

# ACCENT<sub>on</sub>KIDS

A Publication of Franklin County Children Services

Spring 2019



## ***Super Social Worker***

Created by Semaj, a youth in FCCS's Therapeutic Arts Program

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Protecting Children by Strengthening Families

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# Social Work Elevates

By Marion Thompson

Helping people help themselves is at the heart of the work done by Franklin County Children Services staff. This includes the agency's caseworkers who practice social work in the intake, ongoing, adoptions, kinship and youth transition services departments, as well as those in support areas. All provide services designed to help families achieve and maintain safety and stability.

Many times, FCCS caseworkers meet parents during the most difficult periods in their lives. Success comes when caseworkers are able to meet parents where they are without judgments and inspire them to make changes that will benefit their children. While he was a caseworker, Van Frasher, who is now a court liaison officer, was on his way to a visit and found a drug-addicted mother walking home after being out all night.

As he drove her home, he told her "You can choose to live this life with your 11-year-old son or not. It's up to you." Frasher says that soon after that night this mom started on her road to recovery and stability. Her son returned home and eventually went on to pursue a college education. "Each year she calls me on that same date to say 'thank you,'" he said.

Social workers are often challenged to help families who have had years of involvement with child welfare agencies by giving them hope and showing them that they can break the cycle. Ongoing caseworker Alysha (AJ) Koppenhofer recalled being the fifth caseworker on the case of a mother who had suffered with addiction for many years, but wanted nothing more than to be reunited with her children. This mom was able to develop a trusting relationship with her service team and with the help of FCCS, Recovery Court, and many other community supports, she maintained her sobriety, secured stable housing, and completed countless case services that went beyond her case plan goals. She is now reunified with her children, working toward earning her college degree, and becoming a mentor for those recovering from addictions. Koppenhofer appreciates being involved in this mom's journey. "It was truly great to be part of this process and witness the love this mother has for her children," she said.

In addition to direct caseworkers there are many teams that support families served by FCCS and help provide them with needed services. They range from professionals in the fiscal department and IT to those in volunteers and professional development. Simba Mentoring Program Director Daryle Cobb was a member of a team that helped a young man who started the school year more than a year behind his classmates. Together with the young man's family and mentor, Cobb helped him create a plan to catch up. "To the young man's credit, he did all the heavy lifting," said Cobb. "We cheered him on, provided comic relief when needed and most importantly encouraged him to believe in himself. I am happy to report that he graduated with his class and is currently working toward a healthy career path."



**Strong**

Created by Ohnicah, a youth in FCCS's Therapeutic Arts Program

# Helping Families Where Needed

By Cynthia Greenleaf

As a licensed social worker at Franklin County Children Services, Jamie Chambers couldn't imagine doing anything else. "I absolutely love what I do," she says. "Social work is a unique profession rich with meaning, action, and the power to make a difference. We pull communities together, help individuals and families find solutions, advance changes in social policy, promote social justice, and foster human and global well-being."

**"Social work is a unique profession rich with meaning, action, and the power to make a difference."**

Chambers, who has a master's degree in social work from Cleveland State University, wears many hats as a social program coordinator in FCCS's performance improvement department. She helps ensure that the agency's managed care partners, Permanent Family Solutions Network and National Youth Advocate Program, are always striving for the best possible outcome for the FCCS children and families they're serving. Chambers also facilitates "team decision making" meetings, which occur when safety

concerns are serious enough to warrant the possible removal of a child from his or her home. Chambers says she "assists the family and service team in reaching a consensus and developing the least intrusive plan for the safety of the child."



**Jamie Chambers**

Recently, Chambers has been a key player in FCCS's Agency Crisis Response Initiative (ACRI), which helps FCCS's intake, assessment and investigations department during high volume times when it has an influx of cases and a need to rapidly assess child safety. A Cleveland native who started her child welfare career more than a decade ago in Cuyahoga County Children and Family Services' intake department, Chambers enjoys the opportunity to return to direct service and assist on the "front lines." "I love helping families, offering suggestions and collectively creating a plan that will promote safety, permanency and well-being," she says.

## Ohio START Brings New Approach to Recovery

By Marion Thompson



### **Rise**

Created by Shameika, a youth in FCCS's Therapeutic Arts Program

With the goals of achieving more stability and permanency for families dealing with substance abuse issues, FCCS has begun a pilot of the Ohio START (Sobriety, Treatment and Reducing Trauma) program. Created through the office of former Ohio Attorney General Mike DeWine and administered by the Public Children Services Association of Ohio (PCSAO), Ohio START is an innovative approach to helping families in crises by combining traditional case management with specialized services.

