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OCTF NEWS



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A Note From the Ohio Children's Trust Fund (OCTF) Executive Director Nicole Sillaman



For many families, September typically marks the start of a new school year, new activities and schedules, and excitement for what will be another busy season leading up to the holidays. But for others, September brings with it anxiety and concerns pertaining to how to juggle childcare needs on top of work, supporting children with extracurricular activities, and managing new behavioral health concerns as children and youth navigate new pressures affecting their mental health.

Recently, the U.S. Surgeon General issued an advisory on the mental health and well-being of parents across the nation. Cited in this advisory, "Over the last decade, parents have been consistently more likely to report experiencing high levels of stress compared to other adults. Thirty-three percent of parents reporting high levels of stress in the past month compared to 20% of other adults."

We know these stressors are prevalent within Ohio as well, and families participating in our prevention services continue to seek out financial and economic supports to address the needs of their families. During the past state fiscal year, we provided 1,585 families with economic and concrete supports in our efforts to mitigate family stressors that may negatively affect their ability to parent their children. The top two supports families needed were in relation to access to food and housing supports, demonstrating the basic needs families constantly struggle to provide.

As we continue our work to build a community of support throughout Ohio, we are reminded that economic and concrete supports are essential in maintaining the well-being of families, especially in times of stress. If you are interested in learning more about these efforts, please connect with us via OCTF@OCTF.ohio.gov.

~ Nicole

Board Member Highlight: Samantha (Sam) Shafer



Sam Shafer, LISW-S serves as the Chief Executive Officer at Integrated Services for Behavioral Health. Sam has worked in the behavioral health field for 20 years with a strong focus on highlighting the innate strengths of individuals, families, and communities. Sam openly shares that she is a person in recovery and believes strongly in the power of telling our stories to break down stigma. Ms. Shafer has been an OCTF Board member since November 2021.

Through her advocacy work Sam has supported the expansion of collaborative helping and harm reduction strategies across Ohio. This combined work highlights the need to merge behavioral health services

with population health strategies such as prevention and meaningful access to food and housing. Sam shares her belief that the constant, and respectful, critique of ourselves and our systems is essential to our ability to design resources that meet the needs of all those we are dedicated to walk alongside and serve. "It is an honor to serve with so many incredible people working together to make the world a softer place."

For more information about OCTF Board members, and to learn when meetings occur, please visit our website [here](#).

Virtual Reality Headset Experience

In July, OCTF staff were able to participate in a virtual reality experience, allowing them to better understand what a day in the life of a caseworker looks like. This opportunity was provided in partnership with the Department of Children and Youth (DCY) training unit, which coordinated the event.

The virtual reality headsets are made possible by the AVenueS technology, which was made available to Ohio in 2021 to assist with recruitment, preparation, and retention of the children services workforce. AVenueS is an interactive virtual reality-based learning method that simulates current real-world situations faced by workers in the field. This provides a risk-free environment that broadens the abilities to observe, inquire, interpret, and reflect in ways that inform more firmly grounded casework. This tool allows agencies to assess critical thinking skills prior to hiring potential candidates as well as build the skills of existing staff. AVenueS allows workers an immersive experience within a home setting. They are able to observe and listen, in an interactive way, to what happens during a home visit.

Participants can ask the family in the scenario questions that are similar to what they would ask when interviewing a family in the home. They can use that information in a debriefing activity which includes verbal processing and documentation activities. The headsets have been utilized across the state by 62 counties, the 8 Regional Training Centers (RTCs), the University Partnership Program (UPP), and DCY.

As OCTF continues to think through creative ways to support the prevention continuum in Ohio, AVenueS is just one more example of how we are shifting our mindset to be more prevention-focused and understanding the complexities of what families are experiencing in Ohio.



Child Advocacy Centers Update

In the last biennium (SFY 2022-2023), all OCTF Child Advocacy Center (CAC) grantees implemented Darkness to Light's *Stewards of Children* and either trained parents/caregivers and community stakeholders how to identify and prevent child sex abuse or trained professionals to be facilitators of the *Stewards of Children* curriculum. Through this opportunity, 509 caretakers and 1,294 professionals received this valuable education.

Building off this success, beginning in SFY 2024, OCTF awarded seven accredited child advocacy centers with primary prevention grants to implement evidence-based or innovative child sex abuse prevention programs.

