

Richland County Children Services 2015 Report to the Community

Strong families



Stability



Safety



Permanency

Our Mission

To lead our community in assuring the safety, well-being and permanency of children at risk of abuse and neglect.

From the Director's Desk

By Patty Harrelson, MSSA, LISW-S
Executive Director

Many changes came to Richland County Children Services in 2015. We continue to work within our budget and are dealing with continued cuts from the State of Ohio. While we enjoy significant support from our community, we recognize that we are stewards of the public trust, a role we take seriously.

In my child protective services career, I have learned citizens have varying degrees of understanding of our role, of this work and how it is funded. I also recognize that no matter what we do as an agency, we are almost always “on the wrong side” of things. Children do not live in a vacuum, they live in the middle. They are in the middle of parents (sometimes on opposing sides of custody issues), aunts, uncles, friends, and professionals with as many and often times opposing perspectives on what should be done to protect them.

Richland County Children Services is the only statutory agency with the authority to assess abuse or neglect reports and to place children away from the home. Still, we should not do this work in a vacuum, either.

Our work is full of mystery, because we legally cannot disclose to the public what we are doing in specific cases. The work is dangerous, difficult and many times heartbreaking. It is not that we are hiding; it is that we have a duty to every person for confidentiality and this is not only the law, but it is ethically the right course of action. We are largely a caring and compassionate group of people. Yet, the images on TV of the child welfare profession are always negative and misguided. We are not perfect as a profession, yet the public demands as much. What I do know is we strive each day to make our best decisions, often with conflicting and limited information.

I rarely read Facebook, Twitter or letters to the Editor these days as the postings are full of claims that are blatantly not true. However, I have come across some things this year that are just so incredibly wrong that I have felt compelled to respond with op-ed pieces. I will continue to do my best to help our public understand the facts when I can.

We are not a General Revenue Fund (GRF) agency in Richland County. We work cooperatively with the County Commissioners; they appoint our all-volunteer Board which has

oversight of the Agency. We utilize services such as the County Risk Sharing Authority (CORSA), payroll and central services, but we do not ask for, nor receive, GRF monies.

Some myths that I recently have come across locally: “they get \$15,000 for every kid they take” (into custody).

First, I assure you there is no specific dollar amount we receive per child. The \$15,000 claim, if true, would be spent in less than two (2) months in many cases of residential care, and five (5) months in the case of many network foster homes. Child welfare finance is an incredibly complicated structure. It is not like a personal checking account where one can spend money on any expense one has. Our funding comes from the federal government (about 57 percent), the state government (about 5 percent) and local levy funding (about 38 percent). Ohio remains the 50th out of the 50 states in the state share of spending on child protection services. Much of our funding is restricted to specific situations and criteria. I am grateful we have two local levies to support our work, but I am also saddened that like state school funding, the money available to help us protect children really depends on the county in which a child lives. We have been fortunate here in Richland County and I applaud local voters for having the courage to support our work. I am also grateful for the support of our local Job and Family Services and our work with the Richland County Youth and Family Council. Every time I go to a meeting in Columbus, I am assailed by the refrains of people at the state level telling us to “collaborate.” I can tell you that no county in which I have ever worked collaborates better than we do here. I am proud of that.

We have 86 children currently in our care with varying degrees of needs. Some are in local foster care, requiring payments of \$720.00 per child, per month, and some are placed in network homes at more than \$2,900.00 per child, per month. Other youth are placed in residential settings, which require payments of more than \$7,500.00 a month per child.

In 2015, our placement costs alone were more than \$1.5 million.

