

Sandusky County Department of Job and Family Services Children Services Division 2024 Annual Report



Want to make a difference in
a child's life?

Become a Foster Parent
Call 419-334-8708





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.

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

CHILDREN SERVICES DIVISION



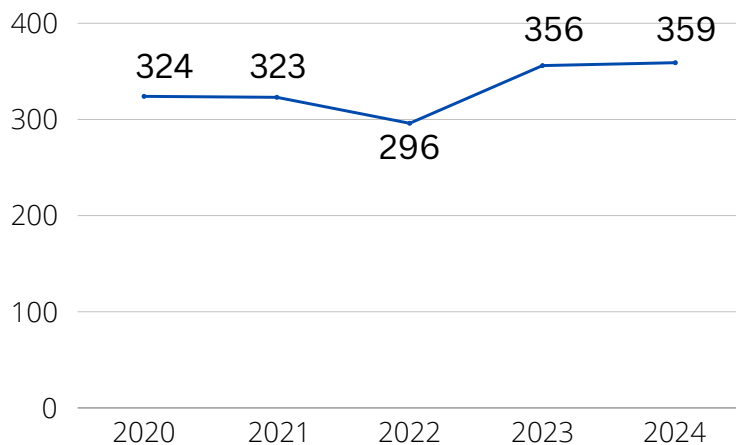
Together we protect children....

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 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.

INTAKES AND INVESTIGATIONS

INTAKES SCREENED-IN

Intake is typically the initial point of contact at the agency. Intake services are available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. The number of child abuse and neglect (CA/N) reports accepted for investigation was nearly consistent when compared to 2023, only 3 additional investigations occurred.

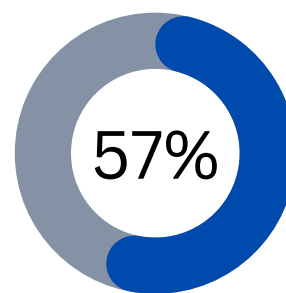


REPORT PATHWAYS

Children service agencies have two options for responding to accepted reports of child abuse and neglect: 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.

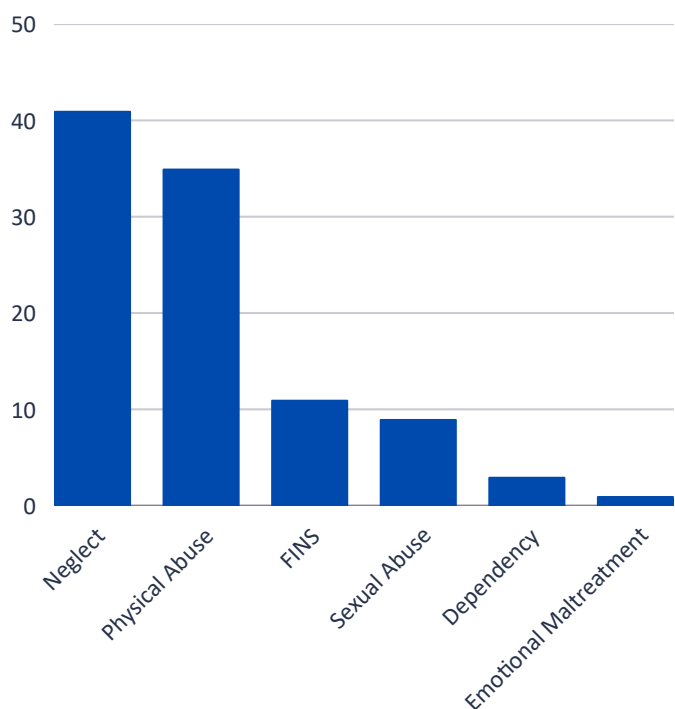
The Traditional Response is always required for reports of sexual abuse, abuse resulting in serious injury, and whenever children are determined to be in serious or immediate risk of harm. It may involve court intervention and will also result in a determination/finding about the allegation.

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. Fifty-seven percent of reports were assigned to the alternative response pathway. This is a 4% decrease from 2023.