The grantees are:

- A Caring Place Child Advocacy Center
- Children's Advocacy Center of Portage County
- Child Advocacy Center of Warren County
- Child Protection Center of Ross County
- Crime Victim Services
- Hope's Place
- Wayne County Children's Advocacy Center



For SFY 2024, these seven CAC's served a total of 1,762 adults (parents/caregivers, community stakeholders) and 13,242 children/youth (grades K-12). Most of the grantees continue to educate adults and professionals using the *Stewards of Children* curriculum. CAC of Portage County is also offering programming that is raising awareness about Sextortion and the Wayne County CAC is employing an innovative program for adults called *How to Protect our Children from Predators: What You Need to Know*. The program aims to teach adults how to identify signs of child abuse, how to respond to a child if they disclose abuse, and how to prevent abuse and refer the child to appropriate services.

Additionally, with the state's adoption of Erin's Law, more than half (four) of the grantees are also providing programming for children/youth in traditional school settings to promote body safety and teach prevention strategies. Youth programs include the Monique Burr Foundation's *Child Safety Matters (CSM)* and *Teen Safety Matters (TSM)*, an evidence-based program, as well as innovative local programs like, *ChildHelp Speak Up Be Safe*, featured in the organizational highlight on page 4, and *Connections*, designed to help youth understand their own behaviors in relationships, identify risky behaviors in others, and make safer, healthier relationship choices. Many of the organizations that are serving youth have been able to secure a partnership with their local school district(s) to provide age-appropriate prevention education in classrooms during the school day.

We look forward to the impact these grantees will make in SFY 2025. Each requested and was awarded funding to continue serving their communities through June 30, 2025.



The Child Protection Center of Ross County was created in 1996 to reduce the incidence and trauma of child abuse through a coordinated multi-agency approach by promoting healthy children, families, and communities by providing education, prevention, and protective services. The child advocacy center ensures that children in our area who have been sexually and/or physically abused receive appropriate attention in a timely and family friendly manner regardless of their ability to pay. The center meets the strict standards of a children's advocacy center set by the National Children's Alliance.

The center provides abuse assessment and free preventative education services to local schools and professional agencies that provide services to children. The Child Protection Center received a grant from OCTF to provide evidence-based primary prevention services to children in kindergarten through the sixth grade. The center has two main programs, *ChildHelp Speak Up Be Safe* (SUBS) and Darkness to Light, Stewards of Children training. The SUBS program is aimed at stopping and preventing child abuse, including physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, bullying, and cyberbullying. Stewards of Children educates adults to prevent, recognize, and react responsibly to child sexual abuse, and is designed for leadership, staff, and volunteers of child-serving agencies and organizations.

Since the grant was awarded in 2023, the Child Protection Center has been invited to facilitate the SUBS program in five school districts in Ross County, training over 1,100 children last school year and providing take home information for countless caregivers. Numerous schools are scheduled for the program this school year, giving school districts the ability to become compliant with Erin's Law and the Department of Education and Workforce's requirements with no additional costs to the school. The center believes it is vitally important to provide children with the skills to recognize if they are in an unsafe situation and be able to approach a safe adult for help.

In addition to presenting the SUBS program in local schools, the center recently collaborated with the local health system to provide the education to area Girls Scouts. The center has facilitated *Stewards of Children* training for the Ross County Health District and is coordinating the training for the local Big Brothers Big Sisters program. The center continues to collaborate with additional schools and community agencies to provide this indispensable service.

Family Success Network Expansion Sites: Year One Update

The Family Success Network (FSN) moved forward with an exciting expansion during the previous biennium, building upon the success of FSN in Columbiana, Mahoning, and Trumbull counties. This expansion extended services to several communities across Ohio. New grant recipients, including West Side Catholic Center (Cuyahoga), Greenleaf Family Center (Summit), Mercy Health (Lucas and Wood), and United Way of Greater Cincinnati (Hamilton, Clermont, and Brown) recently completed their first full year of implementing services to families in their counties.

Each site experienced numerous success stories and highlights during their first year of implementation. The following are some of those stories in the words of our FSN Program Managers:

FSN
Expansion
by the
Numbers

Year 1 Total
Referrals: **734**

Year 1 Total
Families
Served: **396**



"The successes that I think about the most include how effective my family coaches are. Knowing that some of our parents have started GED classes, found employment and/or housing, referred to quality programs and services in the community, etc., because they had the good fortune of being referred to FSN where they were assigned to a knowledgeable family coach that cares and doesn't judge them. There are countless stories, including a family coach advising a mom to go to her doctor because of symptoms that led to a cancer diagnosis, another family coach working with an outside agency to avoid eviction for a family, and another family coach working to secure a juicer for a family with a child that was diagnosed with cancer. The list goes on and on. FSN Cuyahoga's family coaches are creative problem solvers that dedicate themselves to helping our families daily. I'm so proud of them and the work they do." -Maryum Ali, FSN Program Manager, West Side Catholic Center



"A family was referred because they had a lot of needs, including communication with the school where they have a child on the spectrum with high needs and mounting regression. The parents were considering pulling him from a regular classroom setting because of the level of frustration from Mom and Dad with the school staff and accommodations.

