

Sandusky County Children Services Annual Report 2022



Director: Melanie Allen



*Workforce & Initiatives Program
Manager: Casey Morrow*



Administrator: Tami Ward

Our Mission:

Sandusky County Children Services is committed to protecting abused, neglected, or dependent children while also recognizing the importance of preserving the sanctity of the family. This is achieved by assisting families to become self-sufficient and able to provide a safe and stable environment for their children through the utilization of community resources.

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 these entities are essential in order to ensure we protect the children of Sandusky County. Furthermore, everyone can play a role in helping us achieve this goal. Whether you report concerns regarding a child or aid a family in need, as a community we can all contribute to a safer future for our children.

Our Mandate:

Sandusky County Children Services is mandated by the Ohio Revised Code to do all 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 the child's best interests are always our main consideration

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Intake and Investigation Units



Meagan Myers is the intake and investigations supervisor. Meagan's primary role is the screening of intakes, supervising 4 investigators, making decisions for investigators, responsible for the camera system in visitation rooms, and meeting with caseworkers weekly to assess where they are at with their cases. An intake is a report of abuse, neglect, or dependency. Intakes are reported and documented in our child welfare computer system. Intakes have identifying information on families and the concerns or allegations. In 2022, Sandusky County Children Services had 2030 intake calls. 296 intakes were screened in. 134 of the screened in intakes were Traditional Response while 162 were Alternative Response. 654 children were involved within these cases. The Alternative Response investigators are considered a softer approach of investigating. Alternative Response investigators partner with families whose cases are open because of dirty homes, domestic violence, and marijuana abuse. The Traditional Response investigators handle more serious investigations consisting of sexual abuse, severe physical abuse, and serious drug use. Investigators have panic buttons on them when at a home visit. The purpose of the panic buttons is to protect caseworkers when in danger. When a panic button is pressed, law enforcement is immediately notified and sent to the investigator's location. A body camera is worn to protect investigators while on home visits. Investigators may use body cameras for forensic interviews, while in the field, or for training purposes. Meagan stated she enjoys supervising the new START program, building relationships in the community with other professionals, having broad knowledge, supporting workers, and never having a boring job. Meagan stated a barrier is hiring new people and the turnover rates.

Ongoing Unit



The Ongoing Unit is essential to children services. It is supervised by Jessica Murphy and Summer Repass who each supervise 3 ongoing workers amongst other duties. The ongoing supervisors have many responsibilities including meeting with workers weekly for case updates, reviewing and approving work, completing tracking so assignments are done on time, and make case decisions for both emergencies and non-emergencies on cases. After an investigation is completed, a case may be passed for ongoing services to continue helping the family. Ongoing workers have a multitude of responsibilities such as family team meetings, attending court hearings, supporting families while in services, drop ins, drug screens, tracking progress, making referrals, and following up, activity logs, working with the courts and CASA, making monthly home visits and so much more. An ongoing case is generally opened from 6 months to 2 years. There are three types of ongoing cases. A voluntary case is done when the family agrees to work with the agency without court involvement. Protective Supervision cases have a complaint filed with juvenile court and the families are provided a case plan to complete with services. In protective supervision cases, the children are in the home with their parents or reside with kinship caregivers. Temporary Custody cases also require a complaint be submitted to court, along with a case plan, however the children are in the custody of the agency and placed in a foster home. Caseworkers are required to see all families and children monthly or more if needed regardless of what type of case it is. Ongoing worker, Johanna Baun stated "My favorite part of the job is helping/working with the families for them to be successful." In December 2022, Sandusky County had 66 open ongoing cases, servicing 116 children. There were 19 children in custody and 63 children placed with kin.



Foster Parents



Sandusky County Foster Parent Spotlight – Dave and Hope Sheidler.

