



OFC policies and supports should be strength-based and recognize the uniqueness of each community and agency.

OFFICE OF FAMILIES & CHILDREN

A Message from OFC Deputy Director Jennifer Justice – January 4, 2013

In my house, the Christmas decorations and tree are packed away, and we already are thinking ahead to spring vacation. It is the same in our business; most agencies are busy trying to forecast and prepare for what lies ahead.

We know that the future will bring change. After all, this is a budget year, and the signals are clear that Ohio's budget – like every state's budget – will be lean. We can expect to face some difficult choices about priorities. It is critical that our human and financial investments have significant and positive impacts on the families and children we serve.

In this issue, we asked some key Office of Families and Children (OFC) and community stakeholders what they will focus on over the next several months. My priority will not change. I will continue to concentrate on improving how OFC supports public and private agencies so children are safe, and outcomes for families are positive. My visits to agencies throughout Ohio and the opportunities to openly discuss successes and challenges with stakeholders have been my best way to understand what "support" looks like. I will continue to spend much of my time in conversation with our partners while encouraging OFC staff to do the same. We have many initiatives and programs beginning and continuing in 2013, so I know it will be critical to keep communication open, frequent and forthright.

Because we are only a few days removed from New Year's Eve, we also asked our contributors about their personal wishes for 2013. In addition to my annual "20 pounds," I always wish for good health to all.

Independent Living Blog – January

The December First Friday announced the five independent living/transitional youth regional meetings being held throughout the state by OFC's transitional youth coordinators. These meetings are for independent living staff, caseworkers and any stakeholders who are working with foster care youth ages 16 or older.

The two December meetings were great opportunities for participants to learn from each other's successes and to discuss the challenges that they hold in common. For example, it appears that most agencies are using either the Daniel Memorial Independent Living Skills System (www.danielkids.org), the Casey Family Programs Life Skills (<http://caseylifeskills.force.com>) or have developed their own life skills assessment tool for older youth. Also, participants in each session identified some struggle with entering data into the Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS), and virtually all participants identified transportation for older youth as an issue.

Upon the completion of the regional meetings, the transitional youth coordinators will be hosting a statewide stakeholders' meeting to announce the findings of the regional meetings and to share information about various programs available for youth throughout the state.

If you haven't attended a regional meeting, it is not too late to register. See dates, locations and RSVP information below.

<u>Regions</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>RSVP Date</u>	<u>Location</u>
Southeast	01/08/13	01/04/13	Southeast Ohio Regional Training Center 2099 East State, Suite A Athens, Ohio 45701
Northeast	01/11/13	01/08/13	Cuyahoga County/Jane Edna Building 3955 Euclid Ave. Cleveland, Ohio 44115
Central	01/24/13	01/22/13	Franklin County Children Service Board 855 W. Mound Street Columbus, Ohio 43223

RSVP to Susan.Halter@jfs.ohio.gov or Laurie.Valentine@jfs.ohio.gov.

Focuses and Wishes for 2013

As with any state-supervised, county-administered system, Ohio's child welfare programming often differs between counties. While it is challenging from a state perspective, such diversity also can encourage creativity, innovation and transfer of knowledge. This is demonstrated in Ohio's consistent array of new child welfare initiatives and programming.

As a professional community, we share the same goals, regardless of geography. This month, we had an opportunity to talk to a few key OFC and stakeholder decision-makers and ask, "What will you focus on over the next couple of months?" Since the beginning of each year is a time of resolution, we also asked, "What was your New Year's Eve wish?" The responses illustrate our unity of purpose across role and region.

Rita Soronen, President and CEO, Dave Thomas Foundation

2013 will be another exciting year for the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption as we continue to scale the child-focused model of Wendy's Wonderful Kids in Ohio and across the nation; elevate our awareness efforts through new PSAs, social media and messaging; and focus on critical policy issues affecting our children.

Our New Year's wish is for a home and family for every waiting child. We are grateful to be working in partnership with so many dedicated groups and individuals, like the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services, to make this a reality.

Lisa Wiltshire, Chief, OFC's Bureau of Child and Adult Protection

I will be focusing on preparing Ohio's IV-B Report for submission to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Its official title is the "Annual Progress and Services Report," and it is a comprehensive document that requires the collaboration of multiple contributors in this office. It was one of my first assignments when I came on board at OFC this past April. I appreciated everyone's support and assistance in compiling it last time, and I'm optimistic that the IV-B report will not be nearly as daunting this time around! On a personal level, I have a goal of getting to know each of the Columbus area metro parks and their various walking/hiking trails.

