

# ACCENT<sub>on</sub>KIDS

A Publication of Franklin County Children Services

WINTER 2024



Members of the Cheer Institute bring their holiday gift donations to the annual Black Girl Magic Event benefiting Black and Brown girls involved with FCCS.

## INSIDE:

- 🌀 **New Support for Foster, Adoptive Families**
- 🌀 **Partnership Keeps Teens in School**
- 🌀 **Building a Hopeful Future**



Protecting Children by Strengthening Families

## Winter 2024

### BOARD

Tammy Wharton, Chair

Elon Simms, Vice Chair

Maggie Lewis, Secretary

Lolita Augenstein

Rev. Dr. Michael Bean

Napoleon Bell

Wilson Browning

Tiffany Hunt

Elizabeth Martinez

Necol Russell-Washington

Jamie Shumaker

### EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Chip M. Spinning

### COMMUNICATIONS DEPARTMENT STAFF

Bruce Cadwallader

Cynthia Greenleaf

Marion Thompson

Scott Varner, Director



### Franklin County Children Services

- Community Outreach
- 855 W. Mound St.
- Columbus, OH 43223
- Phone: (614) 275-2520

This publication is available online at [fccs.us](http://fccs.us)

# FCCS Partnership Keeps Teens in School, on Track to Graduation

With tutoring and educational supports specifically designed to help young people in a foster or kinship situation - and for youth simply connected to the child welfare system because of struggles with their parents - Franklin County Children Services is helping to prevent young learners from missing school or sliding in grades during transitions in their home placement.

Called the Educational Partnership for Social Emotional and Academics (EPSEA), FCCS works with the Education Service Center of Central Ohio to provide hands-on counseling and resources to children and teenagers in the agency's care.



And with a priority from FCCS on protecting the "whole" child - body, mind, and heart - this partnership on education is reversing past trends that show how foster youth typically struggle with school and often fail to reach graduation due to the social and emotional needs they often have, said Erica James, the EPSEA coordinator.

"EPSEA provided a real shift of focus on the social, emotional, and skill development."

Last year, EPSEA coordinators and liaisons provided one-on-one educational support to 449 students in FCCS custody, with nearly 700 consults on enrollment, attendance, social-emotional, classroom, and special education needs.

Because the youth served by FCCS might be placed in homes across the county and throughout the state, the 17 EPSEA school liaisons coordinated with 34 local school districts and more than 183 schools.

"Schools are doing their very best. FCCS is interested in serving the whole child, and this educational support is a value added to the lifelong experience of our young people. It builds resiliency, which is a trait that can be used in adulthood and secondary education pursuits," Ms. James said.

It must be working. Teens connected to the program have achieved a 94% graduation rate, 30 points higher than the national average.

And only 6% of the EPSEA youth failed to advance to the next grade level last year. Nationwide, it's typically 33% of youth in care who are retained for an extra year in their current class.

An Intake Educational Supports Coordinator is often assigned cases during the FCCS Intake phase and in the FCCS Crisis Center, the agency's front door.

Caseworkers and EPSEA liaisons meet monthly to discuss the needs students might have, as part of a meeting dubbed "Champions of Education," said Tanina Seagraves, an FCCS supervisor who serves as the link between the agency and EPSEA staff. She also regularly meets with school district leaders and caseworkers to manage access to services.

## FCCS Partnership continued

Columbus City Schools is the biggest district EPSEA and FCCS work with.

“We have regular meetings with Columbus City Schools to strategize the challenges we have on both sides,” said Dr. Jessica Foster, associate director of the agency’s Research and Educational Supports Department. “We’ve all had to adjust some since COVID-19 when our numbers were low.”

EPSEA liaisons helped 100 more students last year than in 2022. They held more than 3,000 meetings with youth and school officials in that same time to build relationships that would help the student reach their monthly goals around academics, attendance, and behavior improvements.

EPSEA staff members have also held four successful summer

training camps for high school teens to keep them motivated and on target.

