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Partnerships and collaboration enhance the quality of outcomes.

OFFICE OF FAMILIES & CHILDREN

Important First Friday Notice

Starting in December, all First Friday communications will come from a new email address. Please add First_Friday@jfs.ohio.gov to your email address book to ensure that you continue to receive the First Friday newsletter.

A Message from OFC Deputy Director Jennifer Justice – November 2, 2012

November marks the start of the holiday season. For most of us, the next two months will include lots of shopping, food, celebration and especially family. We'll trade family stories – good and bad – with our coworkers, and think of being with our loved ones for the holidays. Of course, we also are thinking of the families and children who are separated during this time, as well as the children who still wait to find a forever family. On behalf of these 3,000-plus Ohio children who are waiting to be adopted, Governor Kasich has proclaimed November 2012 to be Adoption Recognition and Recruitment Month.

This dual focus encourages everyone to celebrate the generous and caring adults who open their hearts and homes to waiting children; more than 1,300 adoptions were finalized between June 2011 and July 2012. Adoption is a rewarding, lifetime gift to both the children and adults, but it is not always without challenges. We need to learn more about how best to provide the preparation and support that these newly forming families need for a successful transition.

At the same time, we must remember children who still are waiting for a permanent home. The Office of Families and Children (OFC) has made a commitment to refocus and enhance Ohio's efforts. Our work with the child-focused recruiters at Wendy's Wonderful Kids and the new training opportunities throughout the state can help us rethink the term "unadoptable." And because more than 1,000 of Ohio's waiting children are over 9 years old, it is critical that our efforts not be constrained by age.

At a recent meeting with probate court colleagues, Magistrate James Henderson of the Clermont County Probate-Juvenile Court reported on the finalization of the adoption of two teenagers who had been in permanent custody of Clermont County Children Services. Magistrate Henderson expressed hope that such heartening adoptions of older children will become more common, thanks to the efforts of the recruiter ODJFS recently hired as part of the Wendy's Wonderful Kids initiative. The initiative's child-focused recruitment should serve as a valuable enhancement to the department's goal of locating more forever homes for older children in its permanent custody.

Data show sobering outcomes for youth who do not find permanent, lifetime connections. For professionals such as ourselves, who have been fortunate to meet and learn from many of Ohio's current and former foster youth, this picture of the future seems at odds with the bright, ambitious and thoughtful young people we know. It is our responsibility to provide those in our care with the essential tools to succeed as adults, including permanent connections. At OFC, we are beginning to build the framework to support this goal. Read on to learn more about our new transitional youth coordinators, and how to use the Results-Oriented Management (ROM) tool to track sibling placements, an important factor in youth connections.

Welcome to OFC's new Transitional Youth Coordinators

One of the Ohio Youth Advisory Board's "Top Five Asks of the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS)" was for state staff to advocate for uniformity when it comes to youth who emancipate from care in Ohio. To help meet this request, the Bureau of Child and Adult Protection has appointed two new transitional youth coordinators: Susan Halter and Laurie Valentine (pictured below).

Susan has been with ODJFS for the past five years as a technical assistance specialist. Prior to that, she worked at Montgomery County Children Services for 14 years as a caseworker. Susan has 20 years of experience working with youth in various capacities through community service and mentoring.

Laurie has been with ODJFS for the past four years as a business analyst with the Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS) project, providing technical assistance to counties and private agencies. Before that, she worked on independent living and case planning projects at Pickaway County Job and Family Services for five years. Laurie has worked with youth in child welfare settings, public schools and the private sector for the past 21 years.

As a team, Susan and Laurie will work with public children services agencies (PCSAs) and private child placing agencies to identify the array of independent living services provided to youth in each county. They will work to create uniformity in these services and to improve the housing, employment and educational outcomes for youth who emancipate from agency custody.

