

FCCS Group Home Report

February 2014



Protecting Children by Strengthening Families

Table of Contents	Page
I. Introduction	3
II. Agency overview	4
III. Annual Report Statistics for Children Served in 2013	5
IV. Other Reviews Completed by Children Services	6
Random Site Observation of In-county Group Home Staff	
Agency feedback on Providers	
V. Community Outreach	11
Youth Summit	
VI. Consultation	12
Proposed Legislative Changes	
Research	
Next Steps	
VII. Conclusion.....	16

Group Home Report February 2014

I. Introduction

Franklin County Children Services (FCCS) and the community experienced a terrible tragedy in October 2013, involving the murder of Jane Juergens allegedly by a young man in the custody of Children Services. Jordan Stewart was 16 years old and residing in a local group home. Since this youth was in FCCS care, the agency was also very disheartened by this event and began a process to evaluate how this agency and community responds to the needs of adolescent children who demonstrate elevated risks due to their behavioral and emotional needs. This process has involved reviewing actual cases, researching best practices on how this population is served across the state and nation and the initiation of conversations across our community to try to address this concern from a systemic level.

Regarding the specific case involved with this tragedy, agency administrators completed a structured review with the Child Protection Oversight & Evaluation (CPOE) Stage 9 tool, which is utilized by the Ohio Department of Jobs and Family Services (ODJFS) to review standards defined in the larger child welfare system. This tool reviews standards of safety, permanency and well-being for families involved with the child welfare system. The case was reviewed from the time of current case opening in 2011 to the date of the alleged incident for which the child was arrested. In addition, the full case record was also reviewed from the point the child's family first had contact with Children Services to develop overall impressions and recommendations.

The specific case review yielded insights and opportunities for practice change in several areas. Most notably, when children enter the care of Children Services as an unruly or delinquent youth, there is not always as thorough of an assessment of the family system and early life experiences of these youth. The benefit of a more thorough assessment of these early family experiences, which may include neglect, abuse and/or trauma, is that a more holistic view of the family and their needs starts to emerge. Research, and subsequently practice, is still relatively new to the professional field in understanding the impact of trauma on the brain development. Children Services, as well as the Central Ohio community, have started to address this issue through implementation of the work by Dr. Bruce Perry. Consistent and loving relationships from day one are imperative to helping children develop healthy relationships and coping skills as adults. By thoroughly understanding the life experiences of a family, more accurate strategies to engage and help a family heal can be identified.

II. Agency overview

Franklin County Children Services is a public agency mandated to provide protective services to the children of Franklin County. FCCS is governed by a board of trustees appointed by the Franklin County Commissioners. Ohio has a state monitored, county administered child welfare system. The agency is mandated to evaluate all referrals of abuse and neglect and determine whether the allegations meet the state guidelines for investigation. Dependent on the results of those investigations, Children Services may further work with families on a voluntary basis or at times under court order to ensure the safety and protection of children. FCCS may receive court orders to provide services requiring a family to cooperate with a case plan to address the underlying concerns while the child remains in the community with their own family. The agency may also receive court orders giving Children Services custody of a child. This requires the agency to temporarily place the children into the least restrictive, yet appropriate placement ranging from a relative, kinship care, foster home, group home up to a residential facility. The agency's goal is to help families stay together when possible while building their natural supports and providing treatment interventions to minimize safety concerns within the family. When children cannot be safely maintained in their own homes, Children Services seeks other long term permanency options which could include guardianship or adoption.

III. Annual Report Statistics for Children Served in 2013

The following table provides an overview of children and families the agency served in 2013 annual statistics:

General	
Total children served (any type of case):	30,264
Safety	
Intake referrals received:	31,798
Family investigations completed:	12,381
Ongoing services for families ("cases")	4,865
Protective services for individual family members:	13,622
Family services to children through managed care partnerships:	2,851
Children served on the active ongoing caseload:	10,805
Placement (children served at any time during year)	
Children in agency custody:	4,146
Children in contract provided care:	3,106
Children served in foster care homes:	2,379
Children served in group or institutional care:	1,199
Children served in Group Home setting (subset of row above)	355
Children placed with relatives/kinship:	1,450

The following table outlines the number of children served in a group home setting at any time over the course of the listed year:

Year	# Youth
2013	366
2012	355
2011	414
2010	367

When looking at data from October 2013, only 2% of the children served by Children Services on ongoing caseloads resided in a Group Home facility.

