



A Message from OFC Deputy Director Jennifer Justice – January 3, 2014

My thoughts for First Friday generally start with an event or piece of information that has captured my attention. I tend to be inspired mostly by the stories of our successes, the emotional boost I feel after visiting a local agency, some impressive piece of work that has come to light, and my colleagues. More than anything, I try to give attention to the positive achievements that happen daily in our field. This is a business where, too often, bad news makes news. We've all experienced the negative light sometimes shined on child welfare, with characterizations that range from over-intrusiveness to laziness. But the bottom line is that these broad portrayals are not accurate, and they divert us from the tasks at hand. Every day, I interact with hard-working and committed professionals who face their difficult jobs with optimism and a sincere belief that we as individuals make a difference for others. This is our system's greatest strength. Our work certainly is not easy, and it rarely is appreciated with the same enthusiasm as, say, a cell phone or video game console update.

But we are busy and thoughtful people with no shortage of ideas for improving the system. I was reminded of this when I looked back at last January's First Friday. Various OFC staff and stakeholders were asked to describe their focuses for 2013. It was fun to identify what had been accomplished and what still needed work, so we decided to reach out to you, our staff and stakeholders, again this year. We asked what you considered significant, both this year and next. Knowing the determined and passionate individuals who responded, I expect that this newsletter will foreshadow many accomplishments we'll achieve this year.

For my part, I am proud of OFC's achievements in 2013. It is not just that we have accomplished a lot – though we have – but that we experienced our most significant successes together with our stakeholders. I feel we all can agree that our work is better when done with the active engagement of our state and local partners. We continued implementing Differential Response and the Intimate Partner Violence Initiative (Safe and Together); hosted two federal monitoring visits (SACWIS and Title IV-E); completed a review of all 273 Ohio Administrative Code rules; partnered with Lighthouse Youth Services in Cincinnati in its successful application for a federal planning grant to address homelessness of youth leaving care; and engaged in substantive behavioral health collaborations with local and state agencies.

This year also saw the conclusion of OFC's partnership with the Midwest Child Welfare Implementation Center (MCWIC). I consider the improvements made during the past three-and-a-half years – including the improvements to OFC's culture and climate – to be our most significant accomplishment. The research clearly shows that the health of an organization is linked to its effectiveness, and I believe a healthier OFC is leading to improved support for the public and private agencies that serve Ohio's families and children. This is our mission.

My own focus for 2014 is more of the same. We will continue to concentrate on the ongoing evolution of Differential Response as a system in which true engagement results in healthier families. Rollout will be complete by June 2014, but the work will not stop there.

OFC also will continue to work with state and county agencies to identify how we best can help families to be healthy, self-sufficient and intact whenever possible. It is critical that we continue our collaborations in

regard to recognizing and addressing trauma and to making sure that we focus on the least intrusive ways to support families and keep children safe.

Continuous improvement will always be a priority for OFC, as will providing technical assistance to local agencies and giving them access to data so they can make informed decisions and continuously improve, as well. I'm excited about our plans for the coming year and hope you are, too. Best wishes for a wonderful 2014!

A Message from ODJFS Director Cynthia C. Dungey

In 2014, I look forward to continuing and expanding all our good work of the past year, including Differential Response, Connecting the Dots from Foster Care to Employment and Independent Living, and our partnership with the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption, to name just a few. As a young person growing up, I always wanted to make a difference. I'm honored to lead an organization that's making a very big difference in so many people's lives, especially the lives of our children. I can't wait to continue all these efforts and to continue identifying ways we can make a good system even better.

What's On Your Mind?

As one of only nine states with county-administered child welfare systems, we in Ohio often boast about our home-bred innovation, individuality and diversity of community. That diversity of community has been cited both as an asset and a barrier, but our bond of common purpose and commitment is much stronger than geographic divisions.

