



A Message from the Office of Families and Children, Deputy Director Jennifer Justice

Welcome to the first 2012 issue of *First Friday*, a monthly update on the improvement initiatives of OFC's three-year partnership with the federal Midwest Child Welfare Implementation Center. We named this project *Partners for Ohio's Families (PFOF)* to reflect our goals: To do a better job of working together, as partners, to achieve improved outcomes for Ohio's children and families.

We spent our first year gathering information. We did this by asking public and private agencies, families, youth and OFC staff what was working well and what could be improved. Responses from inside and outside OFC were remarkably consistent. Many people cited issues of communication: Lack of communication, poor communication, delayed communication, inaccurate communication. Stakeholders and staff also spoke of the positive experiences they had when communication was steady, timely and responsive.

Increasing and improving communication will be an ongoing priority. *First Friday* is just one example of the many ways we plan to address this issue. Since communication must be multidirectional to be successful, I hope that you, too, will give some thought to ways we can improve our communication. As the British composer John Powell said: "Communication works for those who work at it." We plan to work at it!

STEP Team Update: Pilot Teams

The STEP Team includes a cross-section of staff, representing all OFC bureaus and work levels. STEP Team members come together with a range of perspectives and opinions. The STEP Team has delved into OFC's organizational culture and climate and believes they can develop a new way of working with public and private child welfare agencies. They have been meeting monthly since August 2011 to develop a plan for strengthening OFC's partnership between staff and with public and private stakeholders. This group has adopted the name "STEP Team" which stands for **S**olutions **T**hrough **E**mpowerment and **P**artnership.

To respond to the data gathered during the past year, the STEP Team is focusing on five areas:

1. Building a Team Approach
2. Building Institutional Behavior
3. Establishing Structured Communication
4. Building a Knowledge Base
5. Supporting Agencies to Self-Assess

The "Building a Team Approach" is designed to break down silos, better disperse responsibilities and expertise, improve responsiveness, and develop new and better relationships among OFC staff and with stakeholders.

The STEP Team constructed a new team model aimed at the five areas of improvement. In order to test the model, three sites have kindly volunteered to host a pilot project: Allen, Licking and Ross/Vinton. As anyone who has ever developed a new program or policy knows, unexpected twists and turns are the rule, not the exception. Some

components will work well while others will not. Issues will be discovered that had never even been considered. Many thanks to Allen, Licking and Ross/Vinton for offering to work with the STEP team to find hidden gems and bugs in the new model.

Partners for Ohio's Families (PFOF) Rule Review Initiative Update

Don't forget to provide comments on the Ohio Administrative Code rules. The Adoption Assistance Rules (Chapter 49) are now on the Midwest Child Welfare Implementation Center website and are open for comments until March 5, 2012. Please take the opportunity to make suggestions on these rules as well as the other programmatic rules. The website is: www.mcwic.org/ohio

Where There's a Will, There's a Way

A small victory was scored for partnership recently when the OFC Title IV-E Unit stepped up to address a concern voiced by a number of juvenile courts. Because the courts do not have the authority to use the SACWIS system, they must rely on the county children services agencies to enter monthly caseworker visits into the system. The problem is that there sometimes is a backlog of visits waiting to be entered.

With the assistance of SACWIS team member Tim Doyle-Wenger, Charlotte Gerhardstein and Ricardo Murph developed a data input sheet for the courts to gather data to enter into SACWIS. OFC offered this service to all courts. Clermont County's Juvenile Court took them up on that offer. Valerie Stanley, Clermont County Juvenile Court and court personnel sent their records electronically for Jennifer Kobel and Robin Miller to enter into SACWIS. Within days, a year's worth of records was recorded in SACWIS for this court.

This success story was proof of one of our guiding principles: Partnerships and collaboration enhance the quality of outcomes.

Collaboration in Action: The Office of Families and Children



(Left to right) Charlotte Gerhardstein, Tim Doyle-Wenger, Robin Miller, Ricardo Murph and Jennifer Kobel entered a year's worth of records within days for the Clermont County Juvenile Court. Not Pictured: Valerie Stanley

Principle of the Month



Each OFC staff member has a responsibility and commitment to the agencies and individuals that OFC serves.

OFFICE OF FAMILIES & CHILDREN

The Very Best for 2012

One of the real joys of the holiday season is the opportunity to say thank you and wish you the very best for 2012

**Office of Families and Children
Columbus, Ohio**