IV. Other Reviews Completed by Children Services

In addition to the single case review, Children Services also completed numerous additional reviews of both child cases as well as Group Home Provider reviews. Reviews have been completed on approximately 125 children placed in group homes on 10/25/13. The purpose was to obtain a snapshot of the characteristics and service needs for children placed in these facilities. In addition, a review of the facilities and staff was completed.

The review consisted of:

- A. Child Plans and Progress:** A review of the child's plan and situation including the child's current adjustment in placement, the child's plan/goals, progress and next steps. Permanency Roundtables ¹(PRTs) were recommended for some children.
- B. Provider Reviews:**
 - 1. Group Home Provider Facilities:** A review of each site including on-site review of the building, staffing ratios, staff training, and condition of sites.²
 - 2. Provider Staff:** Unannounced site observation related to staff/children interactions of in-county group home staff during both evening and weekend hours.
 - 3. Children Services Staff Feedback:** Caseworkers provided feedback about their perception of the appropriateness and effectiveness of placement.

¹Permanency Round Tables (PRT) is a strategy developed by Casey Family Programs. PRTs are structured professional case consultations designed to expedite permanency for children in care through innovative thinking, and the application of best practices. The major purpose of PRTs is expediting permanency, increasing staff competencies, assessing/meeting training needs related to permanency, and addressing systemic and cross-systems barriers to permanency.

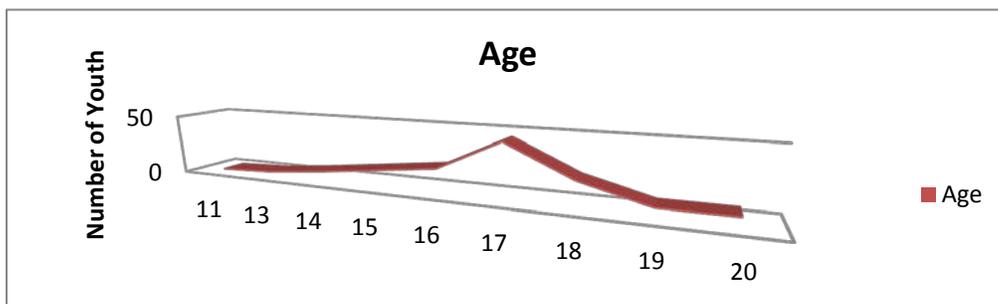
²Staff ratios and training requirements are defined via OAC 5101:2-9-02 and 03 and are mandated by ODJFS.

4. Children Feedback: Caseworkers talked with available children to obtain the child’s opinion about the placement.

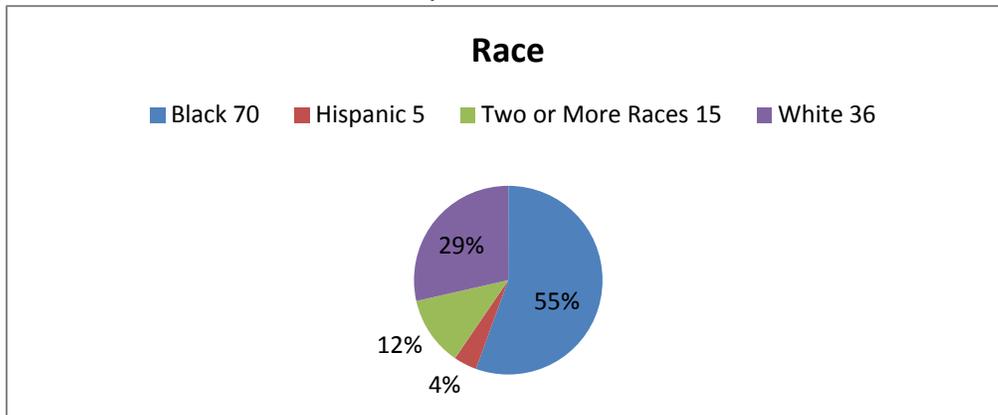
C. Children Review Results

Regarding the point in time review of children the following demographic observations were noted:

- 60% were male
- 52% of the children were between the ages of 16 and 17 and 28% were 18 or older.



