

ACCENT_{on}KIDS

A Publication of Franklin County Children Services

SUMMER 2023



INSIDE:

- 🌀 **It Takes 100% Heart: Recruiting Foster Families**
- 🌀 **Simba Mentoring Program Forges Ahead**
- 🌀 **Trade School Scholarships to be Awarded**



Protecting Children by Strengthening Families

ACCENT on KIDS

A Publication of Franklin County Children Services

Summer 2023

BOARD

Tammy Wharton, Chair

Joy Soll, Vice Chair

Maggie Lewis, Secretary

Lolita Augenstein

Rev. Dr. Michael Bean

Wilson Browning

Karen Days

Tiffany Hunt

Elizabeth Martinez

Necol Russell-Washington

Elon Simms

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Chip M. Spinning

ACCENT ON KIDS STAFF

Marion Thompson, Editor

Bruce Cadwallader

Cynthia Greenleaf

Scott Varner



Franklin County Children Services

- Community Outreach
- 855 W. Mound St.
- Columbus, OH 43223
- Phone: (614) 275-2523

This publication is available online at
www.fccs.us

It Takes 100% Heart! Recruiting Foster Families

By Scott Varner

Franklin County Children Services (FCCS) is enlisting the help of the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS), the Franklin County Commissioners, Columbus City Council, foster care agencies, service providers, and community partners including Action for Children to recruit 100 additional foster parents specifically for tween and teen-aged children in Franklin County.



(From left) Franklin County Board of Commissioners President John O'Grady, FCCS Executive Director Chip Spinning, Franklin County Commissioner Erica Crawley, Helena Herd who has fostered almost 100 youth, Ohio Department of Job and Family Services Assistant Director Melinda Kowalski, and Columbus City Council President Shannon Hardin announce the "It Takes 100% Heart" Collaboration during a Facebook Live event on May 24.

"There's a great misperception about who can be a foster parent. The truth is that you don't have to be married or middle-age, you don't have to own your home or have a graduate degree, and while you do need to have a stable income, you don't need to be rich. But it does take 100% heart, at least to start," said FCCS Executive Director Chip Spinning. "And today, we are standing shoulder to shoulder with dedicated partners who want to help us find more foster families through an impressive collaboration that stretches across state, county, city, and community levels."

The "It Takes 100% Heart Campaign" was initially launched by ODJFS and the Ohio Children's Alliance. FCCS will join ODJFS in promoting the message through community outreach. With support from FCCS and the Ohio Children's Alliance, Action for Children will collaborate with foster care agencies in Franklin County who are responsible for training, licensing, and supporting foster families. Action for Children and FCCS will co-host a Foster Care Fair later this year, where prospective foster parents can learn about opportunities. Columbus City Council will also promote "It Takes 100% Heart" by sharing this important message with city employees, at Neighborhood Pride Centers, city recreation centers, and with city-funded organizations who serve children and families.

Continued on next page

Foster Care continued

Placing children under Children Services care between ages 11 and 17 can be difficult, as evidenced in part by the number of times the agency has been forced to keep tweens and teens overnight in non-residential settings. In fact, in 2022, FCCS was forced to have youth spend two or more nights in the agency's Intake/Visitation building because a foster placement was not available. Nearly all those occasions involved youth between 11 and 15 years old.

"Fostering is making a child feel safe and not alone," said Franklin County Commissioner John O'Grady. "Fostering is the difference between a child sleeping in an office building that was never intended for that purpose and a child sleeping in a warm bed watched over by a caring adult."

"A sense of community and continuity plays such a vital role in the mental and emotional health of young people," added Franklin County Commissioner Erica Crawley. "While foster care is meant to be a short-term solution for families engaged in the child welfare system, it can be a lifeline and a sense of stability for young people at a critical time in their lives."

To learn more about fostering in Franklin County, call (614) 275-2711 or visit fccs.us/foster-care. To review resources from the State of Ohio, learn about foster and adoption options, and hear more about the "It Takes 100% Heart Ohio" campaign, visit fosterandadopt.jfs.ohio.gov/home.



SAFY Parent Partner Program Empowerment Through Peer Support

By Cynthia Greenleaf

For Nellie Aguilar, being a parent partner at Franklin County Children Services is a chance to provide the support she so desperately needed back when she was involved in the child welfare system. Aguilar, a California native and mother of six, is part of Specialized Alternatives for Families and Youth's (SAFY) peer support program that launched in 2021 in Franklin, Knox, and Fairfield counties.

