

# ACCENT<sub>on</sub>KIDS




A Publication of Franklin County Children Services

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Protecting Children by Strengthening Families

# ACCENT on KIDS

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## Fall 2022 Issue

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Marion Thompson



### Franklin County Children Services

- Communications
- 855 W. Mound St.
- Columbus, OH 43223
- Phone: (614) 351-3980

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# Transforming Lives through Music Production Education

By Cynthia Greenleaf

Growing up in Linden with an unstable family situation, Job Clarkson's childhood was not an easy one. He and his three siblings spent most of their youth involved with Franklin County Children Services, eventually coming into foster care before being placed with relatives. It's this adverse life experience—and the desire to help youth going through what he went through—that now drives Clarkson in his role as a founder, mentor and teacher at the Heart of Job Foundation.



Job Clarkson

This Columbus-based music production therapy program works with youth ages 12-24. The curriculum helps participants express themselves creatively, learn a range of professional skills and most importantly realize that they have bright futures ahead if they believe in themselves and make positive choices. Clarkson started this nonprofit in 2017 "to be an advocate for those in my space," he says.

When he was 24, Clarkson had the opportunity to visit a recording studio for the first time. Seeing how music was produced, "being able to use your brain to put together something and see it at the end," was the moment Clarkson's life changed forever, he says. He soon moved to Atlanta and then Los Angeles and eventually became a successful singer, songwriter and producer, collaborating with such big names as Ludacris, T.I. and Rick Ross. While he found huge success on the West Coast, Clarkson's heart has always been in his hometown. He says he knew his nonprofit could have the most impact in Columbus, giving back right where he grew up. "I can help a kid just like me realize that they're worth something," he says.

The Heart of Job Foundation's first Columbus youth workshop was a huge success this past summer with 18 kids participating, including youth involved with Franklin County Children Services. Offering experience in everything from broadcasting and record engineering to social media marketing, song writing and music video production, the program is tailored to the specific needs, interests and talents of each youth. Whether they were most comfortable singing, writing or acting out a skit, it was all about getting everyone to open up and express their authentic selves, Clarkson says.

While the workshop builds confidence and encourages self-expression, the educational component is perhaps the most important part. According to Clarkson, it's all about giving youth job skills and life skills to take with them as they move into adulthood. "I don't want them just coming in and grabbing a microphone...and not knowing what it can lead them to in the world," he says. "At the end of the day, [employers] all want you to have some kind of education when you're coming in the door."

Still a working artist—he just did the music for a Tommy Hilfiger commercial—Clarkson knows he's found his true calling with his nonprofit. Being able to educate, empower and redirect youth who are going through personal challenges is immensely rewarding, he says. At the end of last summer's workshop, Clarkson says he even had one grateful teen tell him: "Man, I would have gotten into trouble this summer without this workshop. I know for a fact I would have ended up doing something I wasn't supposed to do."

For more information about the Heart of Job Foundation, visit [www.heartofjobfoundation.org](http://www.heartofjobfoundation.org).

# Inspiring Black Girls with Paint Your Mind

By Lydia Miller

Franklin County Children Services (FCCS) values the youth in our community and works to ensure their well-being. Through collaboration with community partners, the agency is able to provide enriching opportunities to support the healthy development of our community's children. This led the agency to participate in the annual *Paint Your Mind* event, sponsored by the The Center for Healthy Families' Young Black Girls & Women's Collective in September.

According to the Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, from 2003 to 2017 Black youth experienced significant increases in suicide rates with the suicide rates of Black girls increasing by 6.6% each year. In 2019, "Black females in grades 9-12 were 60% more likely to attempt suicide, as compared to non-Hispanic white females of the same age" reports the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Minority Health. It was in the face of these staggering statistics and witnessing the impact a world-wide pandemic had on Black girls and young women, that the idea for *Paint Your Mind* was born. The organizers saw a need and acted. They reached out to FCCS and others who saw the same need and were willing to offer their support and resources to show our community's Black girls they are important and their well-being is valued.

*Paint Your Mind* is an event geared toward uplifting Black girls and young women ages 11-24. "As a part of the public health crisis, Black girls and young women in our society are often underrepresented, misrepresented, or ignored. It needs to be clear—Black girls and young women matter in the Greater Columbus Metropolitan area community and beyond," says The Center for Healthy Families President & CEO Toshia Safford.

*Paint Your Mind* provided girls in our community a safe space to engage in positive self-care activities. Girls who attended had a chance to express themselves creatively through painting, moving their bodies in a fun instructor-led workout, listening to music, enjoying good food, and having access to helpful community resources.

FCCS recognizes that youth are best served within their community. It is through partnerships, such as this one, that the agency continually strives to meet the needs of our community's children to let them know we see them, and we are here to support them.



