



### **A Message from OFC Deputy Director Jennifer Justice - Friday, May 4, 2012**

Spring is a traditional metaphor for change, and change is definitely in the air for those of us who work together on behalf of Ohio's children and families. I was fortunate to attend the Public Children Services Association of Ohio's New Executives Orientation on April 25, where I got to meet 21 public children services agency (PCSA) directors and senior staff. More than 25 percent of Ohio's PCSAs have had some change in senior management over the last year, and several well-respected PCSA administrators have announced plans to change positions sometime during the next year. It will be exciting to see what direction these new leaders will take to their respective agencies.

New leadership also has come to the Ohio Association of Child Caring Agencies (OACCA) and the ODJFS Office of Families and Children (OFC). Mark Mecum is the new OACCA executive director, and Lisa Wiltshire is now Chief of OFC's Bureau of Child and Adult Protection. OFC is fortunate to have gained several additional excellent staff members to support the work of our public and private partners. (See "Meet Our New Staff Members," below.) We hope you'll get to know them soon.

In addition to leadership changes, many conversations about change also are occurring. At OACCA's Advocacy Conference, held May 1-2 in Columbus, panel members were asked to consider how private agencies should retool to better serve children involved with the child protection system. At the Ohio Family Care Association (OFCA), thought is being given to how resource families can better support child welfare agencies, biological parents and youth. These are exciting dialogues that call on all of us to ask how we can improve the way we do business to better serve Ohio's families and children.

If you read the "SACWIS Update" emails that I sent at the end of April, you know that PCSAs are gaining access to valuable data through the BIC and ROM systems. In addition, new tools and data continue to be made available to all stakeholders on the Ohio Summit on Children website, at <http://www.summitonchildren.ohio.gov/>. All of this information can greatly inform local improvement efforts. Be sure to check the Summit website often, as new resources are frequently posted. For example, have you seen the model motions for permanent custody and the accompanying resource guide, or the 21-year retrospective on children in foster care?

OFC continues to respond to the issues raised in the regional forums, surveys, and OFC assessment and focus groups. The Solutions Through Empowerment and Partnership (STEP) team's technical assistance plan focuses on change through five main goals: (1) Building a Team Approach, (2) Building Institutional Behavior, (3) Establishing Structured Communication, (4) Building a Knowledge Base, and (5) Supporting Agencies to Self-Assess. Team members meet monthly to review our progress in implementing recommendations in each area.

Like winter to spring, change does not occur overnight. It is an incremental process that occurs over time through small differences that easily can be overlooked but should not be undervalued. Each 'First Friday' highlights a few of those changes that, when taken in whole, lead to the transformation that we all seek. I hope you've noticed a few of the adjustments to "business as usual" that have occurred over the past six months. All of these changes were

suggested either by OFC stakeholders or staff members. They're proof that, by working together, we can all be a force for positive change.

### **Spotlight on OFC's Guiding Principles in Action: Alicia Allen**

The challenging development of Ohio's Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System "SACWIS" represents a long term commitment and strong partnership of private, public and state agencies. There is no better example of this month's principle, *It is OFC's responsibility to provide leadership and maintain organizational and professional competence*; each SACWIS end user is an important partner in the ongoing work to support local child welfare practice. Active county participation in SACWIS activities (development sessions, testing, training, problem solving, entering data, monitoring and assessing system performance) is critical to sustaining relationships and building a supportive partnership. While a great deal remains to be accomplished, we'd like to recognize all local stakeholders who exercise daily leadership and competence to improve Ohio's child welfare information and Ohio's SACWIS system. Since SACWIS serves about 5000 total users, it is impossible to recognize everyone adequately. OFC Business Analyst, Alicia Allen has been selected to represent the state-county SACWIS Team. Alicia is a member of a larger network of state and county staff who deeply value OFC's core mission; *'Through partnership with public and private agencies, we (OFC) support the delivery of services to improve outcomes that promote safety and well-being.'*

In her four years on the SACWIS Finance Team, Alicia has seen the financial module undergo an almost complete overhaul. The SACWIS financial components are essential to public and private agencies' day-to-day sustainability, which means change is always complex. It takes a special person to navigate the process, balance the interests of Ohio's diverse users, and meet the state's accountability and federal reporting needs. Alicia does all this while remaining positive, focused and, as described by Cathy Herston, Summit County PCSA SACWIS Director, "an AWESOME resource!"

Alicia achieves all this by assuming that everyone shares her high standards and work ethic and by her desire to produce the best product possible through collaboration. Reva Weekly at the Portage County PCSA appreciates Alicia's awareness that SACWIS' success is dependent upon users' success. "...(S)he is knowledgeable about her work." "She understands that counties and the state have the same goals in mind as it relates to the JFS 4280 and JFS 4281 financial reports."