Another myth: RCCS removes children with no oversight. The Richland County Juvenile Court has oversight for all cases of custody, and the court exercises this authority independent of RCCS. All cases of child custody are also assigned a CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocate) or Guardian ad Litem (GAL) whose role is to make recommendations to the court regarding what he or she believes is in the best interests of a child. Sometimes we all agree, sometimes we don't. This is the nature of the work, and means we

(Continued on Page 7)



Prevent Child Abuse

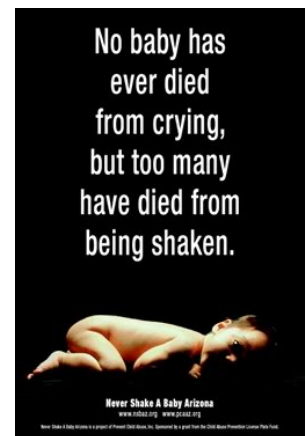


‘Never Shake a Baby’ campaign highlighted in April

Richland County Children Services produced a “Never Shake a Baby” educational video during 2015, debuting it in April during National Child Abuse Prevention month on local radio and TV stations. Money for the effort came from the Ohio Children’s Trust Fund, which has often been used to produce a “Pinwheels for Prevention” display.

“The community had seen several shaken baby incidents early in the year and we felt it was the best message we could deliver,” RCCS Executive Director Patty Harrelson said.

The 60-second video was later edited down to 30 seconds and appeared before movies at the Cinemark 14 Mansfield Town Center in Ontario. That was a combined effort from all members of the Richland County Infant Mortality Task Force.



Highlights of 2015

- Accepted assistance from the Annie E. Casey Foundation related to the Team Decision Making process.
- Began work with the Annie E. Casey Foundation to pilot the Trauma Systems Treatment Model for youth ages 11 and older with the traumatic issues and multi-system involvement.
- Completed a lease with Ohio Health Mansfield to create a forensic center at the hospital that will allow for interviewing and recording child interviews in a more friendly environment.
- Restructured the agency and created the Family Support Specialist Unit to provide direct assistance to families.
- Worked to develop and employ Signs of Safety and Solution Focused Casework.
- Utilized financial flexibility available under our Protect Ohio Title IV-E waiver to provide creative solutions to families in need of assistance.



Richland County Children Services: By the Numbers

2015 Revenues, Expenses

Revenue sources	Amount*	Expense area	Amount*
Federal	\$5,801,101	Personnel	\$6,655,727
Levy income	\$3,684,778	Placement	\$1,517,962
State	\$522,481	Purchased services	\$551,837
Other revenue	\$203,269	Operations/overhead	\$423,633
Parental support	\$1,837	Adoption subsidy	\$221,345
Total revenue	\$10,213,466	Capital replacement	\$113,991
	*Unaudited	Total expenses	\$9,484,495
			*Unaudited



Assessments

Richland County Children Services relies on community members to call us when they suspect a child is being abused or neglected. Professionals who frequently work with children, such as doctors, teachers, and social workers are required by law to do so.

The agency received 6,294 calls from the public during 2015, averaging more than 17 per day.

From those calls, the agency launched 1,864 assessments of alleged abuse or neglect, averaging 35 new cases per week.

The leading cause for investigations was neglect (41 percent), followed by families in need of services (22 percent) and physical abuse (18 percent). Other allegations included sexual abuse (8 percent), emotional maltreatment (7 percent) and dependency (7 percent).

The leading referral sources in 2015 were law enforcement (291 investigations), self reports (288), other agencies (219), schools or day care centers (211), relatives (187) and medical facilities (177).

The agency hotline is open for calls 24/7. During 2015, RCCS had 1,273 calls either after hours during the week (794 calls) or on the weekend (479).



Kinship care

Surveys have shown children who cannot remain at home do much better when placed with a relative or someone with whom they had a prior relationship.

That someone may be a grandparent, aunt, uncle, adult sibling or a significant other whom the child already knows.

That's why Richland County Children Services offers one of the best Kinship programs in Ohio, including two Kinship Navigators who work directly with Kinship families to ensure they receive the benefits and assistance they need. At the end of 2015, RCCS had 113 open Kinship cases involving 214 children.

RCCS believes a child's best chance at a happy and productive future is best served by assisting those who know the child best.

Ongoing services

On an average day in 2015, Richland County Children Services provided ongoing services to 328 cases that included 696 children.

Those numbers are up slightly from 2014, when the average was 298 open cases with 655 children.

These ongoing caseworkers work with families and others involved in a case to help develop case plans that provide needed services.

These services may include counseling, parenting training, mental and drug/alcohol counseling and referrals to other agencies.