Ohio START is an intensive program that involves expedited assessments and counseling, frequent family visits, trauma-related counseling for children and recovery services provided by Eden Counseling Centers. The program is voluntary and the caregiver must commit to having six months of sobriety and living in a healthy, sober environment. The case management team includes a specially trained FCCS caseworker and a certified peer mentor who has battled addiction and is there to provide support. Currently, 13 counties have established Ohio START programs.

Participating families work together with caseworkers, peer mentors and behavioral health specialists to make decisions and plans for recovery. The goal of this collaboration is to help families become more stable and improve relationships. In addition, the hope is that there will be less of a chance of relapse and continued involvement with child protection agencies in the future. "We're hoping that by having a better understanding of the addiction recovery process and focusing on addressing issues surrounding it, families will be more successful in overcoming their obstacles long term," says FCCS Child Welfare Casework Supervisor Jason Kompes.

# Be a Hero to Children and Families

By Valancia Turner

Franklin County Children Services depends on the community to help us prevent child abuse and neglect. Again this year, Children Services is partnering with the Ohio Children's Trust Fund (OCTF) and the Center for Family Safety and Healing to promote child abuse prevention in April. According to the OCTF, "For children, the effects of abuse can have a lasting impact on their physical and mental health." The campaign asks adults to "Be a Hero" and help children heal. Heroes can be parents, family members, educators, foster parents, mentors and other caring individuals. The aim is to inspire adults to become a positive presence in the lives of children who have experienced maltreatment. "Research has suggested that these negative impacts may be substantially reduced for individuals who have at least one trusted adult supporter, a hero, during their childhood," said Lindsay Williams, executive director of the Ohio Children's Trust Fund.

With community support, children can move beyond the hurt and lead healthy lives. There are many ways to be a hero in preventing abuse such as: becoming a mentor, volunteering, fostering, donating, or making another gesture to empower and inspire a youth or their family.

A campaign featuring the "Be a Hero" images will be seen in central Ohio on local billboards, media outlets and print pieces throughout the month.

Learn more about how you can be a hero and fight to end child abuse and neglect here:



- [childrenservices.franklincountyohio.gov](http://childrenservices.franklincountyohio.gov)
- [centerforhealthyfamilies.org](http://centerforhealthyfamilies.org)
- [octf.ohio.gov](http://octf.ohio.gov)

To report suspected child abuse anywhere in Ohio, call toll-free 1 (855) OH-CHILD. In Franklin County, the 24-hour hotline for reporting suspected child abuse is (614) 229-7000.

## Bridging the Gap for Youth Aging out of Care

By Marion Thompson

As its motto "building brighter futures" suggests, the Bridges program, which is administered by the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services, offers supportive services to youth aging out of foster care to guide them toward healthy, stable and productive lives. Being on your own isn't easy and it's especially difficult for youth who have spent their adolescence in foster care. They lack the emotional and financial supports that those who have close family ties receive. According to the National Foster Youth Institute, 20% of youth who leave foster care instantly become homeless; only half will have gainful employment by the age of 24; and less than 3% will earn a college degree during their lives. In light of these dire statistics, Bridges was enacted to extend housing and case management services to youth who leave foster care between the ages of 18 and 21.

Bridges provides wrap-around services with representatives regularly meeting with youth to assess needs, develop goals and monitor progress. As housing is a major concern, a priority for Bridges is locating safe, affordable homes for youth and helping pay for expenses. The program helps youth search for employment via the OhioMeansJobs.com web page and

links them with a service that provides clothing for interviews. Another focus is helping youth maintain their health and well-being by obtaining health insurance and finding doctors.

Recognizing that education is essential to attaining stability and success, Bridges assists youth in locating financial aid through a variety of sources, including the federally funded Educational and Training Voucher program. They also offer guidance in finding schools and training programs, as well as applying for the GED.

While FCCS youth transition services (YTS) staff regularly makes referrals to the Bridges program, youth can also apply on their own. Since 2018, 157 youth who emancipated from Franklin County custody have been referred to Bridges. "It's a great program," says YTS Supervisor Donta Greene. "Even if youth decide after leaving care that they don't need services right away, they can still get support at a later time up until they're 21. You can't beat it." For more information on Bridges visit [bridgestosuccess.jfs.ohio.gov](http://bridgestosuccess.jfs.ohio.gov).

# Therapy Dogs Help Children Heal

By Cynthia Greenleaf

Franklin County Sheriff's Office (FCSO) therapy dogs Mattis, Kit and Woody are certainly cute and cuddly, but these gentle animals are also powerful agents of comfort and healing. These specially trained canines have been helping survivors of trauma since the FCSO Therapy K9 Unit was established in 2017 by Deputy Darrah Metz.

Easily one of Franklin County Children Services' favorite community partners, the FCSO dogs have become a popular presence at the agency's intake, assessment and investigations office. On a regular basis, these dogs spread good cheer and provide trauma-informed support to those most in need, whether it's a disappointed child whose parents missed their family visitation, an anxious teen waiting to go to a new foster home, or a stressed-out caseworker who has had a difficult work day and needs a little love from a friendly dog.