Young girls inspired by the Paint Your Mind event

# FCCS Event Highlights Family Resources

By Marion Thompson

Offering resources for the community, Franklin County Children Services (FCCS) held a safety fair on October 22 at Central Community House. At a time when the community is facing many challenges, it was a priority for the agency's staff to meet people and let them know FCCS and other community organizations were available to help.

"Franklin County Children Services cares about all youth in our community and cares about their safety," said FCCS Executive Director **Chip Spinning**. "The agency was honored to be able to provide these safety resources that will help children stay safe at home, in their school and in their community at our first safety fair. We plan to have more events that provide health, safety and wellness resources to children and families," says Spinning.

The safety fair mixed education with fun. The Columbus Division of Fire brought their Fire Safety House, which offered hands on lessons about fire safety and prevention for kids. Youth also mingled with officers from the Franklin County Sheriff's Department and Columbus Division of Police and explored their vehicles.

Several City of Columbus programs joined the event to promote safety. Columbus Public Health came out in force to share tips and representatives from the Healthy Homes Program talked about preventing lead poisoning. The Columbus Care Coalition provided personal protective equipment kits to the crowd and the Safe Kids Coalition promoted their *Locks Save Lives* campaign, aimed at gun safety.

Mental health, substance abuse and suicide prevention resources were provided by ADAMH, Be Smart for Kids and Brightview Health. Action for Children and the Child Development Council of Franklin County offered childcare information and Columbus City Schools, The Center for Family Safety and Healing, and LSS211 Central Ohio were also represented.

While a deejay played tunes, attendees enjoyed hot dogs, courtesy of Children Services and beverages donated by Brightview Health.



FCCS hosts first safety fair

# National Adoption Day Celebrated in November

By Bruce Cadwallader

Thirteen children celebrated their adoption finalizations through Franklin County Children Services during National Adoption Day, and the adoptions were finalized in court during the 22nd annual National Adoption Day event on Wednesday, November 16, 2022.

The need for permanent, loving homes for children in foster care throughout Ohio and the United States never ends. In partnership with the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption, Children Services spotlights this need during National Adoption Day. This year, Franklin County Probate **Judge Jeffrey D. Mackey** and his staff of magistrates finalized the placements to six homes.

One of the adoptive parents was **Amanda Jackson** of Columbus who had five daughters of her own before her husband died tragically in a house fire in 2014. As her daughters blossomed into teens, Jackson decided to become a foster parent. She was asked to take in a sibling group of four about three years ago and quickly bonded with them.

"They started calling me Auntie and Mom2 this year," Jackson said. "I knew I was the one to adopt these children. We are one big happy family." Jackson is grateful for the support provided by Children Services. "My caseworker was so kind and helpful through this process," she said. Jackson is one of thousands of foster parents who later chose to adopt with FCCS over the years.

Celebrating adoptions and specifically National Adoption Day is important for the agency and the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption. Executive Director of Franklin County Children Services **Chip Spinning**, stated, "I just love to see when families and youth come together and develop permanent, lifelong, positive, and supportive connections." **Rita Soronen**, president and CEO of the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption values the collaboration between agencies. "For more than a decade, we have had strong partnerships in the state of Ohio and Franklin County that have helped change the lives of hundreds of children lingering in foster care," she said.

For more information about adoption through Franklin County Children Services, call (614) 341-6060 or visit [childrenservices.franklincountyohio.gov](http://childrenservices.franklincountyohio.gov) or [davethomasfoundation.org](http://davethomasfoundation.org).



Jackson children

# New Director of Inclusion & Analysis Joins FCCS

By Lydia Miller

Franklin County Children Services (FCCS) recently welcomed **Tanya McClanahan** to the agency as the new director of inclusion and analysis. Intelligent, thoughtful, and driven, McClanahan brings not only her knowledge, skills, and abilities from a lengthy career in the field of education, she also brings the values of compassion, diligence, and non-judgment instilled in her by her family. The child of a single mom who struggled with mental illness, McClanahan had the support of her grandparents to fill in the gaps when needed. This contributed to her life-long passion to serve and advocate for the needs of the community.

In her new role, McClanahan hopes to create a framework in which staff, youth, and families are provided the support and resources they need in an equitable way. She oversees the agency's organizational health and evaluations departments which she sees as a perfect combination. The organizational health department focuses on climate and culture, strategies and engagement, and diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts, while the evaluations department focuses on data. "We are being very intentional about ways that we use data to tell our true story and to help the community see that we have a lot of data that support the things going really well," says McClanahan. She believes it is through building strong relationships with our workforce and fostering a space for honest and transparent conversations, that we can create an environment conducive to helping us best serve our youth and families.

The work that is done at FCCS, though challenging, is worth the reward of seeing the quality of children and families' lives improved. McClanahan applauds the work of Children Services' staff and is happy to be a part of the team.



