

REPORT TO THE COMMUNITY | 2017

# Stories of HOPE

Focus on Families



# From the Director's Desk



Patty Harrelson, MSSA, LISW-S  
Executive Director

Last year, I ended my comments in the 2016 Annual Report with: *There are no easy answers when it comes to child welfare, and no one quick fix to solve these issues once and for all. While child abuse and neglect will, unfortunately, never go away completely, Richland County Children Services continues to strive toward that goal, one family at a time.* In this, the 2017 Annual Report, we changed our focus to highlight some of those families and our own people who work together to support safe homes for children in Richland County. We want to place the emphasis on people, not programs. We will, of course, also include statistics and financial information, but I can think of nothing more important than shining a spotlight on some of the people engaged in and with the child welfare system.

We continue to be faced with a crisis of care for our children. In 2010, our placement budget consumed 5.1 percent of our agency expenses. In 2017, it was 22.9 percent of our expenses. In just 7 years, the costs of placing our children has increased 17.8 percent. The real cost of this is an increase of more than \$1 million per year in placement costs since 2013. We place children from newborns to teens who have experienced horrific abuse, neglect, or even the death of their parents from the opioid epidemic. We also must find homes for an increasing number of very difficult-to-place youth through the Juvenile Court. All of our kids deserve homes which are stable and loving, but our teenagers especially need homes which provide understanding and can deal with their trauma experiences. Teens test us all! This is a normal part of their developmental stage, regardless of their background, and happens even in homes where teens did not survive abuse or neglect. It continues to happen when these kids enter our care or the homes of their relatives/kin and is layered with their significant and often misunderstood traumas. These are some of the difficult realities that our foster parents, relatives/kin, and our employees must understand and manage. I tip my hat to anyone willing to answer this call for our kids and who manages the patience and acceptance needed to be exceptional foster parents, kin placements, and caseworkers for our most vulnerable citizens.

In November of 2018, we will be asking our voters to replace a tax levy which was last renewed in 2008 and is based on 1999 property tax values. We work hard to be good stewards of the public trust. The first and foremost public trust we have is our children, and the second is the financial support which our community provides. We will continue to strive to be worthy of both of these sacred trusts. We cannot, however, do this alone. We need not only your financial support, but we also need foster families willing to provide homes for the children in our community who need it most. If you are interested in becoming a foster parent, please reach out to our agency at 419-774-4100.

## OUR MISSION

To lead our community in assuring the safety, well-being and permanency of children at risk of abuse and neglect.

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## ***“Everybody has a Family.”***

**Richland County Children Services Kinship Supervisor Teresa Coll is passionate about this personal belief. “No matter the situation or circumstances every child that comes to this agency has a family,” Coll said. Coll has made it her mission to find the families of children in the Kinship Care program.**

Finding family members and non-custodial parents has taken Coll across various counties throughout Ohio and across state lines.

Kinship Care refers to a temporary or permanent arrangement in which a relative - or a non-related adult who has a long-standing relationship or bond with the child or family — has assumed the substitute care of a child whose parents are unable or unwilling to do so.

Reasons for the need for Kinship Care can include death or chronic illness, substance abuse, incarceration, domestic violence, child abuse or neglect, teenage pregnancy, unemployment, poverty or other problems.

Kinship Care includes relationships established through an informal agreement, a legal custody or guardianship order, or a kinship adoption. Regardless of how or why the Kinship Care arrangement began, these adults are critically important to the care, wellbeing and success of these children in need.

In many instances, Kinship Care providers are grandparents taking on the responsibility of caring for their grandchildren.

Across the United States, more than 2.7 million children now live in the homes of relatives such as grandparents, aunts/uncles, adult siblings and even more loved ones.

About 100,000 children in Ohio live with grandparents. At the end of September 2017, Richland County had 188 children in formal kinship care and another 300 in informal family settings.

All of these families are being served by Richland County Children Services. Workers help families obtain the assistance necessary to care for children they had not planned on helping raise.

Coll has a team of six staff members working with her. She has worked for the agency for 18 years and has witnessed many stories; some too heartbreaking to mention. But each client and case holds a special place in her heart.

“For me it’s not about my position or the money. This job is about people,” Coll said. “I enjoy looking for people seeking families and permanent homes for our children. If it were me I would hope someone would do the same for me and search for my family,” Coll said.

