

SERVING CHILDREN, FAMILIES, AND COMMUNITIES ACROSS OHIO

scope

**PARENT
AND YOUTH
AMBASSADORS
SERVING YOUR
COMMUNITY**

pg. 12-13

**ABCs OF
SAFE SLEEP**

pg. 24

**BUCKEYE RECIPES
TO MAKE WITH
YOUR FAMILY**

pg. 7



**Department of
Children & Youth**

Issue 1
OCTOBER 2025



The Ohio Department of Children and Youth works every day to make Ohio the best place to start and raise a family. We are committed to serving children, families, and communities across Ohio with one guiding principle: **DO WHAT'S RIGHT FOR KIDS.**

Scope is a quarterly publication designed to help families make connections and learn about important resources and programs so that their children have the opportunity to grow, thrive, and succeed.

We encourage our partners and providers to share Scope broadly within their communities to help us reach as many families as possible. We welcome your feedback. Please share your thoughts with us at communications@childrenandyouth.ohio.gov.



TABLE OF CONTENTS

5	Director's Letter
6-9	Family First This Fall
10-15	Activities, Assistance, and More
16-17	Miles and Momentum
18-19	Stories That Inspire
20-26	Safe, Strong, and Supported
27	Did You Know?
28	Newsroom
29	Resources for Ohio Families



 **Here**
for Ohio kids

Director's Letter

HELLO AND WELCOME

I am excited to introduce Scope, a new DCY publication that will replace Kids' Corner with a primary focus on families. This quarterly magazine is designed to provide families with information they can use, updates about DCY programs, and stories that highlight resources available across Ohio.

We named it Scope because it reflects the breadth of our mission: to look closely at the needs of children, youth, and families while keeping sight of the bigger picture; ensuring every Ohio child has the opportunity to thrive. At DCY, we are guided by one simple principle in all we do: **DO WHAT'S RIGHT FOR KIDS**. That principle shapes every story, resource, and update you'll find in these pages.

The launch of this updated publication comes at an exciting time. Thousands of Ohioans signed up to receive Kids' Corner through our recent advertising campaign, showing that families are actively seeking information and resources to support their children. We're listening... and we're committed to meeting that need.

In this and future issues, you'll find stories connected to DCY's Bold Goals: giving every baby a fighting chance, giving every child a strong start, and keeping families together. These goals guide our work, and through Scope, we will share updates that demonstrate our accountability and highlight our progress. I am grateful to Governor DeWine and the General Assembly for supporting our budget requests, which make it possible to carry forward this important mission.

While Scope will share resources and stories for families, our Tuesday Times publication will continue providing important updates for our partners and providers. Together, these publications help us support families directly (and indirectly) and equip those who serve them with the information they need to use and share our resources.

Thank you for exploring this first issue of Scope.



Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kara B. Wentz".

Kara B. Wentz
Director, Ohio Department of Children and Youth

Seasonal FAMILY FIRST THIS FALL

Fall Into Family: Celebrating the Season with DCY's Bold Goals

As the leaves turn and the air grows crisp, October invites families to slow down, reconnect, and reflect. At the Ohio Department of Children and Youth, this season reminds us why our work matters: Healthy Babies. Ready Learners. Strong Families.

This fall, we encourage families across Ohio to embrace simple, meaningful moments that align with DCY's bold goals:

Give Every Baby a Fighting Chance

Try a cozy evening of reading aloud to your little one. Early bonding builds trust and language skills that last a lifetime.

Give Every Child a Strong Start

Explore nature together — take a leaf walk, visit a pumpkin patch, or create fall-themed art. These activities spark curiosity and learning.

Keep Families Together

Host a gratitude circle at dinner. Let each family member share one thing they're thankful for this season. It's a small ritual that strengthens emotional bonds.

DCY is working every day to make Ohio the best place to grow up and that starts with supporting families in their own communities. Whether it's through home visiting, early intervention, or child care access, we're here to help families thrive.

So, this October, let's celebrate the season and **DO WHAT'S RIGHT FOR KIDS** — together.

What's in Season: October

- Apples
- Kale
- Pumpkins
- Turnips
- Winter Squash



Click the picture above for a kid-friendly recipe from *Celebrate Your Plate* — Apple Crunch Yogurt Bowl.

Featured Produce: Apples

Peak Season: Fall

Selection: Pick firm and smooth skinned apples

How to Prepare: Add apples to a salad, baked goods, or serve sliced

Storage: Store fresh apples for up to three weeks in a refrigerator

Don't Miss Ohio's Breathtaking Autumn Leaves

Are you planning a family road trip this fall? Be sure to check the [Ohio Department of Natural Resources Fall Color page](#) before you go. The page provides fall color reports, foliage updates, and featured locations and activities.





FAMILY FUN

Work together with your kids to make one (or more!) of the buckeye recipes below. Send us a photo of all the fun you have creating the treats! We'll share some of the photos we receive in our January issue!



Buckeye Season in the Buckeye State

No state is known for buckeyes like Ohio! (The Ohio buckeye has been our state tree since 1953.) And no fall gathering is complete without a tray of chocolate buckeyes!

Real buckeyes are poisonous, but you can make your own delicious buckeyes at home and make it a fun fall tradition for the whole family!

The Ohio State University has not only the traditional recipe on its website, but it also lists other recipes for those with various dietary needs. [Check out the recipes out here.](#)

Want another take on the buckeye?

Try Ohio First Lady Fran DeWine's Buckeye Brownies!



Peanut Butter Filling

Mix together 1 stick of softened butter, 1 cup smooth peanut butter, and 3 cups powdered sugar. Chill. Roll into 3/4 inch balls.

Brownie

Mix together 1 stick of melted butter and 8 ounces of softened cream cheese. Add 2 large eggs and mix well. Then add two 19.5 ounce boxes of fudge brownie mix and mix until just combined. The dough will be sticky. Chill.

