

Opportunities and Vision for Ohio's Child Welfare System

Child Abuse/Neglect Prevention

Even during tight financial times, Ohio must invest in prevention because it is cost effective, and more importantly, effective in preventing trauma associated with maltreatment, out of home placement, and the myriad of other concerns associated with maltreatment (i.e., physical and behavioral health issues, unintended pregnancies, and more).

The Ohio Children's Trust Fund provides prevention funds directly to each of Ohio's counties, to be invested according to local need and opportunity. Funds are also invested for evidence-based statewide prevention efforts. These include startup funds and sexual abuse prevention funds for Child Advocacy Centers, funding of Incredible Years programs that train parents and child care providers in prevention, and supporting an "Alternative Response" approach to working with families before their situation escalates and requires entering the traditional child welfare system.

Alternative Response

In September 2007, ten counties were selected to implement an eighteen month pilot project in Alternative Response (AR) as a more family friendly approach when children and families are referred to the child protection



Crystal Ward Allen (left) presents U.S. Congressman Pat Tiberi with PCSAO's Legislator of the Year Award. As a member of the House Ways and Means Committee, Congressman Tiberi played an important role in the final provisions and passage of PL 110-351, the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008.

system. The pilot counties served on a Design Team, along with representatives from ODJFS, PCSAO, IHS, and the AIM Team (the American Humane Association and experts from the state of Minnesota).

Ohio's AR concept is modeled after the successful ten year experience in Minnesota. Alternative Response enables a PCSA to select non-serious child abuse and neglect cases for an "alternative" strength based approach with families. This alternative approach encourages collaboration and cooperation between the families, the PCSA and other community resources. Minnesota's experience in AR has led to fewer children in

placement, enabling agency staff to focus on more services to families. Serious child abuse cases, sexual abuse and placement cases receive the traditional investigative approach.

The project, initiated by the Ohio Supreme Court's Sub Committee on Child Abuse and Neglect, was initiated on July 1, 2008 and is scheduled to end December 31, 2009. An important aspect of the Ohio AR Pilot is a research component that is documenting and evaluating the effectiveness of the pilot.

PL 110-351, Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008

As the most significant child welfare legislation since the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980 (which created the Title IV-E Adoption Assistance program and “reasonable efforts” requirements), the new Fostering Connections to Success Act creates several opportunities:

- New Title IV-E Relative Guardianship program and other relative caregiver support provisions.
- Extension of Title IV-E Foster Care Maintenance for foster youth up to age 21.
- Expansion of Title IV-E short term training support for relative caregivers, court and legal personnel, and private agency providers.
- Improvement of the Adoption Incentives program to increase resources for recruiting, matching and finalizing adoptions of our waiting children.
- Access to Title IV-E for Native American Tribes.
- Various policies to improve practice and outcomes for keeping siblings together, educational and health oversight of foster youth, and more.

Like other states experiencing financial crises, Ohio is focusing first on the cost savings and budget neutral provisions of PL 110-351, with an eye to the future for implementing other provisions. Better support of older foster youth and relative caregivers is definitely receiving attention by all.

Outcomes Data Project

The Ohio Association of Child Caring Agencies (OACCA) has embarked on a significant outcomes analysis project that will greatly inform the purchase of services for children and youth needing substitute care. With fourteen private agencies participating, nearly 2,000 admissions to private placing agencies have been entered into the project. Much of the outcomes analysis is based on discharge and follow up data. While the admission numbers increase to a point that some trends are emerging in the types of children in the system, outcomes analysis remains very preliminary because it is based on discharge and follow up data.

OACCA has issued a preliminary progress report in 2008 and plans to release another in 2009; their goal is to have a more substantial report in 2010. All reports are validated by the Voinovich School of Leadership and Public Affairs at Ohio University.

Preliminary reports for Residential Treatment and Treatment Foster Care continue to show two important trends:

- Among children in care with mental health diagnoses, Mood disorders and Attention Deficit/Adjustment disorders constitute the majority of diagnoses.

- Both the Parents and Youth reports show average problem severity scores diminishing during the course of treatment.

National Governors Association 2020

Ohio is one of six states participating in the National Governors Association (NGA) 2020 project to improve the safety, well-being and permanency for children in foster care. As part of this project, Ohio is developing a strategic plan to meet three primary national outcomes:

- Reduce the number of children in care by 50% by 2020;
- Reduce the length of stay for children in care; and
- Reduce re-entry into the child welfare system.

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NGA 2020 builds on the research-based knowledge and recognition that many children can safely remain with family, relatives or kin when upfront services and supports are provided, thus avoiding the trauma of being separated from their homes and community. In situations when children must be removed from their homes, placement in family settings is important, but it is essential to quickly and safely reunite children with their families, or place them with relatives / kin or an adoptive family.

The NGA 2020 project follows closely and compliments the *Ohio Summit on Children* hosted by Governor Ted Strickland and Chief Justice Thomas Moyer in May 2008. The event brought together juvenile court judges, public children service agency directors, and representatives of local funding authorities, school systems and service providers from across Ohio to build on existing initiatives and advance collaborative efforts between county teams and the state to

enhance safety, well-being and permanency for Ohio's children. A follow-up, second Summit is already planned for November 2009 to assess progress and success, and keep the momentum going in achieving positive outcomes for children and families.

PCSAO has robust participation on the NGA 2020 workgroups (as well as the Ohio Summit on Children activities) with a cross section of diverse public children

service agency directors. These directors and their agencies represent excellent child welfare practice, innovation, and progressive thinking for new direction.

To quote Governor Strickland and Chief Justice Moyer, "We can think of no issue more important than the well-being of Ohio's children and families." – we at PCSAO are in full agreement and appreciate their leadership!

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