Coll oversees 85 cases and each one is important to her. She exudes genuine compassion and fights for what some would consider impossible obstacles to overcome for the families and children.

“Kinship Care creates a sense of stability and continuity in a child’s life. Kids are able to maintain ties to the community and family which eases the trauma of being forced to leave their own homes,” Coll said.



**Kinship Supervisor Teresa Coll**

Kinship Care allows children to live with people they already know and trust. Traditional foster care, while the only alternative in some instances, does not offer the kind of familiar surroundings and familiar people provided by Kinship Care.

Finding families for a child in the temporary custody of the agency can be challenging. Coll makes hundreds of calls going on the only information she has ... a name.

“My hope is that the name I have will lead to the family of the child for a reunification,” Coll said. Coll feels a sense of peace when a connection has been made with a family.

“Kinship provides a safe place for the child. It’s important to make the connection with the biological parent. Many parents want to be included in these children’s lives,” Coll said.

“It’s all about helping people. We get frustrated at times fighting for our families to stay together. Everyday, we do the best we can to make a difference in the lives of the children and families we serve,” Coll said.



## A Father's Love

Josh Oates is embracing his new role as a single father to his beautiful daughter Nevaeh. The 29 year-old restaurant server is enjoying the active toddler who loves to dance and play games with her father. His day begins around 8 a.m. making breakfast for Nevaeh while she watches her favorite Mickey Mouse cartoon. After breakfast, he dresses her and does her hair.

"Monday's are usually our cleaning day," Oates explains, "We jam out to music while we're cleaning; she loves to dance. We make lunch together then it's nap time. If it's nice outside, we'll go for a walk or we stay inside and work on her alphabet or colors. We'll have pizza for dinner and end the evening with a bedtime story," Oates said.

Oates has been raising his two-year-old daughter for almost a year. The experience has been challenging and rewarding. Their journey began in late spring of 2017, when he met a woman who told him that he may be the father of a child she was raising as her grandchild. She suggested he take a paternity test.

"I was approached at work by a woman who was the parental grandparent of Nevaeh's older brother and had temporary custody of him. She told me that she believed that I was Nevaeh's father. She said her son was listed on the birth certificate as the father, but she believed Nevaeh was not his daughter," Oates said.

"I was shown a picture of Nevaeh. I looked at the picture and I knew she was my daughter. The woman gave me her card, I contacted her the next day and got the number to the caseworker at Richland County Children Services.



Nevaeh Oates and her father Josh Oates

I contacted the caseworker and stated that I suspected I was Nevaeh's biological father. I was told that I could attend a court hearing to learn more about the case," Oates said.

Oates learned that Nevaeh had been placed in the temporary custody of her maternal grandmother. Following the hearing he met with the caseworker to begin the process of establishing paternity. "Because someone else's name was on the birth certificate I felt powerless. I felt I couldn't do anything," Oates said.

The judge ordered a DNA test on May 25, 2017, two weeks later the test was done and in July Oates received the results confirming he was Nevaeh's father. "After I got the results I called my sister, my parents and the caseworker. I asked the caseworker if there was anything to stop me from seeing Nevaeh as soon as possible and they said no I could visit her. I contacted the maternal grandmother and arranged a date to visit Nevaeh," Oates said.

"I was so excited to meet her. I brought her a new outfit, diapers and wolf stuffed toy. She was a little weary at first but she warmed up to me. That was the best day of my life," Oates said. After his first visit, Oates set out the plan to get custody of his daughter.

Oates contacted RCCS to start the reunification process with his daughter. He visited Nevaeh every Monday and Tuesday for several hours at a time for three months. A hearing was held in August 2017 and Oates was granted custody of his daughter.

"There were so many legal barriers I had to overcome to get custody of Nevaeh. 'I'm so glad I never gave up and I'm thankful for the support of the caseworkers at Richland County Children Services. I can't imagine what it would have been like not having Nevaeh in my life, Oates said.

The young father wipes away tears from his eyes when he describes how Nevaeh has adjusted to living with him in her new home. "She is so strong and smart. She's learning something new every day and her vocabulary is growing. I'm shaping her to be a loving person. It's amazing to see her grow up," Oates said.