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Form the mixture into about 1.25 inch balls. Put brownie dough on a greased cookie sheet, about 24 per sheet. No need to flatten them. Bake the brownie dough about 9-11 minutes. As soon as the brownies come out of the oven, press a peanut butter ball into the center of each cookie. Makes about 6 dozen.

What Celebrating the Holidays Looks Like for Kinship Families

-By Erin Thompson, Kinnect

Kinnect is an Ohio-based organization dedicated to ensuring permanent families for all children in the shortest time possible. DCY partners with Kinnect through programs including OhioKAN and Kinnect To Family. [Learn more about this DCY program here.](#)

When you sit and think about your favorite childhood memories, what comes to mind? For me, it's the holiday season. It starts with Halloween, goes right into Thanksgiving and Christmas, and ends with New Year's Day. I think about some of my favorite Halloween costumes — I was a cheerleader, a football player, a hobo, a princess, and I'm sure I was a witch somewhere along the way. Thanksgiving always reminds me of my grandma's broccoli casserole, and of course, pie! Then I think about all the Christmas mornings I would run down the stairs and see all the presents beautifully wrapped and ready to be torn open. I realize I am lucky to have these memories, and I know not all children have the same experience.

The holidays can be hard for children, and caregivers alike, who are involved in kinship care. What can be done to make the season as bright and merry as possible? Here are some tips.



What is Kinship?

The definition of a kinship caregiver goes beyond blood relatives and may include an adult who has a close relationship with the child or the family such as a coach, teacher, neighbor, or family friend.

Talk About It

Don't shy away from discussing the holidays and how you celebrate them. Even if the child is only in your care for this season, it's important for them to feel included and know what to expect. You can tell them about other family that may be coming to visit, what food you eat, gifts, religious celebrations and so on. Keeping open and honest conversation is key! Doing this will limit the amount of stress a child feels during the holidays, and it will help you to avoid any unnecessary surprises.

Combine Traditions

At the same time you're talking about your traditions, it's important to give a child time to share their holiday memories and what's special to them. Perhaps they enjoy a certain side dish on Thanksgiving. Putting in the effort to make that dish will help them feel more at home. Maybe they like making homemade Christmas gifts for others. Maybe putting the star at the top of the Christmas tree was always their job. Perhaps they are used to going to church services on Christmas Eve. Maybe they like to put carrots out for the reindeer, along with cookies for Santa. They may even celebrate a different holiday such as Hanukkah or Kwanzaa. Whatever the case may be, combining your traditions with theirs will make the holiday season that much more special for both of you. You can also come up with a new tradition that you and the child can share for years to come.

Introduce Them to Family

If possible, set up times for the child to separately meet other family members in advance of the whole family getting together. This is beneficial for both the child and the other family members. Once the big family gathering rolls around, the child will recognize faces and will feel more comfortable in that setting. This is especially important if the gathering is at another relative's home and not yours. You can also talk to the child about what to expect throughout the day. Tell them who will be there, what time you will eat, what foods you will have, how you handle opening presents, what games you play, what time you plan to leave and so on. Also discuss how you expect the child to act while they're with other family members. Be sure to go over simple manners such as "please" and "thank you." If the child knows what to expect and what is expected of them, the day will run more smoothly. Not taking these steps ahead of time could cause great anxiety and stress for the child.

Ask Them to Help

It's okay to assign certain age-appropriate tasks to the child. Picking out their own Halloween costume at the store, choosing their own pumpkin to carve, setting the table for Thanksgiving dinner are all fun ways a child can get involved. They can also learn and build confidence while they help. Teach them how to wrap presents, have them stir the cranberry sauce while it cooks, taste test something for you, help you make the grocery list, or sign Christmas cards you're sending. It can be a simple task, but it will help the child feel included, needed, and welcome in your home. The holidays might not be a happy time for them but including them in even the simplest tasks will stir up joy.

Birth Parents

If you're in a kinship caregiver situation, another potential struggle for you is handling questions about the child's birth parents during the holidays. The child may be worried about their parents and wondering even more than usual why they can't be together on the holiday. Let the child ask their questions and assure them it's okay to ask about their parents. The most important thing for you to do is ease their mind about why they are with you and remind them they are in a safe and loving place. As always, the child needs to know they're cared for and will be taken care of, especially during the holidays when a family presence is more top of mind. If the child can spend time with their birth parents, can the holiday be shared? If they are unable to be with their birth family, perhaps the child could make a card or gift to send to their parents. That might bring the child some comfort.

Signs to Look For

Because the holidays can be a difficult time for children in kinship care, it's important for the caregiver to keep an eye out for signs of sadness or grief, and to address them as soon as possible. Open communication is key. Talk to the child, assure them they are in a safe place and can talk about whatever is on their mind. If they don't want to talk, give them some space and try again. Let the child know you are there for them, no matter what. Signs to look for include reverting back to younger behaviors, soiling themselves or bedwetting, becoming withdrawn or isolating themselves, temper tantrums, acting rebellious, or complaining more than usual. Knowing what to look for will help you confront the issue head on.

If you are a kinship caregiver, please remember to give yourself some grace. You are doing an amazing thing for the children in your life, and they are so lucky to have you. Enjoy all the magic the holiday season brings!

ACTIVITIES, ASSISTANCE, AND MORE

DCY Family and Customer Support Center: One Source for All Your Needs

The Ohio Department of Children and Youth (DCY) provides a single point of contact for families, providers, and partners through the DCY Family and Customer Support Center. Our goal is simple: to answer questions, provide resources, and connect you to the right services quickly and easily.