And just launched this year, a new pilot tracking system for students in 8th grade and beyond will help monitor whether students remain on track to graduation.

“Without this partnership, we believe you would see a deterioration of academic success and a lack of social-emotional support that today’s students need so much,” James said. “FCCS is definitely making the grade.”

## New Year Brings New Support for Foster, Adoptive Families

As part of Franklin County Children Services’ efforts to strengthen all families - even those who might not be directly connected to the agency - foster and adoptive families throughout Central Ohio will soon have access to a new, trend-setting “parent coach” support.



Nick Mastin (left) shares insights on foster care and adoption.

“Family structures have changed so much, and the challenges families face are far different than a couple of years ago before any of us used words like pandemic or COVID,” said FCCS Executive Director Chip Spinning. “Then you add the mental health crisis faced by so many of our young people, the stressors of violence in our communities, and the uncertainties of our economy. It’s a lot, and no family can overcome it alone... and neither can one agency be expected to solve it all alone.”

The Central Ohio Regional Training Center (CORTC), which is housed inside FCCS, was provided a grant from the Ohio

Department of Job and Family Services to enlist the highly respected coaching skills of Nick Mastin, who brings more than 25 years of experience in working with families and youth - especially those in the foster care system.

Vicki Rhoads, director of the CORTC, said the new coaching will be offered to help address unique challenges faced by certified foster and adoptive families and their caseworkers through the twelve children services agencies neighboring FCCS.

“It’s unique. It’s never been done before,” Ms. Rhoads shared. “It’s a coaching opportunity to all publicly-certified foster families or those trained by a county.”

Mr. Mastin will serve as CORTC’s new Social Program Coordinator. He comes with a significant background providing trainings to small and large groups in formal and informal settings, and experience working as a children services caseworker.

He also has eight years of experience as a single foster parent - primarily to teens and difficult-to-place children - and is licensed as a treatment foster care provider. He hosts a successful YouTube channel that provides information and training to potential foster and adoptive parents, especially single parent households.

Nick will be traveling the Central Ohio area to help county teams and the certified foster and adoptive families they serve to address some of those new challenges that have arisen in this post-pandemic world.

“It might be direct trainings with families or professional development support to staff, whatever is most needed to

## Support for Adoptive Families continued

support the work in the community,” according to Mr. Mastin. “Every county will be different in how they handle trainings, and I can help families maintain their placements or help with their certifications and housing standards.”

Founded in 1986, the Central Ohio Regional Training Center provides high-quality, culturally responsive, family-centered, job-

related training for child welfare staff and caregivers in the region’s thirteen counties: Crawford, Richland, Marion, Morrow, Knox, Union, Delaware, Licking, Franklin, Madison, Fairfield, Pickaway, and Fayette.

For more information, visit the website at <https://ohiocaps.org/ocwtp/rtps/cortc/>.

# Former Foster Youth Nears College Graduation with Mentor by Her Side

For 21-year-old India, a mentor is “someone you can always talk to, almost like a big sister, and lean on when you need help.” She’s been able to rely on Allison Milliken, her College-Bound mentor connected to her through Franklin County Children Services, for sound advice and unconditional support over the past three years.

FCCS College-Bound mentors are matched one-on-one with teenagers in the agency’s care to provide positive influences and help guide and support these older youth as they pursue post-high school education, develop career goals, and make life decisions.

As part of the agency’s strategy to protect the “whole” child - mind, body, and heart - FCCS recruits caring adults who can build heartfelt, trusting relationships with youth through its Volunteers and Mentors Program.

As India finishes a human resources and business management degree at Wright State University, she still relies on her College-Bound mentor. And Ms. Milliken plans to be there for India for the long term.

“I’ll always be the person India can come to for feedback or advice.” A married and devoted “pet mom” of an English bulldog, Ms. Milliken joined the College-Bound Mentoring Program after witnessing the social unrest during 2020.

She wanted to do something to help young people and make a change in her community. She thought the best way was to support at least one young person.

Chuck Cochran, coordinator of the FCCS College-Bound Mentoring Program, matched Ms. Milliken with India, who had been in and out of foster care throughout her life.

