May is known for spring flowers, rain—and National Foster Care Month. If you know someone who fosters, please take a moment to reach out and acknowledge them for sharing not just their home, but also their time, spirit and sense of connection. This is my shout-out to the thousands of adoptive, foster, kinship and respite families throughout Ohio: thank you!

I recently spoke at an event and paraphrased a quote that likened volunteering to voting. When you volunteer, you show your friends, colleagues and government leaders your priorities and the community that you envision. We also have done that by choosing a career—in whatever capacity—that strives to promote strong and healthy families. In my new role as deputy director, I get to meet with lots of groups of professionals and volunteers who are new to me, as well as with colleagues who I worked with in my former roles. In case you ever hear anyone say “no one really cares,” take it from me: That’s not true! We sometimes get frustrated with the barriers inherent to our system, stymied by a lack of physical resources, and overwhelmed with the magnitude of the task at hand, but I always walk away from these interactions super-charged by people’s passion for the job itself.

In April, I was able to take part in a number of prevention month activities, which always is fun. I also participated in Ohio CASA’s 2017 CASA Day event. Lorain County’s Kristen LeProvost was named Pro Star Volunteer of the year and provided an eloquent description of what it means to be a volunteer.

During PCSAO’s New Executives Orientation, we spent a lot of time talking about Ohio’s Child and Family Services Review. We are knee deep in our state-conducted assessment, and I would be remiss to not again thank all of the OFC and county staff who have lent their considerable time and expertise to the process—and, of course, to the 15 volunteer counties who have opened their doors to the process.

This month’s First Friday will link you to information about Foster Care Month, provide updates on Bridges and Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) activities, and acquaint you with an exciting new resource that OFC’s transitional youth staff are developing for foster parents, caseworkers, caregivers and others who are working with transitional age or emancipated youth. I’m also very pleased to introduce OFC’s new Medicaid Technical Assistance Section, which we established to support the transition of youth to Medicaid managed care plans.
May is National Foster Care Month

Each May, we make a special effort to acknowledge the foster parents, family members, policymakers, child welfare professionals, and other members of the community who help children and youth in foster care find permanent homes and connections. This year’s theme is “Empowering Caregivers, Strengthening Families.” For best-practice strategies for recruiting and retaining foster parents, as well as real-life stories that highlight important practice issues, visit childwelfare.gov/fostercaremonth. We’d love to share how your community or organization celebrates foster and kinship caregivers. Send your news and photos to First_Friday@jfs.ohio.gov.

ESSA Update: Foster Care Provisions Unchanged

Many of you have asked about the impact of recent Congressional actions that repealed ESSA’s accountability regulations. Please note that these regulations do not impact the foster care provisions, which became effective Dec. 10, 2016, and were discussed in the January First Friday.

Ongoing protections for students in foster care include the following:

- Allowing them to remain in the school of origin when that is deemed to be in their best interest;
- Immediately enrolling the child in school regardless of whether school records and other documents are available; and
- Having transportation provided to the school of origin when necessary.

Questions? Email Susan.Williams@jfs.ohio.gov or visit education.ohio.gov/Topics/School-Improvement/Foster-Care.

Ohio Medicaid Schools Program

Did you know that the Ohio Medicaid Schools Program allows school entities to be reimbursed for Medicaid-covered services, certain administrative activities and specialized transportation for eligible children ages 3 to 21? The services must be provided through an individualized education program (IEP) designed to allow a child to participate in school. Any qualified local education agency may participate, and more than 600 do. For more information, visit education.ohio.gov/Topics/Finance-and-Funding/Programs/The-Ohio-Medicaid-Schools-Program.

Using the PBIS Framework to Improve Academic and Behavior Outcomes

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) is a framework endorsed by the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) to improve students’ safety, social competence and academic achievement. PBIS emphasizes data-based decision-making, active supervision, structured reinforcement of positive behavior, use of logical consequences and clear office referral procedures. ODE partners with local providers in this effort. The Ohio PBIS Network includes professionals from each of the 16 state PBIS support teams and the ODE Office for Exceptional Children. To identify and contact members of your community’s support team, visit education.ohio.gov/Topics/School-Improvement/State-Support-Teams. For more about PBIS, visit education.ohio.gov/Topics/Other-Resources/School-Safety/Building-Better-Learning-Environments/PBIS-Resources.

It’s Foster Care Month in Ohio, Too!

ODJFS joins Gov. Kasich and Lt. Gov. Mary Taylor in recognizing and celebrating Ohio’s foster parents and kinship caregivers for their kindness and generosity in caring for children whose parents cannot. The governor and lieutenant governor have signed a resolution recognizing May 2017 as Foster Care Month in Ohio. The resolution reminds us that:

- More than 14,000 children and youth are in foster care in Ohio.
- More than 3,000 children in Ohio live with kinship caregivers.
- Ohio has 7,142 certified foster families.
- Dedicated and diverse kinship and foster families provide lifelong love and support.
- ODJFS and other public and private child caring organizations work diligently to ensure that Ohio’s children have temporary or permanent safe and loving homes.

