

# ACCENT<sub>on</sub>KIDS

A Publication of Franklin County Children Services

Winter 2019



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

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Protecting Children by Strengthening Families

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## Winter 2019

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This publication is available online at [childrenservices.franklincountyohio.gov](http://childrenservices.franklincountyohio.gov)

# Grant a Holiday Wish

By Valancia Turner



Since 1963, Holiday Wish has been granting the wishes of youth under the care of Franklin County Children Services. Last year, Holiday Wish served over 6,500 children who may have experienced abuse, neglect or difficulties in the home. In many cases, these were the only gifts received by the children. This year we are counting on the assistance of the community to create a bright holiday for ALL children under FCCS care.

Through the generosity of the community, FCCS ensures that each child receives a gift. Children age 11 and younger receive gifts or toys valued at \$50, while youth twelve and older receive a \$60 gift card. As the community has traditionally been extremely generous with toy donations, this year we would be particularly grateful for monetary donations for gift cards for teens.

At FCCS, we believe that all our children should receive gifts that reflect their culture and celebrate their uniqueness. Since its inception, Holiday Wish has been challenged with meeting the diverse needs of the children we serve, especially for our girls of color between the ages of 8 and 11. Therefore, we are increasing efforts to solicit more culturally diverse toys through the 4th Annual Black Girl Magic Toy Drive and would like for you to be a part of spreading the magic! As part of Holiday Wish, Black Girl Magic focuses primarily on the donation of culturally specific gifts such as: ethnic dolls, inspirational poetry, multi-cultural books, ethnic hair care products and skin care items. The goal of Black Girl Magic is to promote self-love and acceptance with gifts that reaffirm the value of girls and boys of color.



Volunteers, Donors and Donations from Black Girl Magic and Holiday Wish 2018



How YOU can help make a child's wish come true this year:

- CONTACT Holiday Wish at [holidaywish@fccs.us](mailto:holidaywish@fccs.us) or (614) 275-2525 to sponsor a child, learn more about the program or volunteer your time
- DONATE to Holiday Wish online at [fccsholidaywish.franklincountyohio.gov](http://fccsholidaywish.franklincountyohio.gov) or send a check payable to the Franklin County Children Services Children's Fund to: Holiday Wish, 855 W. Mound Street, Columbus, Oh 43223
- DROP OFF a new unwrapped toy at Holiday Wish at 855 West Mound Street, Columbus, Ohio 43223
- ATTEND the Black Girl Magic Toy Drive on December 4 at Copious (520 South High Street, Columbus, OH 43215) from 6-8 p.m. Guests are asked to bring a culturally specific holiday gift.

Help us put smiles on the faces of children and assist families in Franklin County by making their holidays special!

# Community Kindness

The Franklin County community has embraced the families served by Franklin County Children Services with outpourings of kindness. Individuals, businesses and organizations have contributed time, goods and services to enhance the well-being of children and help parents and caregivers meet their needs. These are just a few of the gestures from the public that were received in 2019.



Joel Cooper of Jax Treehouse Children Shoes donated more than 1,000 pairs of shoes and accessories to kinship families.



Twenty five children in kinship families served by FCCS received their very own beds during the Day to Dream event sponsored by the Furniture Bank of Central Ohio, Morris Furniture Company and others.



Marketing firm Warhol & Wall Street held an exclusive Sneaker Boutique event for children served by FCCS. Youth shopped at an exclusive location where they picked out new “kicks” and had custom designs made on them, while they took selfies and listened to music. The event was funded thanks to donations made during the first annual Sneaker Ball.



Maria Ravagnani, age 8, donated 71 sets of towels for care packages for youth in the College-Bound Mentoring program. She asked that friends and family give them to her in lieu of birthday gifts this year.



New Hope Church donated more than \$12,000 in gifts and decorations for this year's graduation party for FCCS youth.

# Grandmother Embraces Kinship Care

By Cynthia Greenleaf

Endlessly selfless and compassionate, Patty Ricketts is the rock of her family. When this 71-year-old grandmother's three grandchildren needed a safe, stable place to stay, she did not hesitate to take them in. "I'm doing what I was brought up to



Kinship Caregiver Patty Ricketts

do," Ricketts says. "You do whatever you can to take care of your family. My mom was a strong lady and that's what she passed on to me."

