



DECEMBER 2024

# OCTF NEWS



## In This Edition

A Note from OCTF Executive Director Nicole Sillaman.....1

2024 Beech Brook Community Partnership Award.....2

Parent Leadership Training.....3

Reach Out and Read Ohio.....5

Annual Impact.....6

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



During the holiday season, many of us look forward to gathering and spending time with family, friends, and other loved ones. However, for others, this time of year can be difficult as many adults are coping with feelings of loneliness. For these individuals, they may be far or disconnected from family and friends or may have lost loved ones over the years.

According to a recent report, we are now experiencing a "loneliness epidemic" where "one in five U.S. adults report feeling lonely on a daily basis (Source: ["1 in 5 US adults reports daily loneliness: Gallup," ABC News](#), Oct. 15)", where this increase of loneliness is impacting daily life.

We know that being a caretaker is hard, and sometimes you may feel alone or not sure where to turn for additional support, but one way to combat loneliness is through social connections.

At OCTF, we have many services available to families to support their social connections, such as parent cafés. A parent café is a place where parents of all types can gather and share their stories, their experiences, their worries, their fears, their wisdom, and find community and strength together. Through open communication, parent cafés become places of affirmation where parents can learn that they are not alone in their struggles with managing their families and households. Parents are able to have these vulnerable conversations because the cafés cultivate positive relationships.

If you are feeling lonely, it's important to recognize there are resources that can help. You can find more information about protective factors such as social connections, along with information on parent cafés in your area by visiting our website at [OCTF.ohio.gov](#). Additional support is also available through 9-8-8 if you or someone you love is experiencing a mental health crisis.

~ Nicole

# 2024 Beech Brook Community Partnership Award

Each year, Beech Brook, a behavioral health agency serving Cuyahoga County, presents one individual or organization with the Beech Brook Community Partnership Award. This is an honor they reserve for those partnerships that directly impact how Beech Brook serves the community. In 2024, they selected the Ohio Children's Trust Fund's Great Lakes Regional Prevention Council as the recipient of the Community Partnership Award to recognize the critical role that OCTF funding in the Great Lakes region has played in the delivery of Beech Brook's prevention programming.

During the height of the pandemic, it was not easy for nonprofit organizations to fundraise and forge new partnerships, but fortunately for Beech Brook – and the thousands of children and families they serve each year – the Great Lakes Regional Prevention Council put out an RFP, in 2021, for parent supportive services to prevent child abuse and neglect. This opened the door for Beech Brook to receive critical funding for children and families at a time when they needed more support than ever.

Today, the Great Lake's Regional Prevention Council funds three of Beech Brook's programs:

- Parent Cafés, funded since SFY 2022, provide parents with a chance to relax, make friends, and share worries and concerns with other parents. Dinner and childcare are included in this 4-week long program, held on Friday evenings. Parent Café has served 123 parents/caregivers.
- Stewards of Children, funded since SFY 2022, teaches parents/caregivers about child sexual abuse and the signs to look for to prevent abuse from occurring. Beech Brook has provided Stewards of Children to 175 parents/caregivers.
- Connect© Parenting Classes, funded since SFY 2023, teaches parents and caregivers the importance of connection with their child/teenager and gives real-life strategies for improving the bond between them. Connect© has had 21 parents/caregivers complete all 10 sessions.

Because of the Great Lakes Regional Prevention Council's partnership, Beech Brook has been able to offer these programs to support families and prevent child abuse/neglect at no cost to the participants.

On September 26 at Beech Brook's 172nd Annual Meeting, OCTF Executive Director Nicole Sillaman joined Stephanie Pennza, the Great Lakes Ohio Regional Prevention Coordinator, in accepting the 2024 Community Partnership Award. Congratulations to Stephanie and the Great Lakes Regional Prevention Council for strengthening families and "DOING WHAT'S RIGHT FOR KIDS".