Oates hopes his experience will encourage other fathers in similar situations to fight for their parental rights. "Play by the rules and exceed the rules to see your child. Seek out the people and resources you need to help you get visitations or gain custody of your child. Don't give up! You can do it!"



# Stories of HOPE

## A New Beginning

*The Parent Partner Stories of Arlana and Deanna*

The word HOPE is defined as “a feeling of expectation and desire for a certain thing to happen.” The word HOPE has a special meaning for parents involved with the child welfare system. The program Helping Ohio Parent Effectively (HOPE) was started by a group of parents calling themselves Parent Partners who at one time had an open case with children services. Parent Partners work to improve the system by being an advocate for parents and supporting child protection case workers with their current caseload.

HOPE is currently active in six counties, including Richland. The mission of HOPE is to utilize the experience of Parent Partners to engage and advocate for other parents currently involved with the child welfare system, ensuring they have the knowledge and support necessary to achieve the best permanency plan for their children. Many of these primary parents have overcome addiction, mental illness, and trauma.

Some of these parents had their rights terminated and their children adopted by other family members. Other parents successfully completed their case plans within the agency units and have been reunified with their children.

HOPE Parent Partners Arlana Strickland and Deanna Williams have overcome the odds. They have survived physical abuse, drug addiction and the temporary loss of their children within the child protection system. These women have faced many challenges, but they refused to be counted out. Today Arlana and Deanna are respected mentors in the HOPE program for Richland County Children Services.

**Arlana works with Mansfield Urban Minority Alcoholism and Drug Abuse Outreach Program (UMADAOP). She's a fighter and determined to prove that anyone can make it if you keep the faith.**

**Looking at her vibrant smile you would never imagine what she has been through.**

An abusive marriage and the birth of her first child opened the door to her addiction to opioids and heroin. “I became an addict after I had my first son. I was prescribed opioids and anti-anxiety medications,” Strickland said.

“It took three to four years before I realized I had an addiction. Then I turned to using powder heroin. I would try anything to help numb the pain of being in an abusive marriage. I was just 20-years old when I started using and I’ve been clean now for more than a year,” Strickland said.

Strickland first became involved with Richland County Children Services in 2007. She had at least 5 cases involving her two sons. Her last case was closed in 2015. Her oldest son is 15 years old and her youngest son is 5 years old. During her time with the agency, Strickland’s parents had custody of her sons through Kinship Care.

It was a painful time, but her family supported her throughout her addiction, case plan and recovery.

“Before I started my recovery I thought I was a good mom. That’s what I told myself. If I went to the drug houses my kids were with me. I never left them with other people. I tried to rationalize it in my head until finally I got help,” Strickland said.

“I was angry, and I resisted the help of my caseworker when I first became involved with RCCS. I felt the agency was trying to take my kids away and I hated them for no reason. At the time I couldn’t see the agency was trying to help me and my children. I would complete my case plan and then I would relapse.



**HOPE Parent Partner Arlana Strickland**

In all my cases with the agency my kids were in Kinship Care with my parents while I went to detox. I know how depressed I was as an addict and I hurt a lot of people including myself. I thought I could never accomplish anything and that I would die in my addiction.

It’s sad I got to that low place in my life,” Strickland said.

With the help of her drug treatment counselors, her family and caseworker she has been sober for more than a year and half.

In March 2017, Strickland contacted the agency to be part of the HOPE program as an advocate to help mentor other parents who are involved with RCCS. She assists with orientation sessions for primary parents, Family Team Meetings, and court hearings.

Strickland has traveled throughout the state of Ohio sharing her story with her sons by her side.

“I’m so glad I’m in this program. It has given me confidence. Instead of being Arlana the drug addict I am someone else. I have my kids with me. They cheer me on and they go with me when I speak. My kids have been through so much. I had to go through some terrible times in my life to appreciate the good life I have now. Recovery is possible. I want other parents to know that you can change your life one day at a time,” Strickland said.



# Stories of HOPE

## A New Beginning

### *The Parent Partner Stories of Arlana and Deanna*

Deanna Williams is thankful to have the opportunity to help parents who have been reunified with their children. The mother of three children is a HOPE Parent Partner mentor and a Recovery Coach with Healing Hearts Counseling Center in Mansfield. She became a HOPE mentor in September 2017.

