

ACCENT_{on}KIDS

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Shades of a Woman created by Serenity, a youth in FCCS's Therapeutic Arts Program

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Protecting Children by Strengthening Families

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Spring 2022 Issue

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Agency Youth Advocate for Peers and Themselves

By Marion Thompson

Youth involved with child welfare agencies can feel as though many things that happen to them are beyond their control. It can seem as though they are powerless when decisions are made that affect their lives. Franklin County Children Services offers these youth an opportunity to be heard and represented by their Youth Advisory Board (YAB). Membership is open to youth ages 14 to 24 who currently are or have been in agency custody and are currently attending high school or college. This is an opportunity for them to share experiences, advocate for themselves and their peers, mentor other youth in care, and develop leadership skills.


“You can share anything you want to talk about at YAB and the advisors will listen.”
– Cynthia

YAB currently has 12 active members with FCCS Youth Transition Services Supervisor **Donta Greene** and Adoptions Caseworker **Deric Cobb** serving as advisors. They meet monthly and typically discuss both personal issues and those that affect other youth such as curfews, sibling visits, mental health support and self-care.

Cobb sees the group as an opportunity for the youth to grow and learn skills they will need when they are on their own. When the young people bring up issues, they are first asked to speak up for themselves at home, in school or with their service teams. “I always tell them: nobody is more invested in your future than you are, so you need to learn to advocate for yourself,” said Cobb. The advisors also bring issues to caseworkers, service teams and up the chain of command at FCCS to influence changes in policies.

The youth are also encouraged to consider their place in the community and reach out to others in need. They wrote letters of encouragement to people in homeless shelters during the holidays. The hope is they will have more chances to serve in the future. “In 2022, I would like for YAB members to have many opportunities to volunteer in person in the community so they can gain networking skills and community service experiences that give them an appreciation for giving back to the community,” said Greene.

YAB members are also called on to represent foster youth on a state and national level. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, they regularly participated in Three Days on the Hill, which was an opportunity to meet with lawmakers and advocate for resources for foster youth. YAB youth helped advocate for housing resources for their peers leaving foster care. Their efforts contributed to the creation of the Department of Housing and Urban Development’s Family Unification Program, which provides housing vouchers to former foster youth. Currently, YAB youth are part of efforts to establish an independent ombudsman position on a state level which would address concerns regarding foster care.

Participating in YAB has been beneficial to the youth involved, bringing them opportunities to learn, travel and express themselves. According to **Cynthia**, a high school senior who serves as president of the group, “You can share anything you want to talk about at YAB and the advisors will listen. I like being able to think outside of the box and come up with ideas that they will take to the leaders.” She also enjoys attending the state YAB meetings and hopes to represent FCCS at conferences in the future. Opportunities for growth and skill development are plentiful for youth like Cynthia thanks to YAB. 

Cobb Receives Lifetime Achievement Award

By Marion Thompson and Bruce Cadwallader

After nearly 30 years of public service mentoring young people, **Daryle Cobb**, a new associate director in the Franklin County Children Services Department of Organizational Health, has received the 2022 Excellence in Mentoring Award for Lifetime Achievement from MENTOR.

Being of service to others has long been part of Cobb's life. "Because of the sacrifices made for me, I feel obligated to make the same sacrifices for the generation following me," he said. Cobb began volunteering with Big Brothers Big Sisters Central Ohio more than 25 years ago. The relationships that Cobb built with the youths in his charge have lasted long after their formal mentorships ended and they still remain in close contact. Cobb was matched with his first little brother, **Kenny** in 1999. They have remained close because Cobb was committed and involved in every facet of Kenny's life. The mentor's "pay it forward" philosophy made a big impression on Kenny who is now coaching and mentoring youth as well. Cobb went on to mentor two additional little brothers with Big Brothers Big Sisters.

According to **Elizabeth Martinez**, president and CEO of Big Brothers Big Sisters of Central Ohio, "Daryle's commitment to service and mentorship has been central to his volunteer work with our organization. He understands the importance of building relational wealth as the foundation for youth engagement as we partner with them to tackle and address different aspects of their development. His impact on our community will continue to be felt for generations to come."

Cobb began working with Franklin County Children Services almost 30 years ago as a child welfare caseworker. He led the agency's Simba Mentoring Program for eight years, before taking on the role of associate director of organizational health in 2021. He now manages both the Simba and Malaika Mentoring programs. Simba matches African American males served by the agency with African American men in one-on-one mentorships, while Malaika matches African American women and girls. Cobb is a strong advocate for young people and works hard to bring them opportunities for development including college visits, educational trips, motivational speakers and other avenues of learning.

MENTOR is a national nonprofit that promotes mentoring through research, advocacy and training. Cobb received the award during a virtual ceremony on January 28 as part of the National Mentoring Summit in Washington, D.C.