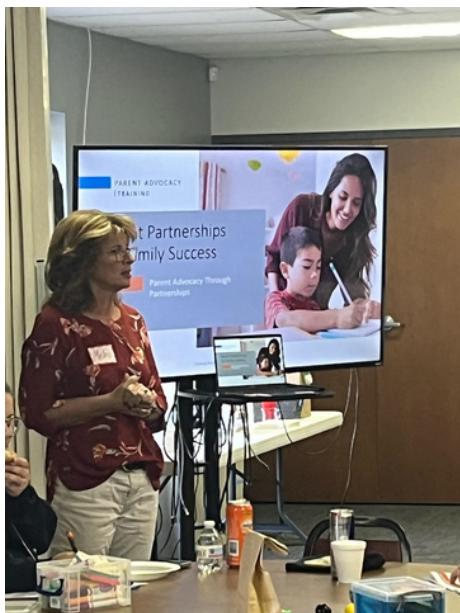
From left to Right: Stephanie Pennza, Nicole Silaman, and Tom Royer



From Left to Right: Debra Brown, Terri Davis, Stephanie Pennza, Nicole Sillaman, Rachel Humphrey, and Nicole Borowy-Salamon

# Parent Leadership Training

## Parent Advocacy on the Road



Meliss Klorer, Northwest Ohio Regional Prevention Coordinator

The Parent Advocacy Training went on the road to the Southeast and Eastern Ohio regions. In September, Jackson High School hosted the one-day event in Jackson County. Southeastern Ohio Council member Scott Lowe helped coordinate all facets of this training, including the location, food, and childcare. Twenty-two parents were in attendance and actively participated in the training. Jackson High School students provided childcare for the 13 children who came along. Parents from the community participated in a parent panel where they shared their advocacy stories including successes, challenges, and local resources.

North Terrace Church in Zanesville hosted the Eastern training in October. Fifteen parents and caregivers attended along with 15 children. Melissa Wood, Eastern Ohio Council member, coordinated the site, technology, and recruited childcare providers from Muskingum Adult and Child Protective Services. The daylong event also included a light breakfast and a lunch.

In each county, the training team provided information on the various topics that have been presented in the virtual parent advocacy training. The day focused on parents as the experts on their children, trust, respect, parent engagement, communication, and building the parent professional partnership. The in-person format allowed for a more interactive learning opportunity. Participants were actively engaged in a variety of activities and discussions. In addition, a local mental health professional in each region provided information on mental health and trauma-informed practices. They were also able to provide local resources.

In the Eastern region, an experienced parent came with the training team and shared her family's story emphasizing the power of telling your story. At the end of each day, participants were asked to write down and place in a self-addressed stamped envelope how they will be a champion in a child's life. These envelopes are being mailed back to them as a 'check in' three weeks later.

Feedback from participants for both regional events detailed the benefits of this training. Some comments are listed below:

- Enjoyed the mental health session the most. Will use it for my daughter's heightened emotions.
- I was only dropping my granddaughter and her children off but decided to stay. I am so happy I did. My family is in crisis right now and we needed this.
- Learn to be assertive and not aggressive. Giving respect will get you further.
- Learning new ways to help my children/grandkids in supporting their growth and mental health. Positive talking, mental health, advocate, and being a role model. Build trust and communication with my children and grandkids. Support them on their needs and wants.



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## What's Next? Systemic and Legislative Advocacy Training