Dave and Hope began fostering in 2015. They did not enter the decision to foster/adopt lightly. Prior to making the fostering decision, Dave and Hope were interested in adopting internationally. Nothing in the process seemed to be going their way and they decided to pursue foster care and adoption locally. Fostering children was not something the couple entered lightly. They had a 10-year-old daughter, Eden to consider. Dave and Hope were accustomed to welcoming friends, and family into their home for holidays and dinners and felt fostering would be similar. The couple was familiar with foster care as Hope's parents, Gene and Norma Schumacher began fostering when Hope was 8 years old and did so for nearly 20 years with over 35 placements. Hope and Dave knew fostering was a commitment and one that would stick with them forever. Her father, Gene, walked a previous foster child down the wedding aisle. After Hope's mother passed away, Gene became a CASA volunteer and continued his journey helping children until his recent passing in 2022.

Hope felt her parents were very cool with things, they looked so graceful and took things in stride. Dave and Hope aspired to be this way. When the couple began fostering children, they found it difficult to watch kids steal and lie, it was frustrating and hurtful, however they understood kids did not do this maliciously. This was an obstacle they had to overcome. Dave and Hope have fostered 7 children since they became licensed in 2015. The placements lasted anywhere from 6 months to 2 years, 4 of which were adopted by the Sheidlers. Dave, Hope, and Eden continue to have contact with the 3 other children they fostered. One lives with his father and the sibling group of 2 live with their grandparents.

Dave and Hope find many positive aspects to fostering children. The couple loved seeing a dad receive custody of his child, he accepted help from the agency and took in the support offered by his family. The sibling group went to their grandparents, Dave and Hope explained they led a different lifestyle, but they loved the children and family was the best thing for them. The couple find it amazing to watch kids come to their home and be a part of their family. They interact with their extended family and begin to understand what that is like. Dave and Hope enjoy seeing the changes and development of the children. They develop skills and the couple see the potential for what they can become.

Fostering children can also be challenging. Watching the children come and go from visits, not being reunified with the family they know, and reacting to the disappointment is extremely difficult. They found they needed to help children understand some of the things they felt were normal were not a life they should live. Dave and Hope stated "A lot of people feel they should foster, but it's not for everyone. Fostering is the hardest thing we've ever done in our life. It's satisfying and worth the investment, but it's not easy. Kids need so much more than love."

Dave and Hope have been licensed foster and adoptive parents for 7 years and cared for 7 children. They have no intention of stopping but are currently taking a pause for time to care for their family. They expressed they would know when they were ready to bring more children into their home.

This summary was written prior to Dave's untimely and unexpected passing on January 25, 2023. Our thoughts and prayers are with Hope, the children, and their family.

Placement and Program Unit



The Placement and Program Unit consists of Foster Care, Adoption, Kinship, and Interstate Placement (ICPC). This unit is supervised by Jessica Murphy and include Caseworkers Jackie Hamann and Bridget Coleman. The Placement and Program Unit licenses and approves Family Foster and Adoptive homes. To approve these homes, the Caseworker must be trained as an Assessor. Jackie Hamann is the Foster Care Specialist and is assigned to all Foster and Foster/Adoptive Homes with Sandusky County. Jackie licenses these homes and becomes their “go to” person for questions related to fostering children. Jackie oversees these homes to ensure they are compliant with the many rules of the state of Ohio for foster caregivers. Jackie completes recertifications every 2 years for these families and any household changes that occur during their licensure. Jackie speaks with and/or meets with her families monthly to keep the lines of communication open. In 2022, there was an average of 12 Foster and Adopt homes in Sandusky County.