Since 2013, Ricketts and her husband Daniel have had legal custody of Dominic, 13, Skylar,

12, and Hannah, 9. Their North Linden household is a bustling one. "Sometimes it's chaotic," Ricketts admits, "but it's all about the kids."

According to Ricketts, Dominic is a loyal, loving brother; Skylar loves fishing and tackling household projects with his grandfather; and Hannah is a "girly girl" who's into Taco Bell and YouTube. The three became involved with Franklin County Children Services due to their mother's drug use, with Dominic

and Skylar spending almost three years in foster care before the Ricketts ultimately gained custody.

Having experienced a lot of family conflict and not always being able to rely on their birth parents, Dominic, Skylar and Hannah have found peace and structure at their grandparents' house. "We have given them stability," Ricketts says. "They know they can count on grandma and grandpa to be there. If we had not stepped up, they would have been back in the system."

For Ricketts, raising three grandchildren in her retirement years is not without its stress, but there are also benefits. "They're keeping me young," she says. "We don't just sit around."

When they need a break, she and Daniel, who have been married 49 years, treat themselves to some ice cream. "We sneak out to Dairy Queen," she says, laughing. Ricketts also has a group of lifelong girlfriends from high school that she meets up with once a month for pizza.

Ricketts appreciates the support that's been available to her as a kinship caregiver. Her three grandchildren are matched with mentors through FCCS's volunteer program and she has her own mentor through OhioGuidestone, who has proven invaluable when things get challenging. Ricketts urges other kinship families to take advantage of any and all resources available. "There's help out there if you need it," she says.

To learn more about how FCCS helps kinship families, visit [childrenservices.franklincountyohio.gov/programs/kinship.cfm](http://childrenservices.franklincountyohio.gov/programs/kinship.cfm).

## FCCS Staff Strengthen Community

While protecting children by strengthening families is the agency's overall mission, Franklin County Children Services staff take it as a personal charge to do their part to give back to the community.



FCCS staff collected cases of water during their Health and Wellness Days events and drove a truckload of their donations to Montgomery County in an effort to help victims of natural disasters this summer.

The Supportive Work Environment Committees collected hygiene items for the Ethiopian Tewahedo Social Services (an agency that supports immigrants and refugees) Sole Shop, which benefits victims of human trafficking, sexual assault and domestic violence.



Continuing an effort that has spanned more than 20 years, Team FCCS participated in the United Negro College Fund Walk for Education. They raised funds for scholarships, which include the Alvin R. Hadley Scholarship benefiting an FCCS youth.

# Former Foster Youth Finds Her Place

By Marion Thompson

At 19, Jeniffer Castillo-Lugo seems to really have her act together. She has her own apartment, a job as a translator for HandsOn Central Ohio, and she majors in international studies at Columbus State Community College. But her accomplishments came after coping with many challenges while in foster care. Her success is the result of staying focused, working hard and taking advantage of the opportunities that she was offered.

Castillo-Lugo came to the United States from the Dominican Republic at a young age. Her mother was unable to accompany the family, and after her father passed away, Castillo-Lugo and her siblings were placed in foster care. When her foster parent retired, her siblings were placed in kinship care and Castillo-Lugo took advantage of Franklin County Children Services' (FCCS) Youth Transition Services to prepare to move toward independence. This involved moving to My Place.

The My Place Transitional Age Program offered through the Buckeye Ranch, helps young adults to transition from foster care to independence. FCCS refers youth ages 16 to 21 to the program, where they reside in furnished one-bedroom apartments, at a complex where mentors are always on hand to provide guidance and supervision.

Castillo-Lugo credits the time that she spent at My Place for helping her get on the path toward achieving her goals with the help of her mentor and advisor Mr. Ricky. "He would sit with me every week, go over my budget and just talk," she said. "He

helped me believe in myself when I felt discouraged." She also received a great deal of support from her FCCS Youth Transitions Services Caseworker, Kelly Stromer.