We met with the school staff and transportation at the school to discuss options for keeping him in a regular classroom, and through those meetings we obtained a communication device for home use outside of school, specialized transportation that will allow for 1 to 1 para-professional assistance for the bus ride to school and home, and he just completed a writing summer program that the school offered to keep him structured during the summer to prevent summer regression." -Kristen Junga, FSN Program Manager, Mercy Health



"A family came to the FSN program with multi-layered complex challenges that took a year to sort through. The family was faced with custody court challenges, unexpected financial strain, child behaviors in the home, and the parent lacked the confidence to push through all of these challenges. At the end of working with FSN, this family had established a routine in the home attributed to Triple P, mom was now able to maintain her budget despite being faced with garnished wages and gained the courage and confidence to advocate for herself and her daughter in custody court." -Chardonnay Starr, FSN Program Manager, United Way of Greater Cincinnati



"One of our Family Coaches started work with a family when their child was only 3 months old. The Family Coach had the opportunity to support the family through many challenges and assist them by connecting them with community resources due to being new in the area and providing concrete supports such as rental assistance and baby supplies. Now upon closing out services, the child is a happy and healthy 1 year-old boy and the family is expecting their second child in Spring 2025." -Heather Finklestein, FSN Program Manager, Greenleaf Family Center

New Sites Coming Soon!

OCTF is excited to announce the addition of two new FSN sites. Funding was recently awarded to The Center for Family Safety and Healing at Nationwide Children's Hospital (TCFSH) and Child and Adolescent Behavioral Health (CABH) to expand FSN to additional communities in Ohio. TCFSH will serve families in Franklin County, and CABH will serve families in Stark County.

Both sites have hired a Program Manager and Family Coaches, and they are currently working on developing their implementation plans in partnership with their county implementation teams. Both sites will be fully up and running by October 2024.

Department of Children & Youth Parent and Youth Ambassadors

Parent and Youth Ambassadors (PYAs) are an exciting new support available to families across Ohio. PYAs provide a single, in-person resource for families to have their questions answered and access the support needed quickly. PYAs have lived experience in social services systems and will respond to requests for concrete supports, service referrals, and support navigating various systems.

PYAs are accessible through twelve service delivery areas throughout the state. DCY PYAs are a unique peer support available for families with no specific eligibility requirements when requesting support. Examples of common requests for support range from navigating special education, resources for unhoused families, assistance with childcare, and assistance paying utilities.

PYAs are members of their local community or service delivery area. PYAs focus on building and growing their knowledge of localized supports in their respective service delivery areas as well as DCY programs and services. This allows them to make optimal connections in communities to best serve and support families.

PYAs take the time to listen to families and build trust in their work with families. It is important to feel heard. In a recent request for support aiding a parent navigating the benefits system, a parent shared with the PYA “it seems like you are the only one to really treat me like I’m not the enemy and I appreciate that”.

Anyone can make a request for support for themselves or on behalf of a family. To reach a DCY Parent and Youth Ambassador, call the DCY Family Customer Support Call Center (844) 234-KIDS (5437) or email Ambassadors@childrenandyouth.ohio.gov.



Resource & Referral Agencies by SDA:

YWCA, Toledo	SDA 1–Defiance, Fulton, Henry, Lucas, Ottawa, Paulding, Williams, Wood
CCRC Inc.	SDA 2–Erie, Huron, Lorain, Sandusky, Seneca
Starting Point Inc.	SDA 3–Ashtabula, Cuyahoga, Geauga, Lake
ECRC	SDA 4–Mahoning, Medina, Portage, Stark, Summit, Trumbull
COAD	SDA 5–Ashland, Carroll, Columbiana, Coshocton, Harrison, Holmes, Jefferson, Knox, Tuscarawas, Wayne
4C for Children	SDA 6–Butler, Clermont, Clinton, Hamilton, Warren
YWCA, Lima	SDA 7–Allen, Auglaize, Hancock, Hardin, Mercer, Putnam, Van Wert, Wyandot
4C for Children	SDA 8–Champaign, Clark, Darke, Fayette, Greene, Logan, Miami, Montgomery, Preble, Shelby
Action 4 Children	SDA 9–Delaware, Fairfield, Franklin, Licking, Pickaway, Madison, Union
COAD	SDA 10–Athens, Belmont, Guernsey, Hocking, Monroe, Morgan, Muskingum, Noble, Perry, Washington
COAD	SDA 11–Adams, Brown, Gallia, Highland, Jackson, Lawrence, Meigs, Pike, Ross, Scioto, Vinton
YWCA, Mansfield	SDA 12–Crawford, Marion, Morrow, Richland