My New Year's wish is to sell my house in Scioto County.

Nicole Harper, Legislative Director, Public Children Services Association of Ohio (PCSAO)

Because I am new to my position with PCSAO, my first priority is making sure that I fully understand the key issues and challenges that are facing those who serve Ohio's children and families. Over the next year, I will focus on telling our story to elected officials and being clear about the ways in which they best can support the work we do to help Ohio's children and families.

My New Year's wish is that we each will be able to look past our individual interests and work together to solve some of the problems Ohio's families are facing. To do so, we will need to recognize our challenges as representing real-life people who are struggling to get by, rather than partisan issues.

Cieria Rodriguez-Toney, Outgoing President, Ohio Youth Advisory Board (OYAB), Lorain

My personal focus in 2013 will be on my own community. I would like to see a mentor program for youth in foster care, and I hope to create opportunities for former foster youth to serve as mentors. I also would like

to see a self-support group for emancipated youth and to recruit some new community partners from our great resources. Ending my term as OYAB president, I would encourage OYAB to focus on communication among members and have youth take on some of the responsibility for communication that has been carried by our adult supporters. My goal always is "Unity and Empowerment."

My New Year's wish is to return to school and be able to support my children, and to continue to move forward with all aspects of my life. For OYAB, I wish that they continue advancing in all the aspects that the board represents for youth.

Steve Hanson; Manager of Children, Families and the Courts Section, Supreme Court of Ohio

My focus will be on increasing use of meaningful measurements for our various initiatives; we want to be able to distinguish those that produce successful outcomes from those that just feel good. We're looking at how to use data-sharing agreements with various agencies to develop a comprehensive data picture that drives improvement.

I wish that the good work through Partners for Ohio's Families becomes a long-lasting culture. I've seen it make a difference.

Dan Shook, Chief, OFC's Bureau of Fiscal Accountability

Our focus will be on supporting public and private agency staff to prepare for:

- The September 2013 Title IV-E Federal Eligibility Review. Ohio can have no more than four erroneous cases out of the 80 reviewed.
- Amended Ohio Administrative Code rules for Title IV-E Foster Care and Adoption Assistance. Significant changes will bring clarity and ease of implementation.
- Further analysis of the Federal Title IV-E guardianship assistance program in conjunction with the passage of HB 279.
- Passage and implementation of the 2014/2015 biennial budget, which will take a great deal of time and precision.

My New Year's wish is for stronger relationships between OFC staff and our customers.

Jeffrey R. Greene, Executive Director, House of New Hope

Over the next several months, I will be focused on community partnerships. House of New Hope is rapidly evolving a strengths-based philosophy. By appreciating what is good and valuable in the present situation, we can discover and learn about ways to effect positive change for the future. As the social service sands continue to shift under our collective feet, it will take partnerships to effectively imagine and implement the solutions to tomorrow's needs. While I embrace the tradition of wishing others a "Happy New Year," people this year seem skeptical of this sentiment because they believe things will just stay the same or even worsen. While it may seem that the negative outweighs the positive, you really don't have to look far to find the good that is all around us. There are always those folks who choose to put themselves in harm's way in order to save lives or protect our freedoms; to accept at-risk and vulnerable children into their homes and work to bring safety, permanency and well-being into their lives; or to provide necessary care and services to those unable to fend for themselves.

My New Year's wish is that we all rediscover our childhood amazement for the beauty that surrounds us, revive the ethic of "paying it forward," and reestablish the Golden Rule as the basis for our existence among others.

Debra Rothstein, Senior Attorney and Manager of Attorney/Guardian Ad Litem Project, Legal Aid Society of Southwest Ohio

Over the next couple of months, I will focus on working with colleagues to resolve various inter-organization issues that continuously and unnecessarily interfere with optimal child advocacy in the courts, in schools and in the service provider community.

My wish for the New Year is, as always, health, safety, goodwill and good humor for everyone.

Barbara Manuel, Chief, OFC's Bureau of Child and Adult Technical Assistance

In 2013, Foster Care Licensing will focus on three areas: training and developing new staff, finalizing and implementing the serious risk rules process developed by ODJFS and public and private agency staff in 2008, and implementing the team approach and the six principals of partnership in all agency interactions.