"I started using drugs at the age of 27. I was having issues with my back and I was diagnosed with Fibromyalgia in 2001. I was prescribed an opioid for the pain. I was living in Kentucky at the time and I was in an abusive marriage which did not help my addiction," Williams said.

In 2009, Williams moved to Mansfield to be closer to her mother in hopes of conquering her addiction. "I struggled for many years trying to stay clean, but the drugs were taking over my life," Williams said. "My mother had legal custody of my kids as I battled my addiction. I was angry at her and RCCS. I felt like the system was attacking me. I didn't understand that they were trying to help me and my children," Williams said.

Williams says she knew it was time to change when she became suicidal.

"I would pray every time I put that needle in my arm that I would die because I believed my kids and my family would be better off without me. My addiction was destroying everything around me and hurting the people in my life I loved the most. I finally made the decision that I would enter into an inpatient drug treatment program," Williams said.

Williams gets emotional when she thinks about the day she left for treatment.

"My mother and my kids saw me off. I will never forget the look of hurt and pain on their faces. It broke my heart. I made the decision that day I would fight for my sobriety," she said. Williams's family and her counselor DeWayne Lee, VP of Operations at Healing Hearts Counseling Center, supported her during treatment at the inpatient drug center.

After completing her treatment Williams was recommended to the HOPE Parent program by the courts.

"I believe I'm fulfilling my calling to help other parents in the program. I hope my story inspires them to never give up. I was so broken. I didn't think I would ever regain full custody of my oldest son. After two years he finally moved back home with me. That was the happiest day of my life," Williams said.

"My children are proud of me! They have attended my recovery meetings with me and my oldest wants to be a counselor because of what he has experienced in his life," Williams said. "I have been clean for 3 years and 4 months. My recovery date means everything to me and I will continue to fight to not lose that date.



HOPE Parent Partner Deanna Williams

I want other parents who have cases with the agency to know that if Arlana and I can do it, they can too. The agency is here to help, and once I realized that, I developed a wonderful relationship with my caseworker," Williams said.

Kinship Navigator Brianne Kindinger says Arlana and Deanna are heroes to many parents in the HOPE program who are fighting for their sobriety and their children. "I've enjoyed getting to know Arlana and Deanna. They are beautiful, amazing women who are strong because of what they have lived through. They have traveled with me across the state sharing their stories and advocating for parents who are going through their own difficult circumstances. They have been recognized for their work with the agency and parents. I hope they know we're here for them. If they fall we're here to lift them up." Kindinger said.





# Community Involvement



Billboard Calendar Contest



"Go Bags" for children in need



Community Meeting on OUR kids

Richland County Children Services employees have participated in a myriad of community events each year. We believe it's a great way to give back to the residents and communities that support the agency each day. Here are some highlights from 2017.



Foster Parent Recruitment



Wear Blue Day



Mansfield Halloween Parade



Girl Scouts Bookbag Donation



# Richland County Children Services Screening / Assessment and Investigations

Richland County Children Services receives and investigates child abuse and neglect allegations. Child safety is the agency's main focus.

## Screening

Richland County Children Services screeners receive calls regarding child abuse, neglect concerns, dependency and other family concerns. Our staff of experienced caseworkers take calls 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

## Assessment Investigation

Caseworkers assess the abuse, neglect, dependency and other concerns by interviewing and observing interactions of the child and family, and by contacting citizens "collaterals" who may have knowledge of a child's safety. Our staff collaborates with local law enforcement as needed on sexual abuse and severe physical abuse cases.