When we asked some of our partners to share their thoughts about the child welfare system, their answers were remarkably similar, regardless of discipline or affiliation. State or local, public or private, advocacy or service-providing, stakeholders from all areas expressed many common themes. Many noted the need for services to be both flexible and comprehensive because families' needs are unique. Many also noted that the failure to serve families flexibly and comprehensively often compounds their problems. Though we don't always agree on a course of action, clearly we're all driven by a desire to improve outcomes for Ohio's families and children.

Q: What do you see as your biggest accomplishment in 2013?

"Adding an evidence-based model of treatment to [Alliance Human Services and Ohio MENTOR's] foster care continuum. Ohio MENTOR's Institute of Family Centered Services provides family-centered treatment for youth within its foster care programs, as well as youth in their biological home."

– Lesia Krisa, agency administrator, Alliance Human Services

"Establishing criteria for a merit-based salary increase methodology that aligns the agency's mission and vision with the CFSR [Child and Family Service Review] outcome measures."

– Dr. Sheila Kochis, audit administrator, Franklin County Children Services

"Attention and value for child and youth behavioral health well-being, and the opportunity to support transitioning foster scholars in their higher education pursuits through OhioReach."

– Crystal Allen, executive director, Public Children Services Association of Ohio (PCSAO)

"I work with a variety of states, the federal government and providers. The most fun thing that I have been able to work on this year is the PCSAO Behavioral Health Leadership Group. Having all the stakeholders and state leadership around the table is fantastic."

– Maureen Corcoran, president, Vorys Health Care Advisors

"For the first time in over a decade, we had no proposed cuts in any JFS programs or services, with significant new investments in several areas."

– Lori Hellenthal, county operations manager, Ohio Job and Family Services Directors' Association

"Attorney General Mike DeWine pledged \$2 million to expand the number of children served by CASA [court-appointed special advocate] volunteers. The commitment came from the final recommendations of

the Attorney General's Foster Care Advisory Group. Not only is it a major boost to the efforts to expand CASA support to more counties, but it also reinforced the valuable service CASA volunteers add to the court and child welfare systems."

– *Doug Stephens, executive director, Ohio CASA*

"[We] achieved re-accreditation, created and filled an independent living coordinator position, successfully maintained an alcohol and drug case manager/counselor under contract within the agency, secured mobile technology for all of our social workers, added a second kinship coordinator, and increased [the] number of children [we] successfully placed with relatives or kinship providers."

– *Bruce Anderson, administrator of children services, Licking County Department of Job and Family Services*

"There are many [projects] that are going to impact the lives of foster children in the short and long term. The "Minds Matter" project to improve the treatment of foster kids who are also experiencing mental illness is one of those, and [its] collaboration of medical providers, educators, child welfare authorities and others is gratifying to see, since teamwork is essential to the success of the effort."

– *Dr. Mark Hurst, medical director, Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services*

"We think that, for 2013, the continued development of a true partnership between ODJFS and the counties was the biggest accomplishment."

– *Chip Spinning, executive director, Franklin County Children Services*

"We ended our work with MCWIC [the Midwest Child Welfare Implementation Center], with ODJFS assuming primary responsibility for continuing the reform process. The fact that ODJFS staff met with public and private agencies throughout the state in regional meetings was another significant milestone."

– *Barb Manuel, Bureau of Child and Adult Technical Assistance chief, OFC*

"For me, the collaboration with public and private agencies to prepare for and undergo the Title IV-E federal eligibility review ranks among our top accomplishments. State, county and private agency staff worked tirelessly for over a year and a half preparing for this review. Although we'll still have work to do after the final federal report is released, this type of dedication and collaboration proves we can accomplish anything together."

– *Dan Shook, Bureau of Fiscal Accountability chief, OFC*

"Our biggest accomplishments included maintaining a high percentage of families assigned to the Alternative Response pathway and the rollout of team supervision utilizing the consultation framework."