Independent Living program

Permanent and loving forever homes are our goals for all local children who come into the agency's custody.

However, that is not always possible and RCCS had four young adults emancipate while in the agency's custody in 2015. That's why the agency has an Independent Living program, aimed at assisting these young people.

We offer a class called PREP to help with college enrollment and/or job searches. We also assist in setting up housing, utilities and other basic tools needed to succeed in the adult world they are about to enter.

Protect Ohio program key to child welfare support

Richland County Children Services has participated in Protect Ohio, the state's federal Title IV-E Demonstration Project, since 1997.

The goal of the waiver program, used in 16 Ohio counties, is to reduce the number of children in foster care, to decrease the amount of time children remain in foster care and to promote adoptions when necessary.

Under traditional child welfare funding, counties are reimbursed by the federal government based upon the number of children taken into custody who meet one or more deprivation factors, often poverty. These were last changed in the 1960s.

Under Protect Ohio, RCCS is able to bring in about \$1 million more each year than would be available under traditional funding. The agency receives no direct funds based on the number of children taken into custody. In fact, the goal of Protect Ohio is to keep children at home if at all possible and to return them home as quickly as possible.



Participation in Protect Ohio allows Richland County Children Services the financial flexibility to offer services many other child protection agencies cannot. In just one example, the agency can allow parents to keep custody of their children and pay for what is known as Direct Parental Placement into care for short crisis periods while RCCS caseworkers assist the family.

The waiver program also provides the agency funds to join with local Youth & Family Council members in a pooled fund used by RCCS, Juvenile Court, the Mental Health Board and the Developmental Disabilities board for placement without custody when possible.

We believe all federal waivers will end in 2019. We hope it ends by the federal government incorporating successes found in Protect Ohio as it eliminates the Title IV-E program as it is today.

RCCS: Who we are

2015 Board members

Pamela Siegenthaler, board chair
James Kulig, vice chair
Robert Kirkendall, treasurer
Renee Bessick, secretary
Lynn Friebel
Stacy Jackson-Johnson
Michelle Kowalski, Ph.D.
David Leitenberger
Jason Murray, Esq.



2015 leadership team

Patricia Harrelson, executive director
Nikki Harless, assistant director
Marsha Coleman, clinical director
Kevin Goshe, director of finance
Tim Harless, community outreach/programming director
Edith Gilliland, legal services manager
Chris Zuercher, human resources manager
Amy Gosser, executive assistant

Foster care/adoption available here

Our number one goal at Richland County Children Services is to keep kids safe — while also keeping them in their own homes if possible. When that is not possible, we want children to stay temporarily with other family members or significant others. It is only as a last resort that the agency considers foster care.

RCCS ended 2015 with 81 children in agency custody obtained through Juvenile Court, just above the average for the year. The agency had 71 initial placements during the year, representing an average of 54 local families.

We are blessed with good foster homes in Richland County and helped to license 12 such homes during 2015. We are always looking for additional foster homes.

RCCS also finalized the adoption of 17 children through Probate Court during 2015, which is one of the highest numbers in recent years. We ended the year with only a sibling group of three and a single 10-year-old child still waiting for a forever home.

Clarett speech highlights 2nd annual Spaghetti Bowl

Maurice Clarett delivered a simple, yet powerful, message to the community on Sunday, Oct. 25th, at the second-annual Richland County Children Services Spaghetti Bowl. The former Ohio State football All-American, whose own bad choices landed him in prison for a few years, spoke about the importance of making good decisions and of self-awareness.

“You think that football is going to last forever, but that’s not the truth of the matter,” he said. “And if you’re not prepared, at some point, life will come at you fast. You can be Mr. Everybody today, and when you can’t serve your football team or you don’t have an athletic ability to offer, life comes down to the skills you develop – and that’s one thing I really want to get across to them.”

The dinner included local fans, players, coaches, cheerleaders and marching band members from Mansfield Senior and Madison Comprehensive high schools. The two rivals meet in their traditional regular-season finale on Friday at Arlin Field. The charity dinner at the Mid-Ohio Conference Center raised money for charities designated by the two schools — United Way of Richland County and the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption.



