

WORKPLUS CENTER NAMES LEHAN PETERS

After an extensive search, the Clark County WorkPlus Board and the Clark County Department of Job and Family Services are pleased to announce that Ms. Lehan Peters has been named the Director of the WorkPlus Center. Ms. Peters will be responsible for the day-to-day operations of the WorkPlus Center, facilitating communication and cooperation between the WorkPlus partners, meeting the on-going needs of employers and job seekers within the area, as well as coordinating activities with the Regional One-Stops.



Lehan Peters

Ms. Peters brings much experience and enthusiasm to this position. For the past 15 years, she has worked in development and fund raising for

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The Clark County
Department of
Job and Family
SERVICES

Victims of Katrina Arriving in Clark County

In the days since Hurricane Katrina ripped through the Gulf Coast communities of Mississippi, Alabama and Louisiana, victims have begun to seek refuge with families in other parts of the country, including Clark County.

At this point, five families have applied for assistance with the Clark County Department of Job and Family Services. In addition, a few county residents have made inquiries about what help may be available when their relatives arrive. So far, all of the contacts have had family members currently living in the county that were willing to provide at least temporary shelter, but there are so many more needs to be met.

While much of the information that we have about disaster programs and regulations is still sketchy, updates continue to come to us at a rapid pace.

[See KATRINA, Page 10]



Clark County Receives Awards!

The National Association of Counties (NACo), and its affiliate, the National Association of County Information Officers (NACIO), have recognized Clark County for its innovative county government program and communication efforts.

NACIO was established in 1966 to promote a better public understanding of the functions of county government between the public and its elected officials. The NACIO Awards of Excellence is recognizing the Clark County DJFS E-Alert publication for its internal, as well as external, communication efforts.

N A C O ' s Achievement Award Program

promotes and recognizes innovative, successful programs that modernize and streamline county government and increase services to residents. This year, Project

Jericho has captured an award for its Project Jericho Family Connections/Summer Arts Camps and Youth Focus Group, which is a collaborative effort between the Clark County Department of Job and Family Services (CCDJFS), and Clark State Community College Performing Arts Center (PAC), which provides performing arts and fine arts workshops, artist residencies and family performances to at-risk youth and families.

Project Jericho

began under a grant from the Ohio Arts Council with a goal of decreasing delinquent behavior of at-risk youth through participation in the arts. In 2003, the project was expanded to offer structured arts activities during supervised visitation times for parents whose children were in foster care or group home placements. In 2004, the project was expanded again to include families involved with CCDJFS whose children

are residing with their families, but may be at risk of removal or have been recently reunified. The program is based on recent research that demonstrates the positive impact of arts programs on at-risk youth and families, including (among other indicators) decreases in delinquent behavior and court referrals, increased communication and social skills, and improved ability to complete home and school tasks. Project Jericho helps build stronger families and a stronger community by changing lives through positive in-depth arts experiences for at-risk youth and families.

Lives of parents and children have changed due to participation in Project Jericho programs. Participants unlock hidden talents due to the positive supportive environment of Project Jericho

[See more AWARDS, Page 10]

Regional Truck Driver Job Fair

As part of the celebration of **Ohio's Workforce Services Month** in September, the Clark County **WorkPlus** Center is partnering with the other four counties in the **WorkPlus** Regional One-Stop system to sponsor a truck driver job fair.

The job fair will take place on Friday, September 16th at the Champaign County Community Center on Highway 68, south in Urbana, from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. This event will allow job seekers to connect with trucking companies to find available employment in the trucking industry.

Area truck driving training institutions will also be on site to answer questions for individuals seeking to be trained as truck drivers. Many of the trucking companies will also have outdoor semi-trailers on display. #



More THAN A Check

In an effort to increase public awareness of child support issues nationally, and in Ohio, August was designated Child Support Awareness Month. Governor Bob Taft issued a proclamation that recognized the role that working partnerships between state and federal agencies, parents, legislators, judges, employers and others play in the state's child support program.