To ensure regular communication with local agencies and our other partners, Susan and Laurie will host quarterly meetings for county independent living coordinators beginning in January 2013. At these meetings, they will share best practice ideas and provide technical assistance to county caseworkers and their supervisors. First Friday also will include regular news and updates regarding transitional living. To learn more, email Laurie.Valentine@jfs.ohio.gov or Susan.Halter@jfs.ohio.gov.

An Introductory Transitional Living Videoconference is planned for 2-3 p.m. on Thursday, November 29, 2012. The conference will provide a brief overview of transitional living expectations and barriers. It also will explain the role of the new transitional youth coordinators.



Left to right: Laurie Valentine and Susan Halter.

Four Early Thanksgiving Events for Ohio Foster Youth and Young Adults

For the past five years, Thanksgiving has been a time for Ohio foster care youth, alumni, allies and adult supporters to gather together and share their voices, insights, talents, abilities and goals for the future. The Ohio chapter of Foster Care Alumni of America invites foster care youth ages 15 and up, former foster care youth ages 18 and up, and their guests to share an early Thanksgiving. Four family celebrations are being held across Ohio:



TOGETHER 2012
ALUMNI FAMILY REUNION

- Southwest Ohio (Cincinnati) Thanksgiving – Saturday, November 10
- Northwest Ohio (Toledo) Thanksgiving – Sunday, November 11
- Northeast Ohio (Cleveland) Thanksgiving – Saturday, November 17
- Central/Southeast Ohio (Columbus) Thanksgiving – Sunday, November 18

Email ohchapter@fostercarealumni.org for more information.

Regional Technical Assistance Teams

In the January 2012 edition of First Friday, we discussed OFC's plan to establish a team approach to technical assistance. This concept was suggested by a PCSA/OFC work group that hoped to build knowledge across program areas and address the "silo effect" that was described by both county and state staff.

Since March, three regional teams have been working with four pilot counties to establish a new model. Each team consists of field office staff, including technical assistance supervisors and licensing specialists; three policy staff from across the office; and a SACWIS representative. Each team also has two volunteer "coaches" to help members navigate any conflicts, cross-team concerns and other issues. Watch your email for a list of the team members assigned to each region.

Over the next several months, the teams will set up regional forums to meet with local public and private agencies. The purpose of the meetings will be to get acquainted, explain the new process, share information about state and county priorities, and establish joint expectations. For now, state field staff remain the primary contact for county staff. County issues brought to field or central office staff are being shared between regional team members. Internally, team members are beginning to reach out to one another for support and assistance. Don't be surprised if your next OFC communication has some new names on it.

Early feedback on this new approach has been very positive. Survey results show that most participating OFC staff and supervisors believe the teams have been helpful in providing technical assistance to the local agencies they serve. Some comments:

- "It has caused me to be more proactive. I have a better understanding of how different areas of OFC fit together to provide TA [technical assistance] for agencies."
- "[It] allows me to field questions, if appropriate, [that] I would have passed on to others in the past."
- "Instead of thinking I have to provide it all to the county, I know that I have teammates who I can lean upon to help provide TA within any agency I will be working."
- "Now I feel empowered to call upon individuals directly and remove the layers of bureaucracy."
- "We have better sharing of information and less 'silos.' "

As with any large-scale organizational change, however, there have been and will continue to be bumps along the way. Pilot participants also provided some important caveats to remember as we move forward:

- Remember that change takes time.
 - "Many have not been asked to change how they do things for a very long time, and that change is uncomfortable."

- “Implementation of the new TA model is a work in progress. There are still many areas of the model to be fully implemented.”
- “The length of time for implementation [is a concern].”
- All levels of OFC must be on board.
 - “Ensure that agency leadership at all levels has bought into the process and philosophy and [is] constantly encouraging staff tocommunicate on a regular basis.”
- Continue to be responsive to agency needs.
 - “There is great potential for this to have a positive impact on the state/county relationship. A lot will depend on how responsive agencies feel OFC staff is — particularly when they have questions outside the expertise of their assigned team members.”