- By ethnicity, approximately 55% were African American, 29% Caucasian, 12% two or more races and 4% Hispanic



- 43% were in a long term legal status of PCC³ or PPLA⁴

³ PCC—“permanent custody” means a legal status that vests in a public children services agency or a private child placing agency, all parental rights, duties, and obligations, including the right to consent to adoption, and divests the natural parents or adoptive parents of all parental rights, privileges, and obligations, including all residual rights and obligations.

⁴ “Planned permanent living arrangement,” pursuant to Chapter 2151. of the Revised Code, means an order of a juvenile court to which the following apply:(a) The child, because of physical, mental, or psychological problems or

- These children have averaged 2.2 removals from parental/guardian custody. Thirty-eight percent were removed three or more times during their life.

This child review served to quickly highlight for administrators which children could benefit from a more thorough assessment of their living arrangements and services. In addition, it provided an opportunity for further dialogue with the service team.

- 14% were on Probation with Franklin County Juvenile Court.
- 17% had frequent/lengthy AWOL history while in care.
- 15% had a current significant safety concern toward themselves or others (defined as violent or aggressive behavior or self-harming behavior).
- 10% of the children (12 youth) were recommended for further assessment to determine whether a higher level of care would be appropriate. Note, three additional flagged children had already been moved at the time of their review.
 - Of these 12 remaining youth, two were currently in an emergency shelter care setting already looking for an alternative placement.
 - As of mid December 2013, five of the 12 children were no longer in the group home facility.
 - As of mid February 2014, eight of the 12 children were no longer in the group home facility.

In reviewing the children placed in group homes, it was found that some children would have benefitted from an alternative placement setting such as a family foster home that could provide intensive supports or a placement option that could provide additional supports for children stepping down from residential care. However, availability of this array of services to Children Services at this time is limited or unavailable. There is a need for a broader array of more comprehensive, culturally appropriate, community

needs, is unable to function in a family-like setting and must remain in residential or institutional care; or (b) The parents of the child have significant physical, mental, or psychological problems and are unable to care for the child because of those problems, adoption is not in the best interest of the child, as determined in accordance with division (D) of section 2151.414 of the Revised Code, and the child retains a significant and positive relationship with a parent or relative; or (c) The child is sixteen years of age or older, has been counseled on the permanent placement options available to the child, is unwilling to accept or unable to adapt to a permanent placement, and is in an agency program preparing the child for independent living.

based and/or placement based services to meet the needs of this population. Later in this report research areas on this topic are discussed.

As a result of this review, Children Services has also decided to include in their required quarterly case reviews specific questions regarding each child's fixation with violence or weapons.

Children going AWOL is another topic that Children Services will continue to assess. Providers are required by OAC 5101:2-9-23 to report when a child in their care goes AWOL within 24 hours. Providers often report a youth AWOL to Children Services and the police authorities as soon as the AWOL occurs. Sometimes an AWOL is reported in a very brief time period (i.e. 15 minutes) if a child has not earned "alone time" and/or if the child has limitations in their functioning. There are times when a provider knows where a youth is actually going but they are not approved to leave for various reasons. It should be noted that what might be considered typical teen behavior in the general population, such as not meeting curfew or coming in late from a friend's house or getting off work late, are circumstances that require Providers to report an AWOL situation in child welfare. Children who are in Children Services custody unfortunately must endure many more restrictions than the typical child due to requirements for fingerprint results and background checks on the adults deemed approved to supervise them.

Existing reporting mechanisms collect aggregate data (i.e. frequency and length of AWOLs). Future reporting will capture trends and patterns that can be used to help direct policy decision making.

