



HOSTING A RIDE-ALONG July 2017

WHAT

- Invite your state Representative and Senator to visit your agency for a firsthand experience of how you carry out your charge to protect abused, neglected and dependent children.
- The visit's focus should be a "ride-along" with a caseworker so they can see the challenging situations children face and understand the value of your work. You may want to include a **brief** introduction; however, keep in mind that experience shows that the ride-along has much more impact than a briefing or overview of the agency.
- Keep the message consistent and focused. You can't cover all issues in one visit, nor do you need to. For example, one agency's recent ride-along focused on funding for foster care since their placement costs have been increasing at a fast pace.

WHY

- Legislators don't understand child protection work and may have misperceptions of what/why/how we do our work.
- Remember, most legislators get their information from the headlines and from constituent calls so it is important that they see the work with their own eyes.
- More informed legislators = better chance for support.

HOW

- Reach out personally to your Representative and Senator and invite them to visit your agency and ride along with a caseworker. Don't be discouraged if it takes several requests --- be persistent.
- Be flexible with timing to accommodate their schedule, but pay attention to what will work best for the agency as well, i.e., best time of the day for a visit, best day of the week for a visit, etc.
- Ask for 2-3 hours to allow enough time for several visits. However, successful visits can happen:
 - With less time: One agency recently hosted a state Senator for 1 ½ hours. He met with a client who had made great progress and reunified with her son (positive outcome) and with a client who had just started working with the agency (negative – shock value).
 - With more time: One agency always asks for a minimum of 4 hours and has not found that a problem to date.
- Don't shy away from challenging cases—they need to see the "real" world.

WHAT ABOUT CONFIDENTIALITY?

Confidentiality should not be a barrier to hosting a ride-along. You can ensure confidentiality in several ways:

- Some agencies have visitors on ride-alongs sign a confidentiality statement (See Franklin County example).

- Some agencies only visit children in agency custody.
- Always ask the family if it is okay if the guest is along. If the family says no, the guest doesn't enter the home. (Caseworkers can simply say, "Mary is along today to observe. Is that okay?")

STAFFING

When considering which caseworker to assign to the ride-along, consider:

- Someone with overall knowledge of the agency/process, not just one area such as investigations or adoptions.
- Someone with an open, friendly manner who can field questions and provide insights.
- Brief the caseworker so they know who is coming for the ride-along and feel prepared.

DURING THE RIDE-ALONG

- Provide an Agency Fact sheet with an overview of your agency's commitment to child protection. (See Coshocton County example)
- Do your best to keep track of time and stick to the timeframe of the scheduled visit.
- Explain what you are doing and why.
- Answer questions. If you don't know the answer, make a note and follow-up afterward.

AFTER THE RIDE-ALONG

- Send a thank you note and provide any follow up.
- Let the legislator know they should follow up with the agency director or liaison who set up the visit if they have ongoing questions, rather than with the caseworker.
- Let PCSAO know how it went so we can follow up with the legislator.
- Depending on the legislator and your community, you may want to do a press release. (See Coshocton County example)

QUESTIONS?

These counties have recent experience hosting ride-alongs and can provide advice:

- Coshocton County: Mindy Fehrman, mindy.fehrman@jfs.ohio.gov
- Franklin County: Tina Rutherford, tmruther@fcss.us
- Licking County: Kim Wilhelm, kim.wilhelm@jfs.ohio.gov

PCSAO resource: Mary Wachtel, mary@pcsao.org, 614.224.5802