Perhaps the best feedback from the pilot was summed up by one comment from a county employee: “Don’t drop the ball now!”

We’ll do our best to keep that in mind.

As with anything new, success will depend on our willingness to invest in the process and experiment with new ideas. This approach should offer both great achievements, as well as opportunities to adjust plans that don’t work as expected. If state staff and county partners can work together with good intent, we can develop a great process.

The Ohio Intimate Partner Violence Collaborative

Intimate partner violence (IPV) and child protection are two community concerns that often intersect, and they require effective interventions across many systems serving all members of the family: domestic violence survivors, perpetrators and children impacted by violence. Poor planning and collaboration among systems often results in unnecessary child removals and ineffective service planning and provision. This, in turn, undermines the goals of safety, stability and well-being for children.



The Ohio IPV Collaborative is a partnership of ODJFS; Casey Family Services; the Supreme Court of Ohio Subcommittee on Responding to Child Abuse, Neglect and Dependency; the Ohio Domestic Violence Network; the Ohio Children’s Trust Fund; HealthPath Foundation of Ohio; and the National Center for Adoption Law and Policy. The partnership was established to help reduce trauma to children experiencing violence in their homes, to avoid unnecessary foster care placements, and to forge community partnerships that develop a collaborative and holistic response to IPV.

The collaborative provides intensive training to county children services agencies and their community domestic violence partners, including advocates, shelters, service providers, judges, magistrates, law enforcement officials and prosecutors. This training features the principles of the “Safe and Together” response model developed by David Mandel & Associates, which has been shown to result in better family engagement and outcomes. Ten Ohio counties have received this training since 2010; the remaining counties will be offered it over the next three years.

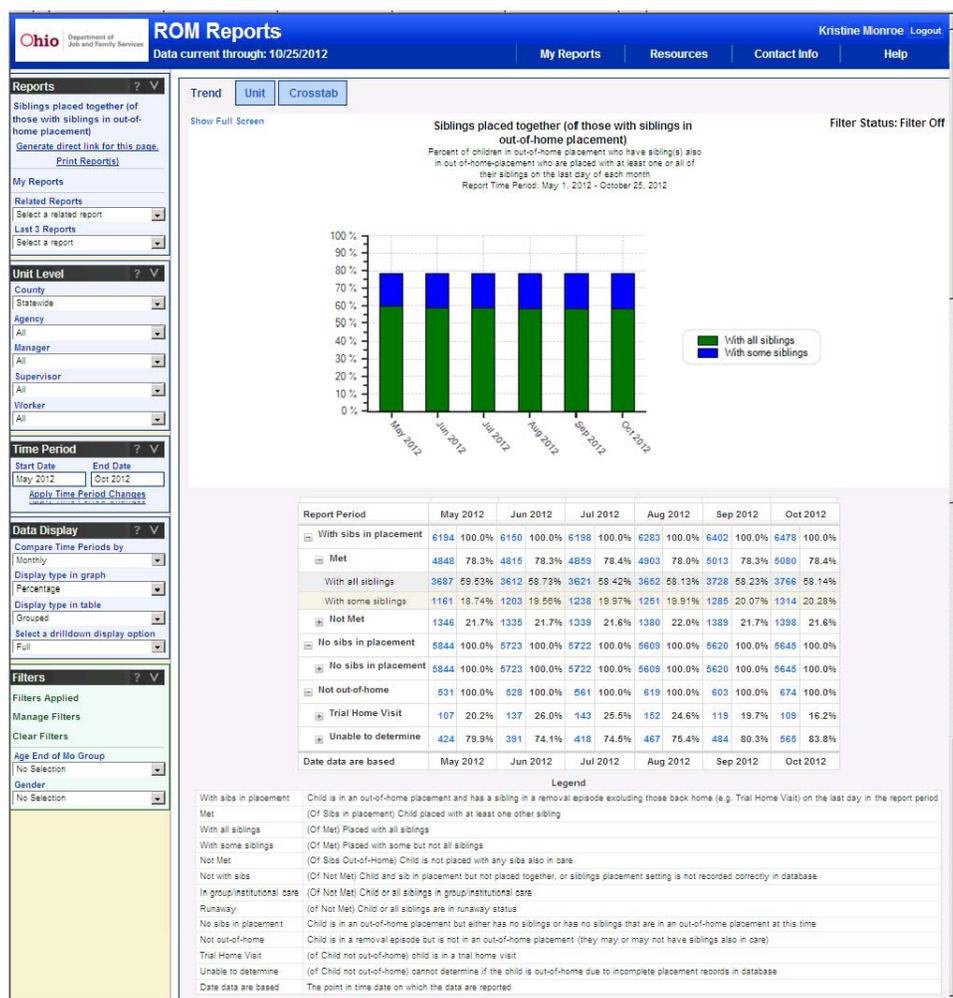
Jennifer Hartmann, social work projects coordinator for the National Center for Adoption Law and Policy in Columbus, is the collaborative’s coordinator. She has a diverse background serving women, children and families, including experience in case management, hospital social work, child welfare and international social work with refugees and survivors of human trafficking. Jennifer is excited about her new position and says she is ready to put her project management skills to work for the collaborative. To learn more, contact Jennifer at jhartmann@law.capital.edu.

