



The Insider

Washington County Children Services. A Safe Home for Every Child.

April 2007
Editor: Mary Wilkins



www.washingtoncountychildren.com

From the Director... **Keep Counting on Us**

Dave Copen, Executive Director

Washington County has faced a tough economic climate in recent years, and major challenges are ahead. Like much of the rest of Ohio, we've been struggling to deal with the decline of manufacturing as an important part of our economy and the pain that has resulted.

These economic challenges are reflected every day in the work done by the staff of Washington County Children Services. All of our core services have been pressed, and pressed hard, by increased demands. In tough economic times, there are more people needing help with greater needs. It's a time when stress for families is at an all-time high, when abuse and neglect is more prevalent. It's a time when a community's social fabric is tested for its strength and flexibility.

We're proud to tell you that the staff of Washington County Children Services has been up to the challenge. Their habit of hard work, combined with a willingness to find new and innovative ways to serve children and families, has ensured that we continue to deliver services in the most cost-effective and efficient way for which we're known.

However, in a similar manner, while focusing on our communities we serve and being fiscally and programmatically accountable, and at the same time meeting public expectations, we are confronting some major challenges. First, our society and communities are changing. Family dysfunction and being required to place children in out-of-home care is growing dramatically. The behavior of children, coupled with mental health issues, continues to spiral upwards with even more children being placed in our care.

The behavioral and mental health disorders grow more challenging, and this doubly hidden population is requiring more expensive forms of care that provide no assurance of success. In addition, the shifting of more responsibility for cost of care and service delivery on the child welfare system has the propensity to create a resource nightmare.

Second, fiscal changes by the state promise to make significant modifications in child welfare financing while changes coming from the federal government threaten to reduce funding.

Third, the nature of the child welfare caseload is changing from one exclusively devoted to abuse, neglect and dependency to one co-mingling with unruly adolescents and, in many instances, juvenile delinquents.

Within this context, Washington County Children Services is seeking to meet community expectations by providing leadership on behalf of children and families; being fiscally prudent; and working in equal partnership with the Washington County Juvenile Court and the Child and Family Services systems in the community. That is absolutely essential to successfully serving youth and their families.

Clearly, major challenges are ahead, but it will only be through receptivity and responsiveness to the community and its changing needs that we will be able to continuously improve the quality of our services. We can't do it alone, but the people of Washington County will know that Children Services will be there every step of the way with the help and services they need. You can keep counting on us!



From the Family Services Supervisor

Anita Meek

2006 was definitely a year of growth and development for the Family Services Unit in regards to unit member changes as we enjoyed the addition of Mary Wilkins, Heather Mahoney and Ashley Reese to our team. They each add individual strengths and attributes that enhance the overall effective functioning of the unit.

Mary brings to the unit a strong passion and desire to make a positive difference in the children and families of Washington County. She is eager to learn her role as a Child Protective Services Caseworker. This past fall she demonstrated her ability to make a difference in all of our lives by the successful spread of her enthusiasm for the West Virginia Mountaineers football team through the agency.

Heather may appear to be quiet and reserved but in reality is quite outgoing and a bit of a prankster. Her greatest strength may well be that she is willing to take on any task - even if she has no clue what she may be getting in to.

Ashley Reese brings a refreshingly pleasant quality of genuineness and her youthful energy to our midst. In March, Ashley received her second Bachelor's degree, in Psychology, from The Ohio University. (Her first degree is in Social Work.)

These three "new" staff members along with Lisa Swisher, Kathy Wright, Mary Ann Rollins, Pam McKenna, Melinda Meredith and Deborah Lambeth comprise the dedicated and highly committed staff members of the Family Services Unit of Washington County Children Services. Together these nine staff members total fifty years of agency employment experience. Our hats are off to each of them for their enthusiasm, passion and commitment to achieve safety, stability and permanence for the children of Washington County!

From the Foster Care/Adoption Supervisor

Teri Wright

In honor of the families who have approved adoptive home studies or have adopted children through Washington County Children Services an

Adoption Celebration Banquet was held at the Comfort Inn on November 10, 2006. Amanda Ware and Stephani Hamm facilitated the banquet.

