

ACCENT_{on}KIDS

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Evergreen, created by Nate S., a youth in FCCS's Therapeutic Arts Program

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Protecting Children by Strengthening Families

Spring 2020

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Former Foster Youth Thrives with Help from Federal Housing Voucher Program

By Marion Thompson

Ciara Richey is settling into her own place, a one bedroom apartment close to downtown Columbus. Thanks to the Family Unification Program (FUP) housing choice voucher she's received, Richey can live on her own, while attending Ohio University Zanesville, working two jobs and remaining close with her foster family.

After aging out of foster care at 18, living with family members and briefly being homeless, Richey entered the Buckeye Ranch's My Place Transitional Age Program, where she lived in an apartment. When she turned 21, Richey needed to make her own way, and the FUP vouchers were a lifesaver for her. "Without them, I would've had to give up on school because I couldn't afford tuition and other expenses," she said.

FUP provides housing assistance to youth who have aged out of foster care and are at risk of homelessness, as well as families who lack adequate housing and are at risk of having their children placed in out of home care. Participants can receive subsidized housing for 36 months.

Richey was introduced to the program by her FCCS Caseworker **Kim Carter**, who helped her gather necessary information and find a home. "I think we looked at every apartment in Columbus," Carter joked. Richey is happy in her apartment, although she doesn't stay home much. "I work a lot," she said. Close to receiving her bachelor's degree in criminal justice, she hopes to enter the Columbus Police Academy and eventually become a private detective. In the meantime, Richey loves to come home to her dogs Marley and Murray. "I like the freedom of having my own place," she said. "But I also have to motivate myself now to make sure I stay on the right track."



Ciara Richey

FUP Voucher Facts

- The Department of Housing and Urban Development grants funding for the FUP vouchers to Public Housing Authorities (PHA) as a result of annual Congressional appropriation acts.
- PHAs administer FUP in partnership with Public Child Welfare Agencies (PCWA), such as FCCS. The State of Ohio was granted a total of 86 vouchers and the Columbus Metropolitan Housing Authority granted FCCS 74 vouchers.
- PHAs determine if youth and families meet eligibility requirements for FUP, including income eligibility.
- In addition to rental assistance, supportive services, such as job preparation, money management and educational counseling must be provided to FUP youth by the PCWA for 18 months.
- While FUP vouchers are available to youth for 36 months, there is no time limit on family vouchers.
- For more information regarding FUP, visit hud.gov.

Malaika Mentoring Program Celebrates 25 Years

By Valancia Turner

Franklin County Children Services' (FCCS) Malaika Mentoring Program is celebrating 25 years! Malaika, a culturally and gender specific mentoring program, matches African-American girls under the care of FCCS with African-American women from the community. Through these relationships, bonds are created that help youth unleash their potential to become productive adults and address the unique challenges faced by girls of color. Malaika, which means "angel" in Swahili, has evolved over the past 25 years to become an enduring, positive force in the lives of African-American girls.

The Malaika Mentoring Program was created in 1995 out of a need to combat the social and economic disparities African-American girls face that were not experienced by their Caucasian counterparts. **Sharon Burks**, the first director of the Malaika program, recognized that African-American girls under FCCS care need the consistent presence of positive role models with a shared cultural experience to combat these disparities. She created the vision for Malaika as a mentoring and rites of passage program. She joined forces with community leaders to develop an Afrocentric, female-focused program.

Mentors are matched one-on-one with girls ages 6 to 18. While mentors are asked to commit to at least a six month relationship, some matches last throughout the youth's childhood and into adulthood. Matches meet at least twice per month for activities and conversation. Simply having a positive role model and someone to talk to makes a great difference in a young person's life and mentors help these youth develop self-esteem, achieve academically and pursue goals for their future. "Through positive relationships, Malaika mentors unapologetically advocate for, empower and support black girls, all while easing their transition into womanhood," said current **Malaika Director Tonia Still**.

