cribs on their backs. “We talk to everybody about it,” she says. “There are always new moms who need to know.” In her time at Children Services, Chaffin has frequently seen parents co-sleep with their babies on a couch or in a bed, a dangerous practice that can end in tragedy if an infant gets accidentally rolled over on or suffocated in blankets or pillows.

Many of the parents Chaffin works with are young and have an “it won’t happen to me mentality,” she notes, on how the safe sleep message isn’t always taken seriously. Chaffin has also noticed that co-sleeping can be a multi-generational family tradition. “We have a lot of people where culturally, it’s the norm,” she says. “If they have six kids, they don’t have six beds.” Chaffin also has had young mothers tell her, “Well, my mama slept with me, her mama slept with her, and nothing’s ever happened to us.”

While it’s not always easy convincing parents to follow safe sleep practices, Chaffin is committed to getting the message out. “It’s the easiest thing to do,” she says. “Why wouldn’t you?”

For infant safe sleep info and other parenting tips, go to franklincountyohio.gov/children_services.

FCCS Graduates Honored with Grand Celebration

Graduating from high school or receiving a GED is a wonderful accomplishment for a young person. It is even more significant for youth served by Franklin County Children Services, many of whom have overcome tremendous obstacles during their young lives in order to stay in school and do well. Each year, the agency takes the opportunity to give them the celebration that they deserve for their achievements. On May 13, a graduation party was held in honor of the more than 50 FCCS youth who graduated this year.

Family, friends, mentors and agency staff gathered with the youth for the party. The festive gathering featured food, dancing, photo opportunities and door prizes for each youth. This annual event is a priority for FCCS staff. “For some of our youth, this may be their last interaction with our agency and we want it to be a wonderful experience for them,” says Elizabeth Crabtree, FCCS director of volunteer services. “It’s their send-off into what we hope will be a bright future.”



Honoree Julia Ezirim (right) poses with her mother Karen during the graduation party.

Mom Kicks Addiction and Reunites with Kids

By Pam Prosser

In 2011, Misty Ward's drug addiction had taken over her life. Her two children, Kiera and Kadyn were removed from her care and placed in foster care. By late 2012, Ward had not made any progress in kicking her addiction and Franklin County Children Services was seeking permanent custody of her children.

Then she had a revelation. "It all began with a decision. I decided that I didn't want to live that way anymore," said Ward. In December 2012, she entered Amethyst Inc.'s inpatient substance abuse treatment program.

While in Amethyst, Ward got clean and sober and now serves as an advocate for others facing addiction. Ward speaks publicly



Misty Ward (second from right) with her children Kadyn and Kiera and FCCS caseworker Jessica Henry.

about her experiences and hopes that her message of recovery helps others dealing with addictions.

After graduating from Amethyst, she got a job, went to spa school, and got her own home. In June of 2014, Kiera and Kadyn returned home to live with their mother.

"I regained custody of my kids, even after it looked like there was no hope of getting them back," said Ward. "I now know how to use my community resources and how to deal with my problems."

Ward recently had a longtime dream come true. She received her esthetics license and is working at a salon as a skin care specialist.

For her accomplishments, Misty Ward was awarded the 2015 Family Achievement Award at the FCCS Child Abuse Prevention Breakfast in April.

FCCS Welcomes New Board Members

By Deborrha Armstrong

Franklin County Children Services is governed by a volunteer board. Appointed by the Franklin County Commissioners, they provide leadership, experience, commitment and expertise to ensure that the agency is financially responsible and maintains effective programs. The 2015 board officers are Chair Necol Russell-Washington, Vice-Chair Mark Bobo and Secretary Maggie Lewis. The agency is also pleased to welcome two new members: Jessica Goldman and Timothy Ryan.

Jessica Goldman is an attorney and serves as a community advocate and volunteer. She previously served as a litigation attorney for Vorys, Sater, Seymour and Pease LLP and Squire, Patton and Boggs LLP. Goldman earned her bachelor's degree in history from Kenyon College and her juris doctorate from Vanderbilt Law School. Goldman serves on the board for the Columbus Association for the Performing Arts (CAPA) and is a current member of the United Way of Central Ohio's resource development committee. Her past recognition includes being honored by *Columbus CEO* as Top Lawyer in 2014 and a Forty Under 40 Award by *Columbus Business First* in 2013. She is also a past recipient of the United Way Robert S. Crane Young Philanthropist Award.



Jessica Goldman

Volunteerism is very important to Goldman. She states, "I am incredibly grateful to our commissioners for my appointment to the FCCS Board. Our community's children need our support and our commitment to helping them grow to become the adults and leaders they are

destined to be. I look forward to serving our children and our community." On a personal note, Goldman is also the proud owner of two rescue dogs.