The Support Center is staffed by knowledgeable team members who can assist with information on programs, services, and local connections. Callers can also be connected to Parent and Youth Ambassadors (See story on pg. 12 for more information about Parent and Youth Ambassadors.) for guidance and support in their communities. By providing resources and answers before a crisis occurs, the Support Center helps families and partners take preventive steps and access support when it matters most.

The Support Center is available from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday, and can be reached at (844) 234-KIDS (5437) or via [email](#).

The Family and Customer Support Center provides information, referrals, and assistance on a variety of topics, including:

- Questions regarding child care
- Researching issues and helping with resolution
- Documenting complaints for investigation by DCY staff or local county agencies
- Guidance on applying for Publicly Funded Child Care
- Connecting callers with services for their children and families

All inquiries and resolutions are carefully monitored to ensure quality and effectiveness. More than a phone line, the DCY Family and Customer Support Center is a vital resource designed to strengthen families, support providers, and connect communities across Ohio.

Lt. Governor Tressel Launches Fitness Challenge to Help Ohio's Students Build Healthy Habits

Schools across the Buckeye State have opted into a new program to help their students form healthy habits in fitness, nutrition, and sleep through individual goal setting.

It's called the Team Tressel Fitness Challenge. Led by Lt. Governor Jim Tressel and Challenge Captain, former Ohio State University and NFL Wide Receiver Ted Ginn, the challenge encourages students in grades four through eight to work through Bronze, Silver, and Gold levels. Students choose activities from a menu in each core area — Fitness, Nutrition, and Sleep—and set specific goals to complete over 60 of the 90 challenge days.

After completing each level, students reflect on their progress or take part in “quiet time,” a technique Lt. Governor Tressel used during his coaching days to encourage self-reflection and goal setting.

By the end of the challenge, students will have learned how to create a workout and lifestyle routine they can build on throughout life. Learn more about the Team Tressel Challenge from the [Ohio Department of Education and Workforce](#). Be sure to visit the [@TeamTresselFitnessChallenge](#) channel on YouTube to meet Team Tressel, see school visits, and try home-friendly exercises like [Adaptive Seated Twists with Casey & Brett](#).



Lt. Governor Jim Tressel helped Cloverleaf Elementary School in Medina County kick off the Team Tressel Fitness Challenge.



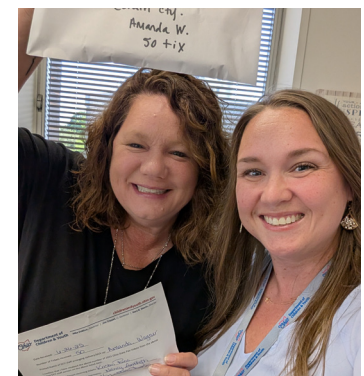
A member of Team DCY helps children enjoy the popular Draw Alive activity.

DCY Team Brings Smiles to the Fairgrounds

DCY and Governor Mike DeWine's Office once again offered free Ohio State Fair admission tickets to some very special Ohio families. To ensure the tickets would make it into the hands of the families and youth in time for the fair, DCY distributed 10,500 tickets to a wide variety of public and private agencies across Ohio!

Public children services agencies, Bridges agencies, and private foster, adoptive, and congregate care organizations requested tickets on behalf of a wide range of individuals — including biological, kinship, foster, and adoptive families; young adults participating in the Bridges program and their children; and youth currently placed in congregate care settings.

Many thanks to Governor DeWine, the DCY team, and local agencies for making a fun day at the fair possible!



DCY team members smile as they deliver free Ohio State Fair tickets to kids across the state.

Why Engaging with Ohio Families Matters: Lessons from the 2025 Ohio State Fair

This summer, the Ohio Department of Children and Youth returned to the Ohio State Fair with “Discover DCY,” our family-friendly booth designed to connect directly with the people we serve. From beloved characters to hands-on activities, we created an experience that was fun, meaningful, and full of opportunities for Ohioans to learn more about DCY.

And the impact was clear. More than 20,000 fairgoers stopped by to explore our programs, talk with our staff, and take home helpful resources about how DCY supports children from cradle to career.

Why It Matters

For DCY, the fair was a chance to introduce our agency and mission in a friendly, accessible environment, reconnect with families who remembered us from last year, spark meaningful conversations with parents while their children engaged in activities like sensory tiles, DrawAlive art, mini-golf, and quiet reading areas, and distribute thousands of resources to families across the state.

Staff Connection and Purpose

For DCY, the Ohio State Fair was more than an outreach event. It was a chance for more than 100 DCY team members who worked in the booth to laugh with families, hear their stories, and share the support we are building together across the state. In a field where challenges are real, moments like these fuel our hope, renew our purpose, and remind us why we do this work.



Ohio Kids enjoying the spinning tea cups at the 2025 Ohio State Fair

Parent and Youth Ambassadors:

Built from Feedback, Made for You



In the fall of 2023, agency leaders from the Department of Children and Youth (DCY) began meeting with families across Ohio to discuss the creation of the new department. DCY held Family Listening Sessions across the state geared toward understanding challenges families face and gathered feedback from families about what a new state agency should consider when it comes to education, awareness, and engagement with families and communities. These sessions offered families an opportunity to connect with fellow parents and caregivers in their community, sharing their insights with DCY. Their feedback was clear: There was a need for local resources to help individuals and families have their questions answered and find access to services quickly. As a result of the Family Listening Sessions, the Parent and Youth Ambassador (PYA) initiative was created to provide real-time, grassroots support.

PYAs live in the regions they support, know their communities, and are employed by their local Child Care Resource and Referral Agency (CCR&R). Being a member of their community is important when it comes to understanding the unique characteristics of the environment making up each service delivery area (SDA). Not all areas around the state look the same when it comes to needs and support. The Department of Children and Youth website has a map of SDAs, which CCR&R supports each SDA, and the counties supported in each.

