

THE PUBLIC CHILDREN SERVICES ASSOCIATION OF OHIO

During the winter of 1980, three separate groups merged forces to form the Public Children Services Association of Ohio (PCSAO). The Associations of children services board executive secretaries; county departments of human services directors with children services responsibilities; and the directors of county children's homes made the decision that by combining their efforts into one collective voice, they could more effectively influence public policy that would affect the children and families of Ohio. Craig Neuman, Executive Secretary of Trumbull County Children Services and John Popio, Director of the Union County Department of Human Services provided the leadership that resulted in this merger.

Several key decisions were made in creating PCSAO. The first was that the Association would be governed by a ten member board of trustees. The trustees would be comprised of an equal number of directors of children services boards (CBSs) or county departments of human services (DHSs). This balance of five directors from each form of public children services agency was determined to be very important to ensure a proper balance between the interests of each. Additional decisions were that no trustee could serve more than three consecutive two year terms and no president could serve in that capacity more than two consecutive years. The presidency would alternate between an individual who was a director of a CSB and DHS. Finally, the mission of the Association was determined to promote the development of sound public policy that benefited the children and families of Ohio and the public agencies that served them. This decision set PCSAO on the road to being the advocacy organization it has become.

During the first two years, PCSAO employed no staff. The work was done by the board during its monthly meetings and a committee structure, which was formed around the priorities of the Association. Counties were assessed dues and these were permitted to accumulate in an investment account. After two years, the Board came to the conclusion that staff was needed to address the many issues that came before the Association. Dora Sterling was hired as the part-time Chief Staff Officer and Joy Robinson was later employed as the Administrative Assistant. These two individuals saw that the day to day duties of the Association were tended to.

In 1984, PCSAO undertook its first major initiative to establish a system of uniform training that would be made available to every social worker and supervisor employed by a county PCSA. This initiative was spearheaded by Dolores Reid, Director of Montgomery County Children Services. The Association developed a proposal that was eventually submitted and not funded by the Ohio department of Human Services. However, within eighteen months after that unsuccessful try, the Ohio Child Welfare Training Program was born, a training partnership between the Ohio Department of Human Services, PCSAO, and the counties. The Institute for Human Services was awarded the first contract to serve as central coordinator for the training; regional training centers were developed in the counties; and competency based training was delivered. Since that time, more than half of the states of America, the Child Welfare League of America, and many Canadian provinces have adopted the Ohio program of training as their model.

In 1986, PCSAO entered into a contractual arrangement with the Ohio Department of Human Services to develop a variety of products and services that would benefit children and families. These products were developed to continue to support counties as they dealt with the many issues facing abused and neglected children and their families.

Also in 1986, PCSAO made a policy decision that it desired to become much more engaged in the legislative policy arena. During that year, Gayle Channing Tenenbaum was employed to spearhead the advocacy efforts. The first big test of this new initiative was the state biennial budget, at the end of which, the State Child Welfare Subsidy (currently the State Child Protection Allocation) was increased by \$10 million. This increase represented a 50% increase over the previous biennial appropriation, unheard of at the time. Along with this growth, the Association also made the determination that it was necessary to recruit and hire a full time director to manage the day to day operations of PCSAO. Dan Schneider, former director of the Knox County Department of Human Services was selected for this position. Dan began his duties in September 1987.

In 1986, PCSAO held its first annual conference. That conference consisted of six training sessions and was attended by approximately sixty child welfare professionals. The conference now consists of more than forty accredited training sessions and has grown to accommodate almost seven hundred professionals from Ohio and across the United States.

The Board made a decision to develop five district associations of PCSAO. The presidents of these district associations were eventually brought onto the board, which increased the total board to fifteen members. The Association continued to expand its efforts to support counties and advocate for children and families in the public policy arena. Financial management and media manuals, work load studies, new county executive orientation, levy campaign consultation, and a variety of training, consultation, and technical assistance offerings to assist policy implementation in the counties were developed.

In 1990, Crystal Ward Allen, then a graduate student on field placement with PCSAO, was given the task of researching and creating the first PCSAO biennial fact book. This document has been replicated every two years since that time and serves as a means to provide critical information concerning Ohio's children, families, and the PCSAs that serve them. Crystal was later hired as the Special Projects Coordinator and now serves as the Association's Associate Director. PCSAO continues to provide field placement opportunities for graduate students on an annual basis.

Also in 1990, PCSAO undertook the development of its first strategic plan to identify the priorities that it wished to accomplish during the upcoming two year period. New plans have been developed by membership biennially since that time. From these plans, initiatives such as focus group research, the Executive Leadership Institute, public policy priorities, training, and family-centered neighborhood-based practice have either been developed or refined to support children, families, and the agencies that serve them.