Timothy Ryan is a partner in the law firm of Gallagher, Gams, Pryor, Tallan & Littrell, LLP. Ryan received his undergraduate degree in accounting from Miami University and his juris doctorate degree from The Ohio State University. Prior to attending law school, Ryan was a certified public accountant working for the accounting firm of Price Waterhouse. After law school, he served as an assistant Franklin County prosecutor and was the director of the office's economic crimes unit when he left the position to join his current firm.



Timothy Ryan

Ryan serves as a friendship volunteer for Franklin County Children Services and has also volunteered as a basketball coach through Columbus Recreation and Parks and Immaculate Conception School.

"I am honored to be appointed to the FCCS Board and look forward to helping our community's children in this unique capacity," said Ryan.

Ryan has lived in Columbus for more than 26 years along with his family, including his spouse, Jean and his daughters Nora, Kieran and Kate.

For more information on the FCCS Board go to franklincountyohio.gov/children_services.

Action for Children Links Parents to Resources

By Marion Thompson

When parents and caregivers need help and guidance in order to build a better connection with their children, Action for Children (AFC) is there for them. Franklin County Children Services often refers parents and kinship caregivers to AFC for parenting classes and other resources. AFC also offers classes through FCCS's Family-to-Family program. Through The Art of Positive Parenting (TAPP) program, participants can learn to resolve issues, practice positive communication skills, effectively co-parent, and successfully meet the needs of their children. AFC also sponsors the annual Empowerment Day Resource and Job Fair, during which attendees can connect with county agencies (including FCCS) and explore educational and employment opportunities.

TAPP features several courses including The Father Factor, Mothers Matter and Parents who Parent Separately, which are led by highly trained facilitators, most of whom have experienced circumstances that are similar to those of their participants. These programs not only introduce parents to new skills, they also make them aware of their rights and responsibilities and introduce them to an array of resources in the community. "We advocate for them and coach them through issues like dealing with child support, getting a driver's license, finding employment and making connections with their children and family members," said Glen Harris who leads the Father Factor initiative.

While some choose to attend TAPP courses because they want to overcome obstacles and better their parenting skills, others are required by courts. Often they are frustrated by circumstances, anxious and apprehensive about participating in class. AFC strives to overcome these barriers by meeting people where they are, without judgments.

"We assume that each participant wants to be a good parent and that they're doing the best that they can," said Judy Williams who leads Mothers Matter. "If we can get a parent to attend one class, the chances of their returning are very good." AFC feels understanding is key to making a positive impact on the families with whom they work. "Most clients have so many other issues that can keep them from being successful parents. That's why we



Glen Harris and Judy Williams from Action for Children.

offer an array of opportunities for them to get help. We try to be as accommodating as possible," says Williams.

Facilitators work hard to build relationships with their clients and ensure they have what they need to be successful. "We have very honest conversations," said Harris. "As a father, I've been through a lot of what the dads in the program are going through and I let them know what they need to do to win."

AFC has made a difference for the families with whom they work. Facilitators have received a great deal of positive feedback from settlement houses, as well as participants. After one class, a mother wrote, "The things I learned in this class have made me a better woman/mother and helped me better understand issues in my relationships." Participants sometimes return for additional classes and stay connected with their instructors. A few alumnae have gone on to facilitate courses.

To learn more about Action for Children and The Art of Positive Parenting program, visit positiveparents.com or connect with them on Facebook or Twitter. For information on Empowerment Day 2015 which will take place on July 15, visit support.franklincountyohio.gov.

Children Services' Message in Your Community

Franklin County Children Services has a message to share about preventing child abuse, while we work to protect children at risk by strengthening families. The agency's goal is to educate the public about important issues facing families, reporting suspected child abuse, the need for volunteers and mentors, and the need for kinship, adoptive and foster families.

FCCS's Speaker's Bureau participates in nearly 150 presentations and public displays each year for local groups, businesses, schools, daycare centers, Head Start programs, homeless shelters and college social work classes. Look for FCCS at a variety of upcoming community events, including the Sunny 95 Block Parties, Mayor Coleman's Neighborhood Pride events, the Franklin County Fair, Festival Latino, African American Wellness Walk and more. Requests for speakers, presentations, booth displays and literature can be emailed to FCCSSpeakersBureau@fccs.us.

FCCS works in other ways to inform the community, including a quarterly newsletter, a monthly e-newsletter, and regular updates on our website, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. In addition, FCCS has monthly segments on NBC4's Daytime Columbus, during which the agency shares messages about child abuse prevention, domestic violence, choosing the right partner, and safe sleep practices for babies.

You can connect with FCCS by visiting our website at franklincountyohio.gov/children_services, following us on Facebook and Twitter, and signing up to receive our publications (sign up on our website).

