



PARTNERS
FOR OHIO'S FAMILIES

OFC seeks and supports strategies to strengthen
the voices of youth and families for its work.

OFFICE OF FAMILIES & CHILDREN

A Message from OFC Deputy Director Jennifer Justice

The work plan for Partners for Ohio's Families was developed in response to regional forum and survey data gathered from public and private agencies and from the ODJFS Office of Families and Children (OFC). Again and again, we heard that more people wanted to be involved in the decision-making process. They wanted a chance to be heard, to have their contributions recognized and validated, and to better understand how decisions are made. As a result, we have been focusing on creating greater transparency around the development of policies and programming. I hope you are beginning to feel more like you are a part of the process. I always am open to suggestions for improvement.

As part of that, the eight Ohio Administrative Code rule review committees have been making an effort to document the rationale behind each rule. They have been documenting each rule's history and intent, which will help us apply the rules better. They also have been making an effort to resolve different points of view among state, public children services agency and private agency staff.

However, we continue to struggle to incorporate the views of youth and families, including resource families. It is hard work that requires us to work outside traditional schedules, present material in different formats and discard some long-standing assumptions. County-based agencies have a stronger history of including youth and families in decision-making, and we can learn from these partners.

Still, I am proud of our many exciting new initiatives to engage youth and resource families in policy development, staff training and advocacy. We are moving forward to formalize OFC's relationship with the Ohio Family Care Association, and I anticipate that this will strengthen and inform our work while guiding us in new directions. We're involved in a joint project with the Supreme Court of Ohio, American Bar Association and Casey Family Programs to encourage judges to allow young people to participate in their own court hearings. We're also giving more support to the Youth Advisory Board and are working hard on our "Connecting the Dots from Foster Care to Employment and Independent Living" initiative. You can read more about these last two initiatives in the articles below.

It has been more than a year since the initial regional forums and staff focus groups. During that time, significant changes have occurred in county leadership, and the landscape of our work continues to shift. We plan to connect with our partners frequently, to reassess our direction and the usefulness of our ideas and projects. Resources are scarce, and we need to focus on the activities that truly support our child welfare network. I will continue to reach out, but please feel free to share your thoughts with me, as well.

OHIO Youth Advocacy Board

The OHIO — Overcoming Hurdles In Ohio — Youth Advocacy Board (OYAB) is a statewide organization of youth ages 14 to 24 who have lived in a foster care setting. The organization has been operating since July 2006 with a mission to be the knowledgeable, statewide voice influencing policies that affect all youth who have experienced or will experience out-of-home care. Youth in foster care and their adult supporters are invited to

attend quarterly OYAB meetings, which take place concurrently with meetings of the Ohio Independent Living Association.

OYAB meetings continue to grow in numbers and enthusiasm as awareness of the positive benefits of county-based youth advisory boards spreads across Ohio. These boards give current and former foster youth an opportunity to develop supportive and meaningful peer relationships, to learn first-hand the value of giving back to their communities, and to develop as leaders and productive adults. Ohio now has 12 county youth advisory boards, in Allen, Athens, Cuyahoga, Fairfield, Franklin, Hamilton, Lorain, Lucas, Mahoning, Montgomery, Stark and Summit counties.

OYAB has focused on six areas of need: (1) Advocacy, (2) Court proceedings, (3) Education, (4) Finance, (5) Housing and (6) Workforce. At the January 2012 OYAB meeting, members brainstormed action steps in each of these areas. Attendees at the January OYAB Officers' Retreat transformed these action steps into a tactical plan of prioritized strategies. They presented their top priorities as a list of "Top Five Asks" of ODJFS Director Michael Colbert, who was able to agree to them. The result will be:

- A conference for youth in foster care,
- Two new regional aftercare coordinators, to promote and support independent living and transitional services for youth in their designated regions,
- A Transitional Youth Housing Task Force, to study the problem of housing for youth aging out of foster care,
- ODJFS support for an OYAB website, and
- Continuing the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Independent Living Allocation.

Look for these things to begin happening in the coming year. There is much to be learned from Ohio's current and former foster youth, and we should seek ways to include them in our work. They come prepared, researched and ready to realign your perspective, so be ready for a rewarding experience.

Considering a Youth Advisory Board?

Funding is available to support the cost of maintaining a county Youth Advisory Board (YAB). YABs support youth ages 14 to 24 who have lived in a foster care setting. They also educate federal, state and county leaders about the issues that are important to young people. Representatives from the Ohio YAB are available to answer questions about the challenges and rewards of having a county YAB. They can help PCSAs that are considering forming a local YAB.

To learn more about YAB funding, email Dan.Shook@ifs.ohio.gov. For more info about state and county YABs, visit <http://overcominghurdlesinohio.blogspot.com>.

Wear Purple to Work Day is Approaching!