D. Provider Review Results

Regarding the Provider reviews, there were no significant findings or concerns identified to reflect that any of the Providers were performing outside of their licensing requirements.

Training & Staffing Ratios

The following data reports the staffing ratios and the training requirements for each provider. It also includes state minimum requirements according to OAC 5101:2-9-02 and 5101:2-9-03.

Provider	New Story	NYAP	JPFC	Adriel	LHS	New Life	CSS	DOY	State / OAC
Initial Staff Training & Yr 1 Training	80 HRS (1st mo)	20 HRS (1st mo) 32 HRS (1st Yr)	20 HRS (1st mo) 32 HRS (1st Yr)	40 HRS (1st mo) 12 1 st yr	24-30 Hrs (1 st mo) 22-26 1 st yr	33 HRS (1st mo) 32 HRS (1st yr)	20 HRS (1st mo) 32 HRS (1st Yr)	20 HRS (1st mo) 34 HRS (1st Yr)	20 Hrs (1st mo) 32 hrs (1st yr) for a first year total of 52
Ongoing Staff Training	24 HRS Yrly	24 HRS Yrly	24 HRS Yrly	24 HRS Yrly	24 HRS Yrly	24 HRS Yrly	24 HRS Yrly	24 HRS Yrly	24 HRS Yrly
Staff Ratio									
Day	1:3	2:10	2:10	1:3	1:2	2:4	2:3	1:3	1:10
Evening	1:3	2:10	2:3	1:3	1:2	2:4	2:3	2:3	1:10
Overnight - Awake	1:4	2:10	1:10	1:3	1:3	1:4	1:3	1:3	1:10
On-call	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	
Outings	1:3	1:4	2:10	1:3	1:2	2:4	1:2	1:2	
Transport	1:3	1:4	1:3	1:3	1:2	2:4	1:2		

Random Site Observation of In-county Group Home Staff

There are 26 group home sites (including traditional group home, independent living and emergency shelter care) in Franklin County where children are residing. Children Services attempted to complete at least one weekend and one evening visit to each site. Providers were notified that random visits would be occurring over the next few months and nothing further. From late November through February 1, 2014, Children Services successfully completed (contact made) at least two visits to each of the locations with the exception of one. This remaining site was an independent living site where three unannounced attempts were made but the youth/staff were not present.

Agency feedback on Providers

Feedback gathered from front-line staff ranged from describing the group home providers as very helpful and supportive to their children to some concerns regarding professionalism (i.e. timely return of calls, staff interaction with children more peer like, attention to details) and staff turnover. Overall, approximately 9 percent of Children Services staff raised some form of concern regarding the providers' professionalism/customer service.

The agency is in the process of reorganizing its role with Providers. Children Services is refining the process for all concerns regarding placement providers to flow through Family Services Network Administration (FSNA) to provide higher level aggregate oversight of Provider concerns. Currently, not all concerns are consistently directed to the FSNA department. In addition, FSNA will be restructuring to provide more on-site monitoring of Providers to ensure the child's needs are being met. These on-site reviews/audits will provide additional oversight on a Provider's performance from an aggregate perspective.

V. Community Outreach

Youth Summit

In efforts to increase dialogue and collaboration among the various systems that serve this population of youth, Children Services co-sponsored a community summit with Casey Family Programs and the Public Children Services Agencies of Ohio (PCSAO⁵) on 12/19/13: *Community Response to At-Risk Youth*. More than 205 individuals representing various disciplines from across the community attended to begin dialogue on this topic. A wide-range of community partners were invited, including: courts, law enforcement, ODJFS, other governmental officials, faith-based leaders, providers, local school districts, neighborhood organizations, local settlement houses, Alcohol, Drug and Mental Health Board of Franklin County (ADAMH⁶) Alcohol, Drug and Mental,

⁵PCSAO is a membership driven association serving Ohio's 88 County Public Children Services Agencies through the support of program excellence and sound public policy for safe children, stable families and supportive communities.