All PYAs have lived experience navigating social systems (i.e., Children Services, Child Care, Early Intervention, Public Assistance, Juvenile Justice, Substance Use, Mental/Behavioral Health, Special Education, Unhoused, etc.). This firsthand experience navigating systems equates to a natural connection between Parent and Youth Ambassadors and the individuals and families they support because they have “walked in your shoes.” Having someone that has experienced similar challenges walk alongside an individual or family struggling to find what they need makes things easier.

PYAs are certified Family Peer Supporters and work to develop a safe and trusting relationship with the individuals and families they support. Meeting an individual or family “where they are” is a crucial part of the person-centered, family-centered, trauma-informed work PYAs do.



DCY's Parent and Youth Ambassadors bring their unique experiences together for their quarterly in-person meeting.

Over the years, Ohio's 12 Service Delivery Areas have been a big support to families when it comes to child care needs. The CCR&Rs also support communities recruiting foster and adoptive parents as well as offering support to kinship caregivers. The addition of the PYA work strengthens the Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies' ability to offer support around any need that arises for an individual or family.

PYAs serve as connectors within their CCR&R and community. In order to offer support to individuals and families to best meet specific needs, PYAs are spending time in their communities networking. Intentional relationship building in the communities they serve is important to ensure individuals and families have access to local and reliable resources. PYAs are also in a unique role to share with DCY gaps that may exist in their communities. PYAs represent individuals and families and the communities they serve, helping to identify challenges that exist around the state.

PYAs are a cost-free resource available to moms, dads, caregivers, youth, community providers, and individuals to make helpful connections in the community to support children and families. Individuals or service providers can request support from a PYA in their SDA.

How to Reach a Parent and Youth Ambassador

Requesting support is as easy as contacting the DCY Family and Customer Support Call Center (844) 234-KIDS (5437) *option 5 or emailing the DCY Parent and Youth Ambassador mailbox at Ambassadors@childrenandyouth.ohio.gov.

Learn more about PYAs by visiting the [DCY website](#).

DCY Releases First Annual Report

The Department of Children and Youth (DCY) has published its [SFY25 Annual Report](#), highlighting key achievements, data insights, and strategic initiatives that shaped the year. Discover how DCY continues to advance its mission of supporting Ohio's children, youth, and families.

At DCY, we've taken the call to **"DO WHAT'S RIGHT FOR KIDS"** to heart — because we know that behind every policy is a child who needs us all to do better.

The comprehensive report demonstrates DCY's dedication to transparency and accountability, providing valuable insights into how the department continues building a stronger, more supportive environment where all Ohio children and youth can thrive.



DCY employees wore blue in April to recognize Child Abuse Prevention Month.



DCY's 2025 summer interns. Top row, left to right: Jacob Eschbacher, Edwin Ortiz, Director Wente, Audrey Eastep, Sam Barans, Sarah Sgambati
Bottom row, left to right: Shirshak Neupane, Emma Barnett, Aishwarya Kalal, Madeline Paulley, Alena Paul
(Not pictured: Anastasia Allison, Shazia Syed, Zoei Tee, Emily Zhang)

Tomorrow's Leaders: How DCY is Investing in Ohio's Future Workforce

This summer, DCY was proud to welcome a great group of college interns whose talents made a lasting impact across Communications, Policy, IT, Finance, Early Care and Education, and several other divisions. Their contributions not only strengthened our work, but they also reaffirmed the importance of investing in the next generation of leaders committed to serving Ohio's children and families.

Real Impact, Real Learning

Our interns didn't just observe — they rolled up their sleeves and got to work. From shaping communications strategies (including the creation of this publication, *Scope*), to supporting early childhood initiatives, they brought fresh perspectives and energy that challenged us to think differently.

Among them was Madeline Pauly, whose work in the Outreach and Engagement Division helped elevate our efforts and left a lasting impression on the team. Check out Madeline's story: [Doing What's Right | Ohio Wesleyan University](#).

Sam Barans was a student from Drexel University who interned with the Government and External Affairs Division. Sam earned his degree and DCY is proud to say he's now a data analytics specialist on our team.

Why This Matters for Your Family

When we invest in internships, we're building Ohio's future workforce. Today's interns become tomorrow's teachers, policy developers, social workers, and community leaders. By nurturing their talents now, we're ensuring skilled, passionate professionals will be ready to support your communities for years to come.

Together, we're investing in Ohio's future — and your family's.

MILES AND MOMENTUM

When DCY travels across Ohio, every mile brings new voices, shared stories, and real solutions for families.

Cuyahoga Falls, Lima, Mt. Sterling, Athens Help Me Grow Regional Conferences

DCY hosted four Help Me Grow Home Visiting Regional Conferences across Ohio — with more than 350 home visiting professionals joining us in Cuyahoga Falls, Lima, Mt. Sterling, and Athens.

From trauma-informed care strategies and early childhood mental health to the power of data and collaboration with Children Services, the day was packed with learning and connection.

Lima

Chief Government and External Affairs Officer Joel Potts joined community partners to celebrate the grand opening of Mercy Tots within **St. Rita's Medical Center**, a brand-new child care center in downtown Lima. Located in the historic Perry Building, Mercy Tots provides 108 spaces for children from infancy through pre-K and was designed to support healthcare workers and community members who work non-traditional hours.

South Point

Director Kara Wenthe and Assistant Director Jeff Van Deusen were pleased to be invited by **Necco** for a visit to their facility in southern Ohio. Located on a 34-acre campus within the Wayne National Forest, Necco provides 24/7 residential care for male youth ages 9-21. This specialized facility serves young people with borderline intellectual functioning, pervasive developmental disorders, and learning disorders that traditional educational settings cannot adequately support.





