Our Mandate: Sandusky County Children Services is mandated by the Ohio Revised Code to do all of the following:

- investigate allegations of child abuse, neglect and dependency
- make reasonable efforts to prevent the removal of children from their homes
- provide placement services to children who cannot remain in their own homes
- provide permanency for all children in our care
- ensure that the child's best interests are always our main consideration

In order to achieve our mission and fulfill our mandates, the Sandusky County Children Services Unit works very closely with members of the community, other social service agencies, schools, churches, law enforcement and the court system. Cooperation and coordination with all of these entities are essential in order to ensure we protect the children of Sandusky County. Furthermore, each individual can play a role in helping us to achieve this goal. Whether you report concerns regarding a child or offer assistance to a family in need, as a community we can all contribute to a safer future for our children.
Intake, Investigations and Assessments

Intake is typically the initial point of contact at the agency. Intakes Services are available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

In 2019, the agency received a total of 2276 intake calls. Of this total, 351 were opened for investigation or assessment, 365 were information/referral calls and 1560 were screened out as they did not contain information that would warrant further Children Services involvement.

During the Investigation or Assessment Stage the assigned worker will conduct home visits and in-depth interviews to help determine the level of risk to the child and the need for any services. Most times, children can be safely maintained in their own homes. However, there are times it is determined a child is not safe in their own home. The child must then be removed and placed with relatives or in another setting such as a foster home, group home, or residential center.

Differential Response

Ohio has a Differential Response child protection system. This means children services agencies have two options for responding to accepted reports of child abuse and neglect: a Traditional Response pathway and an Alternative Response pathway. Both pathways allow children services staff to address the unique safety concerns, risks and situations of each family in a way that is collaborative and respectful. In both cases, the primary goal is child safety.

The Traditional Response is always required for reports of sexual abuse, abuse resulting in serious injury, and whenever children are determined to be in serious or immediate risk of harm. It may involve court intervention and will also result in a determination/finding about the allegation.

The Alternative Response is used when reports of abuse or neglect do not allege serious or imminent harm. It involves safety-focused partnerships with families and does not result in a determination/finding about the allegation.

Both pathways require caseworkers to complete Safety, Risk and Comprehensive Family Assessments to gather information about the family’s strengths and needs.

In 2019, the agency opened 351 investigations/assessments. There were 769 children involved in these investigations/assessments.

In 2019, the agency opened 160 Alternative Response assessments. Of this total, 104 were classified as physical abuse, 54 were classified as neglect, and 2 were classified as emotional abuse.

Investigations/Assessments by Allegation Type
Physical Abuse: 180
Sexual Abuse: 49
Neglect: 55
Emotional Abuse: 2
Dependency: 39
Family in Need of Service: 26

Number of Children Involved in Investigations/Assessments by Allegation Type
Physical Abuse: 377
Sexual Abuse: 121
Neglect: 135
Emotional Abuse: 5
Dependency: 83
Family in Need of Service: 48
The Ongoing Services that are offered to a family can occur in cases where a child is still in the home (protective supervision) or after the child has been removed (temporary custody). In both situations, the caseworker involved with the family will develop a Case Plan to build upon the family’s strengths and help them overcome any identified weaknesses. Once the family has reduced the risk in their home to an acceptable level, the case will be closed (protective supervision), or in situations where the agency has custody, the child will be returned home. The agency will then monitor the home for a period of time before closing the case.

### Placement Costs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Cost</th>
<th>County Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>$1,682,309.06</td>
<td>$1,214,142.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>$1,774,624.35</td>
<td>$1,182,524.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>$1,303,008.11</td>
<td>$937,532.87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Visitation

Children who have regular and frequent contact with their family while in foster care have a greater likelihood of reunification, shorter stays in out-of-home care, increased chances re-entry will not occur and experience overall improved well-being. Furthermore, visits between parents and children provide parents with the opportunity to learn and practice parenting techniques/skills, give the agency an opportunity to observe and assess families and their progress and ultimately promote the goals of safety, child well-being and permanency. The agency offers an extensive visitation program for the families with whom we work. In 2019 the agency offered 298 visits.
Child welfare agencies are struggling to find homes for the children that need to be removed due to parental drug abuse. It can be more difficult to find appropriate relative placements as, many times, opioid use is multi-generational. And the costs associated with placing more children for longer periods of time continue to rise. Additionally, child welfare workers, who are often the first to respond to the homes of opioid-addicted parents, suffer from secondary trauma and burnout as a result of dealing with the tragic situations they see every day. They are further frustrated by the inability to reunify children with their families due to the high incidence of relapses associated with opioid use.

