

ACCENT_{on}KIDS

A Publication of Franklin County Children Services

WINTER 2021



Legacy of Melodies created by Romesha, a youth in FCCS's Therapeutic Arts Program

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Protecting Children by Strengthening Families

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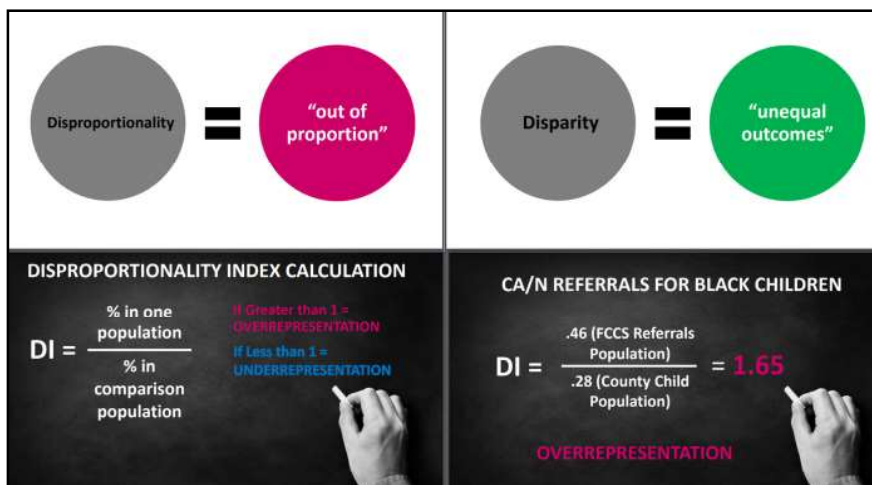
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Agency Considers Racial Disproportionality

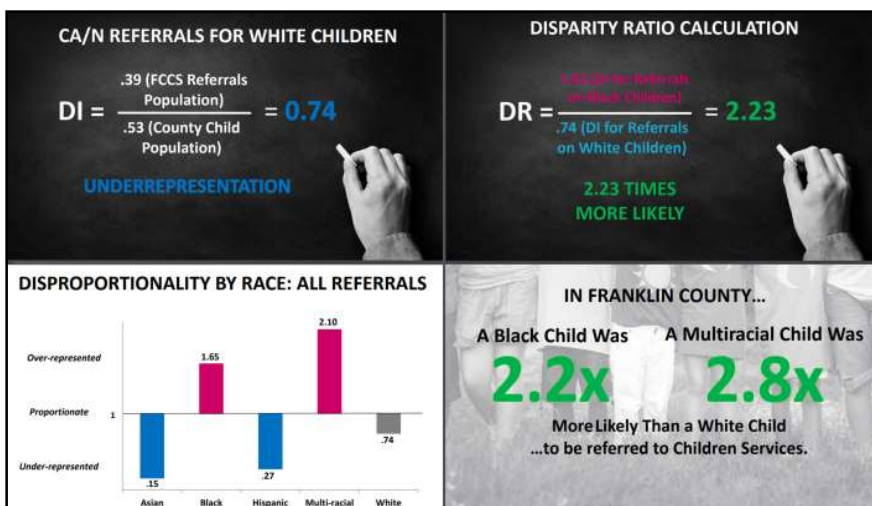
By Marion Thompson

What is at the Heart of Overrepresentation of Black and Multi-Racial Children in Child Welfare Cases in Franklin County?

FCCS has long been dedicated to learning why families become involved with the agency and what can be done to alleviate the need for its intervention. Information gathered by the Strategy, Diversity and Evaluations team in Disproportionality and Disparity: An Overview and Agency Analysis (childrenservices.franklincountyohio.gov) reveals trends in how families come to the attention of the agency and what services can be provided to them. Data collected over the past few years has shown that disproportionality exists in the number of Black and Multi-Racial children who are referred to FCCS, when compared to their percentage of the population of Franklin County.