Bridget Coleman is the Adoption worker at the agency. Bridget has a caseload of children who are in the permanent custody of the agency and awaiting adoptive homes. Bridget diligently works to match children with their forever families – locating homes for many hard to place children including preteens and teenagers. In 2022, there were 5 children with finalized adoptions. Bridget also approves adoptive families to adopt and assists them in locating children to make a part of their family. Children in planned permanent living arrangement (PPLA) are also on Bridget’s caseload. These are age 16 and older teens who continue to have a relationship with their parents, however, cannot reside in the home with them. Jackie and Bridget also complete homestudies for relatives and kin who are interested in placement of children we are working with. A record check of the individual and safety audit is completed to ensure the safety of all children. Should children we are working with have relatives out of state who could be approved for placement the agency must go through the ICPC placement process. Paperwork is sent to the receiving state and the child welfare agency completes the homestudy. The same is also done for out of state children needing placement with relatives in Sandusky County.

Treatment Foster Care



Sandusky County recently began a Treatment Foster Home Program that was established in December 2021. This program is a Tri County collaboration with Wyandot and Seneca counties; these homes can be shared between the counties. The goal of the Treatment Program is keeping kids who have a higher level of needs out of congregate care and in communities and family like settings while case plan goals are being met by the family. The Treatment Unit consists of Jenni Zaika, the Treatment Foster Care Program Lead. Jenni is currently searching for a Family Recruiter. Once the Unit has a total of 8 Licensed Treatment Homes, the agency would be searching for another Treatment Caseworker.

There are 3 different Tiers of Treatment Foster Homes and the home identified for the child/children would be based on their level of need. Tier I is the lowest level; Tier II is the middle level and Tier III is the highest level of behaviors and therefore would need more safety measures in place and all alternate care providers must complete training to be approved. Tier III homes also must complete a 40-hour crisis intervention training. Treatment resource families are considered “professional parents”, having experience in providing direct care or services to children personally or professionally; an example of treatment parents are people who work as nurses, counselors, teachers, or law enforcement officers. Tier III homes must complete a 40-hour Crisis Training.

Currently, the Treatment Foster Home Program has licensed 2 Treatment Homes and have 6 pending homes.

START Program



In 2022, Sandusky County began Ohio START; Sobriety, Treatment and Reducing Trauma. Meagan Myers, START Supervisor states the agency has been working on getting the program up and running in Sandusky County. Other counties had piloted the program and found positive results to working with families with substance abuse disorders. Meagan states this is an intensive approach to drug cases, providing families with extra supports. Meagan stated “There was a lot of time and thought put into hiring a family peer mentor and getting community providers involved. We now have a memorandum of understanding with Reigel Recovery Services in Fremont for treatment. Families still can choose where they would like to have services at. Reigel is also part of our steering committee. A steering committee is a group who helps to guide how the program should run”. Meagan stated all the people and providers involved have had to take trainings to understand the program and their role. The steering committee meets at least one time each month to discuss what is and what is not working. The agency is currently looking at partnering with other agencies. Meagan stated what she loved most about the START program is that it is a different approach to cases. “There’s more open communication with our START families because of how frequently we are holding meetings”. “Nothing happens to the family without the family knowing”.

Interview with START Caseworker Alicia Mulligan:

I became the START worker in August 2022. I have had to take many trainings dealing with substance abuse disorders, assessments of families, motivational interviewing and trauma in children and families. Our agency took on the first START case on October 31, 2022. This program can be intensive for the family and the agency, always needing more time. I like the fact that there is continuity of care, so everyone is on the same page. “With START, we must have constant contact with the service providers and our families. This is very helpful. I am hoping this program continues to grow as there are many benefits to the families and to our children remaining with family”.

Interview with Peer Recovery Supporter Rachel:

Rachel became the START Peer Recovery Supporter in October of 2022. She is contracted through Sandusky Artisans. Rachel is excited to be taking on such an important role where she’s able to show families there is hope and recovery and change is possible. Rachel’s role in a START case is unique as she is able to connect with families on a different level due to her having lived experiences. Rachel walks beside families and helps guide them on their road to recovery. Rachel took on this role because she saw peers who were fearful of the system and having their kids removed. Rachel wanted to show others that they don’t need to be fearful, and being involved with the system can be beneficial. In the upcoming year Rachel is excited to reach and help more families as she believes people will benefit from this program.