The resolution is attached to this month’s First Friday. Consider displaying it in a prominent location at your agency or organization to show your support!

Parent Rights in Special Education

Last month, the Ohio Department of Education released a guidebook for parents of students with special needs. “A Guide to Parent Rights in Special Education” is designed to help parents understand their rights and their children’s rights according to federal and state law. It also has information about how to establish surrogate parents for children in foster care. To view it, visit education.ohio.gov/getattachment/Topics/Special-Education/A-Guide-to-Parent-Rights-in-Special-Education/ODE_ParentRights_040617.pdf.aspx
Bridges Staff Share Information, Seek Input

Staff continue to work hard to develop Bridges, the new program for 18- to 21-year-olds who’ve aged out of foster care. To ensure that the program meets the needs of those it will serve, the Bridges team has met with representatives from many different programs and groups. Here are just a few:

- Comprehensive Case Management and Employment Program
- Ohio Independent Living Association
- OHIO Youth Advisory Board
- Ohio Department of Education
- PCSAO Legislative Committee
- Ohio International Association of Workforce Professionals
- Ohio Association of Child Caring Agencies
- Children’s Bureau’s Court Improvement Program (CIP)
- Coalition on Homelessness and Housing in Ohio

At a regional CIP meeting in Chicago, Bridges staff met with representatives from other states, including Michigan and Nebraska, which have similar programs. Back in Ohio, they’ve worked with OCWTP and representatives from the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative to plan training for youth, PCSA staff, caregivers and anyone else who will be providing Bridges services.

Over the next several months, they will continue to share information, seek input and develop new partnerships. Their goal is to ensure that all emancipated young adults in Ohio will know about Bridges and the opportunities the program can offer them.

Bridges Clarification

Thank you to the sharp-eyed reader who pointed out misleading language in April’s From the Mailbox response. The question asked if a young adult needed to leave agency custody at age 18 to qualify for Bridges. When replying that the young adult could continue in custody past age 18 and be eligible for Bridges, we were not clear that the youth must first leave custody before becoming eligible for Bridges.

To clarify Bridges eligibility: A young adult must have left PCSA custody on or after their 18th birthday but not yet be 21. The young adult also must meet one of the following program eligibility criteria:

- Completing secondary education or a program leading to an equivalent credential OR
- Enrolled in an institution that provides post-secondary or vocational education OR
- Participating in a program or activity designed to promote or remove barriers to employment OR
- Employed for at least 80 hours per month OR
- Incapable of doing any of the activities described above due to a diagnosed physical or mental health medical condition.

Bridges: From the Mailbox

Each month we share a few emails sent to the Bridges@jfs.ohio.gov mailbox. Thanks so much to everyone who has taken the time to share their opinions, ideas and questions. Your insight is invaluable as we develop this program. Recently, we were asked how often a young adult can enter and exit Bridges.

Q: Is there a limit to the number of times a young adult can enter and leave Bridges?

A: There is NO limit to the number of times a young adult can enter and leave Bridges. We understand that the journey of emancipated young adults is not easy. Many factors may impact them and pull them in different directions. As long as they are eligible for Bridges and have not reached age 21, they may use the program’s supportive services as often as they like. For more information, visit jfs.ohio.gov/ocf or email Bridges@jfs.ohio.gov with your questions.

Resource Family Conference in June

The Ohio Family Care Association will hold its 41st annual Resource Family Conference June 16-17 in Columbus. The conference is designed to connect, educate and build meaningful collaborations between people who share similar experiences. To see the agenda and registration options, visit ofcaonline.org/conference.
A Toolkit Test Drive

No one would buy a car without taking a test drive first! OFC’s Transitional Youth Section staff feel the same way about the Independent Living Skills Toolkit, so they’ve been taking it on the road. Recently, they visited Montgomery County, where they led a discussion with foster parents and caregivers from group homes and residential centers. They shared a few of the toolkit’s suggested activities and got some valuable feedback in return. Here’s a sampling:

Suggestion: Take advantage of daily experiences to teach youth how to maintain their home, plan and prepare meals, and plan for their future living arrangement and related expenses.

Feedback: Participants shared how they show youth how to do laundry, clean a kitchen, and properly use and maintain appliances.

Suggestion: Actively involve youth in age-appropriate meal planning and food preparation.

Feedback: Participants reported that they encourage and expect youth to use appliances and learn kitchen skills so they can make food for themselves – for example, a grilled cheese sandwich – and also help with family meal preparation.

Suggestion: Review standard housing applications and lease agreements with youth. Practice completing them and review their terms.

Feedback: Some participants reported that they create mock lease agreements for youth to familiarize them with their future rights and responsibilities as tenants.

Most participants felt that the toolkit would be helpful. One commented: “It could give both fresh ideas to the experienced caregiver and guide newer caregivers with helpful techniques to assist their youth on the road to self-sufficiency.” Many thanks to all the dedicated caregivers who shared their expertise and experience!

SAVE THE DATE!
Fostering Pathways to Success Conference
October 12, 2017
Success Story: Montgomery County Youth Resource Center

It can be difficult to arrange the full range of services that older youth may need to become self-sufficient. Montgomery County decided to improve the process by establishing the Youth Resource Center, a one-stop shop where any Montgomery County resident between the ages of 14 and 24 can drop in for services.