– *Darleen Shope, Investigations and Alternative Response supervisor, Trumbull County Children Services*

"Champaign County began restructuring our Social Services Department in January of 2013 to place more specialization on our custody cases. With...specialized workers handling the cases of youth in agency custody, we are seeing that children are being safely reunified much quicker...[F]or those unable to be reunified, permanency plans are being developed sooner."

– *Stacy Cox, social services administrator, Champaign County Department of Job and Family Services*

"With 346 foster youth enrolled [in] and receiving various Connecting the Dots program services, we can now proudly announce that we have exceeded our program participation goal!"

– *Sonia Tillman, Differential Response and Special Projects manager, OFC*

"The Subcommittee on Responding to Child Abuse, Neglect and Dependency's work on Differential Response is nearing completion, with the statewide rollout of the model and receipt of a follow-up evaluation on families involved in the original pilot project. The positive outcomes of the pilot project are holding up well after five years, and we are beginning to see increased cost savings as a result of use of this model."

– *Steve Hanson; Children, Families and the Courts Program manager; Supreme Court of Ohio*

Q: What are your priorities for 2014?

"[F]ully integrating the newly developed Differential Response Practice Profiles into daily practice and discussions between workers and agency supervisors."

– *Stacy Cox, social services administrator, Champaign County Department of Job and Family Services*

“Ohio CASA will focus on establishing new programs in 2014 and expanding support to underserved existing programs.... Last year, over 7,000 youth were appointed a CASA volunteer in Ohio; however, over 13,000 abuse, neglect and dependency cases are filed each year in Ohio’s juvenile courts.”

– *Doug Stephens, executive director, Ohio CASA*

“Job one is [the] developing and licensing of new homes to serve Ohio’s youth with significant behavioral challenges; also to continue to expand our family-centered services to reach more families and youth around the state.”

– *Lesia Krisa, agency administrator, Alliance Human Services*

“From conversations with newly elected officers, who will take office in January, it’s already quite clear that one of the priority areas of the OHIO Youth Advisory Board in 2014 will be transitional housing.”

– *Lisa Dickson, communications chair, Foster Care Alumni of America Ohio Chapter*

“Our focus will be to ... strengthen our partnerships with our public and private agencies to better serve the children and families of Ohio. Whether it be [through] rule changes, new programs to serve families, maximizing federal and state funding and/or providing training [and] technical assistance, we will keep in the forefront those we serve in everything we do.”

– *Dan Shook, Bureau of Fiscal Accountability chief, OFC*

“[W]orking closely with county and state partners and child welfare stakeholders to further shape and strengthen a statewide Continuous Quality Improvement Plan. We are excited to advance this work with our partners in the upcoming year!”

– *Carla Carpenter, Bureau of Federal and State Initiatives chief, OFC*

1. Equipping providers to meet the needs of at-risk families by achieving state implementation of a new Medicaid service called Intensive Home Based Treatment.
2. Improve communication in the child welfare system through implementation of a common assessment and level-of-care tool.
3. Provide leadership to a new initiative called Ohio Fostering Connections, which aims to inform Ohioans about opportunities to serve foster youth through age 21.”

– *Mark Mecum, executive director, Ohio Association of Child Caring Agencies*

“NAMI Ohio will focus on strengthening our grassroots infrastructure so that all Ohioans in need are able to access our education, support and advocacy programs in their local communities. Additionally, we will work hard in 2014 to reduce the level of discrimination against mental illness so that anyone with an illness is comfortable seeking treatment.”

– *Betsy Johnson, associate executive director, National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) of Ohio*

“[T]o reduce the number of children in the agency’s custody, with a focus on securing permanency for those children in the agency’s permanent custody and reducing the amount of time children spend in the custody of the agency.”

