

A NEWSLETTER OF THE CLARK COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF JOB AND FAMILY SERVICES

Clark County DJFS Talks with Surrounding Counties on Regional One-Stop

As the debate over how to organize Ohio's employment services continues, many local government officials remain committed to the idea that decision-making power and flexibility must remain under local control. In an effort to place their agencies in the most favorable position possible, directors and staff from Clark, Champaign, Madison, Logan and Union counties during the last several months have been

Annual Foster/Adoptive Children's Christmas Party

On Sunday, December 7th, approximately 150 foster/adoptive children and their foster/adoptive families enjoyed an afternoon holiday party at the UAW Local 402 Union Hall from 2 to 4 pm. One of the highlights of the afternoon was a visit from Santa Claus. Each child who attended the party received a gift, along with a treat bag given out by Santa. Cookies, punch, singing carols, and visiting with friends rounded out the day.

Each year this party brings joy to children in the department's care, and it provides foster/adoptive families with the opportunity to come together to share in the holiday spirit and to visit with other foster/adoptive families. The generous spirit of the businesses and citizens of Clark County sponsor this party in large part by giving monetary or in-kind donations to provide gifts, fruit, treats, soft drinks, and cookies, and to provide volunteers who assist with various party activities. UAW Local 402 donates the use of their union hall for the afternoon.

We wish to take this opportunity to thank all the individuals and businesses in the community for their generosity and for helping us ensure that Clark County's foster/adoptive children have a wonderful holiday season.

If you have questions, or wish to make a donation, please contact Mary Manning at 937.327.1792. #

discussing the idea of a regional One-Stop office.



This type of consortium has been encouraged by state leaders and is seen by local representatives as the best way to share resources, to maintain individual county identities and to preserve decision-making power at the community level. Each county would continue to work with its own local Board and make its own budget decisions. It would collaborate on projects in which they had common interests and resources, such as economic development, training and state staff time.

Early plans to organize this five-county collaboration would have Clark County as the full-service provider for the entire group. Other counties would either refer residents of their county to Clark or schedule services to be provided in the other One-Stop centers on a part-time basis. This would likely include state staff stationed in Clark to visit the other counties and to provide services on a regular schedule.

It is expected that a final decision on this proposed regional plan will be made sometime between now and June, 2004. #





Vital Statistics



Children under our protection who remain in their own homes

December 2002	March 2003	June 2003	September 2003
403	357	349	292

Children under our protection who are in our custody

December 2002	March 2003	June	September
203	187	201	185

Children receiving a subsidy for child care

December 2002	March 2003	June 2003	September 2003
770	988	873	782

Families receiving on-going cash assistance

December 2002	March 2003	June 2003	September 2003
711	710	708	734

Individuals receiving health insurance through Medicaid

December 2002	March 2003	June 2003	September 2003
23,345	23,604	23,811	23,894

Individuals receiving food stamps

December 2002	March 2003	June 2003	September 2003
13,493	13,298	13,707	13,829

Individuals receiving job training assistance

December 2002	March 2003	June 2003	September 2003
311	406	472	447

Individuals paying on child support orders

December 2002	March 2003	June 2003	September 2003
7,927	8,031	8,341	8,062

Child Support Roundup

Wednesday, November 19 was the annual Ohio Child Support Roundup. Statewide, more than 363 arrests were made in 38 counties. This is the highest number of single-day arrests in the seven years of the event.

In Clark County, nine individuals were arrested. These nine parents owe a combined \$107,052.83 in Child Support arrearage to their children.

While the round up is a statewide event, arrests for failure to pay child support are not uncommon in Clark County. Prior to the roundup, 68 individuals had been arrested this year. It is part of the department's ongoing process to deal with the most difficult cases.