In honor of the foster families who have provided care for children in the custody of Washington County Children Services a foster care Christmas party was held at our agency on December 14, 2006. Tonya Kidder, Foster Care Caseworker, facilitated the banquet. Sixteen foster families attended the party along with staff and agency Board members, Caroline Fous and Joe Wesel.

The adoptions of ten children were finalized in 2006. The Foster Care/Adoption Unit is diligently recruiting a permanent home for five children committed to the permanent custody of the agency. Two children have been matched with a family.

Three foster children graduated from high school in 2006. Each of these children, with the help of their Family Services Caseworker, Foster Care Caseworker and their foster parents developed plans to assist with their emancipation. One of the graduates is attending college and one entered the United States Marine Corp.

Adoption Caseworker, Amanda Ware and Foster Care Case Manager, Sabrina Buchanan completed a "Needs Based Recruitment Plan" based on statistical data collected from 2005 – June 2006. The plan identifies the strengths and weaknesses of our current pool of foster and adoptive families which will enable the agency to take a more needs based approach to recruitment of new foster and adoptive homes.

From the Intake/Assessment Unit Supervisor

Alice Stewart

On November 1, 2006, the agency implemented new state rules which required many changes. I am very proud of how staff have embraced this change and worked diligently to comply with the new rules. We now have numerous new forms and casework tools that are required. Staff quickly learned how to use the tools and are now refining their skills. Staff have been extremely busy but have made every effort to maintain a positive attitude during this time of change, and I believe they should be commended!

From the School Outreach Prevention Program (SOPP) Unit Supervisor

Laura Wiblin

The Prevention Specialists are often seen with a number of their 'children served' in tow and on their way to do some type of activity. They work in the schools, in the homes and in the community. They seem to be everywhere! But why are they 'everywhere'? Part of the answer to that question is as simple and as complex as meeting the needs of the children and families that we serve. SOPP utilizes a risk and resiliency model to assess the needs of the individual child and then develops a plan to address those needs. Programmatically, we want to make sure that we are providing the best possible services to these at risk children. Therefore, an assessment of the program is done as well. Plans and goals are developed for the program based on these assessments.

The SOPP program is evaluated annually by The Voinovich Center for Leadership and Public Affairs. This evaluation includes statistical analysis of all components of the program. It also contains an analysis of the pre and post assessments that we complete each year on our open cases. The data collected from parents, teachers and the child is analyzed to determine progress for each test item on all six assessment tools that are administered. SOPP would like to share some of the highlights obtained from this year's annual independent evaluation.

- SOPP served 2778 youth in 2006
- 59% of the children served in open cases live in a family where the annual income is less than \$15,000.
- 41% live in homes where none of the adults have full-time employment
- 47% live in homes where only one adult has full time employment
- 22% live in homes who receive income solely from disability

Evaluation Findings

Program success is evaluated by participant measures of school success and of family and youth development. Parents are asked to complete the Index of Parental Attitudes, Stressful Life Events Index and a Family Needs Assessment. Teachers are asked to complete the Teacher-Child Rating Scale (TCRS). In addition, children in SOPP complete the Child Rating Scale (CRS), that compliments the adaptive behavior items

on the TCRS. The findings of the scores on the TCRS, (task orientation, behavior control, peer social skills and assertiveness), all improved significantly between pre and post tests.

Three of the four subscales on the CRS showed statistical improvement. Only one scale, Peer Social Skills, increased by less than the amount required to achieve significance.

If attendance has been identified as one of the referral reasons or goals, daily average attendance is assessed to measure improvement in this area. Last year the mean number of days absent for those specific students declined by almost 50%.

All results in the measures of family and youth success were positive and indicated a significant increase in parental attitude. Additionally, the number of stressful life events and basic needs decreased from pre test to post test. All of these measured areas are predictors for potential child abuse/neglect; therefore the SOPP program has been successful in reducing the potential for abuse/neglect in the families that were served.