Information collected from 2016 shows that in comparison to their percentage of the population of Franklin County, Black children were overrepresented among education, legal, and individual referral sources and Multi-racial children were overrepresented among these same referral sources, as well as child welfare, medical and community organization referral sources. Asian and Hispanic children were underrepresented



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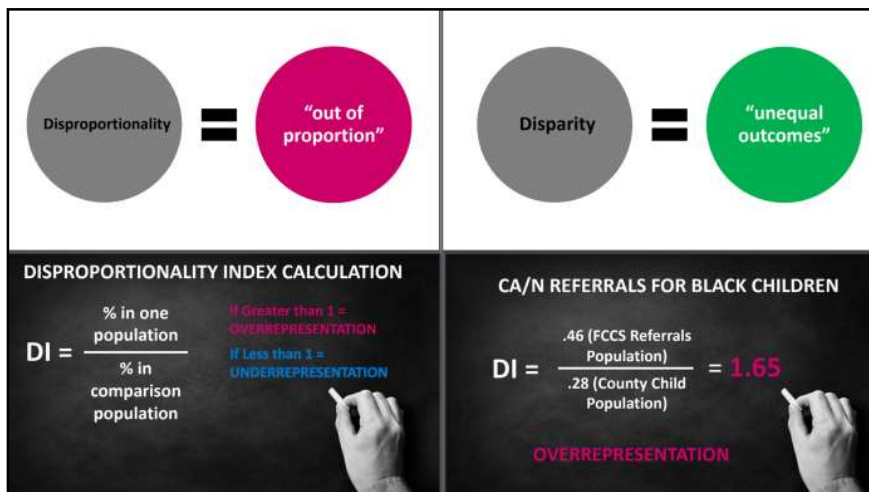
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Disproportionality continued

among all referral sources. The number of White children who were referred was fairly proportionate to their percentage of the population among all referral sources. Analysis of data revealed that a Black child was 2.2 times more likely to be referred to FCCS than a White child, while a Multi-racial child was 2.8 times more likely to be referred to FCCS than a White child.

FCCS is focused on learning why Black and Multi-racial children are overrepresented in terms of referrals and what services and education are needed to mitigate this trend. Additional analysis of data will look at how children are represented in referrals not only by race, but also by gender identity and expression, sexual orientation and age. Findings will be used to enhance training and information-sharing for referral sources, including mandated reporters and community members. FCCS will also continue to address potential sources of disproportionality within the agency by periodically examining disproportionality data and identifying potential sources of bias with staff.



Community Service Worker Offers Ongoing Care

By Bruce Cadwallader

More than 23 years ago, Vilma Lobo, a dedicated teacher with a master's degree in education, started to lose her voice due to health issues, and had a career choice to make. Lobo stepped down from teaching and took a chance on a position with Franklin County Children Services based on a friend's suggestion. She has used her voice for children ever since as a Community Service Worker (CSW) with an ongoing caseload.

"I love my job. I love that I can help others. I see how much we do to protect children."

"My knowledge can make an impression on someone else's life," Lobo said, acknowledging that her mother set the tone for her future career while growing up in Honduras. "My mother opened her house and did all the little things she could to help others. When I was little, there was no Children Services."

Lobo began her career as a Social Service Aide at the agency's West Region in 1998 and spent many years in the intake department. As a current CSW, she helps families with community resources, housing and rent, referrals to shelters and daycares, and delights in creating reunification plans. The bilingual Lobo is often called upon to work with Hispanic families while respecting their culture.

"We usually get many of our referrals from schools and the schools are now mostly online, so my cases have moved from about

26 a month to only 8 right now," Lobo said. "I take my time in helping the families complete a case plan, for us about 90 days."

One former supervisor said Lobo is a tireless worker for our families. "Vilma consistently has gone above and beyond to serve families in her role. [She is] a great community resource navigator and advocate for families," said FCCS Permanency Care Director Raquel Breckenridge.

As an example, Lobo said she spent months monitoring a homeless mother with children at a local shelter who lost her government benefits and medical coverage. "When I closed the case, she was still at the shelter, but she was in exceptional care, had established her rights and found a job and a living situation," Lobo said. "I love my job. I love that I can help others. I see how much we do to protect children."



Vilma Lobo provides ongoing care for families in need.

Celebrating Families and their Advocates

By Valancia Turner

National Family Week is a time when Franklin County Children Services celebrates the successes of families and the support of community advocates for the Family to Family program (F2F). Although we were not able to celebrate in person this November, the five settlement houses wanted to recognize the successes of program participants and community advocates.

Central Community House nominated **Rayona Spencer** and her family for Family of the Year. Spencer has pushed through many obstacles to find a new and brighter path for her family. She stated, "Being in this program for an entire year has helped me stabilize my circumstances." Spencer and her family have been a model of strength and courage.

**"The family is one of nature's masterpieces."
– George Santayana**

Action for Children received the Community Advocate Award for their parenting workshop series and resources impacting 111 adults and 329 children this year. Central Community House is grateful for the service, time, and effort put into classes led by Action for Children staff, **Jenn Qualls**, and instructor, **Gloria Redding**.