"In conjunction with one-on-one mentoring, Malaika also provides culturally-specific programming to address risk factors and build resiliency for African-American girls involved in the child welfare system," Still said. This programming includes group trips to places like museums and a full rights of passage program.

"I am privileged to join with women who share the same passion for building resilience in African-American girls, while helping them to rewrite their internal narrative from undeserved to underserved and from victim to victor," said Still.



Consistency is Key for FCCS Caseworker

By Cynthia Greenleaf

While it's clearly not an easy job, the rewards of being a child welfare caseworker are greater than Emily Kirkpatrick could have imagined. When a case is going well and families are making positive improvements, "it's super exciting to see the change," she says. A graduate of Miami University, Kirkpatrick has worked in Franklin County Children Services' East Region since 2017.



Emily Kirkpatrick

This child welfare caseworker is known for her work ethic and selflessness, doing whatever is needed to help children and families. According to her supervisor, Kirkpatrick's typical "above and

beyond" approach to her job includes camping out at the hospital while a child with complicated medical issues recovers from surgery and traveling monthly to a treatment center in Missouri to visit an introverted teen who will only talk to her. She never hesitates to take on complex cases when her expertise is required.

Kirkpatrick is devoted to the kids on her caseload, always worrying about how they're doing and wondering how she can better help them. When things are going well, the big and little victories alike are cause for celebration, Kirkpatrick says. She notes a recent turning point with a bright, resourceful nine-year-old girl who once told her that "my family's bad and I'm bad because they're bad." This preteen, who has engaged in delinquent behavior such as stealing and hacking into her school's computers, has gradually realized that "she can do her own thing," and doesn't have to follow the negative patterns that she's learned from her family, says Kirkpatrick. For years now, Kirkpatrick has been a dependable, trustworthy adult in this girl's life, checking in once a month without fail and that consistency has made a profound difference. "She's never had that before," Kirkpatrick says.

The Center for Family Safety and Healing: A Source for Trauma Recovery and Intervention

By Marion Thompson

Walk into The Center for Family, Safety and Healing (TCFSH) and you'll find a building swarming with activity with people from various backgrounds providing services to individuals and families who have suffered trauma. It can be called a one-stop-shop for trauma-informed care. A nonprofit grant-funded part of Nationwide Children's Hospital, TCFSH treats victims of abuse, provides training to the public regarding abuse prevention, offers prenatal services to new mothers and even provides medical services to foster youth. With its unique collection of services, the Center is an invaluable resource to families served by Children Services.

Part of the mission of TCFSH is to help alleviate the difficulties that come with overcoming trauma by providing one place where families can have most of their service needs met. The Child Assessment Center is staffed by Franklin County Children Services' caseworkers, law enforcement officials, medical providers and counselors who come together to investigate cases of sexual abuse and treat victims. This approach ensures that child victims don't have to tell their stories multiple times, and is unique among Ohio agencies.

TCFSH also provides counseling and advocacy services for victims of domestic violence. Through their "Where's the Line" campaign, the public can call, chat or text with staff who can offer advice on how to help victims. At the Center, victims receive counseling and are linked with family advocates who help them create a safety plan,

accompany them at court proceedings and link them to support services.

Community outreach is a very important part of the work of TCFSH. Their staff hold regular trainings on guidelines for reporting abuse and neglect for professional and community groups. They also teach courses on developing healthy relationships and dating in a digital world at high schools and colleges.

In partnership with FCCS, the Center's Fostering Connections Program provides extensive health care services for youth in out of home placement at their own site as well as select Nationwide Children's Hospital Primary Care Centers. Their medical providers specialize in providing care to youth who have experienced trauma.

To learn more about the host of services offered by TCFSH and chat with staff, visit familysafetyandhealing.org. To reach their Where's the Line staff, call (844) 234-LINE or text 87028.