Governor Kasich and ODJFS Director Michael Colbert have both proclaimed June 15 as "Elder Abuse Awareness Day." To mark this first-ever occasion, ODJFS is encouraging all its staff and all adult protective services professionals and advocates to wear purple to work on that day, to raise awareness, promote solidarity and take a stance against this significant public health concern.

Elder abuse is a growing problem in the United States. It also is largely preventable. Ohio received nearly 15,000 reports of elder abuse, neglect or exploitation in 2011 alone. Unfortunately, only about one in five incidents is believed to be reported. Please help ODJFS and other Ohio stakeholders by joining the fight against elder abuse.

Connecting the Dots from Foster Care to Employment and Independent Living

Each year in Ohio, 1,000 to 1,300 young people age out of the foster care system and enter legal adulthood. In order to better help them pursue careers and live successfully on their own, ODJFS has launched a new initiative called "Connecting the Dots from Foster Care to Employment and Independent Living."

Connecting the Dots is bringing together foster care independent living caseworkers with staff at Ohio's One-Stop Career Centers, to better coordinate the services offered to older foster youth. The initiative has three main components: cross-program training for staff; vocational services, including mentoring, tutoring and work experience; and better independent living support services. Five areas have been chosen to be part of a two-year pilot project: Hamilton County, Cuyahoga County, Lake County, Summit County, and a consortium of Montgomery, Preble, Greene and Clinton counties. The best practices learned in these pilot areas will be shared with counties throughout the state.

Partnership for Permanency

In order to prevent so many children from aging out of the foster system — and instead help them find permanent homes with adoptive families — ODJFS recently announced that it will be partnering with the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption. The agency will contract with the Dave Thomas Foundation to hire 35 specialized, child-focused recruiters whose sole mission will be to find adoptive families for older children in foster care.

The Dave Thomas Foundation will train and oversee the recruiters, who will follow the Wendy's Wonderful Kids program model. Research shows that children in this program are up to three times more likely to be adopted. Initially, the recruiters will work in selected Ohio counties where at least 20 children between the ages of 9 and 17 are available for adoption. More than 1,000 young Ohioans in that age group have been in foster care for more than two years.

Spotlight on OFC's Guiding Principles in Action: Amy Eaton

This month's principle, "OFC seeks and supports strategies to strengthen the voices of youth and families for its work," is not one that always comes naturally. In addition to stepping outside traditional methods of outreach, we must make an effort to present and capture information in a way that makes sense to those who don't readily understand the complexities of child welfare policy and programming. The OFC Placement Team (located in the Substitute Care/Permanency Section) is striving to incorporate this principle into its daily work.

This month, we're featuring Section Chief Amy Eaton, who has taken a leadership role in developing programming that promotes positive youth development. Amy supervises the human developer staff and is responsible for writing all policy that is relevant to children in foster care from birth to age 21.

"Amy's presentation during a statewide youth advisory board won the hearts of youth in the audience," said Lisa Dickson of Ohio's chapter of Foster Care of America. "She was brief and to the point as she expressed her dedication and commitment to listen to the voices of youth, and welcomed their firsthand insights regarding child welfare policies." We spoke with Amy to ask her about this experience.

Q. What is the picture for youth aging out of foster care?

A. Every year in Ohio, 1,000 to 1,300 youth age out of foster care. Nationwide, a third of youth who age out of foster care have dropped out of school, and a third are or have been incarcerated. Almost a quarter have experienced homelessness, and almost half of the girls have been pregnant. Half are unemployed or underemployed and living three times lower than the national poverty level. Over one-half report at least one mental health problem, and a third are in dire need of health care coverage. These youth are twice as likely to suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder as Iraq war veterans.

Q. What have you learned by attending OYAB meetings?

A. So many things. First, there is a stark distance between the youth I hear and the statistics I read. I am so impressed every single time by the maturity, thoughtfulness and sheer likability of the youth I meet through OYAB.

I also am struck by how much I assume I know, and how this often turns around when I listen to youth describe their successes and challenges. For example, the topic of drivers' licenses is a huge issue for youth. I think we often assume this is related to youths' universal desire to drive, but when I listen to these articulate young people reflect on the importance of a driver's license, I am reminded that — in addition to all the teenage motivations — they also are looking ahead to issues of housing, education, employment and maintaining a connection to familiar adults.

Q. Not everyone has the good fortune to attend OYAB. What would you suggest instead?

A. I would love to see every PCSA consider starting a local YAB. The benefit to the youth is so important. These boards create a sense of community and give youth-in-care an opportunity to engage with bright and successful young adults who have navigated the child welfare system and are living meaningful lives. I think these foster care alumni beget other success. They give courage.

Q. You sound like a YAB convert.

A. I am. And, from a selfish standpoint, I think that the YAB really benefits programming that I support. It is one more way to identify those youth who might especially benefit from the services we can provide to support educational and professional development.