Kinnect



Our Kinnect to Family Specialist, Lisa Mullholand has touched the lives of many cases in children services as she works to keep children from coming into foster care. The Kinnect to Family Program works to seek out family/kin to build a genogram of at least 80 family members per case and place a child with family as quickly as possible. Lisa had 10 children on her caseload this year with 8 of them having successful transitions to family members. Lisa works to provide the children and families she works with a less traumatic and invasive experience for a more stable transition. Lisa helps prevent entry and re-entry into foster care, when possible, by finding family/people who support the child to help give them a more stable and long-term plan of care and residency. Lisa has found over 800 family members during her searches to reunite children with family. Currently, the agency has less children coming into foster care due to the Kinnect to Family Program. To ensure children in foster care or living with relative have an amazing birthday, Lisa partners with Giving Birthdays to give our foster and kinship children birthday boxes that include cake, candles, decorations, and birthday wish gifts to help celebrate the child's birthday in the home. The program is a delight to the children and helpful for the families.

Visitation/Parenting Programs



Aimee Martinez is our Sandusky Co Visitation Coordinator. Aimee is a new face to our agency since accepting this position in July of 2022. On average, Aimee supervised 14 families and 21 children. Thirteen of these families are supervised in our building while one family is having supervised visits in the home. Aimee also performs other duties that include drop-ins and forensic fluid drug testing. Aimee stated doing drop-ins as another way to ensure the family is following any court orders or seeing if the family needs any services or supports". Aimee stated she is also responsible for planning monthly parenting events with guest speakers and the annual Visitation Christmas Party for all the families whose contacted with their child(ren) is supervised. Aimee states "I really enjoy planning events that brings family's together".

Jolene Smith is our Sandusky Co Parent and Case Aide. Jolene has been the agency parent aide since starting her career in August 2017. Jolene, on average works with 14 different families at a time. She works with families at the agency and out in the family's home. Jolene has duties that include forensic fluid drug testing, monitoring court orders, and parent education. Jolene will utilize a curriculum based off the needs of the family she is working with. Jolene utilizes skills learned to teach parents parenting needs that include discipline, chores and routine. Jolene stated, "the best part of my job, is engaging with families to improve their situation using education and community resources". Jolene stated, "although I am challenged at times due to limited community resources, I enjoy getting out in the community and working through the challenges beside each of my family's". Jolene additionally assists with purchasing and dropping off groceries, obtaining smoke alarms and batteries, and transporting families.

School Outreach Program



Jenny Ayres is the Sandusky County School Outreach Worker. Jenny shares this role along with being an Investigator at the agency in the summer months when school is on break. Jenny has been the School Outreach worker since November 2020. Jenny is currently serving at three local schools: Fremont City, Lakota and Gibsonburg Schools. When this position was created, in 2020, it started with one school, Fremont City. Through the work and role of Jenny and her position, Jenny was able to expand her position to support two additional schools for the 2022-2023 school year to include Lakota and Gibsonburg. Jenny supports and participates in many school activities. This year Jenny participated in Red Ribbon Week, signing drug free pledges with the children. Jenny has participated in helping children to have their meals delivered during COVID 19 as well as learning materials. Jenny has participated in other activities to include children utilizing positive affirmations in school and in their homes. Jenny stated, "my job is more preventative". "I try and help work with families to address any needs before they get to the Children Services level". Jenny stated, "I have helped to drop off things families need such as bed bug treatments, hygiene items, coats, clothing and detergent". "I identify information and resources families could benefit from and get those referrals sent to connect families to available resources such the HYPE program". Jenny stated, "being able to work with families to help them be successful in being the best parent-child family they can be". Jenny stated seeing families at their best makes this the most rewarding position". Jenny worked with a total of 152 families in 2022, and substance abuse concerns were reported with 8 of those families.