The Child Protection Oversight and Evaluation (CPOE) team will continue to provide support and technical assistance to public child welfare agencies in Ohio. Staff will provide up-to-date information to monitor and measure CPOE child welfare outcomes. In 2013, we will focus on monitoring Ohio's progress to decrease the number of cases that close and reopen. The CPOE process will continue to encourage public children services agency staff inclusion and participation.

My New Year's wish is that every person reading this will make a pledge to reach out to one child or family with an open child welfare case. Public child welfare organizations will never be able to meet all the needs of all the families they serve. The community must be the eyes, ears and support for abused and neglected youth in Ohio.

Dot Erickson, Financial Secretary, Ohio Family Care Association, Foster and Adoptive Parent

My thoughts turn to personal focus and resolution, which will probably also work in my "retired" professional life. I am going to practice listening compassionately and living with compassionate thoughts and actions as I learn to straddle a new married life with two very different extended families and sets of friends. I am resolving in 2013 to live authentically, accepting life and its challenges by seeking peace in each moment.

Betsy Johnson, Associate Executive Director, National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Ohio

In 2013, NAMI Ohio will focus our advocacy on four issues:

- Increasing the number of housing options for individuals with mental illness. Too many people with serious mental illness are living on the streets because there are not enough supportive housing options available. Many of these individuals unnecessarily end up in jail or prison because they have no place to go.
- Increasing funding to meet the mental health needs of children and their families. Families with young children with mental health disorders are struggling with long waits for mental health services and the lack of support services for families.
- Clarifying the Ohio Revised Code section that gives judges the ability to court-order outpatient treatment. Court-ordered outpatient treatment ensures that individuals in need are served in the least restrictive and least costly setting and reduces unnecessary hospital and jail/prison stays.
- Expanding Medicaid to all Ohioans with incomes under 138 percent of the federal poverty level and continue to support Medicaid health homes for individuals with severe and persistent mental illness.

My 2013 News Year's wish is that this will be the year that Ohio's decision makers recognize that adequately funding mental health services and supports will result in happier, healthier and more productive families and will lead to significant cost savings elsewhere in the budget.

Tresa Young, Chief, OFC's Bureau of Automated Systems

We will focus on three areas:

- Successfully completing the federal SACWIS on-site review in April 2013 with the support of several participating counties. This review ensures continued federal funding for SACWIS activities and helps Ohio comply with federal requirements.
- Improving the availability, performance and integrity of SACWIS, Results Oriented Management (ROM) and Business Intelligence Channel (BIC) child welfare reports. The SACWIS team will work to improve the availability of data and implement additional tools to ease the production of county-specific and performance reports.
- Completing priorities such as the ability to link intakes to adoption cases, improving private agency functionality, replacing the Optimal J code, improving reports and integrating SACWIS training into state core child welfare training curriculums.

I wish for continued partnership with county, state and vendor staff to improve SACWIS, provide meaningful information and achieve federal child welfare outcome standards.

Pam Meermans, Deputy Director, Clark County Department of Job and Family Services

The two priorities at the top of my list for the start of 2013 are to 1) use our CPOE 9 review to align our compliance and outcome requirements with casework practice so all staff understand the "why" of what we do, and 2) implement psychotropic medication policy and procedures for foster youth.

My New Year's wish is generally a theme for peace and balance in my life, so I extend that wish to all of my staff, coworkers and colleagues, because the work we do is hard, especially for our front-line staff.

Judge Deborah Alspach, Marion County Family Court

Marion County Family Court will continue to focus on improving the lives of children, especially those who are without families.

My wish every year, and perhaps more poignantly this year, is that we remember the children as we make decisions that affect the future. Children are a reflection of the society to which they are exposed. For me, Fred Rogers said it best: "Please think of the children first. If you ever have anything to do with their entertainment, their food, their toys, their custody, their day or night care, their health care, their education – listen to the children, learn about them, learn from them. Think of the children first."

December 2012 Global Emails

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

12/11/12 - Regional Independent Living—Transitional Youth Meeting

12/11/12 - Additional Clarification on Child Welfare Confidentiality, Research and SACWIS Access

12/17/12 - Results of the First Preliminary Review for the 2013 Title IV-E Foster Care Maintenance Eligibility Federal Review

12/18/12 - 2013 Letter of Assurances

12/18/12 - Monitoring of the Federal Indicator Recurrence of Maltreatment

PRINCIPLE OF THE MONTH:

OFC policies and supports should be strength-based and recognize the uniqueness of each community and agency.

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