Cleveland

Starting Point Community Forum

At the Starting Point Community Forum, Director Wenthe spotlighted the Ohio Business Partnership — an innovative public-private effort tackling child care challenges for working families. With 44% of Ohio parents reporting work disruptions due to issues with child care, Wenthe emphasized the urgency and invited attendees to join this growing model of six partnerships, including Starting Point. “This isn’t just a family issue — it’s a workforce issue,” she said.

Cuyahoga County Public Library Maple Heights Branch

Director Wenthe, Assistant Director Jeff Van Deusen, and Chief of Governmental and Public Affairs Joel Potts toured the Cuyahoga County Public Library’s Maple Heights Branch to learn about its innovative on-site child care program — the only one of its kind in Ohio.



Launched to address the area’s child care shortage, the successful program is expanding to the Parma Heights Branch, which will also house a training center for early childhood education students. This model supports both working families and the future child care workforce.

STORIES THAT INSPIRE

Welcoming Children with Disabilities: Perspective of a Foster and Adoptive Caregiver

Mackenzie's Story

When Mackenzie first started her foster and adoptive adventure four years ago, she did not set out with the goal to foster children with special needs. "Fostering children with disabilities isn't the niche I started my foster care journey with, but I'm so thankful I ended up here," Mackenzie says. "When I began fostering I was licensed for one child, birth to two years old.

While I was open to children with disabilities, it wasn't where I was expecting to land. I had a placement for two years before deciding to open my home for another placement. This is the child that changed the course of my foster care journey."

Not only did this child, a little boy just shy of three years old, change her foster care journey, he changed her entire life. Mackenzie went on to adopt him, joyfully growing her family and gaining a son.

When Mackenzie first welcomed her son into her home as a foster placement in July 2022, she says she was full of excitement, hope, and nerves. Her son has multiple diagnoses, including cerebral palsy, hydrocephalus, and seizure disorder. "He is a wheelchair user, uses a g-tube for eating and medication, and a shunt in his brain to drain excess fluid," Mackenzie says. "This can sound scary and overwhelming at first, but it is our normal, and I don't think anything of it anymore."

Mackenzie describes the first six months of caring for her son as a learning curve. It was full of specialist doctor appointments, setting him up with an IEP for preschool, and finding a support network. Throughout the process, Mackenzie discovered ways to include her son in the norms of family life. "I've loved finding adaptive equipment for him so that he can join in our everyday family activities," Mackenzie says. "He joins us at the pool with an adapted float [and] at the beach with an adapted beach chair so that he can safely sit in the surf, feet in the sand, and feel the waves. He goes to all my older kids' sporting events and sits in the stands with an adapted seat to cheer them on. There's no limit to what he can access and helping him interact with the world has been such an incredible joy."



“Fostering children with disabilities isn't the niche I started my foster care journey with, but I'm so thankful I ended up here”

— MACKENZIE

A year later, Mackenzie's newfound passion for caring for children with disabilities was called upon again, beckoning her into a new adventure. She was asked if she would be willing to provide respite care for another boy under three years old who was suspected to have autism. "I agreed to meet this little guy, and the moment he walked in the door I knew that I would accept placement, not just as a respite provider," Mackenzie says. "His big brown eyes were full of love and curiosity." Since coming into her care, the little boy has grown by "leaps and bounds." "He started out completely nonverbal to now saying close to 100 words," Mackenzie says. "He couldn't navigate stairs and didn't know what to do at a playground but is now becoming a daredevil who will jump off the couch and slide down the biggest slide at the playground unassisted. A little guy who was afraid of utensils and would only eat with his hands, now feeds himself independently with his utensils for each meal. He's a lover of letters, numbers, books, Hot Wheels cars, and snuggles."

Mackenzie describes her experience of caring for children with special needs as a great chance to nurture both children and their primary families. "I'm able to share my knowledge about the best way to support their child in ways they may not yet know. I'm able to share my knowledge about disabilities and the resources that I utilize with families to help them gain the skills and resources they need to successfully parent when the child returns home. Being able to witness not just the growth of a child, but also their primary family is simply magical and an opportunity that I treasure."

Mackenzie encourages both prospective and current foster caregivers to embrace a wide range of placement opportunities, including caring for children with disabilities. "Don't be scared of what you don't yet know — everything you know right now, you learned. Parenting a child with a disability is a skill you'll learn just like any other, and it is so rewarding."

Home Visiting Makes a Difference

Wendy and Rosie's Story

In Knox County, Ohio, Wendy has been caring for her granddaughter Rosie, who was born weighing under four pounds. Rosie's parents needed extra support, so Wendy stepped in to provide a loving and stable home for her granddaughter.

From the very beginning, Help Me Grow Home Visiting has been a source of guidance, reassurance, and practical support for their family. Wendy works with Roxanne, a family support specialist, who visits regularly and is always available when Wendy needs advice or encouragement. "I can reach out to Roxanne when I'm struggling, and she reminds me that I'm doing a good job," Wendy shared.

Home Visiting goes beyond routine check-ins. It helps caregivers understand their child's growth, development, and health needs. Roxanne noticed an eye turn in Rosie and helped the family get the care she needed, including finding fun ways to help Rosie adjust to her glasses. These proactive visits help children like Rosie thrive and reach important milestones.

Thanks to Help Me Grow, Rosie is achieving great things and is about to start Head Start, while Wendy feels empowered and supported in her role as a grandparent. For families across Ohio, Help Me Grow Home Visiting provides personalized support, education, and encouragement, helping both children and caregivers flourish.

"Home Visiting makes a difference in people's lives. It really helps any parent," Wendy says, and her story is proof.

To learn more about Help Me Grow Home Visiting, visit www.helpmegrow.org



Rosie, once not much bigger than a T.V. remote, is now thriving, thanks to her grandmother Wendy, and support from Help Me Grow Home Visiting.

