



GEAUGA COUNTY CHILDREN'S SERVICES

A Division of Geauga County Job and Family Services

Phone: 440-285-9141 or 1-800-209-7590 Email: info@geaugajfs.org

NOVEMBER IS NATIONAL ADOPTION AWARENESS MONTH

Each year, November is recognized as National Adoption Awareness Month. While all adoption-related issues are important, the particular focus of this month is the adoption of children currently in foster care. This year's Adoption Month theme, "Build Capacity to Make Lasting Change," targets adoption professionals by focusing on ways to recruit and retain parents, especially for pre-teens and teens. According to the Child Welfare Information Gateway and AdoptUSKids, five important steps to a successful adoption include: supporting and retaining families, diligently recruit new families, work with diverse populations, proactively find families, and facilitate placements across state lines.

There are seven Geauga County children waiting to be adopted. They range in age from 12-17. Although each case is unique, they have lived with substance abuse, sexual abuse, mental illness or any combination of the three. Their childhoods have been filled with fear, sadness, grief, and rejection. All are waiting for the next chapter of their childhood to begin.

Geauga County Job and Family Services will host an adoption party to celebrate the foster/adoptive parents and foster/adoptive children in Geauga County in the month of November. If you would like more information on becoming a foster/adoptive family please contact Geauga County Job and Family Services at (440) 285-9141 and ask to speak with a Permanency Planning Worker.



SPONSOR A FAMILY-2011



The 2011 Sponsor a Family program is underway. Sponsor a Family matches low income families who need assistance during the holidays with sponsors who would like to help.

For the past 40 years, Geauga County Job and Family Services has coordinated the Sponsor a Family Program during the holiday season. When it first began in 1971, Sponsor a Family provided 2 dozen families with Christmas baskets. This past holiday season, over 630 families, from every geographic location in the county, received help through Sponsor a Family. This included 1,322 children who received toys and gifts. In addition, over 15,000

pounds of food was donated and distributed.

Sponsor a Family supports families, foster children, and seniors in the county. About half of the referrals Geauga JFS receives are matched with a church, organization, company, or individual who will "sponsor" them for the holidays. Those not matched with an outside sponsor will be "sponsored" by Geauga JFS through donations of food and gifts.

The Sponsor a Family Program is supported solely through donations and would not be possible without the generosity of community members. Area schools, businesses, organizations, and churches collect food and toys to donate. Many individuals and families have made donating to Sponsor a Family part of their holiday tradition. Monetary donations are used to purchase meat, food and other items.

Volunteers are essential to the success of the program, spending several days sorting food and gifts. Once the sorting is completed, bags of food for the families and gifts for the children are packed for delivery.

To make a donation, sponsor a family, volunteer time, or for any additional information on the Geauga County Sponsor-A-Family program, contact Sara Shininger at 440-285-9141. Monetary donations are accepted. Checks must be made payable to **Special Services** and may be mailed to P.O. Box 309, Chardon, Ohio 44024. *Please indicate Sponsor a Family in the memo portion of the check.* New or gently used toys, coats and other donations are accepted at Geauga County Job and Family Services, 12480 Ravenwood Drive, Chardon.

The safety and protection of children is always the primary concern when Child Protective Services becomes involved with a family. Knowing the importance of keeping a family intact, the goal of CPS is to achieve reunification whenever possible if a child is removed from their home. The disruption caused when children are separated from their family and social networks can have a negative impact on the child and family. Ohio law requires that a permanent plan for the child must be made within 12 months from the removal, therefore CPS understands the importance of striving for reunification of the family.