In Clark County, more than 22,000 children currently are involved in the child support system. There are nearly 34,000 adults who are mothers, fathers, or caretakers involved in the lives of these children. The only social service program that affects the lives of more children is public education. Initially, the child support system was designed to reimburse the welfare system for money paid to families with children on public assistance. However, with fewer families relying on public cash assistance, the program is changing. The focus now is to give children the chance for a better life with child support being a reliable source of income. This goal can only be accomplished by working with both parents to make sure children have the financial and medical support

they deserve. In those cases where public assistance is still needed, effective child support collections benefit the Ohio tax payers by defraying the cost of public assistance.

As the focus of the child support system has changed, financial support is just one of many benefits provided to children. According to an article published in "Child Support Quarterly," a publication of the National Child Support Enforcement Association, child support collections have been linked to a reduction in child poverty and reductions in income inequality. Other research shows a positive link between the receipt of child support and cognitive development, educational attainment and grade point average and improved behavior with many children. Families also recognize benefits from child support. Research shows that child support can also affect many decisions involved with formation of the family, including marriage, divorce and unwed births.

Clark County Child Support routinely collects and disburses \$30 million per year. All of the traditional enforcement tools are used, such as income withholdings, interception of federal and state income tax returns, suspension of professional, recreational, and drivers licenses, credit bureau reporting and seizure of bank and financial accounts. The court and Sheriff's Department are important partners in traditional Child Support Enforcement, but in Clark County, tools have been expanded to provide meaningful support to children.

Clark County CSEA administers more than 17,500 active support cases. This should not be surprising in a county that has an average marriage failure rate of 97%. The fact is, for almost every marriage license issued in a given year, there will be one divorce. Over 50% of the families divorcing have children. Additionally, year-to-date, 46% of the children born in Clark County are born out of wedlock.

Children under our protection who remain in their own homes

June 2003	June 2004
736	640
December 2004	June 2005
658	454

Individuals paying on child support orders

June 2003	June 2004
8,341	8,347
December 2004	June 2005
7,938	8,568

QUICK STATS

Individuals receiving food stamps

June 2003	June 2004
13,707	14,752
December 2004	June 2005
15,485	15,605

A quarter-by-quarter look at the conditions and circumstances under which Clark County families live, and the performance of the Clark County Department of Job and Family Services in its response.

Individuals receiving job training assistance

June 2003	June 2004
472	447
December 2004	June 2005
599	473

Individuals receiving health insurance through Medicaid

June 2003	June 2004
23,811	24,620
December 2004	June 2005
25,129	25,498

Children under county protection who are in custody

June 2003	June 2004
201	140
December 2004	June 2005
143	152

Children receiving subsidy for child care

June 2003	June 2004
873	725
December 2004	June 2005
679	690

Families receiving ongoing cash assistance

June 2003	June 2004
708	673
December 2004	June 2005
674	655

Digital *imaging*



Premier Appointment Manager (PAM)

Clark CDJFS is well on its way to converting more than 10 million paper documents to digital images. That means more than just the fast and efficient retrieval of records. It means shorter waits for families and staff, and greater efficiency for taxpayers.

Cutting Through the Paperwork

As part of a digital imaging project, Clark County Department of Job and Family Services (CCDJFS) reviewed products that would interface with existing systems and provide opportunities for greater efficiency.

Premier Appointment Manager (PAM) developed by Northwoods Consulting Partners, Inc. has supplied a complete scheduling application, which is used to keep track of worker schedules, client appointments, staff leave requests, and lobby activity.

Many labor hours are spent in acquiring the appointment data for all case managers, as well as scheduling new customers and the management of follow-up appointments. Likewise, supervisors spend many hours covering appointments for case managers who are unexpectedly off work. This system takes existing manual operations by case managers and front desk staff and automates paper document procedures. PAM also assists by automatically capturing appointment data, develops queues for incoming appointments and walk-ins, plus notifies supervisors

of staff absences. Front desk staff can automatically notify case managers of arriving customers, or customers waiting in reception areas. The system escalates the notification if not acknowledged by the case managers to avoid excessive wait times, as well as providing true information to the front desk staff that can be given to customers. Supervisors or front desk staff also have the ability to move appointments to other case managers for coverage of an absent worker.