I also want to encourage caseworkers and supervisors to take advantage of the new Ohio Child Welfare Training Program course that we have developed, called the Youth Development Curriculum. This includes representatives from OYAB to help teach others how to work with older youth. There is an exercise called “Mind Field” that I think is profound. It reminded me that it is not the loudest voice that gets heard; youth gravitate toward the quiet voice that nurtures. I think we tend to shout.

Q. What one thing do you think caseworkers can do to help youth transition to independence?

A. Start earlier. Our rules require that preparation for independent living begins at 16, but two years is a really short time to accomplish all that needs to occur. There is nothing that prohibits our work from beginning at 14, for example. These are skills that all young adults need, regardless of where they reside.

Q. Anything else?

A. I am very much involved in community service, especially a group called Jack and Jill. So much of what that group is founded on resonates in my job, but I try to incorporate the tenets they project: Respect, Listen, Stay Calm & Poised.

Q. You’ll be happy to know that Doris Edelman from Montgomery County Children Services Board says you have “intentional listening skills that allow youth to feel comfortable to speak honestly.”

A. That feels good. I hope people know that even though OFC staff don’t often have direct contact with youth and families, we care.

Rule Review Update

The Partners for Ohio’s Families Adult Protective Services Rule Review Team has completed its reviews, and the revised rules are moving through the formal clearance process.

The following rule review teams also are meeting, and have very aggressive schedules:

- Protective Services
- Case Planning and Review
- Substitute Care
- Resource Home Certification and Approval
- Program Eligibility and Review
- Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children/Interstate Compact on Adoption and Medical Assistance (ICPC/ICAMA)
- Monitoring/Administration/SACWIS Documentation

It was decided at the onset of the process that comments could not be accepted while rules were being reviewed, so teams would not have to revisit work that had already been completed. As a result, many of OFC’s rules are now closed to comments as the above teams begin their analysis. Updates regarding comment period closures and extensions are posted on the SACWIS Banner Screen and on www.mcwic.org/ohio. Rules that are still open for comments include the ICPC/ICAMA rules, the Adoption Assistance rules, the Indian Child Welfare Act rules, and the definition rules (5101:2-1-01 and 5101:2-01.1). Log on to www.mcwic.org/ohio and let your experience speak!

A Look at the Resource Home Certification and Approval Rule Review Team

The Resource Home Certification and Approval Rule Review Team has completed its review of the Chapter 9 licensing rules. The team recommends moving the rules in Chapter 5 that pertain to foster care to Chapter 7 so that all foster care information is in one place (similar to the organization of Chapter 48). The team also recommends combining selected rules (for example, 2-7-02 and 2-5-20) to eliminate duplication. The team has removed references to the required contents of the central registry summary report, because public children services agencies are not responsible for creating the report's format. Additionally, the team completed review of the foster care and adoption rules with a focus on consistency in language and requirements

What Do You Think?

Members of rule review teams report lots of dialogue on the underlying philosophy and structure of rules. For example:

- **Should Ohio Administrative Code (OAC) rules reflect minimal standards or best practice standards for child welfare?**

This is a discussion that has arisen across multiple teams as members wrestle with the level of prescription that is appropriate to incorporate within language. The reality is that OAC rules reflect only minimal standards and basic expectations that are to be met by all agencies regardless of environment, community or resources. Most of Ohio's public and private agencies strive for best practice, which often exceeds minimal standards. OAC rules should not prevent practitioners from exceeding minimal expectations when providing services to children.

- **Is there need for an OAC rule when the Ohio Revised Code (ORC) contains guidance on the issue? In other words, why should there be an OAC rule if the issue is addressed in ORC?**

There was much discussion as to the purpose of rules. A rule decreed by an administrative state agency under the OAC is an amplification of the intent of law and carries the force of law. OFC rules are intended to provide guidance to those who implement social welfare policies and programs. After discussing the utility of rules and the manner in which rules are drafted, it is the consensus of the Rule Review Coordination Board that OAC rules are helpful to practitioners. Although a rule may simply reflect the requirements of statute, it usually is written in more user-friendly language, and often is clearer and more easily understood. The organization of the OAC also establishes a "go-to" location for the spectrum of requirements specific to a social welfare function. Although eliminating rules that reflect only ORC would decrease the number of OFC rules, it would not make life easier for practitioners. As a result, the board decided that requirements contained in ORC will continue to be addressed in OAC rules, as well

The state-established process for rule promulgation and revisions continues during the Partners for Ohio's Families review process. Thanks to Technical Assistance Specialist Susan Halter for compiling the attached document outlining rule revisions made during the month of May.

May 2012 Global Emails

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

5/22/12 – Low Cost Health & Dental Care

5/25/12 – SACWIS Upgrade

5/25/12 – Elder Abuse Awareness Day on June 15, 2012

5/30/12 – Ohio Children's Trust Fund Video Contest

PRINCIPLE OF THE MONTH:

OFC seeks and supports strategies to strengthen the voices of youth and families for its work.