SAFE, STRONG, AND SUPPORTED

Ohio Adoption, Foster & Kinship Care: Start Your Journey

There has never been a greater need for committed resource (foster or kinship) and adoptive families in your community. Right now, there are teens and young children in the foster care system who need families to care for them. Your decision to become a resource or adoptive family could provide stability and love to those who need them most.

What is a Resource Family?

“Resource family” is a term used to describe individuals and families that provide care for children in the foster care system. This includes foster and kinship care providers. Resource families play a crucial role in offering a stable, nurturing environment for children who are temporarily unable to live with their primary families.

Requirements to Become a Resource Family

You don’t need to be rich, married, or have an advanced degree to make a difference. However, to become a resource family, you must meet certain requirements that ensure you can provide a safe and loving environment:

Age: You must be at least 18 years old.

Marital Status: Singles, married couples, and unmarried partners can all apply.

Housing: Stable housing is required, whether you own or rent your home.

Background Checks: All potential resource families undergo thorough background checks.

Steps to Becoming a Resource Caregiver

1. Educate Yourself about Foster & Kinship Caregiving

Initially, children services agencies prioritize placing children with known relatives or close family friends, known as kinship care. If this is not feasible, the search extends to certified foster homes that can provide temporary care.

2. Choose an Agency

In Ohio, prospective foster caregivers can choose which agency is best for their family, so it’s important to do your research. Once you select an agency, [Find an Agency for Adoption, Foster Care, and Residential Services](#), and complete your inquiry form, [OCAF Inquiry Form](#), that agency will reach out to you to start the process to become a foster parent.



3. Attend Required Pre-Placement Training

Pre-placement training is required for anyone who wishes to become a certified foster caregiver. If the caregiver is kin, pre-placement training may be waived by Ohio law. Pre-placement training consists of 24 hours of coursework on foster care, child development, and agency policies.

4. Fill Out an Application

The application starts the official process to become a caregiver and requests basic demographic information and historical data.

5. Complete a Home Study

A home study is required as part of the licensing process. The home study ensures that your family and home are safe and prepared to welcome new children or youth. The basic elements include home visits, background checks, references, and a safety check of your home.

6. Welcome Your First Child

Once all details have been discussed and the home study is completed, you may receive a call to care for a child. It is important to remember that the focus is to find a family for a child in need of temporary care. When a child's needs align with the characteristics your family feels able to accommodate, your family may soon welcome a child or sibling group into your home.



7. Participate in Meetings and Home Visits

When a child is placed in your home, you may have the opportunity to work with their primary family to support the child in returning home. The child will have regular visitation with their primary family and loved ones to maintain those connections. The child's caseworker and your foster care worker will visit regularly to support you and the child placed with you.

8. Complete Ongoing Training

Once you become a certified resource caregiver, you will need to complete ongoing training on a regular basis, as well as updating background checks and other documentation as needed.

9. Make a Difference Today

Ready to take the first step toward becoming a resource caregiver? Interested in adopting a child in foster care? Your choice to explore foster care, kinship care, and adoption can change lives — yours and the children you welcome into your home. Fill out our inquiry form to begin your journey.



Helping Parents, Growing Strong Families: The Help Me Grow Home Visiting Program



“One thing I like about Help Me Grow is they help me make sure my daughter is developing correctly. If I have any worries, they are always willing to answer my questions. When my home visitor comes over, they interact with both the baby and myself and give me good ideas on how to make sure my baby growing up happy and healthy. My daughter loves it when they come to play and all the developmental toys that they bring with them. Help Me Grow does a great job. 10/10. Would recommend for any momma.”

Thanks to this mom for sharing her experience with Help Me Grow Home Visiting!

Becoming a parent is one of life’s greatest joys, and yet, it can also feel overwhelming. At every stage, new milestones bring new questions or worries. That’s where Help Me Grow Home Visiting comes in, offering support in the comfort of your home.

Help Me Grow Home Visiting is a voluntary, home-based program offered at no cost to families. If you’re pregnant or caring for a young child, a professional home visitor will be assigned to your family. They help guide you with reliable information during pregnancy and early childhood, empowering you with skills, tools, and the confidence needed for your child’s healthy development. By focusing on the earliest years of life, the program ensures children have the strongest possible start.

Depending on your specific needs, home visitors provide assistance on a variety of topics, like maintaining a healthy pregnancy, soothing a crying baby, setting up effective sleep routines (for both you and your baby!), and managing parental stress. And if you need extra help, they’ll connect you to community resources tailored just for your family.

As a voluntary program, it puts parents in the driver’s seat. You choose how to apply the guidance and support; you’re empowered to make the decisions that are best for your family.

Help Me Grow doesn’t just support daily parenting, it produces real, measurable outcomes:

Home Visiting Participants:



At its heart, Help Me Grow is about partnership. Parents bring love and dedication; home visitors bring tools and guidance. Together, they create a strong, healthy foundation for children to grow, thrive, and reach their full potential.

For more information on Help Me Grow Home Visiting program, visit: helpmegrow.org/HomeVisiting

Supporting Families and Protecting Children

Every child deserves to grow up safe and loved. As community members, we all play a vital role in supporting families and protecting children. When families face overwhelming challenges — economic hardship, mental health struggles, or lack of support, children may be at risk.

Often, concerning situations stem from unmet family needs rather than intentional harm.

How to Help

Offer Direct Support First:

- Connect families with local resources
- Provide practical help when appropriate
- Listen without judgment

When to Report: If you believe a child is in danger, don't wait for someone else to act.

How to Report:

- The Ohio Department of Children and Youth has launched 855-O-H-CHILD (855)642-4453, a phone line that connects callers directly to their county's children services or law enforcement office. You can make a report without giving your name.
- National Hotline: (800)4-A-CHILD ((800)422-4453)
- Emergency: Call 911

Reporting Means Supporting, Not Punishing

Making a referral connects families with resources and services they need. The goal of Child Protective Services is family preservation — helping parents provide safe homes for their children.