The SACWIS financial rollout and ongoing enhancements have not always been easy, but Alicia has a combination of policy, technical and financial skills that have allowed her to help resolve long-standing problems in managing data, understanding federal financial reporting and reconciling reimbursement. The work has resulted in reduced manual workloads, increased accuracy and, in some cases, additional revenue.

Alicia agreed to answer some questions about her job and what the concepts of partnership and competence look like in the workplace.

#### **Q. You work on the Finance Team. What does that mean?**

**A.** My team oversees SACWIS functionality related to a number of children's services. Areas include determining eligibility for Adoption Assistance programs and title IV-E foster care maintenance funds; payment for county agencies, private agencies and adoptive parents; financial reporting; managing contracts; and generating Medicaid eligibility spans for children in care.

#### **Q. What do you do when the system doesn't cooperate, or when counties have concerns about possible changes?**

**A.** We begin by asking county, state and other stakeholders, "What do we need the system to do, and how can we do it within the confines of policy while accommodating all users?" Our job is to take the input from these groups and create business rules that outline changes that need to be made to the system. We then work internally with our development staff to make it happen.

We try to get a handle on what is needed from a policy perspective while keeping our user community in mind. The most challenging piece is balancing the wishes of 88 county agencies, since each has very real and individualized needs. We bring together county and state policy representatives through our JAD process and go through the requirements step by step. It is a long and detailed process, but it has become well-established. County and state representatives see the value of participation. The key is to make it worth the time invested.

**Q. What does JAD stand for?**

A. JAD stands for Joint Application Design. These are the meetings where we hash out all of the proposed requirement changes with representation from county, policy, SACWIS business analyst and state development staff.

**Q. It sounds as if SACWIS is always evolving. How do you determine enhancements?**

A. (Laughs) Users let us know when something needs work. We have done a really good job of soliciting and listening to user input, but there's always room for improvement. We also are constantly responding to changes in federal and state requirements.

**Q. On March 1, SACWIS financial functionality rolled out to private agencies. How did that go?**

A. Remarkably well. There were a few hiccups, but we were lucky to have lessons learned through rolling out the same foster parent training module to the public agencies in July 2011.

**Q. When things don't work, is there usually a common reason for error?**

A. We enter lots of data in SACWIS, and often it must be entered in a very specific, sequential order. If a step gets missed or information is entered in the incorrect sequence, the user may not receive the intended result. This is far and away the most common cause for user-system frustration.

**Q. Why do you think you've been successful in this job?**

A. I am fairly organized and tenacious. I love what I do and the relationships that are a part of the work.

**Q. If you had to create a SACWIS poster, what would the tagline be?**

A. "Keep the User in Mind."

## **Meet Our New Staff Members**

OFC is pleased to introduce four new staff members who bring a wide range of qualifications, experience, perspectives and personal interests to our team:

**Matt Slanoc** is responsible for individual and out-of-state central registry checks. He comes to OFC from the Ohio Adult Parole Authority, where he was employed as a parole officer for 12 years. He is a graduate of the Ohio State University and has a master's degree in public administration from Central Michigan University. An outdoor enthusiast, Matt enjoys traveling, golfing, biking and kayaking.

**Lisa Wiltshire** is chief of the Bureau of Child and Adult Protection. For the past six and a half years, she has been executive director of the Scioto County Children Services Board. She is a licensed independent social worker who brings diverse, front-line experience in child welfare, behavioral health and juvenile justice to her new position. Lisa's move from Scioto County allows her to join not only OFC, but also her two Columbus-area sons and their families.

**Rachel Rayburn** is an administrative professional for the Bureau of Child and Adult Technical Assistance. She has almost 12 years of state experience between the Department of Administrative Services and the Department of Rehabilitation and Correction, and has spent the past five years as the warden's executive secretary at the Franklin Medical Center. Married with three boys, Rachel is used to managing multiple activities and priorities and feels right at home in her new position.

**Monica Kress** (not pictured) is the foster care licensing supervisor overseeing the Canton and Cleveland districts. She has a master's degree in public administration and has spent most of her career working in child welfare, including child care licensing, at both the state and county level. She lives on a small farm with her three dogs and one skunk (who is currently residing in the barn).

## **A Look at Rule Review**

Our Partners for Ohio's Families initiative has two main components: one is improving the level of technical assistance we provide to counties. The other is undertaking a comprehensive rule review, to get rid of redundancies, inconsistencies and any potentially unnecessary rules, and to make all rules easier to understand.

The Ohio Administrative Code has approximately 273 rules that establish the operational parameters for Ohio's child and adult protective services programs. In order to examine all of them thoroughly, we established eight

review teams, each co-chaired by OFC staff and external stakeholder representatives. We also set up a rule review website <http://mcwic.org/ohio> – to make it easy for all stakeholders to weigh in during the process.

One team has finished its review, six continue to meet concurrently, and the eighth is scheduled to begin this month. Future editions of *First Friday* will highlight the conversations that are occurring within the teams, rule changes that have been adopted or rejected, and any other decisions that have been made. This month, David Thomas, our Partners for Ohio's Families rules coordinator, answered some questions about the overall process.