Using Data to Self-Assess: The 'Siblings Placed Together Report' in ROM

The "Siblings Placed Together Report" in ROM gives agencies a mechanism to evaluate whether the majority of a county's sibling groups are placed together. The report separates children in placement who have siblings who also are in placement from children with no siblings in placement. This division ensures that children with no siblings in placement do not negatively affect the reported percentages.

The graph and numbers below show statewide aggregate data. The green portion shows the percentage of children placed with all siblings, and the blue portion shows the percentage of children placed with at least one other sibling. As you can see, Ohio is doing a great job of keeping siblings in placement together. Users can filter this report by county and agency to see if the trend of statewide excellence continues within their own agency's practice.

Please note that children are determined to be siblings based on membership in the same case. This report is not calculated based on relationships in SACWIS. To obtain access to ROM, please contact Kristine.monroe@jfs.ohio.gov or Tim.Doyle-Wenger@jfs.ohio.gov.



HealthPath Foundation of Ohio Presents Awards and Grants

The HealthPath Foundation of Ohio (HPF-Ohio) celebrated the accomplishments of its Prevention of Family Violence Initiative on October 5, 2012, at the Renaissance Columbus Downtown Hotel. Justice Yvette McGee Brown of the Ohio Supreme Court was the event's keynote speaker. During the ceremonies, the National Center for Adoption Law and Policy received an award for its leadership in the Ohio IPV Collaborative.

HPF-Ohio also announced the first recipients of its Community Connections grant program. This new initiative was established to bring evidence-based and promising practices in family violence prevention to the 36 counties it serves. Thirty-two grants of up to \$5,000 each were awarded to projects that help prevent family violence. Family violence includes child abuse, domestic violence, intimate partner violence, bullying, teen dating violence and elder abuse, among others. For more information, visit www.healthpathohio.org.



Pictured above, left to right: Theresa Wuksick, HealthPath Foundation of Ohio; Kristin Gilbert, ODJFS Office of Families and Children; Carla Carpenter, ODJFS Office of Families and Children; Denise St. Clair, National Center for Adoption Law and Policy; Steve Hanson, Supreme Court of Ohio; and Jo Simonson, Ohio Domestic Violence Network.

October 2012 Global Emails

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

10/16/12 - Title IV-E Foster Care Maintenance (FCM) Eligibility Training

10/17/12 - 5101:9-6-32 Differential Response Implementation Funds

10/23/12 - ENGAGE Final Plan/Grant Outcome

PRINCIPLE OF THE MONTH:

Partnerships and collaboration enhance the quality of outcomes.

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