– *Bruce Anderson, administrator of children services, Licking County Department of Job and Family Services*

“I would like to obtain and maintain a full staff of foster care licensing and technical assistance specialists to provide consistent support to public and private agencies. It is important to continue to listen to the voices of our community partners, not only during regional meetings, but every day during our contact with them. We must continue to operationalize the Six Principles of Partnership on a daily basis.”

– *Barb Manuel, Bureau of Child and Adult Technical Assistance chief, OFC*

“The Advisory Committee on Children, Families and the Courts will be reviewing the guardian ad litem standards contained in Rule of Superintendence 48. The rule has been in effect for about five years, and we would like to examine how it is being implemented and its effectiveness.”

– *Steve Hanson; Children, Families and the Courts Program manager; Supreme Court of Ohio*

“The OCTF board and staff will be creating a five-year strategic plan. This will allow the Trust Fund to refine its purpose [and] solidify its core infrastructure and its core business, while identifying

opportunities for expansion into other area projects in the furtherance of its mission. ...The OCTF will also continue searching for ways in which it can streamline its operations through internal modifications and/or statutory changes. This includes further assisting our local partners in delivering their OCTF-approved child abuse and child neglect prevention programs and services, in achieving their child abuse and child neglect prevention outcomes, [and] in fulfilling their OCTF reporting requirements.”

– *David Monder, acting executive director, Ohio Children’s Trust Fund*

Q: What do you see as the child welfare system’s greatest strength? Is there something we should be doing that we’re not?

“One of the many system strengths is the open communication and partnerships between the counties and the Office of Families and Children.”

– *Darlene Shope, Investigations and Alternative Response supervisor, Trumbull County Children Services*

“The system’s greatest strength is the professionals and foster parents dedicated to serving Ohio’s most at-risk youth. We have also experienced a better working relationship between [OD]JFS and private agencies – more of a partnership to work on issues [that] impact people’s lives. ...As a state, we need to address the issue of youth aging out of the system into homelessness. This is unacceptable.”

– *Lesia Krisa, agency administrator, Alliance Human Services*

“[C]onsistency in independent living preparation throughout the state. ...[Also,] caseworkers and foster parents who work with teens could be better equipped with knowledge about resources to support youth during their transition from foster care to adulthood.”

– *Lisa Dickson, communications chair, Foster Care Alumni of America Ohio Chapter*

“[A strength is t]he ability to share information and have up-to-date data at our fingertips in the SACWIS system. ...We need better coordination of effort and communication/sharing of information between child welfare, juvenile court, schools and health care (physical and behavioral).”

– *Dr. Sheila Kochis, audit administrator, Franklin County Children Services*

“I continue to be energized by the spirit of partnership and collaboration across our system! Whether it’s OFC and county staff coming together to partner on Ohio’s Differential Response Leadership Council or counties reaching out to and collaborating with one another in peer-to-peer learning opportunities, the generosity within our system is clear.”

– *Carla Carpenter, Bureau of Federal and State Initiatives chief, OFC*

“Ohio CASA and the local network of 33 CASA programs appreciate the collaborative relationships with local public children service agencies in the 37 counties served by CASA volunteers. ...Ohio CASA values its relationship with OFC and appreciates their efforts to encourage local support. OFC has been invaluable in helping CASA programs maintain a high level of training, including ... developing new skills for working with older youth.”

– *Doug Stephens, executive director, Ohio CASA*

“Ohio has many experts in child welfare and mental health, including policymakers, agency administrators and direct care staff. We need to do a better job of bringing these leaders together to advance the child welfare system. One of many improvements we can achieve is establishing a standardized communication tool in the child welfare system – one that produces an assessment of a child’s needs and recommends levels of out-of-home care. Many states are years ahead of us in this regard.”

– *Mark Mecum, executive director, Ohio Association of Child Caring Agencies*

“The people [who] provide the services to children and families are the system’s greatest strength. We must continue to find ways to support and acknowledge the work being done.”