St. Stephen's Community House East picked **Jerell Madison** and **Tyrell Madison** as their Family of the Year. Mr. Madison enrolled in F2F after his son's mother was murdered. After losing custody of his son, Madison worked one-on-one with staff and participated in parenting programs. He credits F2F for helping him find a lawyer and not give up on fighting for his son.

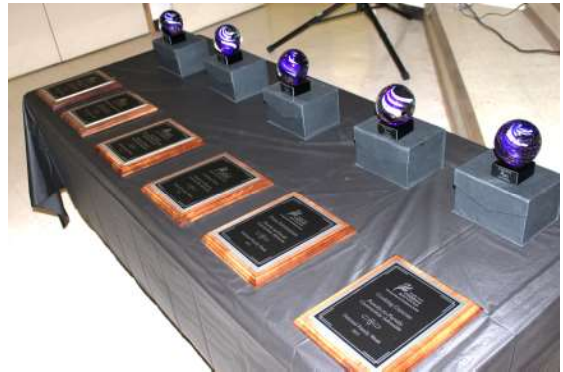


Our Lady of Peace Society of Saint Vincent de Paul received the Community Advocate Award. Their **Judy Statmiller** and **Bill Oberdick** helped provide food, clothing, and emergency assistance to F2F participants during COVID-19. St. Stephen's East is honored to give them this award.

St. Stephen's Community House Northeast nominated **Terri Watkins** and her family as its' Family of the Year. Watkins has overcome many challenges, while raising 11 children, including the deaths of two children and becoming the guardian of her granddaughter. With the assistance of F2F, she has become a shining example of inspiration and perseverance.

Central Ohio Bed Brigade received the Community Advocate Award. **Dale Cory** and his organization have supported F2F by providing much-needed beds.

Gladden Community House named **Samantha O'Connor** and her family as the Family of the Year for her dedication to getting back on track after facing many challenges in her personal life. O'Connor was linked with F2F to help remove barriers and regain custody of her son. Now, O'Connor is providing her family the stability and love they need.



The Center for Family Resolution received the Community Advocate Award, as they helped Gladden Community House return to in-person parenting and money management classes, which had been suspended due to COVID-19. Director **Amy Armstrong** and her staff, **Deborah Frazier** and **Wendi Stern** assisted F2F clients by providing needed services.

St. Stephen's Community House North gave the Family of the Year Award to **Gelyn Clardy** and her family who have made tremendous improvements during her involvement with Family to Family. After Clardy secured a comfortable, stable, and loving home for herself and her family, F2F staff were brought to tears when they heard her son say, "Mommy, this is my room!"

The Community Advocate Award was given to **Tammy Johnson** at **Bargain House Appliances** in Linden for helping F2F purchase appliances for clients. F2F appreciates that Johnson takes time to understand and accommodate families.

Although each of the families have different stories and challenges, all are determined to be successful. Franklin County Children Services and our F2F partners are honored to share their successes and grateful to our community advocates who have helped them.

Caring for Children During COVID-19

By Marion Thompson

Those who care for children face many challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic, ranging from health and safety to schooling and making ends meet. Preventing child abuse and neglect is also a great concern for families, caregivers and the community. Following guidelines and taking advantage of available resources can help keep children safe.

Parents/Caregivers: Plan in Case of Illness

During the uncertainty of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, parents and caregivers need to be prepared in case they become ill. Create a crisis plan for caring for your children in advance.

Designate a caregiver for children. This should be someone nearby, who is not at high risk of contracting COVID-19. If a spouse or partner cannot care for children in your home, select a friend, neighbor, coworker or relative. List information for the caregiver prominently in your home, so that it can easily be found by emergency responders. Create a child care profile for the caregiver that lists your child's full name, birthdate, allergies, medications, likes/dislikes and sleep habits. Also include emergency contacts and copies of their birth certificate and immunization records. If you can't identify anyone, contact community resources such as hospitals, churches and other organizations to see if they can recommend assistance. Visit childrenservices.franklincountyohio.gov/resources/coronavirus.cfm for an example.

Prepare your home in case of illness.

Make sure that high-traffic areas within your home remain clean by using germ-killing cleaning agents. If you test positive for COVID-19, you may remain in the home with your children and their caregivers, providing they are not at high risk of contracting the virus, but precautions must be taken. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have outlined steps to take if you or

someone else in your household tests positive for COVID-19 on their website here: cdc.gov/coronavirus.