Family reunification can be challenging due to the impact of long-standing family dynamics. Intensive family services are frequently required to deal with issues such as substance abuse, parenting skills, mental illness and neglect. A first step is to deal with any immediate risk in the home and determine what support

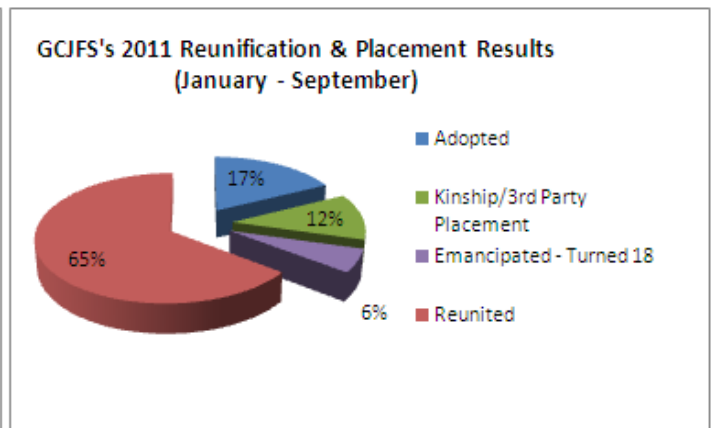
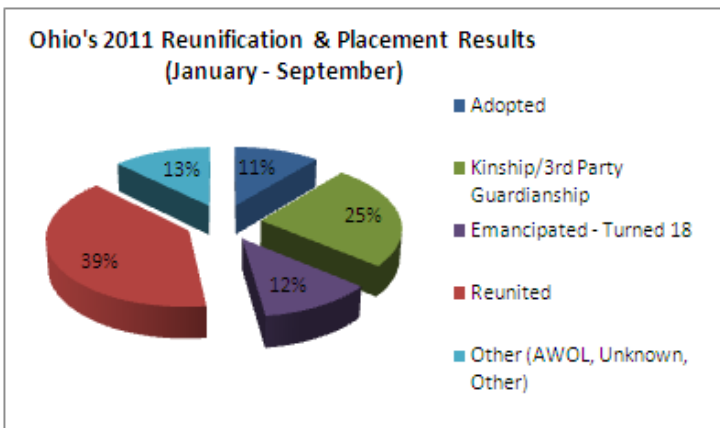
services are required along with developing a case plan and setting goals. Geauga County CPS accomplishes this by connecting the family to clinicians, mental health professionals, and certified drug and alcohol treatment facilities.

The family's progress is reviewed at least every 90 days and CPS is responsible for providing updates to Juvenile Court. During this time, visits between parents and children are vital for successful reunification and are encouraged in order to maintain family connections. Visits may be supervised depending on the family's situation. Another critical component of reunification is regular monitoring by the social worker. Monthly visits between a CPS social worker and the family take place to provide an opportunity to discuss the family's progress towards achieving the goals of the case plan. The family needs to demonstrate the needed changes that will ensure the child's safety. Upon reunification, CPS continues

to provide services for continued success.

In some cases it is not safe or appropriate to return a child to their home. Statistics indicate that the longer a child is out of the home, it becomes less likely that reunification will occur. Reunification is more difficult for parents with multiple problems such as substance abuse and mental illness. If the parent is unable or unwilling to comply with the treatment process, an alternative placement of the child may be the only suitable option. For those cases, Geauga County has directed additional resources to finding suitable relatives or kinship options in the hope of preserving the child's family and social networks.

Nationally about half the children in foster care are reunified with their parents. Currently the 2011 reunification rate stands at 39% through September for the State of Ohio. In Geauga County, the success rate of reunification for 2011 stands at 65%.



WELCOME JUDGE GRENDALL

Gauga County Children Services welcomes Timothy Grendell as our new Gauga County Probate/Juvenile Court judge. Judge Grendell was appointed by Governor Kasich at the end of September. A resident of Chester Township and former State Senator, Judge Grendell has spoken of his excitement and eagerness to serve Gauga County in this capacity. GCJFS looks forward to working hand in hand with Judge Grendell in helping the children and families of Gauga County.

STAFF HIGHLIGHTS

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After two years as a social worker for the Family Preservation Team, Suzi Manning has returned to school to continue her education. Suzi is pursuing her Master's Degree at Case Western Reserve University. We wish Suzi the best in her future endeavors.



Michelle Warren has joined the staff of GCJFS on the Family Preservation Team; and we welcome her back to the agency. Michelle served as a Social Worker from 1998 to 2004. She has recently been assisting the Family Preservation Team with supervised visits as well as working at the Geauga Youth Center and the Juvenile Court. We are pleased to have Michelle return to GCJFS.