Volunteers Plant Seeds of Kindness

By Elizabeth Crabtree

“Service is the rent we pay for being. It is the very purpose of life, and not something you do in your spare time” is a quote by Marian Wright Edelman. The stories shared at the annual Franklin County Children Services’ volunteer reception demonstrated this quote in action. Held at The Ohio State University’s Ohio Union and supported by the FCCS Volunteer Services Advisory Committee, it was a night to celebrate the many ways volunteers and mentors work to serve the youth receiving services from the agency. The theme was *Volunteers, Planting Seeds of Kindness* and that theme played out through the evening as the evidence of lives changed was seen in each award and speech given.

The first award of the evening was given to **Dr. Philip Corn**, who began the Terry Glass Volunteer of the Year Award 30 years ago and has financially supported it since that time. This has allowed the agency to honor more than 60 volunteers and mentors since its inception.

Fran Frazier was presented the inaugural Sharon Burks SOAR award. SOAR stands for Spirited advocate for African-American girls, Outstanding commitment to community building, Authentic character and Resounding passion.

Friendship volunteers **Lee Gruver, Chris Alexis** and **Sarah Wright** were recognized for their amazing commitment to the youth they are matched with in one-on-one relationships. Gruver became a volunteer in 2011 and was matched with a 9-year-old who needed the time and attention that a one-on-one relationship could provide. Gruver also embraced the entire family.

Alexis became a volunteer in 2012 and was matched with a 12-year-old boy with whom he has built a strong relationship over the last three years. He has provided this young man with time, trust and mutual respect. Alexis and Gruver both stated that the benefits they received from their mentoring relationships were beyond what they had expected.

Wright’s relationship with her youth also began three years ago and has been a constant and positive force in her matched youth’s life. Her acts of service even inspired the youth she is working with to donate her hair to Locks of Love. Wright was described by the youth she mentors as “the best friend you could ever ask for.”

College-Bound mentoring also provides youth with a one-on-one relationship with some goal setting to help agency youth transition into post-secondary education. **Donna Albanese** was recognized for the time and support she has provided her mentee since 2013. She has been more than a mentor to this young woman; she has become part of her family.

LaShaya Wallace, the Malaika mentor of the year, gave a riveting speech about the needs of little girls, and how she has answered the call to give back because at one time she was a little girl in need and her mother was there for her. Matched with her mentee six years ago, Wallace has been a sounding board and a cheerleader for this young lady since that time.

The Simba mentor of the year **Andrew Gordon** has been a mentor for nearly 15 years and has been matched with his current mentee for seven years. Under his influence, this young man reported that he has stretched as a person, will be attending



Top photo: Dr. Philip Corn (center) was congratulated by FCCS Executive Director Chip Spinning and Board Chair Shadya Yazback for receiving the Executive Director’s Award.



Middle photo: Fran Frazier (left) received the SOAR Award from FCCS Malaika Director Monique McCrystal.



Bottom photo: Lee Gruver (left) received a Friendship Volunteer Award from FCCS Volunteer Coordinator Leesa Evans.

college in the fall, and is rebuilding his relationship with his father.

Crisis volunteers support the agency in a different capacity, assisting intake staff by caring for children who have just come into the custody of the agency, stocking shelves or disinfecting toys. **Lynda Otte** was recognized for being a consistent and dependable volunteer at intake since 2013. She has been a constant at volunteer department events, always helping out so that the needs of children are met.

Volunteers, mentors, board and Citizen Advisory Committee members were recognized for years of service, including three volunteers for 25 years of service. They are **Franklyn Duffy**, a Simba mentor and former Simba Advisory Committee member; **Elizabeth Escue**, a former college-bound mentor, crisis volunteer and Volunteer Services Advisory Committee member; and **Cheryl Harger**, a current friendship volunteer and the chair of the Volunteer Services Advisory Committee.



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Never Leave a Child Alone In a Car

By Julia Foster

A car can be a dangerous place for a child who has been left unattended, even for a few minutes. According to FCCS Caseworker Rebecca VanOverloop, “Adults need to make good decisions for children who cannot protect themselves.” Parents and caregivers must take special care that a child isn’t accidentally forgotten in a car or gets into a car without their knowledge. While there may be times when it would be more convenient for a child to remain in a car alone, it is never a good idea as they face danger from several sources.

According to safetykids.org, heat stroke is the leading cause of non-crash, vehicle related deaths of children. Young children are particularly susceptible to heat stroke, because their bodies heat up three to five times faster than an adult’s. Unattended children may also be injured by setting a car in motion, falls, seat belt strangulation, being trapped in a trunk, kidnapping during car theft, and carbon monoxide poisoning.



Kidsandcars.org offers these safety tips to ensure children stay safe:

- Look before you lock! Get in the habit of always checking the back seat or opening the back door before you leave your vehicle.
- Put something you will need when you leave your vehicle, such as a cell phone, brief case, purse, etc., on the floor of the back seat.
- Keep a large stuffed animal in your child’s car seat. When the child is in the car seat, put the stuffed animal in the front seat as a visual reminder.
- Keep vehicles locked and the keys out of reach of children at all times.
- When a child is missing, check vehicles and car trunks immediately.