He was nominated by **Elizabeth Crabtree**, FCCS director of Volunteers and Child Enrichment, who worked with Cobb for years before his promotion. "It is an incredible honor to work alongside Daryle Cobb. There is not an interaction with him that I do not learn something new or am not stretched in my growth," Crabtree said. "This is what mentoring is all about."

In its release, MENTOR said Cobb's 30-year career "has demonstrated profound dedication to supporting youth with opportunities and connections." 🌱



Daryle Cobb

2021 Families and Partners of the Year

By Marion Thompson

Children Services' Family-to-Family program (F2F) enables families to get the assistance they need through services provided at local settlement houses. Each year, the agency celebrates F2F families that have overcome obstacles to achieve success by awarding Families of the Year during National Family Week. Community partners who help families achieve stability are also recognized.

Central Community House: Jacqueline Yarborough

Jacqueline Yarborough has been able to continue working and maintain a stable and safe living environment for her family, while moving on from difficult circumstances. When asked about her experience working with F2F, Yarborough said, "I have been really blessed throughout this whole experience, no matter how hard it was for my family to go through."

Gladden Community House: Brittany Oliver and Family

Brittany Oliver is a single mother to six children. While in F2F, Oliver obtained employment and will soon relocate to Clark County, where she has been approved for housing.

St. Stephen's Community House North: Leigha Gray and Family

After Leigha Gray's FCCS case was closed, she continued attending F2F classes, because she wanted to learn something new. Gray received a scholarship for an employment readiness program and found part-time work, while caring for her children.

Families and Partners of the Year continued

St. Stephen's Far East: Malasia Keen

Malasia Keen reached out to St. Stephen's to learn to manage her finances and obtain supportive services. Keen and her family have their first apartment, thanks to her perseverance and growth.

St. Stephen's Community House South: Angel Kitchens

After leaving a difficult situation, Angel Kitchens is raising three children alone, while working two jobs. Kitchen always encourages others who are struggling.

Community Partner: I Support the Girls-Columbus

Kathleen Jackson, founder of the I Support the Girls-Columbus, collects donations to provide bras and other items to women in need. Jackson committed to providing bras to the women at St. Stephen's North whenever needed.

Community Partner: Furniture Bank of Central Ohio

Furniture Bank of Central Ohio provides furniture to families who are affected by difficult events and economic challenges. They have long partnered with F2F to provide resources to families.

Due to COVID-19, the agency was unable to hold an in-person celebration and awards were presented individually. 🌿



FCCS Executive Director **Chip Spinning** speaks during a previous National Family Week celebration.

Caseworker Engages Families with Care

By Cynthia Greenleaf

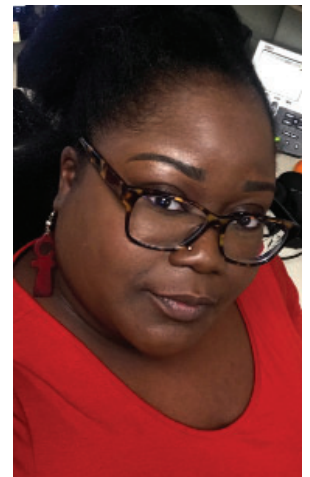
Widely respected by colleagues and clients alike, **Lydia Jones** is a seasoned child welfare caseworker at Franklin County Children Services' intake office. Jones also serves as a mentor to the agency's newer intake caseworkers, imparting her hard-won wisdom from almost a decade in the social services field. Here are a few of Jones' tips for success when it comes to engaging with children and families.

Empathy is an essential part of being a child welfare caseworker, according to Jones. "Families should know us as down-to-earth, understanding and empathetic," she says. "Truly, at the heart of any type of service field is empathy." Jones is always mindful about putting families at ease in initial interactions. She is also careful to recognize the inherent awkwardness of the situation when Franklin County Children Services shows up at a family's door. When she first meets a family, Jones says she will often say something like "I can only imagine how crazy this is, that on a Tuesday a stranger is showing up at your house, asking you questions about your parenting. I haven't missed that and I really thank you for talking with me."

For Jones, building a successful rapport with families is also about authenticity. "In this line of work you really need to bring your human self because people pick up real quick when you're not genuine," she says. While professionalism is always paramount, drawing on personal experience helps her gain a family's trust, she adds. Jones recalls talking to an African American mom, for example, who was frustrated at the ways in which the judicial and educational system had treated her African American husband and son. Jones took that opportunity to connect with her on common ground, letting her know that "culturally I do understand being black and feeling subjugated," she recalls. "That's a moment to be like 'I understand that.'"