– *Bruce Anderson, administrator of children services, Licking County Department of Job and Family Services*

“As with all human services, the greatest strength lies in dedicated and compassionate professionals who are committed to the well-being of children. ...I have found these [child welfare] professionals to be a committed group of people.”

– *Dr. Mark Hurst, medical director, Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services*

“I see our greatest strength as our caring. Despite the odds and obstacles, we continue to work tirelessly for our clients because we really care about the people our agencies and/or organizations serve. We continue to measure our success one person at a time.”

– *Terry Kennedy Mancini, policy staff, Ohio Department of Youth Services*

“The state has done an excellent job of implementing Differential Response in Ohio. Over time, more and more families will become comfortable reaching out to the child welfare system for help. The funds that are saved [by] keeping children out of substitute care need to be reinvested in support services to help families who come to the attention of the child welfare system.”

– *Betsy Johnson, associate executive director, National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) of Ohio*

“Both the counties and the Office of Families and Children are always looking at what can be done to improve the child welfare system in Ohio and, most importantly, taking action to make these improvements. This is clearly seen through various different initiatives, such as Differential Response, ProtectOHIO, Permanency Roundtables, Crossover Youth, etc.”

– *Stacy Cox, social services administrator, Champaign County Department of Job and Family Services*

Q: What would you like to see the Office of Families and Children focus on in 2014?

“OFC needs to continue to focus on licensing rules to ensure that the rules are practical and address current concerns; continue to advocate for services for youth aging out of the system; continue to partner with private agencies.”

– *Lesia Krisa, agency administrator, Alliance Human Services*

“The ability for providers to enter more information into SACWIS that is applicable to placements of youth in custody.”

– *Dr. Sheila Kochis, audit administrator, Franklin County Children Services*

“Raising a child with a mental health disorder is difficult and exhausting work. If one of the parents also has a mental health disorder or does not have a support system in place, the family could find themselves in crisis. Identifying these families before a crisis and linking them to support services such as parent advocates, respite care, support groups, etc., would go a long way toward keeping families together and children out of substitute care.”

– *Betsy Johnson, associate executive director, National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) of Ohio*

“Being a partner with other agencies. Seldom is one person, child or family a ‘single agency’ family. We need to work as a team for the betterment of all Ohioans.”

– *Terry Kennedy Mancini, policy staff, Ohio Department of Youth Services*

“Continue with the development of new data reports to better help agencies make data-informed decisions.”

– *Stacy Cox, social services administrator, Champaign County Department of Job and Family Services*

“Support[ing] 88 county-enhanced resources while continuing to build tools and practice for child safety, permanency and well-being.”

– *Crystal Allen, executive director, Public Children Services Association of Ohio (PCSAO)*

“[P]racticing more of our PFOF Six Principles through demonstration.”

– *Sonia Tillman, Differential Response and Special Projects manager, OFC*

“Continuing the work of Partnerships For Ohio's Families [PFOF] toward the goals of providing better services to Ohio's children and families and, of course, meeting our federal mandates. We have come a great distance, but there is still much work to do.”

– *Bruce Anderson, administrator of children services, Licking County Department of Job and Family Services*

1. Implement the new Master Contract for public and private agencies.
2. Plan implementation of a common assessment and level-of-care tool.

3. Continue to seek consistency among licensing specialists' enforcement of ODJFS rules and enhance technical assistance offerings to public and private agencies.”

– *Mark Mecum, executive director, Ohio Association of Child Caring Agencies*

“[We all] need to focus on cross-system collaboration. The needs of children are complex and touch many different systems. For us to be effective, we must marshal our collective resources to assure that we are meeting needs in the important areas and not needlessly duplicating efforts in others.”

– *Mark Hurst, medical director, Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services*

December 2013 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.

12/12/13 - Webinar Title IV-E Foster Care Maintenance (FCM) Federal Review Results Update

PRINCIPLE OF THE MONTH:

Partnerships and collaboration enhance the quality of outcomes.

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