

Trends

Current Trends and Environment Affecting Child Welfare

While Ohio has accomplished much in recent years regarding our efforts for Safe Children, Stable Families and Supportive Communities, we are aware of the many challenges ahead and are planning for immediate and long-term opportunities. Our mission is a difficult one—how can we keep children safe while supporting and strengthening intact families? We know family disruptions are traumatic, and healthy child development is not well supported by temporary care.

Looking at statewide data over the past seven years, we can be proud of many outcomes, especially that fewer children are being removed from their birth families each year. When removal is necessary for their safety, more children are being placed close to home, school and community. Children are in temporary care for shorter lengths of time, and fewer children are waiting for adoptive homes. More timely outcomes include family reunifications or permanent placements with relatives or adoptive families.

“...fewer children are being removed from their birth families each year.”

Nevertheless, challenges remain great. Each year, nearly 25,000 children celebrate their birthdays in a temporary placement. Plus, an estimated 1,200 young people “age-out” of foster care and have no permanent families with whom to celebrate holidays or life’s milestones. Close to 3,000 children are waiting for an adoptive family and child maltreatment reports are on the rise – over 106,500 reports of child abuse, neglect or dependency were assessed and investigated in 2007.

Child Welfare Indicators
Following the first round of federal Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSR), Ohio successfully completed all of its action steps and achieved all data and program goals of its Program Improvement Plan (PIP).

Ohio’s second CFSR, completed in 2008, revealed many Ohio strengths, as well as ongoing areas for improvement. Ohio’s home rule, county based system regularly reveals the benefits of community based services and programs, as well as local partnerships, opportunities and relationships – all working within federal and state policies to make a difference in the lives of children and families.

However, like all other states to this point, Ohio will continue to have a Program Improvement Plan. To improve our outcomes we need to:

- Further shorten the time children spend in foster care;
- Reduce the numbers of children re-entering foster care; and
- Shorten the length of time children wait for permanent relative or adoptive families.

Of course, a key strategy to improving the outcomes listed above would be to invest in struggling families early on, strengthening their capacity to safely raise their own children without traumatically removing their children.

Indicators

Figure 1: Statewide Trends	2001	2007	% Change
Children in custody at least a day	35,083	26,853	23% decrease
Children in custody at year-end	21,239	14,282	33% decrease
Number of placement days	7.8 million	5.5 million	29% decrease
Children waiting for adoption	5,391	2,915	46% decrease
Reports of maltreatment	101,136	106,538	5% increase

Mother Pieces Her Life and Family Back Together Again, One Step at a Time

A PCSAO Birth Family of the Year: *Angelina's Story*

Angelina is a mother who has overcome many challenges and made great strides to surmount the effects of child abuse and neglect. After losing custody of her six children, Angelina realized the dire affects of



Angelina proudly accepts a well-deserved PCSAO Family of the Year award presented by U.S. Congressman Pat Tiberi.

drug abuse and made a vow to change her life. She has diligently completed all her case plan objectives, including family counseling and parenting classes. She was very consistent about visiting her children and those visits increased in frequency and length until three children were able to safely return home by the end of 2007. She continues to have regular visits with her three younger children and hopes that someday they will be able to return home. Angelina has now been drug free for more than two years. Angelina continues to have confidence in her abilities to remain free from substance abuse and to be a good supportive mother to her children.

Economy & Poverty

With a seriously faltering economy, Ohio's families are stressed, the poverty rate is increasing, unemployment is rising, utility and fuel bills continue to climb, and parents find it difficult to keep pantries stocked with healthy foods. Despite a depressed real estate market, safe and affordable housing remains a dream for many. Too many families struggle without health care. It is not hard to understand the challenges of being a safe, nurturing parent during these challenging times.