Congratulations to Lauren Rakocy on the birth of her first child. Lauren will be leaving the agency to spend time with her family. Best wishes to Lauren and her baby boy.

THE INCREDIBLE EDIBLE ART SHOW

Geauga County Job and Family Services will once again participate in the Incredible Edible Art Show. This event, sponsored by the Geauga County Department on Aging, combines art and fun with a community food drive. Sculptures are created using non-perishable food items which are then donated to the Geauga County Hunger Task Force's food cupboards within our county. Each display consists of approximately 300 food items, enough to provide a week's worth of food for a family of four. This year's theme is "Wonders of the World." Job and Family Services will be constructing the "Temple of Artemis at Ephesus."

The event is open to the public on Friday, November 4th and Saturday, November 5th between 10:00 am and 4:00 pm at the Chardon Senior Center located at 12555 Ravenwood Drive in Chardon. Please stop in to show your support for this great community event.



INDEPENDENT LIVING PROGRAM



Annually approximately 20,000 youths "age out" of foster care nationwide. Growing up in foster care presents unique challenges. A recent study found that 37% of foster youth aged 17-20 had not completed their high school degree or received a GED. Foster youth are more prone to suffer learning disabilities, health, emotional and behavioral problems that can intensify an already

challenging transition. These youth are more likely to rely on public assistance, live in poverty and have a child out of wedlock.

Geauga County Job and Family Services' Independent Living Program (ILP) works with youth starting at the age of 15 ½. Participants in the program complete a life skills assessment to determine strengths and weaknesses. A plan is developed to teach skills such as balancing a check book, completing job applications, searching for housing and completing daily

chores, skills to provide self confidence and self-reliance. County custody is typically terminated at age 18; however, these teenagers are able to work with an ILP worker until the age of 21.

The goal of the ILP is to prepare these youth for responsible adulthood by providing emotional, social and material support. The hope is that by participating in the ILP will help the youth's self-confidence allowing them to want to stay on the right track for their future. Recently one of the participants in Geauga's ILP program was invited to attend the 2011 Career and Entrepreneurship Event for Foster Care Youth in Columbus.

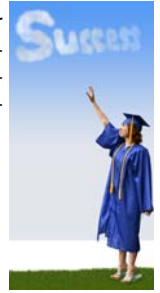
Funding for the ILP program comes primarily from the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999, also known as the Chafee Act. Ohio continues to enhance services and opportunities available for this population. Geauga County remains committed to assisting young adults as they transition from foster care to living independently.

MOOREHEAD SCHOLARSHIP FUND

The Moorhead Scholarship Fund was established in 2008 to honor Paul and Elma Moorehead's passion for foster children. Residents of Chardon, the Mooreheads served as foster parents to more than seventy children between 1969 and 1985. Their entire life was devoted to loving children and giving them a place they could call home.

The fund is for children ages 15 ½ to 21 who are, or were, in GCJFS custody. The fund also assists those who were adopted after the age of 16 or in kinship placements. The scholarship helps to fund secondary education, training programs, or other life-readiness services. Grants have been approved for college expenses, driver's license fees and car insurance.

To make a donation, or for additional information contact the Permanency Planning Team at (440) 285-9141.



THANK YOU FOR A SUCCESSFUL 2011 HELP ME LEARN DAY



Geauga County Job and Family Services would like to thank everyone who participated in the 2011 **Help Me Learn Day** school supply distribution program.

This was the fifth year for Help Me Learn Day. Donations were received throughout the county from individuals, churches, businesses, and organizations. As a result, school supplies were distributed to over 600

children in need from every school district in the county.

A wide variety of supplies including backpacks, paper, notebooks, markers, pencils, pens, crayons, scissors and folders were distributed. Parents who registered for the event were able to bring their children "shopping" for school supplies. Volunteers helped kids fill their bags with items on their school supply lists. Supplies were provided at no cost to families in need. Help Me Learn Day was held at GCJFS and Chagrin Falls Park Community Center.



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