This system was implemented last March, and CCDJFS has since seen improvement in the flow of customers in the reception areas and is beginning to capture data that will enable decisions to be made on peak times, no show rates, and other statistics that can lead to improvement in the services provided to customers. CCDJFS is well along in the conversion of approximately 10 million paper documents to digital images. This will save time and money by eliminating numerous steps and duplications, while providing better service as other uses for PAM are identified for all divisions and departments. #



Child Support Involves More Than a Check

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Research and experience tell us that many of these children are at a tremendous disadvantage. These are problems that are bigger than child support checks can solve.

The county Department of Job and Family Services offers several support programs available to families with children, whether parents live together or not. These programs better meet the needs of the changing family structure. During 2004, planning began on the county's early intervention approach to child support. One part of this was working with the national Marriage Savers organization to design a program for non-married, child support clients after the birth of their children and separated parents with a temporary child support order. The goal is to improve child well being. There are programs that provide parents with strategies to strengthen their relationships, eliminate the need for child support, and provide the opportunity for more children to grow up in healthy homes. If the ideal of the traditional family is not possible, families still need help to communicate and work together to further the best interest of their children. #

WORKPLUS

VITA Program Completes Successful First Year

Staff and volunteers at the WORKPLUS Center were recognized in July for their efforts in contributing to a successful first year as an IRS certified VITA (Volunteer Income Tax Assistance) Program. This program provides free tax preparation assistance and electronic filing to Clark County residents with simple 1040EZ and 1040A returns. This service is done in partnership with the IRS, the Clark County Department of Job and Family Services and partners at the WORKPLUS Center.

During the 2005 tax season, volunteers completed a total of 61 returns for both individuals and families. While this number was less than expected in the first year, it represented some significant benefits to those who took advantage of the service. Most notably:

- 1) Households collected a total of \$65,073 in Federal Income Tax refunds, or an average of \$1066.77 per return; and**
- 2) Households collected an additional \$28,496 in Earned Income Tax Credits, or an average of \$467.15 per return.**

Plans are already being made for the 2006 program with training and recruitment of volunteers now underway. It is anticipated that the program will grow significantly as the community becomes more aware of the program.

Special recognition is in order for the program coordinator, Beth Patton, and the staff of volunteers. Participating in the first year of operation were: Robert Severt, Brenda Sims, Tiffany Stewart, Tondalaya Hendricks, Karen Simms, Jennifer Smith, Lynn Noble, Sandra Crawley, Kim Dysert, Marc Holt, Wendy Holt, Jennifer Moorman, Julie Prugh, Donna Phipps, Mark Miller, Jennifer Dye and Sally Wones. #

Susan Staton Has a Knack for Finding People



Sue Staton must love mystery novels. Sue, an employee of the Clark County Department of Job and Family Services for over 19 years, has a knack for finding people. For one custodial parent, that knack was quite beneficial.

Sue works in the Child Support Enforcement Division. For many years she specialized in establishing paternity of children in the county. Recently, her job duties changed. For the last six months, Sue has worked on locating custodial and non-custodial parents so that child support payments can be processed. When asked why Sue was given this job duty, the answer was "If anyone can find someone, it's Sue."

At the beginning of this summer, a supervisor at child support challenged Sue to locate a custodial parent. After reviewing the case, Sue found that in 1994, the custodial parent relocated and never reported a new address. For many years, the agency has attempted to locate the parent, but to no avail. However, since that time, the non-custodial parent has been paying child

support for her child. Sue began her exhaustive search using various techniques and record searches. On July 1, the custodial parent was located. Sue was pleased to inform the parent that \$18,602.75 was waiting to be sent to her. Sue said that this was one of the best "finds" that she has ever accomplished.

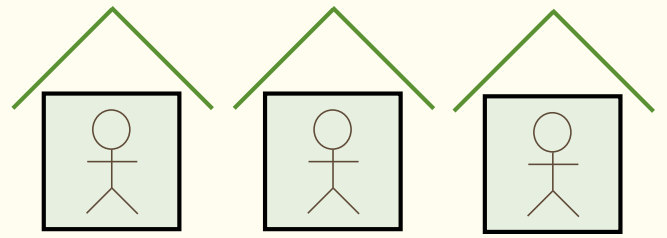
When asked about her work, Sue said that often the work can be frustrating when hitting a dead-end. But when a location is made and monies are dispersed to a custodial parent, or, in the other case, when a non-custodial parent is located and orders can be established for payments, it is very rewarding.