⁶ ADAMH is the county agency charged with improving the well-being of our community by reducing the incidence of mental health problems and eliminating the abuse of alcohol and other drugs in Franklin County

Franklin County Board of Developmental Disabilities(FCBDD⁷) and Ohio Department of Youth Services (DYS⁸).

One of the issues raised at the summit was the need for systems to share information that could possibly lead to better assessments and treatment for at-risk youth. As a result, Children Services and Franklin County Juvenile Court are in the process of executing an agreement for data sharing that will help each entity better identify and serve the unruly/delinquent population going forward.

FCCS also plans to follow-up with youth dialogues. Leaders of the various organizations that were represented at the summit will be invited to attend a conversation with our community's youth. The goal is to have a dialogue with young people and hear from them firsthand about their issues and concerns.

Community

During meetings with community partners, a need was identified for the community to be able to report concerns about group homes, placement providers and issues that are not child abuse/neglect related. Children Services has developed a policy to clarify the role of the Agency's Client Right's Office (CRO) as the point of contact for the community. The community can now share non abuse/neglect concerns for Providers who contract with Children Services via an email address cro@fccs.co.franklin.us or by calling 614-275-2621. Information will be posted on the agency the agency's public website: www.franklincountyohio.gov/children_services (under About Us> Contact Us).

VI. Consultation

FCCS consulted and met with the Community Housing Network to discuss strategies for engagement of facilities with their community/neighbors.

Children Services also met with contracted Group Home Providers to discuss strategies for further engagement of providers and children with their community and identify

⁷ FCBDD Franklin County Board of Developmental Disabilities operates a county agency providing direct or contracted services on a daily basis. The Board provides educational, employment and support services to children and adults of all ages, who have developmental disabilities.

⁸The Ohio Department of Youth Services (DYS) is the juvenile corrections system for the state of Ohio. DHS is statutorily mandated to confine felony offenders, ages 10 to 21, who have been adjudicated and committed by one of Ohio's 88 county juvenile courts.

active ways for Providers to solicit neighbor/community feedback and problem solve collaboratively.

Children Services has reached out to other large PCSAs⁹(public children services agencies) in Ohio to ask how they respond to this population. In part, some of their circumstances are different as they have a Title IV-E court¹⁰ and do not receive emergency placements of these youth. For these PCSAs, emergency placements in group homes were generally disregarded in favor of short-term residential or treatment foster care where diagnostic assessments are conducted and recommendations for future treatment are made. Cuyahoga and Hamilton Counties report very infrequent use of group homes as emergency placements for adolescents. Lucas County is identified as having significantly reduced emergency placement of adolescents in group homes.

Proposed Legislative Changes

Representative Anne Gonzales of Westerville introduced legislation on February 18, 2014 related to group homes for children. This bill will require the operators of new and current group homes to provide first responders in their area a copy of their emergency and disaster plan, their emergency medical plan and the newly created community engagement plan. The plan outlines the points of contact for members of the community and how issues community members have may be resolved. Children Services was invited to participate in these discussions regarding the proposal and supports this legislation.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation: Technical Assistance

Children Services has also reached out to the Annie E. Casey Foundation (AECF) for technical assistance and support. The AECF is a private charitable organization, dedicated to helping build better futures for disadvantaged children in the United States. The primary mission of the foundation is to foster public policies, human-service reforms, and community supports that more effectively meet the needs of today's vulnerable children and families. AECF has agreed to assist Children Services in exploring and developing alternative strategies and collaborations to better meet the needs of children in Franklin County.

⁹ Public Children Services Agency means an entity specified in section 5153.02 of the Revised Code that has assumed the powers and duties of the children services function prescribed by Chapter 5153. of the Revised Code for a county.

¹⁰Title IV-E is a federal program that subsidizes the cost of care for eligible youth placed in foster care

Research

Children Services has been completing a review of literature, websites and speaking with other professionals across the state and country in order to further assess promising strategies to better serve this population of at risk children in our community.