Lived experience is the secret to the program's success. Each parent partner—there are four currently at FCCS—has first-hand experience with the child welfare system and has lost custody of their child at some point in the process. "We've been there and we know what it feels like," says Aguilar, who is passionate about her work as a parent advocate and is currently mentoring four parents as they work their care plans. "We're not there to judge. We're just there to support."

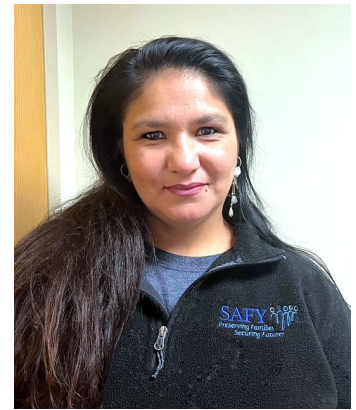
This three-year Ohio Department of Job and Family Services pilot program is modeled on a hugely successful statewide program in Iowa. It aims to better support birth parents involved with child welfare agencies, help them understand the multiple systems they are navigating, and ultimately reunify families more quickly. Participation in the free program is voluntary and parents can opt out at any time.

Whether it's helping them locate housing, linking them to community resources, or prepping them for court hearings and family team meetings, parent partners meet the families on their own terms and help build their confidence and esteem, according to Charisse Penn, SAFY's parent partner program manager.

Parent partners are also neutral parties that don't report directly to FCCS or the judicial system as a caseworker does. "It levels the playing field and takes that power differential out," Penn says. "This is strictly about the parent and support."

SAFY's parent partners address a critical need for many FCCS-involved parents by giving them an empathetic support they can count on and someone who truly understands what they're going through. This is especially needed after the significant trauma and loss felt after a child is placed in foster care, Penn says. "I hear time and time again, 'I don't have any family support, not one caring person.'" "When I had my case, I wanted help so badly and I didn't know how to reach out," Aguilar adds. "I don't even know if I knew what I needed. I just knew I was tired, and I wanted help."

FCCS's program is yielding positive results so far, especially when it comes to letting parents know they're respected and have someone in their corner. It's about empowerment, Penn says, noting that some parent partners send positive affirmations to their families every day, letting them know: "Your children are worth fighting for. You're worth it. You're valued."



SAFY Parent Mentor Nellie Aguilar

FCCS & Community: We're Stronger Together

Franklin County Children Services has asked community members and organizations to partner with us in celebrating and offering opportunities to the youth and families we serve. FCCS staff and volunteers have given back in turn.



On January 25, community members came out to learn about the agency's volunteer and mentor programs during Make a Difference Night.



On March 18, youth involved with the agency attended a Career Fair during which they learned about education and employment opportunities.



On January 16, members of the Simba and Malaika mentoring programs held a day of service at the Ronald McDonald House.



FCCS Associate Director of Organizational Health Daryle Cobb and Alvin Hadley Scholarship Winner Destinee



Keynote Speaker Luke Fedlam



On June 14, FCCS celebrated youth involved with the agency who graduated or earned their GEDs this spring with help from generous donations from the community. The celebration took place at The Gallery at Champions.



The annual Child Abuse Prevention Breakfast was held April 13 at the Grand Event Center. During the event, youth, families, staff, and community partners were recognized for outstanding achievements and scholarships were presented.



FCCS staff and volunteers marched in the Stonewall Columbus Pride Parade on June 15.

Simba Mentoring Program Ready to Grow

By Marion Thompson

Approaching its 38th anniversary, the Simba Mentoring Program, which matches African American boys in one-on-one mentorships with African American men, is poised to extend its reach and serve more youth with new staff and tools for enrichment. Under the leadership of Associate Director of Organizational Health Daryle Cobb, Program Manager Oleatha Waugh, and Program Coordinator Dennis Makokha, Simba is entering a new phase.

With the newly formed leadership team, Simba has the benefit of a wealth of skills and experience in its management. A Franklin County Children Services (FCCS) employee for more than 30 years, Cobb led Simba as its director for more than 10 years and is happy to see it grow. “The responsibilities for continuing to build Simba were a lot for one person, so we advocated for a manager and a coordinator. Now that we have the very best people in these roles, we’re ready to expand,” said Cobb.

