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**Contact: Benjamin Johnson**  
**Phone: (614) 466-6650**  
**Email: [benjamin.johnson@jfs.ohio.gov](mailto:benjamin.johnson@jfs.ohio.gov)**

## **Foster Care Month Honors Ohio Foster Families**

COLUMBUS, OHIO – May is National Foster Care Month, and the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) is joining Governor John R. Kasich in recognizing Ohio’s foster parents and kinship caregivers for their kindness and generosity in caring for children whose parents cannot.

“It is never easy when a child must be removed from his or her home,” said ODJFS Director Michael Colbert. “Ohio’s foster families and kinship caregivers provide safe, stable homes for children in need. They make an extraordinary contribution to the children in their care, to their communities and to the state as a whole. I commend them for their unwavering commitment to children in need.”

Over the last year, ODJFS began two partnerships that will improve Ohio’s foster care system for older children and teens.

The agency has partnered with the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption to place adoption recruiters trained in the “Wendy’s Wonderful Kids” model in counties around the state. Research has shown that children served with this method are up to three times more likely to be adopted. The recruiters are focusing solely on finding adoptive homes for older children who have been in foster care for more than two years.

Ideally, all children will find permanent, loving homes. When that doesn’t happen, ODJFS still works to make their experience in foster care the best it can be. Earlier this year, the agency partnered with Big Brother Big Sisters to launch a program called “Connecting the Dots from Foster Care to Employment and Independent Living” in eight pilot counties. For younger teenagers in foster care, Connecting the Dots offers mentoring, educational supports and work readiness training, so that if they turn 18 before finding permanent homes, they will be better prepared for life on their own. For older teenagers and young adults, it will offer improved independent living and employment services so that they will have more support, more guidance, more connections and more knowledge as they transition to work, vocational training or college, and independent living.

Ohio has 12,741 children in foster care and 9,752 licensed foster parents. In addition, many children live with grandparents or other relatives when their parents cannot care for them. Ohioans interested in becoming foster parents or learning more about the foster care system should contact their county public children services agency. A directory of county agencies is available at <http://jfs.ohio.gov/county>.

