



A Message from OFC Deputy Director Jennifer Justice

This month marks an exciting benchmark for Ohio's Differential Response program. With the August implementation of Differential Response in eight new counties, families in 48 of Ohio's counties now have the option of an alternative response to reports of child maltreatment. The remaining 40 counties will be using this new approach by June 2014.

Members of my team recently had the opportunity to chat with Eric Fenner, a former Franklin County Children Services director and current managing director of strategic consulting with Casey Family Programs. Eric was visiting Ohio with a delegation of representatives from New York City who hoped to guide their own Differential Response implementation by learning from our state's experiences. Eric reminisced about his membership on the Supreme Court of Ohio's Subcommittee on Responding to Child Abuse and Neglect. The multidisciplinary work group proposed that Ohio examine the feasibility of an "alternative response" and brought together the 10 counties that designed Ohio's field experiment and evaluation.

"We revolutionized child welfare in Ohio," Eric said. "It will forever be different because of a small idea proposed around a table of people who cared."

Eric's statement caused me to pause and reflect on the significance of our collective accomplishments. It is important to acknowledge the value and responsibility of our work. *We* change the lives of children and families. "The system" is simply the way we as individuals work together. While change often is hard — Differential Response still has its doubters — each of us has the ability to spark a transformation.

Not all change is difficult, however. I am pleased to announce OFC's support of the Ohio Family Care Association (see the article below). It is exciting to see this association's members seek new ways to use the assets of Ohio's Resource Families. I challenge each agency to do the same: to take a fresh look at how birth, foster, respite, adoptive and kinship families are valued and supported.

Ohio Family Care Association

Nearly 40 years ago, in 1974, the Ohio Family Care Association (OFCA) started as a conversation between a group of foster parents who came together to have a picnic. Federal statute (Public Law 92-247) had recently been passed requiring states to enact mandatory reporting laws. Foster parents had few educational mandates, and they routinely were required to commit to never adopting a foster child placed within their homes.

Since then, both child welfare and OFCA have experienced ongoing evolution. OFCA's latest chapter begins with a new state office, which shares space with the Ohio Association of Child Caring Agencies in Columbus. It also has a new executive director, Marynell Townsend. Adopted as an infant, Marynell parented her younger brother after her mother's death. She has been fostering children ranging in age from newborns to teenagers for 19 years, and she also adopted two children. Working as a licensed social worker with the Ohio departments of Mental Health and Aging, Marynell specialized in mental health forensics, substance abuse, long-term care issues, training and public relations. You may already have met her on a local or state board, including the Ohio Child Welfare Training Program Steering Committee.

OFCA's state office will provide support to its membership and to individuals who are interested in becoming resource families. The association also will be a state-level legislative and policy resource, providing education and insight into the experiences and systemic challenges of Ohio's resource families and those they serve. Throughout the next 12 months, OFCA will be working with membership to develop a two-year strategic plan that positions Ohio's resource families to meet the emerging needs of the ever-changing child welfare system. When asked what she wants to convey about OFCA, Marynell says the association "looks forward to working with agencies to enhance caregiver support and advocacy around our common interests of protecting and nurturing children in the child welfare system. We also appreciate child welfare leaders and partners' referrals of foster, adoptive, kinship and respite providers to OFCA."

OFCA is committed to supporting the role of birth parents in policy and decision-making forums and is seeking referrals of birth parents who are interested in participating on the OFCA advisory board.

"Foster, adoptive, kinship, respite and birth parents have a valuable perspective on how we can improve outcomes for children in care," Marynell says. "OFCA wants those first-hand perspectives to be considered in policy and decision-making forums across the state, and looks forward to partnerships with other child welfare leaders to celebrate system strengths and address the areas of need."

For more information about OFCA, visit <http://www.ofcaonline.org/>.

Connecting the Dots Conference Benefits Foster Youth

Today, more than 200 youth are meeting with adult supporters to "connect the dots" between foster care and independence, through the 2012 Connecting the Dots Conference for Foster Care Teens and Young Adults. This conference is geared toward the youth themselves, rather than social workers and child welfare professionals. It features workshops and seminars geared toward foster youth who are preparing for college or a career.

More than 40 speakers are presenting on topics related to the workshops, as well as on personal health and making lifelong connections. The opening keynote was provided by Archie Griffin, known not only for his successful football career, but as a community leader and an active supporter of numerous charities and projects throughout Ohio.

This conference was part of the larger Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) initiative called "Connecting the Dots from Foster Care to Employment and Independent Living" and was one of five "asks" that the Ohio Youth Advisory Board (OYAB) took to ODJFS Director Michael Colbert (discussed in the June 2012 edition of First Fridays). The OYAB is composed of current and former foster youth who aim to be the voice influencing policies that affect youth in out-of-home care. Check out the OYAB blog at <http://overcominghurdlesinohio.blogspot.com/> to read how these youth envision their future.

Spotlight on OFC's Guiding Principles in Action: Barbara Parker

Few people take to heart this month's guiding principle – "Every person has value and should be treated in a manner that is respectful and culturally responsive" – as strongly as OFC's Barbara Parker. Barbara demonstrates this principle daily, working with Ohio's public and private agencies, child welfare agencies in other states, and private citizens in her duties with Ohio's Central Registry on Child Abuse and Neglect.