Waugh comes to Simba with experience as the director of African American Initiatives and the My Brother’s Keeper Program under the Columbus Urban League, where he assessed the needs of young people in crisis. He worked with youth to overcome emotional, financial, and familial obstacles to become productive and self-sufficient. A longtime fan of Simba, Waugh joined the agency two years ago as a visitation supervisor.

A native of Kenya, Makokha came to Children Services from Texas, where he worked with immigrant children in foster care. While he served FCCS as an ongoing caseworker, a common circumstance he noticed among youth he encountered was the absence of fathers in the home. Makokha recognized the importance of providing mentors for these youth.

Ready for growth, Cobb said, “I’d like to have 200 active mentors and provide year-round opportunities for education, employment, and support for youth.” Waugh agreed, adding, he’d like to see more mentors who have overcome adverse experiences to become productive and successful. “We need people with lived experiences who are well-vetted and committed to seeing young people rise above circumstances that may lead to their involvement with the justice system,” he said. Makokha wants Simba to serve a wider population and meet the cultural needs of immigrant youth. “These youth want to talk with someone who understands their culture, and I’m working with refugee organizations to identify a diverse pool of mentors,” he said. Waugh also wants to measure the success of mentoring relationships and the progress of youth. “We want to tell the story of our youth quantitatively,” he said. Makokha added that with the growth of the mentoring pool, he hopes for faster matches. “The likelihood of positive outcomes increases when youth don’t have to wait to begin relationships,” he said.



Simba Leadership: (from left) Oleatha Waugh, Dennis Makokha, and Daryle Cobb

Tips for Today: What to do this Summer

By Bruce Cadwallader

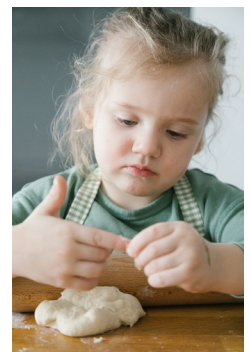
It happens in the middle of every summer. Kids say, “I’m bored!” as parents and caregivers run out of ideas for things to do. The team at Expert Home Tips has these suggestions:

- Let kids rearrange furniture in their bedrooms. The room will feel brand new and kids might even be more motivated to keep it clean.
- Set up a treasure hunt. Make a map or write a list of clues that link each spot to the next and leave a little surprise to find at the end.
- Get messy with baking. Kids love being able to eat their creations.
- For teens, set up a home spa. Fill bowls with warm water and bubble bath for a nice foot soak.
- Make a time capsule. Talk about your family history and the things that your child thinks would be interesting ten years from now.

- Explore the globe on Google Maps. Ask your child about all the places they would like to go in the world.

You can also find lots of free and low cost opportunities to keep the kids entertained and informed outside of the home. Summer is a great time to explore nature by visiting parks. Museums offer opportunities for experiencing art, science, history, and more. Families should also check out local events and attractions.

For more parenting ideas, follow us on Facebook (Franklin County Children Services) and Twitter (@FCCSEnews).





Printed on Recycled Paper
Address Corrections
& Communications Division (614) 341-6013
or e-mail jjallen@fccs.us

www.fccs.us



Trade School Scholarships Honor Late Board Member Douglas C. Moore

By Marion Thompson

Youth involved with Franklin County Children Services (FCCS) just got a leg up on the career ladder, thanks to the legacy of Douglas C. Moore, who was a member of FCCS's Board of Trustees for sixteen years. Moore was also president of the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) Local 1632, City of Columbus. He was a steadfast voice for youth, families, and all working people. Moore, who passed away in December 2022, will be remembered for his dedication to providing youth access to learning skills and guiding them toward bright futures.

To keep Moore's legacy alive, FCCS will award two Douglas C. Moore Trade and Technical School Scholarships annually beginning in 2024. This is an opportunity to provide youth with alternative options to post-high school education and career development, and open additional opportunities for them to earn a substantial living.

Young adults who have obtained their high school diploma or GED and have an open or closed case with FCCS are eligible to apply. This includes post-emancipated youth. The preferred programs for study are accredited trade, technical, and vocational colleges, as well as job training programs providing certification, licensure, or bonding. Other programs may be considered. The two renewable scholarships will be in the amount of \$4,000 each.

With the addition of these scholarships, the agency is well equipped to support youth in reaching their academic and career goals in a wide variety of ways. According to FCCS Director of Volunteer Services and Child Enrichment Eboni Partlow, "We hope that these scholarships help provide our youth with access to education, skills, and opportunities to gain self-efficacy and achieve their wildest dreams."



FCCS Board Member Douglas C. Moore