Now on her own, Castillo-Lugo continues to do well, even receiving the 2019 Rising Up and Moving On awards both during FCCS's Child Abuse Prevention Breakfast and the Public Children Services Association of Ohio conference. After getting her driver's license, she bought her own car with the help of Byers Auto Group. Castillo-Lugo fluently speaks English, Spanish and Italian and wants to advance in her career as a translator while helping immigrants like herself.

When asked what advice she'd give others who are striving for independence, Castillo-Lugo said, "Success depends on your mindset. It's going to be hard, but having a focus is important. Find something positive in each situation and keep thinking about your goal."



Jeniffer Castillo-Lugo

# New Communications Director

By Bruce Cadwallader

Executive Director Chip Spinning has appointed Alison L. Rodgers as the new communications director for the agency after the retirement of Deborrha Armstrong.

Rodgers, the director of professional development for the agency and the Central Ohio Regional Training Center, has been a caseworker and trainer and served on the Columbus City Schools Innovation and Reform Committee.

"Ms. Rodgers brings years of agency knowledge and experience to this position coupled with expertise in developing and supporting staff. She is highly respected throughout the agency and the community," said Spinning.

The communications director plays a vital role in connecting the mission and message of our agency to the community. Rodgers will oversee staff in Professional Development, Volunteers, and Community Outreach.

Armstrong retired in October after serving in various positions for 36 years. Her work has involved overseeing community awareness and foster care/adoption recruitment initiatives,



(From left) Alison Rodgers and Deborrha Armstrong

including Wendy's Wonderful Kids, and the All Kids Count campaign. She also coordinated the One Church, One Child program for more than 10 years. In addition, Armstrong helped implement the agency's kinship program. She holds a master's degree in journalism from the Ohio State University.

"Our agency's vision is demonstrated in our actions and words and I'm excited about working with the knowledgeable professionals who are responsible for sharing that vision," Rodgers said. Rodgers holds an undergraduate degree in psychology and sociology from Hampton University and a master's degree in social work from the Ohio State University.

Rodgers presently serves as a Celebrate One community liaison, and volunteers with the Community Shelter Board food pantry, Helping Hands Materials Support Program, and as a math tutor with Southern Gateway Community. Married for more than 30 years, Rodgers and her husband, Leon, are the proud parents of two with one grandchild.



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## Caseworker Guides Teens

By Cynthia Greenleaf

Emily Wynn thinks of herself as a mentor to the 17 teens on her caseload. As one of seven child welfare caseworkers in

The most rewarding part of her job is seeing her teens succeed, “when they’ve accomplished a goal they’ve set for themselves.”

Franklin County Children Services’ Youth Transition Services department, Wynn is always there for the older youth she serves, helping them prepare for the future as independent, self-sufficient young adults. Whether they’re focused on earning a high school diploma, searching for affordable housing or simply figuring out how to grocery shop, do laundry or budget money, Wynn is ready to provide guidance and tough love when necessary. She prides herself on always being honest, open and to the point.

A social worker with almost 20 years of experience in the child welfare field, Wynn is resourceful and a skilled problem solver ready to address whatever needs her youth might have. “I don’t know everything, but I’m good at finding the right people to talk to,” she says.

A central part of Wynn’s job is creating permanency for her youth, identifying connections to lifelong advocates they can depend on when times get tough. “If I am struggling, who would I call?” she says. Wynn notes that the advice she most often gives her youth, who are on average 17 years old and/or a senior in high school, is to maintain those meaningful connections no matter what. Whether it’s a former foster parent, a caring coach or a friend at church, “don’t burn bridges,” she advises her youth. “Preserve those relationships.”



Youth Transition Services  
Caseworker Emily Wynn

The most rewarding part of her job is seeing her teens succeed, “when they’ve accomplished a goal they’ve set for themselves,” Wynn says.

To learn more about how Franklin County Children Services’ Youth Transition Services team helps teens aging out of child protection, visit <http://childrenservices.franklincountyohio.gov/programs/youth-transition-services.cfm>.