Self Evaluation is also a part of the report. 102 child satisfaction surveys were collected. 98% of these children felt that SOPP was 'Helpful' or 'Very Helpful' to them. 99% would recommend the program to a friend. School Principal evaluations are also a part of the report which were favorable to both the specialist and the positive impact of the program.

Evaluation Summary

Sure it looks like we are having fun taking twenty kids (and sometimes their parents) hiking, fishing, bicycling, golfing, bowling, doing community service projects and just hanging out with kids from other districts. However, SOPP and the auxiliary services including RSVP and Child Lures are effectively keeping at-risk youth connected with their families, schools and communities. This summer, we will focus on developing social skills with peers since this was our weakest area with regard to our annual evaluation. These skills are highly linked to school success and in dealing with peer pressure. Therefore, the summer activities and groups will be geared toward improving peer social interactions.

So when you wonder what Prevention is doing and why, you'll know that it is really all about continual quality program improvement to better meet the needs of the children and families we serve!

Ok, the truth is, for the most part it is fun too!

Agency Years of Service

(April—September)

Teri Wright – 19
Kim Ensign – 18
Tami McBride, Dee Jackson – 14
Beth Palmer – 13
Kathy Wright – 10
Sherri Hughes – 8
Alice Stewart, Lisa Ball, Stacia Westbrook – 7
Dottie Anderson, Sabrina Buchanan – 6
Jamie Vuksic – 5
Melinda Meredith, April Jenkins – 3
Stephani Hamm, Diane Iaderosa – 3
Mike Spahr, Tonya Modrzakowski – 2
Mary Wilkins, Heather Mahoney - 1
Emily Erlwein, Christalyn McDonald - 1
Ashley Reese, Cortney Cawley, Emily Reeder - 1
LeAnn Bates - 1

Would you walk to Cancun?

It is 1,297 miles to sandy beaches, ocean views and sunny days. On February 12, 2007, the Human Resource Committee kicked off an event to promote employee togetherness and a healthy lifestyle. Employees who wanted to participate were randomly selected into teams. Participants keep track of the miles they walked or 15 minutes of exercise equals 1 mile. Every week the amounts are turned in and calculated and posted on the wall near the front office. The team who walks to Cancun first will win a dinner at Tampico.

A Work of Heart

The Foster Care and Adoption Unit has recently begun some new recruitment activities in an effort to secure additional foster and adoptive homes for Washington County. As part of this campaign, in early March, billboards advertising the need for new families were posted on Route 60 and on Route 7 next to Lowe's. Phone calls from interested families have begun to come in, and the unit is optimistic about the effectiveness of the billboards. Utilizing other types of mass media, in addition to child-specific recruitment efforts, are next on the agenda for upcoming months.

April is Child Abuse Awareness Month

In a new awareness program this year, Washington County Children Services has partnered with Prevent Child Abuse Ohio in a campaign called Pinwheels For Prevention. In communities throughout the state of Ohio, colorful children's pinwheels have been planted in front of courthouses, playgrounds, libraries and parks in order to raise public awareness of the continuing problem of child maltreatment. Each pinwheel represents a case of child abuse and neglect referred to Ohio public children services agencies in 2005.

In Washington County, 2,063 pinwheels were planted on the National Guard Armory lawn in downtown Marietta and remained on display from April 3rd through April 19th. Because child abuse and neglect is promoted by silence and ignorance, our hope is that this powerful visual symbol will help educate the citizens of Washington County on the prevalence of child maltreatment in our community and ignite action to prevent future occurrences.

In addition to the pinwheel planting, Washington County focused attention on the issue of child maltreatment through several planned events in April, including an Awareness Breakfast in which community partners were recognized for their outstanding service on the behalf of the children in our county. A pinwheel craft activity was scheduled with area K-8th grade students as a forum to begin discussion on the difficult subject, and the agency's yearly 6-hour Child Abuse and Neglect Awareness training was offered to the public on April 19th.

Pick up your free pinwheel today in our lobby or at one of the many public distribution sites. Displaying or wearing a pinwheel in April will show that you cherish every child and support our community's efforts to keep our most vulnerable safe.

For information on how you can help, please call 740-373-3485.

