



Better Ways to Keep Kids Safe

Franklin County Children Services' mission is clear: to provide protection, care and permanency for children whose lives have been damaged by adults' neglect, frustration and despair; and to strengthen families where love and affection have been replaced by hostility, or where discipline has become abuse.

Fortunately, most children in our community are healthy and secure. But Children Services knows that far too many kids' lives are in jeopardy. These children need help in becoming competent, caring adults. They need services and supports that enable them to thrive, not just survive.

These are the children and young people for whom Children Services is working. The agency's goal is to protect children without removing them from their families. Conducting family assessments, offering a range of early support services and collaborating with other community-based organizations are some of the things that will keep children safe. Unfortunately, sometimes more serious interventions are called for.

In this context, Children Services is implementing a new computerized information system to ensure that we have the latest and most accurate information regarding the children we serve. It's also why we are using a new planning model that will allow Children Services to improve its ability to assess children's safety, conduct family assessments, develop safety plans and provide family support services.

With this new information system and planning model, Children Services will be better able to keep kids safe and ensure their physical and emotional well being, while avoiding interventions into families where parents are able to protect their children.



Protecting Children.

The importance of protecting children from neglect and abuse is documented almost daily. A young girl is brought to the hospital with no acceptable explanation for her injuries. A mother of three small children is apparently high on drugs and physically impaired when a social worker shows up for a home visit. A young child has been left alone in his home unsupervised all night, while another child dies at the hands of a parent whose abuse has gone unnoticed for months or was ignored by those who might have helped.

Each of these situations calls for action by the community's children services agency.

But what should be done?

Should the children remain with their families while services are provided and careful monitoring takes place? Should the children be placed in foster care while their troubled families are given time – and intervention services – to work out their problems? Or should the children be removed permanently from their families to protect them from physical, emotional or sexual abuse?

To help its workers answer these questions, Franklin County Children Services is launching ***a new computerized information system and a new set of assessment and decision-making tools***. They are called SACWIS and CAPMIS and they are intended to make our children safer.

SACWIS ... Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System

In July 2007, Children Services converted to the statewide automated child welfare information system. All of Ohio's county children services agencies will enter data into



the system in a consistent manner, which will ensure that the latest information regarding a child will be available and accessible at all times by any agency. This will help workers conducting investigations of child abuse and neglect by giving them access to current information about families or children, regardless of where in Ohio they have lived and how long they have been there.

SACWIS is a Web-based program that will give county caseworkers access to appropriate information in a timely and protected environment. It will help them manage their cases and give them a better understanding of the children and families they are serving. In addition, it will give the state comparable, aggregate data from each of Ohio's 88 counties.

CAPMIS ... Comprehensive Assessment and Planning Model – Interim Solution

Children Services also has begun to use the comprehensive assessment and planning model – interim solution. This model involves structured decision-making from the time a child or family is referred to the agency and throughout the life of the case.

CAPMIS provides tools for assessing a child's safety, developing safety plans and conducting

Strengthening Families.

family and reunification assessments. It also helps Children Services' workers better protect and care for children who are unsafe, while avoiding interventions into the lives of families where parents are able to protect their children. CAPMIS structures decision-making and results in more consistent and higher quality services.

In contrast to current practice, which calls for an assessment of *risk* to a child, CAPMIS puts the focus on a child's *safety* when decisions about services and interventions are being made. Acknowledging that it is often difficult to distinguish between risk and safety, CAPMIS deems a child to be safe when there are no immediate threats of serious harm present, or when the family can protect the child from identified risks.



.....
CAPMIS is designed to structure decision-making and lead to more consistent services. Yet, it recognizes that there are no one-size-fits-all answers. So the purpose is to establish a consistent approach to protecting children and strengthening families by looking for and using customized, tailor-made solutions.
.....

An initial assessment of a child's safety is required within four days from the beginning of the investigation. If a child is not safe, a safety plan will be created with the family. If further help is needed, the child and family will be referred to community agencies, or a case will be opened, and in some cases, the child will be removed from their care. Services will be offered to families to resolve safety threats, reduce the likelihood of further abuse or neglect, and promote child well-being and permanency.

The implementation of SACWIS and CAPMIS is expected to take several months. Children Services staff has been undergoing extensive training for the past several months and the agency is expecting no disruption of services or operations during the transition period.

"We want all Franklin County children to be safe and free from harm. In the vast majority of families, parents protect their own children from harm, but in some families children are abused or neglected. By incorporating the best practices in our profession, we can use our resources to protect and care for the most vulnerable children in our community while respecting the rights of parents to raise their children in appropriate and effective ways."