Adult Protective Services (APS)



The Adult Protective Services (APS) unit is a specialized unit within the Agency that investigates and assists vulnerable elderly individuals in our community. The supervisor of the unit is Linda Ackerman, and she takes great pride in assisting seniors in our community. The APS unit has 2 assigned workers, Gabrielle Henry and Arica Rakay, who both dedicate a portion of their time to APS cases. The APS unit is active with other community services, and they're getting their interdisciplinary team up and running again after COVID. The unit signed a Memorandum of Understanding with GLCAP wherein the unit purchases 4 boxed meals every Friday, and those meals are distributed to individuals with open cases who are in need but are not yet receiving Meals on Wheels or other assistance with meals. The boxes consist of meals to last the individual through the weekend. The unit is also working with area homeless shelters to provide seniors with not only food but also hygiene products. In the past the unit worked heavily with seniors who struggled with being able to afford their medications. However, over the past year there has been an alarming increase with seniors who cannot obtain affordable housing and/or who are unable to obtain home health workers to assist them. The APS unit is using grant money to assist with obtaining affordable housing, housekeeping needs, and/or self-care needs of the individuals they serve. The unit is partnering with community committees to determine where the greatest needs are and where the grant money will be best spent. In 2022, there were 44 open APS investigations and 2 ongoing cases.

Training Program



Angela Wheeler started her role as the training officer in May of 2011. Her role as the training officer is to provide training for new hires and current employees, update rules and curriculum, maintain training hours for workers and supervisors, handle virtual reality goggle training for new hires, host trainings, identify changes, and update forms. Angela also facilitates case plan meetings and team meetings, mentors, coaches, and does public speakings. Angela has trained 13 new hires in 2022 along with 2 fellowship workers. Angela provides mandated reporter training to those who are mandated to report. In 2022, Angela conducted 2 school mandated reporter trainings, hospital trainings, and other medical provider trainings. One school training had 80 people present. Also in 2022, Angela provided human trafficking training and intimate partner violence training. In 2023, the training program is looking to continue trainings and broaden the trainings to more professional providers. The outreach for CARA program partners with state trainers in a community event. Medical workers, social workers, probation officers, and more attend this community event. The last event was on October 27th, 2022. CARA stands for Comprehensive Addiction and Recovering Act. Outreach for CARA is a safety net for families affected by substance abuse. Angela stated she likes being the training officer because she creates her own mini trainings, provides support to new hires and current employees, and loves being in the community and providing support. Angela stated one unique thing about Sandusky County Children Services is we have an in-house training officer, and we are one of the few out of the 88 counties in Ohio. Angela stated a few barriers to being the training officer is staff shortages and short-term employees.

Quality Assurance/Casework Coaching



The traditional quality assurance position has been redesigned over the past year in 2022. In previous years quality assurance workers focused primarily on reviewing investigations and ongoing cases. Leslie Adams is the new quality assurance worker, and this position is not only reviewing cases but also coaching workers in the field to ensure mandates are being met and families are provided with as much assistance as possible. Due to hiring multiple new caseworkers over the past year, Leslie is working closely with the training officer, Angela Wheeler on coaching and developing the new caseworkers. Leslie believes it's essential for new caseworkers to have continued coaching while out in the field until the caseworkers are more knowledgeable and experienced, but most importantly until the new caseworkers feel comfortable and confident on their own. Leslie has been with the agency for almost 5 years and has spent time in the ongoing and investigation units. Leslie believed the best part of being a caseworker was being able to help and interact with families. Although Leslie enjoys reviewing cases, she states the best part of her new position is she can still help and interact with families, but she can also assist new caseworkers who are just entering the career. She finds this to be this field. Leslie has found it is very rewarding to see new workers grow and thrive as caseworkers. Since this position is newly created there are still aspects of it being developed. Leslie intends to continue to work on developing the position to make it as beneficial as possible for all caseworkers at the agency. Leslie understands the importance of ensuring mandates are met, but she also understands the need to try to be supportive and encouraging to the workers who are working hard and trying to juggle many things at the same time. Leslie's overall goal is to ensure the high standards at Sandusky County Children Services continue to be met so all children in our community are safe.