For more than 12 years, Barbara has quietly, effectively and efficiently managed the thousands of requests for Central Registry searches that ODJFS receives each year. She has made responsiveness to customers the number one priority of her job, and her supervisor has received countless emails, phone calls and hand-written "thank you" notes from those Barbara assists. Whether it is dropping everything to respond to a time-sensitive request or revising a form letter to include specifically required language for "just one" person, Barbara does whatever it takes to ensure that customers and colleagues alike receive the assistance they need in a timely and courteous manner.

Barbara also provides support to the ProtectOHIO Consortium.

"She just doesn't know how much I appreciate her," says Jim Lacks, ProtectOHIO's manager. "Her attention to detail and how she captures the discussion of the Consortium is incomparable."

Leslie McGee, Barbara's supervisor in the Protective Services Section, echoes these sentiments: "Barbara is one of the most generous and thoughtful people I know. She is quick to give of herself in offering support or words of encouragement to others, and she has a wonderful sense of humor."

Barbara believes that everyone and every job in OFC contributes to its mission. She understands that providing accurate and timely responses to the requests she receives plays a key role in ensuring child safety and helping children achieve permanency. We talked with Barbara to get a better idea of her work.

Q. What is the Central Registry?

A. Various federal and state laws require a determination of whether an individual has been the subject of child abuse or neglect. For example, searches are required for all adoptive and foster parent applicants. Public children services agencies (PCSAs) in other states request Central Registry information to assist in investigating reports of child maltreatment. An individual is able to request and receive information about the status of his or her name in the Central Registry for any reason; individuals often use the information as a requirement for employment or volunteer work.

At one time, an actual physical registry existed at the state office. It had its own room with files to the ceiling filled with note cards. Now, a Central Registry check is a Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS) inquiry.

Q. How do you get requests for a Central Registry check?

A. With access to SACWIS, PCSAs can conduct their own searches. Requests still come in by mail, and also email or fax. We do not accept phone requests because of confidentiality concerns. We have an obligation to protect the information within SACWIS to the fullest extent.

Q. What piece of advice do you have for agencies submitting requests?

A. Agencies should verify that the information they submit for a Central Registry search is correct, especially dates of birth and Social Security numbers. Also, the more information given, the better.

Requests should include maiden names and previous names whenever possible. I've found a few times that a nickname made a difference in a search.

Q. How long does it take for a registry check to get processed here?

A. About seven days; we try to be fast. There was a time several years ago that we were back-logged more than three months, but with the SACWIS transition and the addition of a second staff person, we now are able to achieve a pretty quick turnaround. We try to always keep in mind that these names are people. It's a priority within the office; people are waiting.

Q. How many requests do you process?

A. We process between 15,000 and 16,000 requests annually. In 2009, prior to the SACWIS transition, we had about 28,000 requests a year, so this is very manageable.

Q. Your supervisor said that you strive to and succeed in consistently providing superior customer service. Why do you feel customer service is so important to your job?

A. I feel that we're all in the same boat; we all need other people to get our jobs done, and we all want the same thing for children. What I do is a small thing, but it can make a difference both for the person whose name is on the paper, and for a child somewhere. It is a full day, with a full job, and I find it very satisfying to know that what I do matters to families and children. A central registry search is a small piece in the overall process, but it is critical in ensuring safety. It is our responsibility to be conscientious in doing everything we can to not place children in situations where there has been a history of maltreatment.

Rule Review Update

Nearly 105 individuals are participating on Ohio's rule review teams, representing a wide range of experience and perspective from across the state. With the comment period closed for the majority of the rules, OFC Rule Review Coordinator David Thomas has provided some examples of recommendations that teams are making. He turned to the **Resource Home Certification and Approval Rule Review Team**, which has recommended the following:

- Changes to synchronize the timelines that impact families that are both licensed foster care providers and approved adoptive families, when licensed and approved by the same agency (OAC rules 5101:2-48-12 and 5101:2-48-11). These revisions will make the adoption approval span correspond with the date of the foster care certification.
- That the terms *assessor*, *sibling*, *special needs* and *exceptional needs* be included in the definition rule (OAC rule 5101:2-1-01). This will provide more clarity through definition, with the goal of more consistent application of the terms as they relate to corresponding rules.
- Requiring agencies to contact the adult children that do not live in the home of foster or adoptive applicants (OAC rules 5101:2-48-12 and 5101:2-5-20), which will improve the assessment of foster or adoptive applicants by supporting a holistic assessment of them.

Not all rules are undergoing significant change. For example, the **Substitute Care Rule Review Team** recommended few changes to rules related to relative and kinship placement (OAC rules 5101:2-42-05 or 5101:2-42-18). Federal law is clear that relatives are the preferred placement for children who must be removed from their birth families, because this type of placement maintains family connections for children and can be considered a family preservation service. When team members have a shared understanding of the purpose and intent of a rule, fewer changes tend to be recommended.

July 2012 Global Emails

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

7/6/12 – National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD) Survey

7/6/12 – SACWIS Update

7/9/12 – Welcome to E-Track

7/12/12 – Former Foster Youth and Medicaid Enrollment

7/18/12 – CFSR Penalty Risk for Recurrence of Maltreatment Performance

7/23/12 – Upcoming Medicaid Teleconference

7/30/12 – Compliance Reports

7/31/12 – 2012 PSCAO Conference – October 24-25, 2012

7/31/12 – FASD Awareness Event

PRINCIPLE OF THE MONTH:

Every person has value and should be treated in a manner that is respectful and culturally responsive.

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