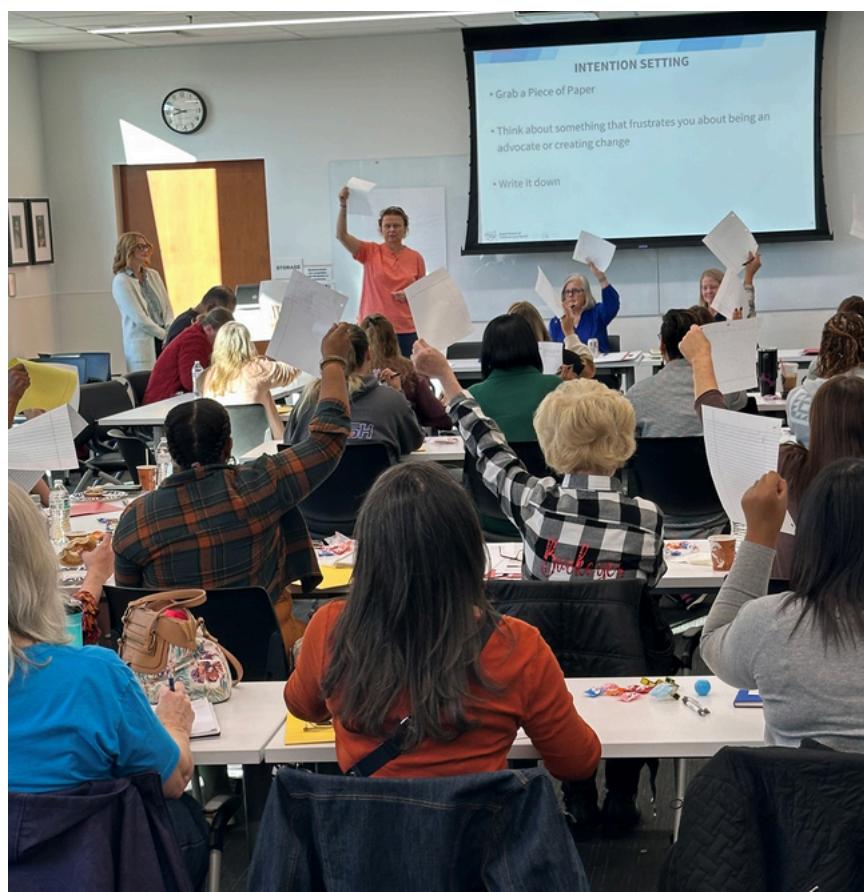
Since SFY 2021, the Northwest Ohio Regional Prevention Coordinator has led a statewide approach to virtual parent advocacy training, focused on creating parent professional partnerships to enhance outcomes for children. Feedback received from the participants oftentimes asked, 'What's next?' Through one of OCTF's statewide grants, Mercy Health St. Vincent Medical Center provided a daylong conference on November 2, 2024, at the Martin Luther King Library in Columbus to provide an advanced parent advocacy training focusing on systemic and legislative changes. Fifty-two participants came from all over the state to learn skills and strategies to impact various systems and to better learn how to advocate for their families as part of the legislative process. Nicole Sillaman, OCTF Executive Director and Melissa Palmer, DCY Project Manager, started the day off with a presentation and activities discussing change and introducing the participants to DCY and OCTF. A panel of four experienced advocates shared their stories on disability advocacy, health advocacy, dyslexia advocacy, and animal rights advocacy.

During lunch, Jon and Michelle Fishpaw shared their personal journey from a tragic day in childcare when their 11-month-old daughter Claire was shaken by the childcare provider, leading to the enactment of Claire's Law, Ohio' Shaken Baby Law. Each participant received a copy of Michelle's book Claire's Voice. In the book, Claire, now 24, writes the final chapter and shares her perspective.

The afternoon focused on the art of political persuasion. Ken Ward, a political and legislative strategist shared his years of experience working both in state government and on Capitol Hill. His presentation revealed five tools for effective advocacy. The day ended with participants creating an action plan on a topic that is relevant to them. Over the next several months, a mentor will work with the participants in completing their action plan.



Left to Right: Melissa Palmer, Ken Ward, Tara Fusco, Mary Murray, Nicole Sillaman, Meliss Klorer, Jon Fishpaw and Michelle Fishpaw



Participants who attended this event shared:

*Thank you for hosting such an insightful training. I appreciate the entire day, and the panel in particular.*

*I would like to see this program continue! Enjoyed it a lot!*

*It was informative and professional. Location was excellent. Very informative training! I also appreciated how kind, respectful, and helpful the staff were in welcoming us, and in serving us our breakfast and lunch.*