India shared that she’d been disappointed by several people in her past, but she found her greatest supporter in Milliken. “I didn’t have the best support system, so this meant a lot to me,” she said.

“Allison made me feel like I’m loved and I’m wanted.”



India is working to achieve a bright future.

As India started looking toward the future, her mentor taught her how to budget, helped her apply for scholarships, and drove her to visit schools. The duo also spent quality time together playing games, visiting during the holidays, and chatting over lunch or shopping about everything: who India is dating, how school is going, what plans she’s making, and more.

“I just like to chill with Allison,” India remarked. Now that India is away at college, they still text frequently and visit when possible.

India has achieved a great deal with Ms. Milliken by her side. She received the Franklin County Children Services merit scholarship in 2021 and served as an intern in the AmeriCorps I Foster Program. While attending school, she works at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, assisting a lieutenant colonel.

“I am so in awe of India’s independence and how level-headed and mature she is at her age,” Ms. Milliken beamed. The pairing benefited her too.

“Our relationship made me realize I want to make sure other young people have the sort of support system I’ve had and built with India.”

Are you interested in becoming a mentor for an FCCS-involved youth? Visit [fccs.us/volunteers-mentors](https://fccs.us/volunteers-mentors) for more information on our mentoring programs.

# FCCS Partners with the Community

Agency staff and volunteers are frequently out in the community spreading the mission of protecting children by strengthening families, while volunteers, mentors and donors help support the families we serve.



Members of Lockbourne Freewill Baptist Church are among the many donors who provided gifts for youth through the Holiday Wish Program.



FCCS staff participate in the UNCF Walk for Education to encourage scholarship.



Volunteers from Junior League Columbus help decorate and serve snacks during the annual graduation party.



FCCS staff welcome students at Sullivant Elementary on their first day of school.



Malaika and Simba Mentoring Program staff and volunteers spend a day of service helping out at the Ronald McDonald House.



Parishioners at Reynoldsburg Community Church donate 67 new suitcases to youth served by FCCS.



Address Corrections to  
Communications and Community Outreach  
Division (614) 275-2520  
or e-mail [fccsoutreach@fccs.us](mailto:fccsoutreach@fccs.us)

[fccs.us](http://fccs.us)



## Building a Hopeful Future

April is National Child Abuse Prevention Month, a time to raise awareness of child abuse and neglect and focus on the supports a community can offer families to ensure children are safe and well cared for. In keeping with the theme selected by the Ohio Children's Trust Fund and Prevent Child Abuse America, Franklin County Children Services takes this occasion to focus on "building a hopeful future together."

The theme encourages communities to prevent child abuse and neglect by surrounding families with supportive structures. These structures promote economic stability, affordable healthcare, access to mental health resources, safe neighborhoods, quality childcare and education, and community-based services.

With strong foundations in the community, parents who need help have access to resources, and children are more likely to have positive experiences. According to Prevent Child Abuse America: "Children who live in families with access to economic and concrete supports are less likely to experience abuse and neglect." Each member of the community plays a role in promoting policies and structures that strengthen families through volunteerism, advocacy, and electoral power.

FCCS asks community members to show support for child abuse prevention and promote positive childhood experiences by wearing blue on April 10. WEAR BLUE and show your willingness to help build a hopeful future for our community. Email your #wearblueday photos to [fccsoutreach@fccs.us](mailto:fccsoutreach@fccs.us) and we may post them on social media.

In honor of Child Abuse Prevention Month, FCCS will host the 2024 Child Abuse Prevention Breakfast at Mitchell Hall on the Columbus State Community College campus on April 10 at 8 a.m. Dr. Amy Acton, former director of the Ohio Department of Health, will be the keynote speaker.

During the event, the agency will recognize staff and community members who are helping families build hopeful futures by offering them support. FCCS will also celebrate families and youth who have overcome obstacles and taken advantage of community supports to build hopeful futures. In addition, several scholarships will be awarded to youth.