The impact the opioid epidemic is having on children has received very little attention. The long-term effects will most likely include behavioral issues, learning disabilities and developmental delays. More needs to be done across the state to address both the immediate and future needs of these invisible victims.
Foster Care and Adoption Services

Foster parents provide temporary care to children who are in the agency's custody. When a child is in the agency's temporary custody, reunification is almost always the goal. Foster parents have a responsibility to help the agency and the child achieve this goal. Some of the things that a foster parent can do to help with this objective are: transporting the child to visits with their family, offering support to the family by listening to their needs and offering them advice, helping to reestablish a bond between the child and the family by sharing information about the child with the family or allowing visits to occur in the foster home, involving the family in activities like birthday parties for the child, doctor appointments, athletic events, etc. Each case is different and therefore, the level of involvement with the family will vary. Foster parents are expected to provide more than just food, clothing and shelter for a child in their home. They need to allow that child to share in their experiences and become part of "their family" so that the child may succeed and grow during their placement. Each foster parent can make a significant difference in a child's life.

Adoptive parents provide a "forever family" for children in the agency's permanent custody. Just like foster parents, adoptive parents need to work hard to incorporate the child into their family so that they may be successful not only in the placement, but in life. Once the child's adoption is finalized, the adoptive parents take on full responsibility for that child's health, education, and overall well-being.

Applicants can choose to be licensed as a Foster Home, approved as an Adoptive Home or opt for Dual Licensure/Approval which allows them to accept both foster and adoptive placements.

January 2019:
Total # of Licensed homes= 15
• Foster/Adopt=13
• Foster only=1
• Adopt only=1

December 2019:
Total # of Licensed homes= 19
• Foster/Adopt=17
• Foster only=1
• Adopt only=1
Independent Living Services

Independent Living Services are provided to children in the agency’s custody starting at the age of 14 years. The children learn skills in a variety of areas to prepare them to live on their own. Topics covered in this program include: budgeting, job hunting, finding and maintaining an apartment, general hygiene and health issues, self-esteem building, community resources and educational opportunities just to name a few. Each child is assessed at the beginning of the service to determine what skills they have and what areas need further improvement.

Post-Emancipation Services

The services available through the Post-Emancipation Program are the same as through the Independent Living Program but are offered to children age 18-21 years who have already emancipated from the foster care system. These services are completely voluntary, but often essential to ensure the success of youth after leaving care.

Total Number of Youth Receiving Independent Living Services in 2019

16

Total Number of Youth Receiving Post-Emancipation Services in 2019

0
Our Mandate: Sandusky County Adult Protective Services is mandated by the Ohio Revised Code to investigate allegations of abuse, neglect (including self-neglect) and exploitation on adults age 60 and over. Ongoing protective services will be offered if determined necessary by the Department. Furthermore, the agency also offers voluntary services to adults who are 45-59 years old.

To achieve our mission and fulfill our mandates, Sandusky County Adult Protective Services works very closely with members of the community, other social service and health care agencies, churches, law enforcement and the court system. The Sandusky County Adult Protection I-Team has been in existence since 2015. A group representing 12 different community organizations meets monthly and focuses on improving senior services in Sandusky County through increased communication, cooperation, and service planning. Their 2019 Strategic Plan includes developing a volunteer guardianship program and providing community education for professionals on elderly abuse and neglect. Furthermore, each individual can play a role in helping us protect the elderly members of our community by reporting concerns regarding an adult or offering assistance to an elderly person in need.

In 2019, the agency received a total of 349 intake calls in the APS Unit. 39 calls were opened for further investigation. One case was opened for Ongoing Adult Protective Services in 2019.
Sandusky County Children Services implemented the 30 Days to Family Program this summer, taking their first case in July.

30 Days to Family is an intense, short-term intervention developed by the Foster & Adoptive Care Coalition to:

1) Increase the number of children placed with relatives when they enter the foster care system
2) Ensure natural and community supports are in place to promote stability for the child.

The goal of the program is to locate placement, back-up placement and as many natural supports as possible within 30 days of taking custody. The specialist is required to find no fewer than 80 family members per case.

Sandusky County has had four, 30 Days to Family cases since the onset of the program involving 5 children. The 30 Days specialist has located 467 family members for 5 children. Four of the 5 children have been successfully placed with family, saving approximately $11,800.00 in placement cost.