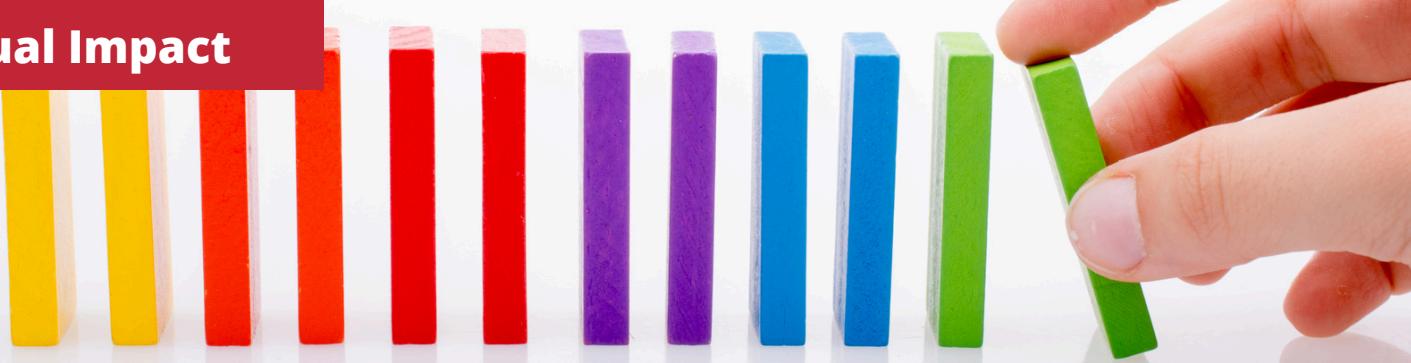
Reach Out and Read Ohio is one of six entities to be awarded OCTF's statewide innovation grant for SFY 2025. Reach Out and Read Ohio is a primary prevention approach to supporting children's social emotional learning needs, while improving the caretaker and child bond. By using shared reading to facilitate positive parent-child interactions and to support safe, stable, nurturing relationships, the model can prevent abuse and neglect. With grant funding, Reach Out and Read Ohio will strengthen and scale the model statewide to increase positive outcomes for Ohio children.

Reach Out and Read's mission is to strengthen all families with young children through guidance from medical clinicians about nurturing relationships through shared reading. Across Ohio, at well-child visits for children birth up to age five, Reach Out and Read-trained clinicians deliver the evidence-based, two-generational model: the clinician talks with parents about the importance of reading together, models developmentally-appropriate reading strategies, and gives the child a new, high-quality book to keep.

Last year, Reach Out and Read served 165,326 Ohio children at more than 330,000 well-child visits, at more than 200 sites, with the goal of reaching all Ohio families with young children. The model offers an almost universal platform since 90% of children attend at least one well-child visit annually. Reach Out and Read's effectiveness is supported by over 24 independent, peer-reviewed studies demonstrating a positive impact on shared reading, literacy and language development, and parent-child relationships. Reach Out and Read Ohio works collaboratively with the [Dolly Parton Imagination Library of Ohio \(DPILO\)](#) to ensure families attending well-child visits are then enrolled into DPILO, allowing families to continue receiving monthly books to build their family library.



## Annual Impact



As we wrap up the year, we want to thank you and express our sincere gratitude for your support of the Ohio Children's Trust Fund (OCTF).

Since 1984, OCTF has worked to provide child abuse and neglect prevention programs in Ohio. This year marked the launch of our "Ensure They Shine" awareness campaign, which emphasizes that children have a unique ability to light up our lives, and that we can all be a part of nurturing their bright spirit with love and care. During state fiscal year 2024, we were able to fund programming that reached nearly 25,000 parents and caregivers who were able to ensure that the children in their lives had the opportunity to shine!

As you plan for your end-of-year giving this season, we hope you will consider donating to OCTF. Your donation will support our mission to prevent child abuse and neglect through investing in strong communities, healthy families, and safe children. We believe that when the people who surround children have the support and resources they need, then children get the nurturing environments they deserve. Your donation will help us continue providing these supports and resources to families in all 88 Ohio counties.

To learn more about Why Prevention Matters, use the QR code or visit <https://octf.ohio.gov/whypreventionmatters>.