Sue Staton is just one example of the many dedicated employees employed by the county's Department of Job and Family Services. Thank you Sue for your tireless efforts! #

Electronic Disbursements to Become Mandatory

Effective October 1, all new child support cases will be required to have child support payments put on an **Ohio E-Quick Pay Debit MasterCard**, or arrange for direct deposit to a checking or savings account. Current cases will be phased in, and it is expected that in January 2006, Clark County will begin the phase in for all cases that have received a payment within the last year.

In 2004, Ohio introduced the E-Quick Pay Debit MasterCard. Child support payments received are put on the card, giving the card holder access to funds much more quickly than by waiting for checks in the mail. For those who do not want the card, direct deposit is an equally fast way of gaining access to child support money.



Home Alone in Clark County

Once the school year starts, the Family & Children's Services Division receives many calls from interested persons wanting to know the rules for leaving children home alone. According to Census Bureau data from 2000, about 2.4 million grade-school children nationwide with working mothers are home alone for a certain amount of time each day. Although any data regarding specific numbers in Clark County are not available, experience within the division clearly indicates that a significant number of children are left home for periods of time, both before and after school hours.

One of the questions most often asked is, "How old does a child have to be in order to stay home alone?" The truth is that Ohio has not legally set specific age limits for staying home alone, although Ohio law does make it clear that the parent, guardian, or legal custodian may be held responsible for what happens to a child in their absence.

One of the most important things that people should remember is

that it is important to know the child in question. Some children are mature at age 10 or so, while other children may not have developed the maturity to be left alone at age 15 or 16. The following tips should serve as a guideline to leaving children at home "BUT" remember that anything can happen in a short amount of time, and as a parent/caretaker, you are still held accountable for what happens while you are gone. Make sure that you consult with other professionals, such as your child's pediatrician, school officials, or the Family & Children Services division, if you are concerned about the appropriateness of leaving your children home alone.

Talk to your child • How do they feel about being left home alone? For an hour? For the evening? If they are uncomfortable, do not force the issue. Hire a baby sitter or have them go to a neighbor/friend's house.

Take a trial run • Do a practice run for an hour or so while you are nearby and easily accessible. Talk to your child about how it felt.

Rules of safety • Does your child know the basic rules of safety,

i.e. don't talk to strangers, don't accept candy or anything else from strangers when you are not around, don't open the door to strangers, etc.

Phone list • Make sure your child has all the important phone numbers handy, such as 911, your work/cell number, the neighbor's number, a trusted family friend's number. Teach your child what to tell people in case of an emergency.

Fire drills/safety • Make sure your child knows what to do in case of fire. Make sure the smoke alarms are working and that they know where the fire extinguisher is if you have one. Practice escape routes from your home. Make sure they know to leave immediately, call for help, and not to try to put out a fire themselves. If you have a second story, have portable escape ladders handy and make sure your child knows how to use them. Also, be certain that carbon monoxide detectors are in working order with fresh batteries.

Deadbolts • Make sure all entrances to your home, including the garage, have good dead bolt locks in working order. Anchor

Home Alone in Clark County

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the dead bolts to the joist of the garage door and not the molding.

Alarm System • If you have an alarm system, be sure your children can tell if it is on or off, how to set it, and how to disarm it.

Appliances • Have rules for the appliances your children can use without your supervision. Make

sure they know how to operate the appliances they are allowed to use, and how to detect if they are not functioning properly.

Answering the phone/door • Have a clear set of rules for answering the phone/door. Practice with your children so they know how to answer without letting on that they are alone, i.e. "Mom/Dad is busy

right now. Can I take a message?" You may not want your child to answer at all. If so, make sure they know that.

Make house rules - Make sure that you have written out house rules for concerns, such as when to do homework, TV watching, chores, having friends over (not recommended if there is no supervision), cooking et cetera BEFORE you leave your child home alone. Clear expectations must be set so there will be no confusion for your child with respect to acceptable behavior.