Children Services has reviewed information from various professional organizations including but not limited to the following:

- *Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Association (SAMHSA) and SAMHSA's National Registry of Evidence Based Programs and Practices.* www.samhsa.gov
- *Anne E. Casey Foundation* www.aecf.org
- *Center for the Study of Social Policy* www.cssp.org
- *US Health and Human Services- Children's Bureau* www.acf.hhs.gov
 - *National Youth in Transition Database*
 - *Child Welfare Information Gateway*
- *National Institute of Health* www.nih.gov
- *California Evidenced Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare* www.cebc4cw.org
- *American Association of Children's Residential Centers* www.aacrc-dc.org
- *Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago – Policy Research on children, families and their communities* www.chapinhall.org
- *Child Welfare League of America* www.cwla.org

It is worth noting there is little empirical information specific to group homes in the current literature. However, the literature reviewed is unanimous in the position that all children, regardless of age, should live in “family or family like” settings that put emphasis on securing and maintaining meaningful, lifelong adult connections for the child. The work does not begin with the placement of the child in out-of-home care but rather at the point of family contact with a child welfare agency. The loop is circular; it starts with strong community partnerships such as the Family-to-Family model, competent child welfare professionals with a clear understanding of the agency mission and best outcomes for children, and providers that practice using evidence based/informed services aimed at meeting federal outcomes for children/families. Should a child need out-of-home care it should be for short term stabilization with focus on returning the child to his/her family or another permanent family setting. The literature recognizes that for a very small percentage of children, congregate care (i.e. a group home or a residential facility) is a necessary service on the continuum of care.

Children Services currently contracts with numerous providers for intensive evidence-based community treatment services for adolescents that help maintain children in their homes. The agency has also been researching additional evidence-based treatment models (out-of-home placement and community based) for adolescents with high end emotional/behavioral needs and transition aged children.

In addition to the identification of where children are placed once they enter custody, there are other broad issues related to effectively servicing children and families in crisis: placement prevention and reunification/permanency planning. Some of the other Ohio PCSA's utilize strategies similar to Children Services such as Team Decision Making (TDM) meetings, Permanency Roundtable (PRT) staffings or the Family-to-Family model. Franklin County Children Services will continue to explore how these opportunities can be expanded in order to increase permanency options and long-term connections for children.

Next Steps

Children Services plans to focus on the following areas for 2014:

1. The agency will complete a critical review of which researched services (community based and placement) it will want to further explore for contracts. Exploration and solicitation of new contracts is anticipated to occur from now into 2015 as needs are further defined. It will take time to work with providers to develop these services to complement our existing service array.
2. In pursuing additional services, there will be a continued focus on the expansion of the Neurosequential Model of Therapeutics by Dr. Bruce Perry to aid in addressing the underlying trauma and developmental needs of youth.
3. Children Services will be partnering with AECF to further assess our strategies, partnerships and policies in servicing this population. A strategy and actions steps will follow the assessment stage. Initial meetings are being planned for March/April 2014.
4. Children Services will continue to work on the community collaboration.
5. Children Services will explore alternative ways to gather AWOL information that help highlight trends and patterns that can be used in decision making.

6. Children Services is restructuring an internal department to provide more on-sight monitoring of Providers to ensure the child's needs are being met as well as formalizing communication paths for direct service staff feedback.
7. The agency will maintain a single point of contact for community concerns regarding contracted Providers to be addressed.

VII. Conclusion

In conclusion, this review has revealed the continued need to expand the array of services available to serve a wide range of children in Franklin County. In part, the federal grant Children Services received in 2012, (Gateway CALL) will assist in enhancing the service array available for children as well as providing early trauma screening for children to aid in the selection of optimal services to meet their needs. This review also highlighted the increased need to work with the community to develop solutions to better serve this population of youth. Collaborating with new partners and finding creative and effective solutions will hopefully provide support to the families of Franklin County in a new, more comprehensive manner. Children Services and other systems are usually involved in the lives of children for a short period of time therefore it is imperative that agencies work in collaboration with the community to help ensure better, long term outcomes for these youth. There are many layers to this complex issue such as family systems, provider systems, mental health, addiction, poverty, violence- just to name a few - that all impact the children we serve. Finding solutions will take time, collaboration and support from throughout the community.