**Q. Which team has completed its rule review, and which is about to start?**

A. The Adult Protective Services/Title XX team has completed its rule review, and its revised rules as recommended are available on <http://mcwic.org/ohio>. The ICPC/ICAMA Rule Review Team convenes May 21, 2012.

**Q. Are the teams discovering any common issues that you didn't expect to see?**

A. Every team has engaged in some very interesting and thoughtful dialogue regarding clarity of expectation. Everyone wants to make the rules' expectations easier to understand and clearer to readers. However, since each team is comprised of diverse representation that brings a variety of perspectives to the conversation, members are divided regarding the most effective ways to achieve clarity. Some practitioners seek increased specificity in rules, and others recommend language that gives the widest discretion possible.

Members speak from personal experience, and differences in viewpoints most likely are related to differences in members' roles within their agency or community, an agency's approach to rules, and how latitude for professional judgment on an individual case basis is applied within a community. OFC staff members write rules from a statewide perspective, often intentionally being less specific in order to accommodate the wide range of county environments. So, by and large, OFC staff supports some ambiguity. The dialogue regarding specificity most likely will resolve itself differently in each circumstance, so stay tuned.

**Q. Can you provide an example of a substantive change made to a rule?**

A. The Protective Services Rule Review Team has recommended that the timeframe to conduct the assessment and investigation be extended from 30 to 45 days. (5101:2-36-03, "PCSA Requirements for Intra-Familial Child Abuse and/or Neglect Assessment/Investigations")

**Q. Many stakeholders cited difficulty in reading rules that reference other rules or that refer to statute. How will that be addressed?**

A. Rules will include active links within the body of the text, so that a user can click on a reference and be taken to the source. This same process is being considered for definitions, although teams are concerned that a rule could contain too many links, become distracting and defeat the purpose.

Many rules are still open for comment. Please visit [www.mcwic.org/ohio](http://www.mcwic.org/ohio) and let your experience speak!

## **May Is National Foster Care Month**

May is National Foster Care Month, and Governor Kasich has issued a resolution honoring the many individuals and organizations serving foster children, and the children themselves, by proclaiming May as Foster Care Month in Ohio. For more details, see the Governor's attached Foster Care Month Proclamation May 2012.

As everyone reading this '*First Friday*' communication knows, foster and kinship families play a vital role by providing safe temporary homes to our children, and they help children safely reunite with their birth families. Throughout the month of May, let's all show an extended appreciation to our foster and kinship families for their ongoing effort in supporting children.

To view one former foster child's testimonial to the power of foster parents, check out this moving article that appeared in the Cincinnati Enquirer:

<http://news.cincinnati.com/article/20120501/EDIT/305010116/Foster-mom-brought-order-expectations-hope>.

## **Coming to Your Desktop: OFC Event Calendar**

Our February 2012 '*First Friday*' communication announced the new OFC Event Calendar, which can be accessed

through the OFC home page at <http://www.odjfs.state.oh.us/ocfcalendar/>. The calendar lists events that pertain to OFC staff and county-based stakeholders. Be sure to check it before scheduling events, and also to see whether someone else has scheduled an event that might interest you.

If you have an event you would like to post, email Kristin Gilbert at [kristin.gilbert@jfs.ohio.gov](mailto:kristin.gilbert@jfs.ohio.gov) for additional information.

Soon, using the calendar will be even easier! On May 15, 2012, a shortcut to the calendar will appear on each OFC and PCSA staff member's desktop. Once issued, click on the Partners for Ohio's Families icon (shown below) to access it directly.



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### **April 2012 Global Emails**

The following emails were sent in April from Jennifer Justice to PCSA directors and/or private agency directors. They are organized below by mailing date and key word.

- 4/4/12 – Rule Update Jan-March 2012
- 4/5/12 – Transitioning Foster Youth Symposium
- 4/20/12 – SACWIS Update for Private Agencies
- 4/27/12 – SACWIS Update

### **OFC Numbers to Know**

In regional forums, surveys and focus groups, public and private agency representatives repeatedly asked for help in knowing where to direct questions within OFC. For most inquiries, technical assistance supervisors, licensing specialists and established Help Desks should remain the first and logical source to turn for help. But, for when OFC central office staff are what you need, this *'First Friday'* has an attachment listing often used telephone numbers.

### **Principle of the Month**

**It is OFC's responsibility to provide leadership and maintain organizational and professional competence.**

### **Contact Partners for Ohio's Families**

If you want to subscribe to *'First Friday'*, have comments or ideas about content, or would like to be removed from the mailing list, please contact us at the following.

**Partners for Ohio's Families E-mail address:**

[Partners\\_for\\_Ohios\\_Families@jfs.ohio.gov](mailto:Partners_for_Ohios_Families@jfs.ohio.gov)