### In 2017:

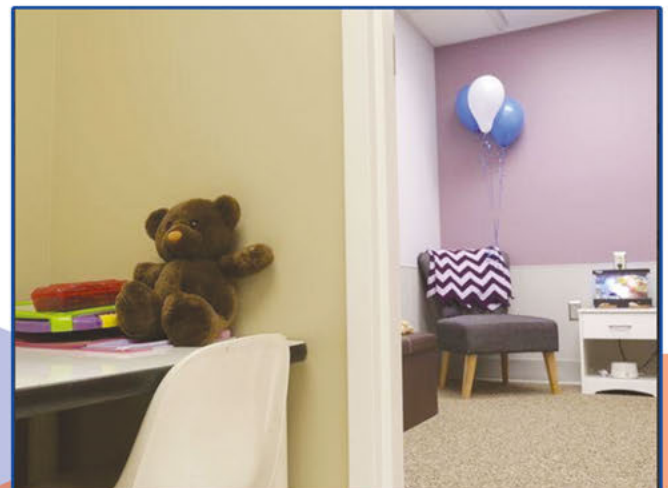
- **6,484 calls into the Agency with child(ren) safety concerns**
- **1,670** screened for assessment/investigation
- **1,228** screened out cases
- **796** information and referral
- **2,306** information only
- **484** assists
- Average calls per day = **18**
- Average screened in intakes per day = **5**



## Forensic Center

The center is a collaboration with OhioHealth Mansfield Hospital, local law enforcement and Richland County Children Services. Victims of sexual assault and domestic violence have a place to tell their stories. The expanded Forensic Department, off of OhioHealth Mansfield Hospital's emergency department, features one examination room, two interview rooms, one children's interview room and two offices.

- **33 Interviews conducted at the center in 2017**





# Richland County Children Services

## Ongoing Services

### Protective Services

Richland County Children Services provides Protective Services with the priority of helping families keep their children safe from abuse and neglect. When this is not possible, children are placed in foster care or with relatives/kin. Caseworkers provide case management by coordinating and making referrals for a variety of services such as: mental and behavioral health services, drug abuse treatment, parenting education, domestic violence support, and facilitating family team meetings. Our staff regularly sees children and families to assist them in making the best decisions possible for child safety.

#### Number of Open Ongoing Services cases

- Average per month = **366**

#### Number of children in Open Ongoing Services

- Average per month = **792**

#### Children in Kinship Care

- Average per month = **237**

#### Number of Kids/Cases in custody at the start and end of 2017

- **80** kids in custody at end of January 2017
- **53** custody cases at end of January 2017
- **95** kids in custody at end of December 2017
- **77** custody cases at end of December 2017

#### Family Support Specialist

Family Support Specialists (FSS) transport kids to and from visits and school and provides visit monitoring for ongoing placement cases. In the fall of 2016, RCCS opened a visitation center on Lexington Avenue.

#### Number of new custody events in 2017

- **75** initial placements in 2017
- **60** custody terminations in 2017

#### Open Protective Supervision Cases

- First of January 2017: **77** cases with Protection Supervision Orders involving **140** children
- End of December 2017: **115** cases with Protective Supervision Orders involving **217** children





# Richland County Children Services Placement Services

## Placement/ Adoption Services

Our placement and adoption services team works to recruit and retain foster parents, finds placements for our kids and works to locate adoptive placements for our youth in agency permanent custody. This team has the extremely challenging role of finding foster parents for our youth.