Showing respect is another necessity when helping children and their families navigate difficult circumstances. Jones is a careful listener and knows that there's always a deeper story than the one that she first hears. "I am just getting a little tiny piece of something that happened and it may have really been the worst day for your family ever," she says. Respect is also about meeting families where they're at. "Just because I'm in your house, just because you said yes to talking today does not mean that at any moment, if this gets too heavy for you, that you're not allowed to say 'Today is not the day,'" Jones says. "You need to stress just how many rights a family has."

For more on how Franklin County Children Services caseworkers like Jones are helping children and families in need, visit childrenservices.franklincountyohio.gov. 🌿



Lydia Jones

Providing Support for Youth Education

By Cynthia Greenleaf

Equal access to a quality education is a fundamental right for all children. But sadly this right isn't always readily within reach for youth in foster care, who often face substantial barriers that impact their educational opportunities. This inequity is why Franklin County Children Services has been amplifying efforts to advocate for youth in school with the recent formation of its first-ever Education Strategy Team. It's all about giving youth in the child welfare system—who have often survived tremendous adversity—the unique supports they need to succeed in school, according to **Dr. Jessica Foster**, who leads the Education Strategy Team in her role as associate director of FCCS's Organizational Health Department. "The impact of experiencing trauma of any sort, even if it was years in the past, can affect students' ability to do well in school," Foster says. "Additionally children in care can face bias and discrimination. Providing educational advocacy can help ensure that kids in care are treated fairly and equitably."

According to the National Factsheet on the Educational Outcomes of Children in Foster Care, youth in the child welfare system are twice as likely to be absent from school as their peers and are much more likely to be suspended or expelled. Additionally, only 65% of youth in foster care graduate from high school by the age of 21. The Education Strategy Team is aiming to improve these outcomes through its focus on three main educational areas: strengthening services and support; bolstering internal and external communication; and sharing the latest research and data.

A central way the Educational Strategy Team advocates for agency-involved youth is through the enforcement of the 2016 Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), a federal law that aims to minimize unnecessary school transitions. For children in foster care who often move from home to home, switching schools unnecessarily can be profoundly disruptive and often traumatic, according to **Joy Medlock**, the Education Strategy Team's educational support coordinator. "For children in care, it's a sad fact that they're highly mobile," Medlock says. "A huge part of my job is making sure children remain in their school district if it's in their best interest, regardless of transportation challenges. It's almost always better for the child to have that stability. It may be the only stability that they have." In her daily student advocacy, Medlock works on behalf of ESSA by facilitating discussions with child welfare staff, educators, parents/caregivers, and other relevant parties to help make informed decisions about school placement.

Another chief objective of the Education Strategy Team is to heighten collaborative relationships around education within Franklin County Children Services and with the agency's community partners. To that end, the team held its first education summit in the fall of 2021.

Attended by 25 FCCS staff involved or interested in youth education, the day-long

summit was an opportunity to "connect and learn about each other's work," according to Foster, the event's organizer, along with **Tanina Seagraves**, program manager with the Education Strategy Team. "We have a lot of resources that we want to be able to connect service teams to, to help them better serve kids and families," Foster says. "We also wanted to help identify needs and brainstorm potential solutions because we know there are a lot of gaps in the way we serve kids. We wanted to hear what those gaps are and figure out ways we can address them."



Franklin County Children Services



Gathering for Education: FCCS staff meet for an education summit to discuss ensuring youth served by the agency get the access to education that they deserve.



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Cooking with Kids Safely

By Bruce Cadwallader

Some of your favorite childhood memories might include smelling some aromas wafting from the kitchen—cookies in the oven, grandma’s apple pie, or your mom’s favorite dish bubbling on the stove. That’s enough to make some kids want to help and cooking with your children can be fun, if you follow some simple safety rules.

Before you invite young children into the cooking process, a quick tour of kitchen do’s and don’ts seems prudent. It’s important to wash hands and use only clean cooking pots and skillets before starting any dish. Explaining the dials on a stove and what they mean, keeping sharp knives under cover until ready to use them, and knowing what cooking utensils to use are important.

Kids should ask a parent’s permission before they start any cooking experience, according to the Children’s Medical Group of Mississippi. They practice a “listen before you act” philosophy. This is a great way to make sure they don’t harm themselves in moments of excitement because they touched something that may be hot, sharp, or slippery, according to their website in its “Top 7 Safety Rules to Teach Your Kids.”

Other tips include cleaning spills or grease as you go to prevent slips and falls, enforcing a “no running” policy in the kitchen and taking care with appliances that involve electricity and heat for cooking. They also recommend using a pot holder or towel for transporting warm dishes and making sure that kids ask before licking utensils, as they may be sharp or contain raw ingredients.

Have fun and make cherished memories.

For more information from Super Healthy Kids® visit <https://www.superhealthykids.co/kitchen-safety-rules-kids/>. Children Services offers parenting tips on a variety of subjects. To download printable parenting tip flyers visit childrenservices.franklincountyohio.gov.

