

Cutting The Path To Excellence Clinton County Children Services

Whose says rural communities cannot redefine themselves? It is happening with awesome results in Ohio's Clinton County. For the past three years Clinton County Children Services has been working to transform the way in which they think about, approach, practice and provide child welfare services. As a result of their community-driven Strategic Plan, the agency was able to focus its attention and efforts in the direction of family-centered, neighborhood-based Services. Patricia Yost, the executive director of Clinton County Children Services said "our community strategic plan assisted us in moving in a direction that has reinvigorated our staff and guided us in forming partnerships 3 years ago we would never have imagined."

As a result of their tireless efforts to habituate a more FCNB approach to service delivery, child and family quality of life outcomes have been positively impacted. For example, as a result of focusing on voluntary agreements with families, community focused safety plans and wrap around local services, the agency was able to reduce the number of children removed from their homes by 30% in 1999. The agency is seeking to reduce this by an additional 10% in 2000. In 1999 55% of the children who were removed from their homes and placed in foster care were placed in foster homes outside of their school district. So far, in the first 5 months of 2000 only 10% of all child removals required placement outside of the child's school district - that is extremely significant and something the agency and community should be very proud of. As a result of their work with neighborhoods, the spiritual community and citizens throughout the county, the agency will meet its goal of increasing the number of foster homes licensed in their targeted area by 25% before the year's end. The agency is conducting sermons on Sunday's at churches across the county and as a result are establishing a respite program with practitioners who cannot make a full commitment to do foster care on a regular basis but are willing to "pitch in." Also, as a result of the agency's efforts, churches are sponsoring families - lending a helping hand when one is needed - weaving a network of support for vulnerable families where no natural network existed.

As part of the community, the agency enters 3 county-sponsored events each year as a team; they have met with and continue to gain the support of township trustees throughout the county and supervisor's have had a significant impact on building a strong foundation with the juvenile court administrators and magistrates as a result of attending court hearings with their staff. In addition, the agency's public information officer is a columnist for their local paper and writes about child welfare issues that concern all citizens on a regular basis.

There is much to learn from this outstanding agency who is walking the talk and successfully journeying down the road of FCNB excellence.
BRAVO! ■