Recent figures from the state show that more than \$70 million is owed in child support arrearage in Clark County. The county is fortunate to have a court system and Sheriff's Department that works so well with department staff in pursuing individuals who try to avoid their obligations. #

County Food Stamp Program Error Rate Continues to Drop

ODJFS officials have recognized Clark County for its outstanding accuracy rate in the Food Stamp Program with the recent release of its final report for Fiscal Year 2002. Clark County workers recorded an accuracy rate of 96.78% in issuing Food Stamp benefits. This marked the second consecutive year of improved performance by Clark County and ranked it 8th among the state's 34 large and medium-sized counties. Clark County improved from 93.92% in FY 2001 and 92.4% in FY 2000. Clark County was recognized at the state's annual Payment Accuracy Conference in Columbus.

The county's improvement can be traced directly to department staff and their focus

Project Jericho Family Lifebook Activity

Project Jericho is a collaborative project between the Family & Children Services Division of the Clark County DJFS and the Clark State Community Performing Arts Center. The Project was designed to create opportunities for at-risk children and their families to have positive in-depth arts experiences which will increase the development of positive social interaction skills, coping skills, appropriate expression skills, and encourage more positive involvement in the community.

During the past two months, 10 families participated in an arts project to develop a family life book. This life book is a recording of family histories through a combination of art mediums including pictures, collages, poetry, and other written material. During this six-week activity, families were encouraged to explore their feelings and history through directed questions and activities led by Kristie Limes, and her staff, along with Family & Children Services staff.

All 10 families expressed their desire that the project not end because it had offered them the opportunity to interact with each other in positive ways, and it had increased their communication skills. Families were pleasantly surprised by their artistic abilities. They also felt that the activity increased their knowledge about how to work together to solve problems and express emotions in a more positive manner. As more families have become exposed to the arts, they are now choosing to use their family time to attend perfor-

mances at the Kuss Auditorium and other arts venues, courtesy of Clark State Performing Arts Center complimentary ticket program for our families. Some family members have even become volunteers at the Kuss. Project Jericho is opening doors for families by offering arts opportunities as a way to increase parenting skills, communication skills, and to broaden their knowledge of family-friendly activities. This collaborative project is an example of how Family & Children Services is using all community resources to more effectively serve the needs of the children and families in Clark County. #

L.E.A.P. Update

The LEAP (Learning, Earning and Parenting) Program has been an established part of the Ohio Works First (OWF) cash assistance program for some time. The purpose of the program is to provide young parents with the education and motivation that they need to build strong and healthy families. This is accomplished, in part, by providing cash rewards for school attendance and for earning high school degrees, or G.E.Ds.

Last September, some significant rule changes in the LEAP program were implemented. They encompassed:

* Teen parents (or pregnant teens) cannot qualify as LEAP participants after they reach their 19th birthday. Prior to the change, 19 year-olds could participate as long as they remained enrolled in school.

* No teen parents may receive OWF cash assistance until after they have completed a LEAP assessment. This assessment requires teens to participate in interviews with county LEAP Coordinators. During these assessments, teens will receive explanations of the program, including the consequences for failing to enroll in school and attend classes.

* Failure to participate in LEAP will result in one of two actions. The teen parent will be removed from the OWF grant until they cooperate or they will be referred to adult work activities. (Children of the teen parent may continue to be on the OWF grant even though the teen parent is removed for failure to participate.)

Incentives for teen parents to participate in LEAP remain the same as in past years. A one time enrollment bonus of \$62 is awarded at the time of initial enrollment. Payments of \$62 per month are made for satisfactory attendance and a bonus of \$200 is paid upon graduation. #

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E-Alert

Food Stamp Program

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on error-prone elements in the Food Stamp program. This has been done through training, redesigning the review process, and emphasizing the importance of individual accountability. Congratulations to everyone who contributed!

In addition, Ohio was recognized for its overall performance, and was named the "Most Improved State" for its accuracy rate of 93.5%. Ohio has improved its rate from a dismal 85.5% in 1995, when it was the second worst in the nation. This year's rate placed Ohio within 0.6% of qualifying for enhanced Federal funding, which could bring significant cash to the state to continue program improvement. #

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or at **rmaynard@clarkdjfs.org** to be put directly on this newsletter distribution list.