The Youth Resource Center is located inside The Job Center at 1133 S. Edwin C. Moses Blvd., in the same building as OhioMeansJobs Montgomery County and the Montgomery County Department of Job and Family Services. Youth can visit the Resource Center for help finding a job, accessing training, completing school, finding a place to live, learning independent living skills, receiving developmental disability services, getting a health screening or physical, and/or accessing behavioral health care. Youth also can visit an emergency pantry stocked with clothes and other essential supplies, and sign up for workshops, such as “Math that Matters,” “Ready, Set, Resume,” “JUMP Start Your Job Search,” “Master Your Money,” and “Anger Management.”

No referrals are necessary. Most youth hear about the program from various community and governmental agencies, such as the Montgomery County Community Action, Goodwill Easter Seals, various community behavioral health organizations, and probation and parole officers. To participate, they just have to visit the center, see the receptionist and complete a self-assessment. A Youth Resource Center coordinator will then talk with them about their self-assessment and ask further questions using the Comprehensive Case Management and Employment Program assessment to determine the most appropriate services needed.

To learn more, see the attached flyer, call (937) 496-7987, or email Doris Edelman at EdelmannD@mcohio.org or Lee Hollis at HollisL@mcohio.org.

Rule Review Update

The following Ohio Administrative Code rule was posted to ohioerulereview.org in April:

From April 5 through May 5:

- 5101:2-5-28, “Agency cause for denial of initial certification, denial of recertification or revocation of a foster home certificate”

Please continue to visit the site periodically for new postings. We welcome your input and hope you use this opportunity to share your experiences and suggestions. The website received 353 hits in April.

Missed an issue of First Friday?

No problem. All First Friday updates are posted on the OFC website under the Partners for Ohio’s Families button. Click here to check them out!
New Medicaid Technical Assistance Section

We’re excited to announce the launch of OFC’s newest section: Medicaid Technical Assistance. This important group has a big job: supporting the transition of youth from Medicaid fee-for-service to Ohio’s managed care plans. This includes children currently in foster care, as well as children who have been adopted from foster care. (For more about this, see the January First Friday.)

Sue Williams is leading the section, which is part of the OFC Bureau of Systems and Practice Advancement. Three staff already are on board – Peggy Day, Leondrea Ingram and Amber Moore—and two more will join in the near future. Together, they will provide direct support to PCSAs by answering questions about the data system, answering questions about Medicaid policy, and helping county staff navigate the provider networks. They also will work with the plans to identify service providers for children in need.

Many thanks again to our partners at the Ohio Department of Medicaid for supporting this important work. To learn more about the assistance that will be available soon, contact Peggy Day at (614) 387-8588 or Peggy.Day@jfs.ohio.gov.

Meet the Medicaid Technical Assistance Team

Peggy Day, Supervisor

Peggy says she can’t imagine herself in anything but a public service job. She has been a teacher, a librarian and a university delivery truck driver. For the past 11 years, she has worked in Ohio’s Medicaid program, where she helped develop and implement Medicaid Managed Care. Peggy holds both a master’s degree and a PhD, though she prefers not to use the “Dr.” title.

Leondrea Ingram, Medicaid Health Specialist

Leondrea joins OFC with more than 10 years’ experience as a case manager for the Franklin County Department of Job and Family Services. There, she was recognized for her work developing cooperative action plans and helping customers overcome barriers to employment and become self-sufficient.

Amber Moore, Medicaid Health Specialist

Amber also joins us from the Franklin County JFS, where she served as a case manager and mentor helping customers get health care and related supports. She has served in a number of county roles, including as a caseworker, supervisor and coordinator of the Learning, Earning and Parenting program, which helps low-income youth 18 and younger earn high school diplomas or GEDs. She also has been a liaison between the Franklin County PCSA and Huckleberry House, which provides services for young people struggling with homelessness, substance abuse, poverty and violence.

April 2017 Global Emails

The following emails were sent in April to PCSA directors and/or private agency directors. They are organized below by mailing date and key words.

4/7/2017 – Title IV-E Non-Reimbursable Placement Setting: The Mustard Seed Foundation

4/21/2017 – Name the System Contest – May 5, 2017

4/24/2017 – Presentation of Results from the Comprehensive Assessment Planning Model-Interim Solution (CAPMIS) Evaluation

4/28/2017 – Foster Care Resolution 2017

New Trauma and Human Trafficking Bench Cards

The Supreme Court of Ohio recently published new Juvenile Trauma and Juvenile Human Trafficking Bench Cards. The cards are useful for judges, magistrates, court staff and others who work with court-involved youth who may be at risk of trafficking.

The cards will be distributed at upcoming training events. They also can be downloaded here:

- Juvenile Court Trauma Informed Practices
- Juvenile Human Trafficking, Ohio Laws & Safe Harbor Response

Anyone with questions can email Veronica.Burroughs@sc.ohio.gov.

Principle of the Month

It is our responsibility to provide leadership and maintain organizational and professional competence.