Preventing Child Abuse and Neglect

During the challenging circumstances caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, Children Services staff are still on the front lines protecting children from child abuse and neglect by supporting families. It's also especially important for the community to be involved in preventing abuse, as many children are still out of school and families are under ever-increasing pressures.

Everyone can help prevent abuse and neglect by being aware and vigilant. Keep in touch with your neighbors, family members and friends. If you suspect that child abuse or neglect are occurring, call the 24-hour Child Abuse Hot Line at (614) 229-7000 and make a report. Children Services staff are available to listen to your concerns and conduct investigations. For more information, visit childrenservices.franklincountyohio.gov/abuse-and-neglect to review Guidelines: What You Need to Know about Child Abuse and Neglect.

Check in with families and be a good listener. Talk with caregivers about what they're experiencing and offer them support. Encourage those who are experiencing stress and anxiety while caring for children to seek professional help. Children Services can offer them assistance, while working to keep the family together. Help alleviate their fears about contacting FCCS.

Additional Help

Resources are available in the community to help families with a variety of issues including remote learning, mental health support, financial issues and more. Visit childrenservices.franklincountyohio.gov/resources/coronavirus.cfm for a comprehensive list of COVID-19 resources.

Youth Villages Helps During Transitions

By Cynthia Greenleaf

As the central part of our mission, Franklin County Children Services helps thousands of children every year. We can't do this critically important work alone, which is why we collaborate with a range of specialized service providers to ensure we are best meeting the individual needs of each child we serve. Nonprofit organization Youth Villages is one such invaluable partner. A national leader in children's mental and behavioral healthcare with 72 locations across 20 states, Youth Villages provides youth involved with FCCS community-based intervention as well as residential services as needed.

In particular, Youth Village's intensive home-based therapy program, Intercept has been yielding positive outcomes since FCCS began using it in 2018. According to FCCS Community Referrals Social Program Specialist Nicci Faw, Intercept is designed to help three types of youth while engaging with their caregivers and families in a comprehensive, community-based way.

Intercept assists youth transitioning out of residential treatment who need aftercare services, children in crisis who are at risk of placement, and those youth needing stabilization in their current living situation so they can safely stay where they are and avoid disruption.

Intercept's success stories are many, which means better long-term outcomes for kids and their families, Faw notes. "There are many cases in which Youth Villages has been able to quickly link with a youth and FCCS has been able to close out their services at the intake level so that the family doesn't penetrate further into the system," she says.

To learn more about Youth Villages and the array of comprehensive mental and behavioral health services it offers children and families, visit youthvillages.org.



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Family Becomes Three on National Adoption Day

By Cynthia Greenleaf

A sweet, spirited toddler, Leannah was only supposed to be with Heather and Shawn Jordan temporarily, while her birth parents navigated difficult circumstances. Instead, she ended up finding her forever home. The Jordans officially became a family of three in November 2020 when Leannah's adoption was finalized on Franklin County's National Adoption Day. This annual Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption event brings awareness to the more than 120,000 children nationwide currently in foster care awaiting their permanent families.

While they never had children of their own, the Jordans have always loved kids and thoroughly doted on their friends' and family's little ones. So when this Bremen, Ohio couple had the chance to help out Leannah, the young daughter of a family friend going through tough times, it made perfect sense. "This is an opportunity to have a child in our lives," Heather recalls thinking. Leannah, then two and a half years old, needed a safe place to stay due to her birth parents' mental health and substance abuse issues.

When Leannah first came to live with them, she had virtually no language skills. "Now she doesn't stop talking," Heather says, laughing. Seeing this bright, affectionate child thrive under their care has been tremendously rewarding, she noted, especially seeing Leannah learn how to play and discover her imagination.

Leannah, who is now five, has a special bond with her father Shawn. The two like to explore the nearby Hocking Hills and have their own weekly ritual "milkshake Mondays." Shawn says he most cherishes waking up with his daughter every day. "I like my morning cuddles," he says.

For the Jordans, becoming the temporary—and now permanent—caregivers of Leannah wasn't an easy process. But providing this little girl a safe, nurturing home and keeping her out of the child welfare system has made everything worth it. "That means everything to me," Shawn says. "That's what keeps me going."

For more on the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption's National Adoption Day, visit www.nationaladoptionday.org.



(From left) Shawn, Leannah and Heather Jordan are now a family! They're joined by Franklin County Children Services Adoptions Caseworker Kelly Crawford (right) and Probate Court Magistrate Kelly Green.