When you report, you're:

- Advocating for a child's well-being
- Helping families access support services
- Building a community that values every child

Don't assume someone else will step up. Whether through direct support or making a report when needed, your actions matter. You don't need certainty — trust your instincts. Trained professionals will determine what support a family needs.

Together, we create communities where every family has the support they need to keep children safe and thriving. For more information, click [HERE](#).





The ABCs of Safe Sleep: Protecting Ohio's Infants; Reducing Infant Mortality

Every parent and caregiver wants their baby to sleep soundly and safely. In Ohio, too many infants die each year from unsafe sleep environments. The good news is that these deaths are preventable when families follow simple, proven steps known as the ABCs of Safe Sleep.

A – Alone

Babies should always sleep alone in their own crib, bassinet, or portable play yard. While it's natural to want to cuddle through the night, sharing a bed with an infant increases the risk of suffocation or accidental injury to the child. Parents and caregivers can keep their baby close by placing the crib in the same room, but the baby should always sleep in their own safe space.

B – Back

The safest position for a baby to sleep is on their back for naps and nighttime. Placing a baby on their stomach or side increases the risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS). Babies naturally breathe easier and stay safer when lying on their backs.

C – Crib

A crib, bassinet, or play yard with a firm mattress and fitted sheet is the only safe sleep surface for infants. The sleep space should be free of pillows, blankets, bumper pads, toys, and stuffed animals. Keeping the crib clear ensures babies have plenty of room to breathe and move safely.

Cribs for Kids / Safe Sleep Program in Ohio

Ohio has a Cribs for Kids program to help ensure all babies have a safe place to sleep. Cribs for Kids, an important part of the Department of Children and Youth (DCY) Safe Sleep initiative works to decrease Ohio's infant mortality rate by ensuring babies have a safe sleep environment and families are educated about safe sleep practices. This is accomplished through funding provided to organizations across the state that promote safe sleep practices and distribute free cribs to eligible families.

Find out if you are eligible and connect with your local program here: [Ohio Cribs for Kids County Contact List \(PDF\)](#)

Safe Sleep in Ohio

To guide these efforts, DCY tracks statewide and community-level data to identify gaps, measure progress, and drive targeted action. There is good news. Ohio's infant mortality rate has reached its lowest level in two decades, reflecting the collective impact of prevention strategies, community partnerships, and data-driven solutions.

Ohio is committed to preventing infant sleep-related deaths by sharing the ABCs of Safe Sleep with families, caregivers, and communities. Hospitals, healthcare providers, and state partners work together to raise awareness and provide resources so that every baby can grow and thrive.

By practicing safe sleep every day, families can help protect their little ones during their most vulnerable first year of life. For more information about Safe Sleep, [visit us online](#).

Involved Dads Help Reduce Infant Mortality and Support Ongoing Health of Mom and Baby

Fathers play a powerful role in helping babies grow up healthy and strong. Research shows that when dads are involved, even before their baby is born — infants are more likely to be born at a healthy weight and have a better chance of survival. In fact, a lack of father involvement has been linked to lower birth weight and a greater risk of infant mortality. When dads are present and engaged, babies may show stronger brain development and emotional well-being.

The Ohio Commission on Fatherhood (OCF) is working to support fathers through its Serving, Educating, and Empowering (SEE) Fathers grant programs. These programs help dads become more involved in their children's lives, especially during the early years. Last year, SEE Fathers programs served 103 expectant fathers, 216 fathers of children under one year old, and 741 fathers of children ages one to five. These efforts are helping to meet two important goals of the Department of Children and Youth: lowering infant mortality and improving kindergarten readiness.

Father involvement also helps mothers. Studies show that if moms experience depression, babies may feel more distress. But when fathers are actively engaged, they can keep their children from feeling those effects. Dads also play a key role in supporting breastfeeding. When fathers understand the benefits of breastfeeding and encourage it, moms feel more confident to start and continue, which helps babies get the nutrition they need.

From pregnancy through preschool, dads make a difference. Their love, support, and involvement help children grow healthier, happier, and more ready to learn. Thanks to programs like SEE Fathers, more dads in Ohio are staying involved—and more children are getting the strong start they deserve.

FIND IT HERE

For more information,
check out these
Ohio Commission on
Fatherhood resources:

- 10 Ways Fathers-To-Be Can Help
- Are You Ready To Be a Dad?
- I'm a Dad



Helping Children Shine with Sparkler

In less than a year, more than 10,000 children across Ohio have been screened for developmental milestones—an incredible achievement made possible by the Department of Children and Youth's (DCY) commitment to reaching children earlier. This milestone marks a major step forward in helping families understand their child's growth and connect with support when it's needed most.

The early years are filled with wonder, discovery, and rapid development. It's also a time when parents may have questions or concerns about how their child is growing. Thanks to Sparkler, a free app designed for families, those questions are easier to answer. Sparkler helps parents track their child's development, celebrate milestones, and get connected with professionals who can offer guidance and resources.

Sparkler's success is rooted in its simplicity. Families simply download the app, complete a screening, and receive instant feedback. If a child needs extra support, Sparkler helps connect families with services sooner—making sure no child falls through the cracks. This early connection can make a big difference in a child's future, from school readiness to long-term success.

DCY's focus on early screening means more children are being supported during the most important years of their development. Sparkler also benefits providers, helping them engage with families, share resources, and reduce paperwork. With automatic reminders and a dashboard that tracks progress, Sparkler is helping everyone—parents, educators, and healthcare professionals—work together to give children the best possible start.

[Click here to watch a video introduction to Sparkler, and learn how to sign up!](#)

10,000

children screened



DCY provides many resources for parents to promote early learning and early literacy.

Click the photos below to learn more about activities for infants/toddlers and preschoolers.