Former OSU star stresses reading to Prospect Elementary students

Maurice Clarett’s visit to Mansfield, arranged by RCCS, grew to include a second presentation by the former OSU star at the Crossroads Community Church, sponsored by the Mansfield Police Department, Mansfield UMADAOP and WeAct.

Students representing the Prospect Elementary School’s reading tutor program attended the speech at Crossroads and had a chance to meet Clarett afterward.

“We had pizza with them afterward and asked them what they had heard (Clarett) say,” Prospect Principal Kirsten DeVito said. “One boy raised his hand and said ‘READ!’ So they listened.”

The Prospect tutor program involves more than two dozen volunteers coming to the school to work one-on-one with students during 30-minute reading sessions.



From the Director's Desk

(Continued from Page 2)

are all doing our best to keep children safe. There is no “rubber stamp” for RCCS custody decisions.

By far, we have an incredibly dedicated and competent staff. We are also legally mandated to receive a significant number of training hours. Yet, we are no different than any public or private employer; we have our employment challenges, too. While discipline is meant to teach and correct behavior, it also, at times, means that people are terminated. This is not a pleasant experience for us or the employee. As public stewards it is our duty, and one I will never take lightly.

In 2015, we instituted major changes including the introduction of Team Decision Making (TDM) meetings so decisions are made with families and service providers, not in a vacuum. We also introduced Signs of Safety and Solution Focused Casework and began to lay the foundation to a process of appreciative inquiry inside the agency. Signs of Safety as an approach to child protection is best described as:

Child protection practice and culture tends toward paternalism. This occurs whenever the professional adopts the position that they know what is wrong in the lives of client families and they know what the solutions are to those problems. A culture of paternalism can be seen as the ‘default’ setting of child protection practice. This is a culture that both further disenfranchises the families that child protection organizations work with and exhausts the front-line professionals that staff them. Signs of Safety seeks to more constructive culture around child protection organization and practice.

Central to this is the use of specific practice tools and processes where professionals and family members can engage with each other in partnership to address situations of child abuse and maltreatment.. Signs of Safety, Child Protection Practice Framework Government of Western Australia, 2011.

We were awarded a significant grant from the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services to pursue this practice, the TDM model as well as provide coaching for our line supervisors and some staff. The work on the grant was extended into June 2016, and we are monitoring our progress. The grant also pays for a consultant on Organizational Culture and Secondary Trauma to support our employees. Finally, we are a pilot site of the Annie E. Casey Foundation on Trauma Systems Treatment (TST) for our youth in foster and kinship care and well as the foster parents, and kin themselves. As you can see, there is a lot happening here.

This year will be spent on implementing these changes and 2017 on solidifying them as routine parts of our practices. Change is never easy. In fact, this past year was overwhelming at times. I have asked much of our team in the past 12 months. The next 24 months will be spent on supporting and solidifying these changes.

There have been many hours of training and processing, but I also believe, in the end, these changes will make RCCS a better and stronger agency for those we are here to serve.

One of our greatest needs remains foster parents who will take on our teens. These youth come from difficult backgrounds, but they are in need of and deserve special and dedicated adults who are willing to step up with patience and support.

If you are interested in becoming a foster parent, especially for our teens, please call us at 419-774-4100.

Engaging families key to child welfare success

It takes more than a caseworker to obtain child welfare success.

That’s why Richland County Children Services spent a great deal of time during 2015 learning methods to improve interaction with families, training enabled by a Efficiency and Innovation Fund Grant from the State of Ohio.

The agency brought Trauma Informed Practices to staff, first with an understanding of how the work impacts

child welfare teams and then moving out to its impact on children, families and the community. Second, the agency also completed training in order to implement the Signs of Safety model of child welfare, which helps caseworkers to better engage families and works to create safety networks to help keep children out of foster care, prevent re-entry and prevent the recurrence of maltreatment. Finally, the agency implemented the Annie E. Casey Foundation’s Team Decision Making process, which promotes meetings that include family, supporters and others.



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