Eric Fenner, Executive Director, Franklin County Children Services

Q Why is Children Services introducing SACWIS and CAPMIS?

A There are two answers to this question. First, the use of this new information system and planning model is required by state law. But there is a more compelling answer. The availability of a statewide information system and the assessment and decision-making tools embedded in CAPMIS will allow Children Services to do a better job of protecting children. They will help us guard against unnecessary interventions into families that are equipped and willing to manage threats to their children's safety and well-being. And they will result in better and more consistent solutions that lead to better outcomes for our children.



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS *about SACWIS and CAPWIS*

Q How do we know that CAPMIS is really going to work and what's going to be different with this new approach?

A The new CAPMIS approach has been developed over a period of four years. It has been piloted in a number of Ohio counties and the results of these projects have been fully evaluated. So Franklin County should be able to benefit from lessons learned and best practices that have been developed from these experiences.



Historically, Children Services has looked at family situations and tried to determine the likelihood that children are or will be neglected or abused. The agency's social workers have visited homes and conducted investigations based on calls received from professionals, family members or other citizens.

With CAPMIS, people who report suspected abuse or neglect may see differences in how Children Services handles their calls. Some situations that in the past may have been investigated and a case opened will not be in the future, while other situations that would not have been investigated may now be handled as an open case.

For example, superficial bruising on a non-sensitive area (limbs or buttocks), which is in line with parental discipline would not be considered abuse. However, bruises that cause serious harm, or bruises in a sensitive area such as the head, face or chest, would be. Babies affected by any drugs, including marijuana, are now considered abused and will be assessed to see what services are needed.

CAPMIS prioritizes identifying the safety of a child when making decisions, rather than the current practice that focuses primarily on assessing risk. Using CAPMIS tools, Children Services will be required to make an initial assessment of a child's safety within four days from the initiation of an investigation.

Q What are these CAPMIS “tools”?

A Very simply, they are the safety assessments and safety plans that are developed during the first days of any investigation. They are the family assessments that tell case workers whether families are able to manage situations and protect their children. They are the ongoing case reviews – often developed in collaboration with other community-based programs and agencies – that reveal how families are doing.



Q What is Children Services doing to make sure that people understand SACWIS and CAPMIS, and that its social workers are able to make effective use of them?

A SACWIS and CAPWIS implementation is expected to take several months, although the agency expects no disruption of services or operations during the transition period. Children Services’ employees have been undergoing extensive training for the past several months and the agency has launched a communications plan to ensure that the new approaches are fully understood by other child- and family-serving organizations, as well as by the families that are being affected.



Building the Capacity of Families to Protect their Children

As it launches SACWIS and CAPMIS, Children Services also is introducing a new approach to visitation – one that strengthens families and provides tools for family stability.

With this new approach, children who have been removed from their homes will have frequent opportunities to visit with their families *in a variety of home and community environments, not in institutional settings*. Visits will be used to promote bonding and to help families solve their problems and to get back custody of their children as quickly as possible.

The new visitation program is a joint initiative of Children Services and the Alcohol, Drug and Mental Health Board of Franklin County (ADAMH), a collaboration that allows families and caseworkers to address both child welfare and mental health issues. According to Children Services executive director Eric Fenner, “this new approach to visitation will allow us to develop and carry out plans that address the needs of the whole child while strengthening the ability of families to protect their children.”

Rethinking Child Safety

Everyone wants the children in our community to be safe. Yet, many families are at risk for abusing or neglecting their children. They need support and attention. But too often, families do not know where to turn for help or their needs are not brought to the attention of the agency.

Franklin County Children Services is determined to change that. The agency is building its capacity to protect and help these children and families. Our new Web-based information system (SACWIS) and our new assessment and planning model (CAPMIS) are part of this effort. But they are only two of the innovative ideas we have adopted and are using to ensure that all children are safe and are able to thrive.

In partnership with more than 100 child-serving agencies and organizations, and with the help of our 700 employees, 400 foster parents, 200 adoptive families and 600 volunteers and mentors, Children Services is committed to making sure that every child has a safe and stable home. We thank all who join us in making a difference each day for the children and families of our community.

We are doing everything we can to reach these children and their families through care and support ... before tragedy strikes. We are working to make sure that every child is safe.

For more information about Franklin County Children Services and its efforts to make all children safe and secure, contact:



855 West Mound Street
Columbus, Ohio 43223
614/275-2571