INFANT & TODDLER LANGUAGE

Birth-1 year

- Coo, smile, and copy sounds or faces
- Begin to know the names of familiar things
- Respond to caregivers' voices
- Say first words around 8-12 months

1-2 years

- Use short sentences with 2-4 words
- Pretend to read and ask you to read
- Follow simple directions
- Know around 50-100 words

2-3 years

- Speak clearly so others understand
- Enjoy reading, repeat parts of favorite books
- Ask for help and say what they need
- Know around 500 words



What to do if you're worried about your child's growth

- Use the Sparkler app to complete the ASQ questionnaire
- Talk to your child's doctor about your concerns
- Call Help Me Grow to ask about your child's growth: 1-800-755-GROW (4769)




PRESCHOOL READING & LANGUAGE

3-4 years

- Ask and answer questions
- Try to read and write
- Tell you a story from memory
- Use location words, like inside, on, or above
- Vocabulary grows to around 1500 words


4-5 years

- Use words for past, present, and future
- Can read and write some familiar words
- Blends words together, like: bed+time = bedtime
- Names and writes some letters
- Vocabulary grows to about 2500 words



What to do if you're worried about your child's growth

- Use the Sparkler app to complete the ASQ questionnaire
- Talk to your child's doctor about your concerns
- Call your local elementary school to ask about your child's growth, or call 1-844-234-5437 for help



DID YOU KNOW?

Early Intervention for the Win!

Last state fiscal year, almost 30,000 children were served in Ohio's Early Intervention program, enough to fill InfoCision Stadium where the Akron Zips play!



Ohio's Early Intervention program serves children under the age of three with developmental delays and disabilities. To make a referral, call (800) 755-4769 or [go online](#).

Parents Can Sign Up Newborns for Free Books When They Fill Out Birth Certificate

Ohio First Lady Fran DeWine [announced](#) a new statewide initiative designed to enroll more Ohio children immediately after birth in Dolly Parton's Imagination Library of Ohio. Studies have shown that books in the home, such as the books the Imagination Library provides to children from birth to age five, and increased reading can improve Kindergarten Readiness Assessment scores.

First Lady DeWine made a big announcement at the September 2025 First Lady's Luncheon. Governor DeWine also participated in the program, along with country music legend Zac Brown.



Ohio First Lady Fran DeWine talks with country music star Zac Brown at the 2025 First Lady Luncheon.

"Research has shown that 80 percent of a child's brain is developed by age three, so we want to get books into the home as early as possible in order to have the most impact," said First Lady DeWine. "I am thrilled to announce that now, as part of the Ohio birth certificate process, moms and dads will learn about Dolly Parton's Imagination Library of Ohio and have the chance to sign up at the hospital before they head home with their newborns. One simple checkmark will give Ohio's little ones a great start in life."

Free Books Sent to Your Child

If your child or grandchild doesn't receive free books every month, it's easy to sign up! The program is available in all of Ohio's 88 counties. Just click [this link](#), and once you follow the steps, their first book will arrive in six to eight weeks. To view the 2025 Book List, [click here](#).

NEWSROOM

Governor DeWine Announces Launch of Child Care Cred Program to Support Families and Employers

Ohio Governor Mike DeWine and Ohio Department of Children and Youth Director Kara Wentz recently announced the launch of the Child Care Cred Program, a \$10 million program making child care more affordable for working families while helping Ohio businesses strengthen their workforce.

The program was created through Ohio's SFY26–SFY27 biennial budget and is designed to tackle one of the state's biggest workforce challenges: access to affordable child care.

[Read Full Press Release](#)

Governor DeWine, Lt. Governor Tressel Announce Nearly \$20 Million to Support Young Families and Advance Infant Health

Ohio Governor Mike DeWine, Lt. Governor Jim Tressel, and Ohio Department of Children and Youth Director Kara Wentz announced earlier this month nearly \$20 million over the biennium in grants to 21 nonprofit organizations across the state through the Ohio Parenting and Pregnancy Program. These grants will connect expectant parents and caregivers to education, support, and trusted local services—giving more Ohio babies a healthy start in life.

[Read Full Press Release](#)

Child Care Program Increases Access to Affordable, Quality Child Care for Military Families in Ohio

Ohio Department of Children and Youth (DCY) Director Kara Wentz announced a new partnership between DCY and the U.S. Department of Defense to ensure that while our country's military personnel are keeping us safe, we are providing a healthy, safe, high-quality educational environment for their children.

[Read Full Press Release](#)



RESOURCES FOR OHIO FAMILIES

Family and Customer Support Center

Call (844) 234-KIDS (5437)

[Email the Family and Customer Support Center](#)

DCY's Family and Customer Support Center provides information, referrals, and assistance for families, providers, and partners. Hours of operation are 8 am to 5 pm EST, Monday through Friday (excluding holidays).

All inquiries and resolutions are monitored for quality assurance.

Childrenandyouth.ohio.gov

Find information and resources you need at childrenandyouth.ohio.gov.

Child Care Search

Use the [child care search tool](#) to find the early care and education program that meets your needs. You can search by location, type of program, days/hours of operation, services provided, and Step Up To Quality ratings.

Report Abuse and Neglect

Call (855)O-H-CHILD ((855)642-4453) to be connected directly to your county's child welfare or law enforcement office. You can make a report without giving your name.

Interested in becoming a foster parent or adopting a child?

Find an [Agency for Adoption, Foster Care, and Residential Services](#). If you are interested in foster care and/or adoption, you can click the inquiry link in a specific agency's details page or click here: [Inquiry Form](#).

988

The easy-to-remember, three-digit number provides 24/7, free and confidential support to Ohioans in a behavioral health or substance abuse crisis. 988 is a direct connection to compassionate, accessible care and support for anyone experiencing mental health related distress.

Follow us on social media



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**Department of
Children & Youth**