### In 2017:

#### Children placed in purchased foster care or institutional care

- Average per month = 20
- End of December 2017 = 104

#### Foster Homes

- 60 homes at the end of January 2017
- 56 homes at the end of December 2017

#### Children in Agency permanent custody

- Average per month = 18
- End of December 2017 = 28



**We celebrated the adoptions of 14 children in 2017**

### Subsidy Committee

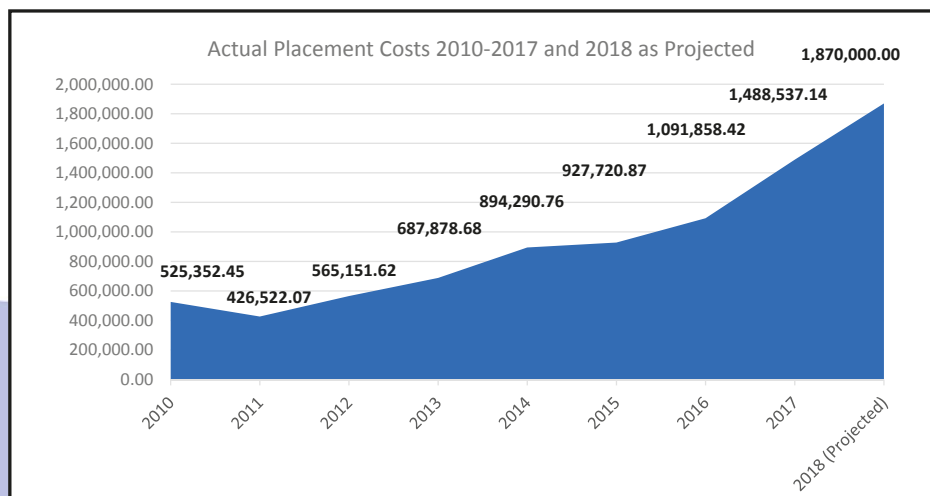
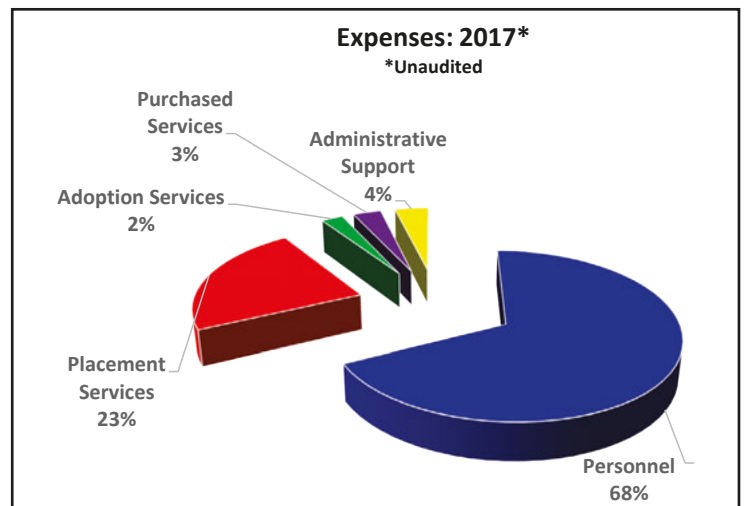
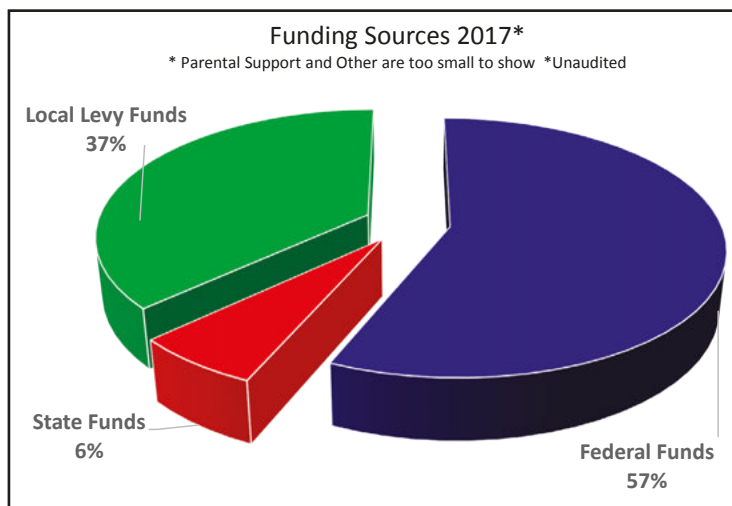
In 2017 we created a new adoption subsidy committee. This committee is made up of three agency administrators. They gather and discuss the information needed to determine a fair subsidy payment for those parents whom adopt our kids.



# Richland County Children Services 2017 Revenues, Expenses

Revenue	*Unaudited	Expenses	*Unaudited
Federal Funds	\$5,498,237	Personnel	\$6,447,329
State Funds	\$631,339	Placement Services	\$2,172,096
Local Levy Funds	\$3,597,684	Adoption Services	\$232,249
Parental Support	\$6,546	Purchased Services	\$300,845
Other	\$25,433	Administrative Support	\$360,155
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$9,759,237</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$9,562,522</b>

The following is a graphic representation of the budget chart above.



The chart shows placement costs associated with the per day costs of placing youth in care. These costs continue to increase and are projected at just under \$2 million in 2018. In addition our days of paid placement has increased from 19,706 in 2015 to 32,590 in 2017, projected to be over 34,000 days in 2018.





**Richland County Children Services**

**731 Scholl Road**

**Mansfield, Ohio 44907**

**419-774-4100**

**[www.richlandcountychildrenservices.org](http://www.richlandcountychildrenservices.org)**