In 1994, Joe White, director of Summit County Children Services, led the campaign to encourage PCSAO to develop Standards for Effective Practice for child welfare. PCSAO contracted with Stacey Saunders to coordinate and facilitate the development of these standards. More than one hundred child welfare professionals from across the state participated in subcommittees and developed the final version, the first of their kind ever, for release in 1996. These Standards are being reviewed for necessary revisions and new development in 2001. These standards have been used by not only Ohio's counties, but also agencies across the United States.

In 1995, PCSAO developed and implemented the Rising Up and Moving On Program, a venue to recognize children who have been in the foster care system and overcome extraordinary circumstances to become successful. Each year, six to eight youth are recognized at the Association's annual conference and many more are honored in their home counties. Attorney General Betty Montgomery has solidly supported this program and serves as the presenter of the awards each year. Using this theme, PCSAO has expanded this theme to honor families, social workers, and child advocates at the annual conference.

In 1997, the Annie E. Casey Foundation approached PCSAO to coordinate the expansion of the Family to Family Initiative in Ohio beyond the pilot counties of Cuyahoga and Hamilton. PCSAO is the only private, non-profit corporation in the United States to be asked to perform this important duty. Stacey Saunders again was asked to coordinate this expansion.

Also in 1997, the board promulgated policy to encourage leaders of county PCSAs to attend Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government's Senior Executive Program. The Association agreed to pay one half of the tuition for any PCSA executive admitted into the program. Since that time four executives have attended this highly educational program.

In 1998, PCSAO collaborated with Ohio University and Harvard to develop the Executive Leadership Institute. This program focuses on the concept of value creation, political management, operational capacity building, and the measurement of strategic performance. The initial session was held in November 1998. Since that time, more than two hundred professionals, from Ohio and across the country, have completed the Institute that is now housed in the University's George V. Voinovich Center for Leadership and Public Affairs.

In November 1999 PCSAO launched this website. The site contains many tools developed by the association and provides access to several PCSAO publications. It includes links to a variety of county, state, and federal child protection resources and agencies.

In 1999, the United States Congress appropriated funds for use by PCSAO to work in partnership with other states to assist in developing a grassroots network of local and state agencies to increase the safety of children and the stability of families in each state and across the country. Additional appropriations have been made each year to support this effort. In 2001, the states of California, Pennsylvania, Colorado, Kentucky, Maryland, and San Diego County California have fully engaged in this effort.

Also in 2001, Dan Schneider assumed the title of Director of National Operations for the National Network for Child Safety where he utilized his vast leadership skills developed over the years. Crystal Ward Allen was named Executive Director of PCSAO on October 1, 2001 by the PCSAO Board of Trustees.

In 2002, Max Bucey, former Executive Director of Athens County Children Services and President of PCSAO, was hired as the Assistant Director of PCSAO. Also in 2002, PCSAO created the Rule Review Committee and initiated activities to assist PCSA's going through COA Accreditation and became involved with the University Partnership Program. After the tragic death of Nancy Fitzgivens, a Franklin County Children Services caseworker, PCSAO commissioned the "Community Heroes Quilt" that was unveiled at the 2002 PCSAO Annual Conference.

The year 2003 was momentous in many ways. The PCSAO Standards for Effective Practice were revised and updated and new standards for Caseworker Safety and Prevention were added. PCSAO facilitated the Annie E. Casey Foundations' seeding of the Endowed MSW Nancy Fitzgivens Scholarship Award at OSU. Also that year, PCSAO became involved with CLA and quickly demonstrated the value of CLA and FCNB together. PCSAO was able to gain PCSA's access to Leads and identified a Level of Care Tool, which could be available to the counties by 2004.

On May 23, 2003, Dan Schneider passed away after a long and courageous battle with pancreatic cancer. Jacqui Romer-Sensky, who had served as acting director during Dan's illness, was named Director of the National Network for Child Safety. During 2003, the PCSAO Board Of Trustees initiated activities to enable the NNCS to become a separate 501 (c) 3 with its own National Board of Directors. By the end of 2003, the NNCS had expanded to 14 states.

Those individuals that have served as President of the Association have included:

Wilbert Jansen, Franklin County 1981-1982
Ron Rockwell, Clark County 1983-1984
Max Bucey, Athens County 1985
Dan Schneider, Knox County 1986-1987
Mary Ann Paloncy, Greene County 1987-1988
Don Thomas, Hamilton County 1989-1990
Isaac Palmer, Montgomery County 1991-1992
Russ Johnson, Medina County 1993-1994
Max Bucey, Athens County 1995-1996
Dennis McKay, Fulton County 1997-1998
Gary Crow, Lorain County 1999-2000
Jim Smith, Champaign County 2001-2002
Rhonda Reagh, Greene County 2003 – 2004
Terry Miller, Coshocton County 2005-present