FCCS Honors Youth, Families and Advocates

By Marion Thompson

This year's annual Child Abuse Prevention Breakfast was unfortunately canceled due to health concerns. The event highlights the accomplishments of youth and families involved with the agency who have overcome obstacles to find success and staff and organizations that have helped with their efforts. Children Services would like to take this opportunity to focus on the award winners and share their stories.

The Jack Donahue four-year scholarship was awarded to **Marquai Smith** and the two-year scholarship to **Karimah Addison-Bolding**. Smith will pursue degrees in political science and psychology and eventually obtain a law degree. Her ambition is to work as part of the district attorney's office. Addison-Bolding plans to become a social worker. The Alvin Hadley United Negro College Fund scholarship was presented to **Ingrid Mestizo-Alvarado** who intends to pursue degrees in business and criminal justice so that she can help working mothers and immigrants in her community. CME Federal Credit Union gave their first scholarship to **Taja Blomgren** who plans to further the education in cyber security that she received as a student at Fairfield Career Center.

The Rising Up and Moving On Awards were presented to agency youth who have overcome obstacles. Awards were received by **Ciaira Richey** who went from being homeless to living on her own and pursuing a degree in criminal justice and **Mark Mayle**, an aspiring sneaker designer who will graduate from high school this spring with a 3.7 GPA.

Tania Johnson-Person received the Nancy Fitzgivens Award for Child Protection after 15 years of service with FCCS. She is currently a caseworker in the Kinship department.

The Kinship Appreciation Award was presented to **Leaigha and Thomas Perkins** who are caring for two nieces and two nephews. **Melissa Hoyd and Leonel Tomas-Ramirez** received the Family Appreciation Award after dealing with substance abuse issues, completing their case plan and being reunited with their four children.

Community Advocate awards were presented to individuals, organizations and businesses that have donated time, materials and funds to help families. Awards were presented to **Proprietors American Motorcycle Association Club, New Hope Church, Dr. Julie Holinga and One Church** for their significant contributions to meeting the needs of FCCS's youth and families, such as the Holiday Wish Program, graduation party, school supplies and more.



Marquai Smith



Karimah Addison-Bolding



Ciaira Richey



Mark Mayle



Taja Blomgren



Ingrid Mestizo-Alvarado



Tania Johnson-Person



The Perkins Family



The Hoyd/Tomas-Ramirez Family



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How to Advocate for Your Child's Education

By Marion Thompson

One of the keys to a child's educational success is the involvement of their parents and caregivers. According to the National Education Association, students with involved parents or other caregivers earn higher grades and test scores, have better social skills, and show improved behavior. Follow these tips to help your child and their teachers along their educational journey.

Advocate at Home

As a child's first teachers, parents and caregivers can create opportunities for learning outside of the classroom and get children excited about school. Notice what interests your child and help them learn more about their favorite subjects. Make a habit of reading together and talking about what you've read to help stimulate your child's imagination and critical-thinking skills. Connect learning to real life by helping them apply reading, math, science and problem-solving skills during activities like games, cooking and exploring outdoors.

It's also important to reinforce the work that's done in the classroom. FCCS Lead Educational Liaison Joy Medlock suggests taking a few minutes to go through your child's backpack with them daily. "You may be amazed at what you find: assignments that need to be completed or turned in, a note from the teacher or information that the school wants to share," she said. "It will help you understand your child and their responsibilities as an active, engaged learner." Doing it together is important. "Showing interest in this way not only increases your child's self-esteem and willingness to take responsibility, but also gives you the opportunity to talk about both of your days!" Medlock continued.

Advocate at School

Parents and caregivers also need to be available and involved at their children's school. Get to know the staff and participate in school activities and the parent teacher organization, whenever possible. Even if your schedule is very busy, make attending parent/teacher conferences a priority. Keep copies of report cards and school correspondence and make sure you're aware of class requirements, assignments and individual grades, so that you can be prepared to talk with teachers about your child's education.

For more information from the National Education Association, visit <http://www.nea.org/parents> and <https://www.pbs.org/parents/thrive/the-role-of-parents>.