Common sense judgment • If you are getting many calls from your child, try to determine if your child is merely testing limits, or if there is a real problem with them being home alone. For some children, being home alone is too much responsibility. Consider your child's physical, mental, and behavioral health. You might want to sign your child up for a baby sitting course, such as those offered by the American Red Cross. You may need to reevaluate the arrangements you have made for your child and seek other alternatives. If for any reason you have doubts, it is better to be on the cautious side and wait awhile before leaving your child home alone.

For many children, being home alone represents a rite of passage with respect to growing up. The opportunity to take on more responsibility helps develop decision-making skills and self-esteem. As a parent/caretaker, you will need to have a well-thought out plan for your child, set clear rules and expectations, and use good judgment. #



Electronic Disbursements to Become Mandatory

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Statewide, 34.6% of all cases have some sort of electronic disbursement. In Clark County, approximately 30% of cases receive electronic payments. It is estimated that electronic disbursement efforts to date have, at a minimum, saved \$235,878.00. By moving to the mandatory program, the State Office of Child Support estimates initial savings of \$2 million in the first year, with savings increasing in future years. #

Clark County Receives Awards!

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staff, volunteers and artists. Parents are learning appropriate social skills, how to access community resources, and how to develop a repertoire of constructive activities to engage in with their children. Parents with children in care also get the chance to interact with parents whose children have been reunified, giving them hope that they also can reunite with their families.

For CCDJFS staff, one particular situation proved the power of Project Jericho. A mother was involved in *The Life Book Program* series with her son. CCDJFS had made a determination prior to the series that permanent custody would be pursued because the mother had not been working on her case plan. During the course of the series, it became apparent

to the mother that her son really did have a bond with her. As the mother realized that she was of importance to her son, she began to work diligently with CCDJFS to actively pursue reunification. In 2004, Project Jericho's *Life Book Program* was so successful, it was featured in three statewide social services conferences across the Ohio, and was so well received that it was featured in "The Front Line," a statewide newsletter for social service agencies. A variation of *The Life Book Program* is now being replicated in Greene County.

The value of Project Jericho is evident to outside persons as well. Shaun Baker, from WorldStage stated, "I love the rapid changes I've seen in the children of Project Jericho. They create a painting,

put on a play, write a poem, and suddenly they know they have value. You can see it in their eyes, and if you don't believe me, I'll show you the video. I have hours of tape showing kids at the beginning of a project looking sullen, mean, broken. By the end, they're joyful, generous, and inspired. Project Jericho is creating better people, and I can't think of a more important work of art!" #

Katrina

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At this time, we know that all of our programs are able to waive many of the verification requirements that are normally required because most of the documents and resources that people would need are simply not available to these victims. Our primary areas of concern are that applicants have come from one of the declared disaster areas, and that we have some assurance of identity.

We have been able to provide expedited food stamps to all of our applicants and have referred all of them to the Red Cross who can provide some cash assistance and hopefully the connection with FEMA that will provide more comprehensive assistance. In the mean time, our agency will also provide medical and cash assistance in most cases and use our network of community partners to plug any gaps in services that are needed. For more information on Katrina disaster programs, call 937-327-1700, and choose the Employment & Benefits option. #

LEHAN PETERS NAMED

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for Wittenberg University, most recently as the Director of the Wittenberg Fund. Prior to joining Wittenberg, she worked at the Credit Life Insurance Company. Ms. Peters holds a Bachelor of Arts from Wittenberg University.

Since beginning her position on August 1, Lehan has met with partners within the WorkPlus Center, employers within the county and other constituents. When asked about her new position, Ms. Peters enthusiastically smiles, saying that "she is pleased to be working with such a diverse and committed group of people."

If you have not had the opportunity to meet Lehan, please do not hesitate to contact Ms. Peters at 937-327-1962 or petersl@odjfs.state.oh.us. #

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Forward this pdf. file as an attachment,
and encourage others to contact Robin Maynard at
937/327-1859,
or at rmaynard@clarkdjfs.org
to be put directly on this newsletter distribution list.