While tough economic times impact everyone, those living in poverty are especially hit the hardest. This is certainly the case in Ohio, as evidenced by data in *"The Real Bottom Line, State of Poverty in Ohio 2008."* This study, released by the Ohio Association of Community Action Agencies, included these

findings, among many:

- In 2006, 13.3% of Ohioans were living in poverty.
 - The poorest group of Ohioans is young children under the age of five living in single headed households, followed by single female headed families and African Americans.
 - The majority of persons living in poverty in Ohio are employed with an average wage of just under \$10.00 per hour, creating a new layer of poverty that includes people with jobs who are experiencing a need for public assistance for the first time in their lives.
- Expansion of categorical eligibility for food stamps.
 - Aligning and extending program recertification periods for all work supports to twelve months.
 - Allowing recertification for work supports by telephone interview.
 - Expanding outreach by using program enrollment information and establishing more integrated intake procedures.

PCSAO commends Governor Strickland for appointing the Ohio Anti-Poverty Task Force to identify ways to reduce poverty in our state. While working on long-term recommendations due by April 2009, the task force has already submitted twenty-two, short-term recommendations the Governor approved for implementation, including:

"It is not hard to understand the challenges of being a safe, nurturing parent during these tough economic times."

Bipartisan Support for Children and Families

Ohioans can be proud of our leaders working in a bipartisan manner to support children and families. Together, Governor Strickland and the Republican led 127th General Assembly passed the 2008-2009 Biennial State Budget with increased investments in child protection; access to health care for all children; continued support for providing mental health and addiction services for children, youth and their families; and provided health care for youth transitioning out of foster care up to the age of twenty-one. Unfortunately, some of these funding gains have been lost through budget cuts made because of deficits facing the state.

In January 2009, for the first time in fourteen years, the Democrats became the majority in the House of Representatives. PCSAO looks forward to working with the new House Leadership on both sides of the aisle. Speaker Armond Budish from Cleveland is a strong advocate for seniors and is very interested in kinship care issues. Speaker Pro Tem, Matt Szollosi from Toledo is a former member of the Lucas County Children Services Board. The House Minority Leader, Bill Batchelder of Medina returns to the Statehouse after serving in the legislature during the 1980s and early 1990s; he has a long history of supporting child protection, including foster care reform legislation in the late 1980s.

Likewise, we look forward to

continued work with Senate President Bill Harris who has been a great supporter of child welfare since his early days in the Ohio House. In 2009, Senator Harris was joined in leadership by Senator Tom Niehaus, President Pro Tem, a strong advocate for children's issues and the sponsor of many pieces of child protection legislation. The new Senate Minority Leader is Capri Cafaro, who brings to her leadership position an excellent understanding of human services.

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These leaders, the Governor and policymakers have very difficult choices to make in the coming months and years. Ohio's jobless rate as of March 2009 is 8.8% and it is expected to rise. The 2010-2011 State Budget could have as much as a \$7 billion deficit.

It will be up to Ohio's leaders to make certain government keeps its promise to meet the basic needs (i.e., food, housing, safety net services, health care and child care) of its most vulnerable people, including: abused and neglected children; persons with mental illness and developmental disabilities; senior citizens; and the

unemployed. Cutting services is not the only way to address a budget deficit. We must make sure our leaders find ways to provide necessary services to vulnerable Ohioans.

The serious economic challenges facing Ohio and the nation have Governor Strickland leading Ohio to work with President Barack Obama and Congress to provide significant relief to the States. The federal Recovery and Reinvestment package includes increased federal resources for Medicaid and child protection services, Unemployment Insurance, Child Care, and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). The Recovery package also makes investments in critical “shovel ready” projects and environmentally “green” projects, which will strengthen wise infrastructure, quickly put people to work, and hence stimulate the economy as paychecks flow back into our communities.

Difficult economic times require advocates and policymakers to be creative in addressing challenges by using data, evidence-informed programs and prioritizing scarce resources to support programs that work for Ohio's children and their families.

PCSAO is working diligently with state and federal leaders to support programs that help families deal with the stresses of the economy and poverty, while also helping local governments and agencies embrace increased caseloads and reduced budgets.