Legal Team



The legal team consists of Administrator Dean Ross, Attorney Nancy Haley, and Legal Case Aide Sharon Ochs. Attorneys Ross and Haley are each assigned cases when a complaint is filed with juvenile court. The assigned attorney attends all hearings with the Caseworker and represents the agency. Dean, Nancy, and Sharon work together to ensure all complaints, motions, and other necessary paperwork are completed. Sharon keeps the legal team organized by ensuring all paperwork is completed accurately and filed in a timely manner. Dean and Nancy also work closely with the Training Officer, Angela Wheeler, and in 2022 Dean and Nancy conducted 4 legal trainings for the Children Services unit. Two of those trainings were held at Sandusky County Juvenile Court; one of which consisted of mock testifying training, and the other was an opportunity for Judge Brad Smith to speak and provide his input on being a judge and the expectations of caseworkers. The team also works closely with the Quality Assurance worker, Leslie Adams, to ensure mandates are being met, documents are ready for discovery, and records are up-to-date and meeting all expectations. The team is very supportive of the Children Services Unit and Dean and Nancy often spend time meeting with caseworkers before hearings to ensure they're comfortable and confident in their testimony as this can be intimidating for caseworkers. In 2022 the attorneys attended an impressive 320 hearings. There were 82 new Complaints filed in Sandusky County Juvenile Court alleging children were abused, neglected, and/or dependent.

Support & Clerical Staff



Megan Sweeny



Kelle Greene

The clerical and support staff at the agency is vital in keeping everything running smoothly. They ensure the phones are answered, documents are scanned into Traverse, fax requests, and many other tasks and duties they're asked to do to assist staff. Kelle Greene started working at the agency in October of 2022 as the Clerical Specialist. Her positive demeanor and willingness to assist has been an asset to the agency. She just recently began providing additional support of sending out Law Enforcement Notifications every week as this is a new state mandate on certain investigations. Kelle stated the best thing about her job is the amazing staff she works with! She stated everyone is funny and inviting and she really feels like she was welcomed into the group.

Megan Sweeney works as the fiscal specialist for our department. She is responsible for determining the eligibility and reimbursability for IV-E for all children when the agency is granted temporary custody. Megan completes contracts for all of the placement locations used for our children in custody, as well as ensuring all placements are paid and reimbursements are received monthly. She also keeps track of and completes placements, leaves, and Medicaid enrollment and coverage for children in custody, while being responsible for running many programs that financially support the placement of children with kin and adoptive families.

Community Events & Pictures



ProMedica Family Fun Fest



Spooktacular at Terra Community College



Beat the Heat Event



CASA Dancing with the Stars Event



Foster Parent Appreciation Dinner at Ole Zims



April is Child Abuse Awareness Month

Community Events & Pictures



Christmas Donations from B.A.N.C.



Foster Parent/Kinship Christmas Party at Journey's



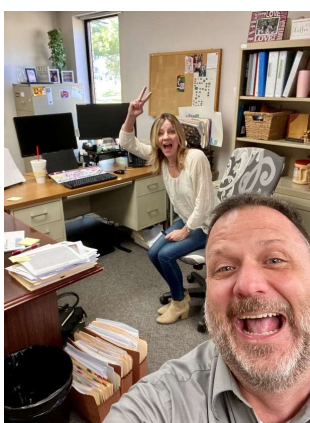
Christmas in July for teens in foster care (donated by Share & Care)



APS at the Farmer's Market



Participating in Leadership of Sandusky County



If you leave your phone sitting around...you might end up with a silly picture