Director of Inclusion and Analysis Tanya McClanahan

# COSI Connects Youth to STEM

By Marion Thompson

“Just use your imagination,” Tracy Conley advised her daughter Trashawna, as the youngster built a model of a moon landing station out of toothpicks and Play-Doh. “It’s all about using your imagination,” Trashawna’s brother Trayquan agreed. During their recent visit, the family spent time working through activities in the space themed COSI Learning Lunchbox.

Youth served by Franklin County Children Services (FCCS) are learning and having fun with COSI Learning Lunchbox kits provided to the agency thanks to a partnership with the Franklin County Commissioners and COSI. The activity boxes are rooted in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) and encourage students to investigate the sciences.

The boxes, which have been available to FCCS for more than a year, are making an impact in homes, during visitations and in life skills classes. Apart from being a resource for learning and fun, youth and their families have found that doing the activities in the kits is a great way to spend time together.

At Conley’s visit, she was surprised that the activities were “fun, interesting and easy to understand.” The consensus among Conley’s children was that watching a model rocket powered by an Alka-Seltzer tablet launch into the air was the favorite activity of the day. “It went boom!” remarked Trashawna. The family also tested a new board game called *Your Place in Space*, developed in partnership with the White House and the National Space Council, which taught them about careers in space. Trashawna chose a doctor as her character for the game “because they help people.” The activity taught her that special doctors take care of astronauts who go to space. According to Stephen White, chief strategy officer at COSI, this innovative new game is intended to connect youth directly with careers and jobs in space and inspire them around STEM career pathways.

Staff from COSI were also on hand during the visit to evaluate the effectiveness of the kits. According to Meredith Bush, manager of educational business development at COSI, the kits are designed “to open the children’s minds to career options in STEM.” The space box was developed by NASA with the Artemis 1 mission in mind. Other kits teach children about dinosaurs, nature, the human body and more.

According to FCCS Executive Director Chip Spinning, Franklin County Children Services appreciates the opportunity to enrich the visitation experience with the COSI Learning Lunchboxes. “The agency has received tremendous value by adding an educational and interactive component to our visits and our life skills classes,” said Spinning.



Tracy Conley and her children explore science

# Building Family Connections for Children

By Cynthia Greenleaf

An innovative intervention program that began in March 2021 at Franklin County Children Services, Kinnect to Family is all about finding kinship caregivers for youth involved with the child welfare system and creating a network of connections in partnership with them. Program specialist Sarah Laboiteaux uses “strategies of diligent searching and relentless engagement” to track down family members via multiple means of communication such as calling, texting, writing letters, engaging through social media and home visits. Laboiteaux makes daily attempts at reaching “priority” family members such as grandparents, siblings, aunts and uncles until contact is eventually made.

James (not his real name) is one of the program’s many success stories. This five-year-old came into foster care after his parents died and he had nowhere else to go. Working tirelessly to locate extended family for this child, Laboiteaux eventually discovered a cousin in Florida who was able to care for him and meet his complex medical needs. James is now thriving in his new home and has been adopted by his cousin, all thanks to the Kinnect to Family Program.

“All children deserve to remain connected to their culture, their community, and their family,” Laboiteaux says, adding that even if a relative isn’t able to take custody, making a new connection is always worthwhile for a child. “All family connections are valuable.”

For more information about Kinnect to Family, visit [www.kinnectohio.org](http://www.kinnectohio.org).

**“All children deserve to remain connected to their culture, their community, and their family.”**

**– Sarah Laboiteaux**



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# Franklin County Children Services is Hiring

By Bruce Cadwallader

Amazing, dedicated, silent heroes—these are all words used to describe the caseworkers at Franklin County Children Services (FCCS). FCCS is hiring caseworkers and for other positions. The agency offers remote work, flexible work schedules, college loan repayment, 100% paid Master of Social Work program through The Ohio State University, paid on-the-job training, and many more great perks. And right now, FCCS is offering up to a \$1,500 hiring bonus (conditions apply).

FCCS is hiring professionals who are dedicated to a career with a purpose. The work can be challenging but the rewards are great. The agency is mandated by law to keep Franklin County children safe through prevention, placement and permanency programs. Staff meet families where they are and help them achieve success.

Right now, the need is greatest for caseworkers. Interested applicants must meet the following qualifications:

- Strong written and verbal communication skills, thrive in a fast-paced environment and value the diversity offered by a major metropolitan community
- Bachelor's degree in social work or a related degree or a master's degree in social work or a related degree

Additional employment opportunities are available. "We are constantly updating our website for job openings in the field of social work, but we also need hundreds of support staff daily in other areas. Often, a high school diploma or above is all that's needed," says Melanie D. Huffman, director of employee relations at FCCS.

Be the difference in a child's life with a career at Franklin County Children Services. Visit our website at [childrenservices.franklincountyohio.gov](http://childrenservices.franklincountyohio.gov) to apply for job openings.



**WE'RE HIRING  
CHILD WELFARE  
CASEWORKERS**



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