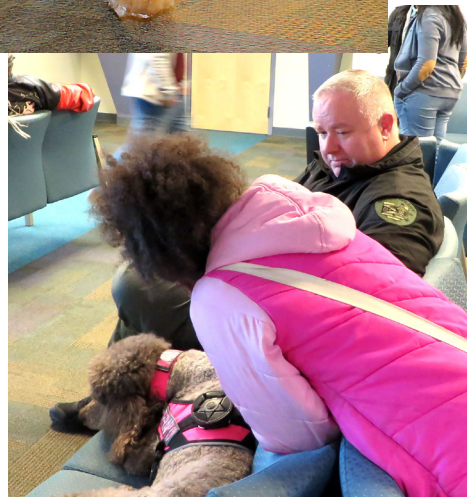
So how exactly does a dog help someone who has experienced trauma? The answer is "simple but it's also technical," says Sergeant Jason Ratcliff, a FCSO Therapy K9 Unit handler who works full time with therapy dog Kit, a five-year-old standard poodle. "It's basic science," he says. Interacting with a therapy dog lowers cortisol levels, hormones that are responsible for stress, and it raises oxytocin levels, hormones that create a sense of peace and happiness. Trauma-informed research has shown that these positive experiences can gradually change the brain to lessen the effects of mental, physical or psychological trauma, according to Ratcliff. "There are so many kids out there who are hurting," he says. "Dogs can help."

Therapy dogs can be a remarkably effective tool for connecting and building rapport with children who might be experiencing depression, anxiety or other mental health issues. Ratcliff, who does weekly outreach with adolescents through Nationwide Children's Hospital's mood and anxiety program, says he routinely sees otherwise withdrawn teens "brighten up and engage" when the therapy dogs show up. Affable and affectionate, the dogs boost confidence, provide courage and act as trusted confidantes for child survivors of trauma who might not be ready to confide in anyone else. Ratcliff recalls a case in which a young victim of sexual abuse was being interviewed and wouldn't talk to anyone but a therapy dog who was present. She opened up to the dog and "told him everything," Ratcliff says.

To learn more about the FCSO therapy dog program, which is self-sustaining and funded solely through donations, visit [sheriff.franklincountyohio.gov/Programs/Therapy-Dog-Program](http://sheriff.franklincountyohio.gov/Programs/Therapy-Dog-Program).



**"There are so many kids out there who are hurting. Dogs can help."**





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# The Question of Screen Time

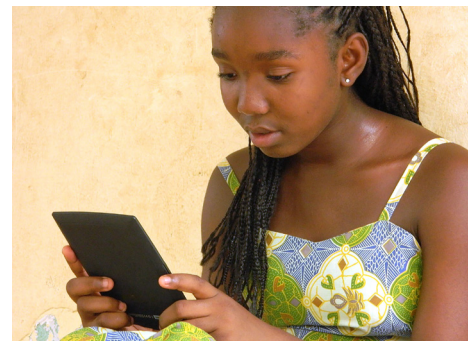
By Marion Thompson

Many parents are concerned about the effects that excessive screen time may have on their children and teenagers' development. They face constant struggles about how long to allow youth to watch TV, play video games or stare at their cell phones, fearing that their children will miss out on other developmental experiences and that their brain functions might be impaired. The jury is still out concerning the long term effects of excessive screen time, as research, such as the Adolescent Brain Cognitive Development Study by the National Institutes of Health is still underway. However, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) offers some guidelines for managing screen and media use by children to maintain a healthy balance among activities.

## Basic Guidelines

The AAP recommends the following for children:

- 18 months and younger: Avoid screen time, other than video chatting.
- 18 to 24 months: Parents and caregivers may introduce some educational digital programming
- 2 to 5 years: Limit screen use to one hour per day
- 6 years and older: Set consistent limits on media use to ensure children have time for other healthy activities



## Get Involved

Parents should take time to talk to youth about screen time and set expectations regarding safety and time spent. They should also become familiar with their children's media use and take time to view content with children. Designating "media free times," such as family meals or board game nights is also a good practice. Children should be encouraged to balance media use with other activities, such as sports, clubs or just exploring outdoors. A media plan can be a useful tool for families to manage their children's screen use. [Healthychildren.org](http://healthychildren.org) provides an online tool for creating one which can be found at [healthychildren.org/mediauseplan](http://healthychildren.org/mediauseplan).

For more information, visit the American Academy of Pediatrics online at [aap.org](http://aap.org). For additional parenting tips, visit [childrenservices.franklincountyohio.gov](http://childrenservices.franklincountyohio.gov).