ALTERNATIVE RESPONSE

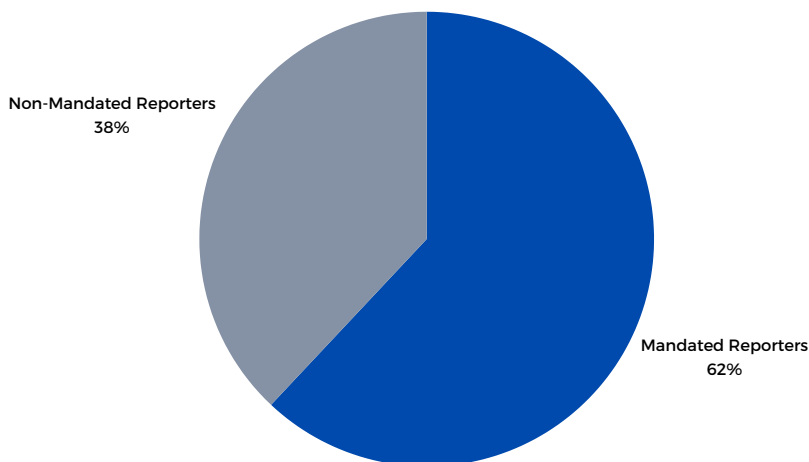
REPORTS BY TYPE



Neglect was the most commonly alleged abuse type for screened-in intakes accounting for 41% of the total intakes received in 2024. Physical abuse was the next most common type at 35% of intake. Family in Need of Services, which is a parent’s self referral or a courtesy request from another PCSA was 11% of intakes. Sexual abuse consisted of 9% of the intakes screened in. Dependency and Emotional abuse accounted for 4% of the intakes in 2024.

REFERRALS BY SOURCE

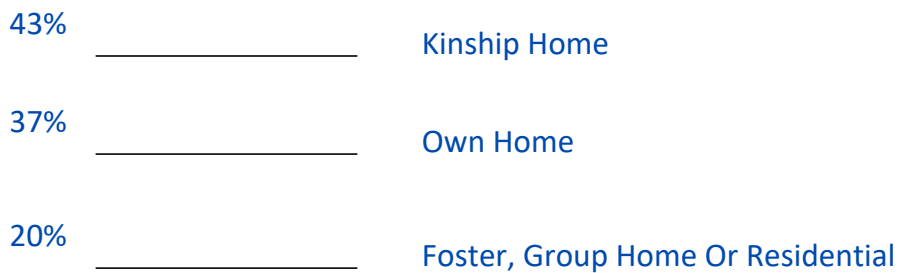
Mandated reporters (Law enforcement, social services, school, medical and other PCSA staff) are the largest referral source to make reports of child abuse and/or neglect in Sandusky County in 2024, totaling 62% of all reports made. This is also consistent with reports that are accepted for investigation. Mandated reporters accounted for 67% of those reports that were investigated.



ONGOING CASES

The Ongoing Services that are offered to a family can occur in cases where a child is still in the home or after the child has been removed. 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 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.

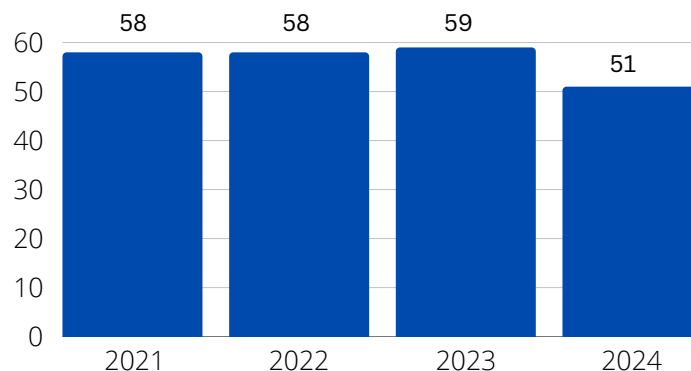
Children receive ongoing services while either remaining in their own home, living with relatives or while residing in substitute care setting. Below is the breakdown of placement types for children receiving ongoing services in December 2024.



80% of children on open cases were receiving services while living in their own home or in relative/kinship care in 2024, this is a 10% increase in comparison to 2023.

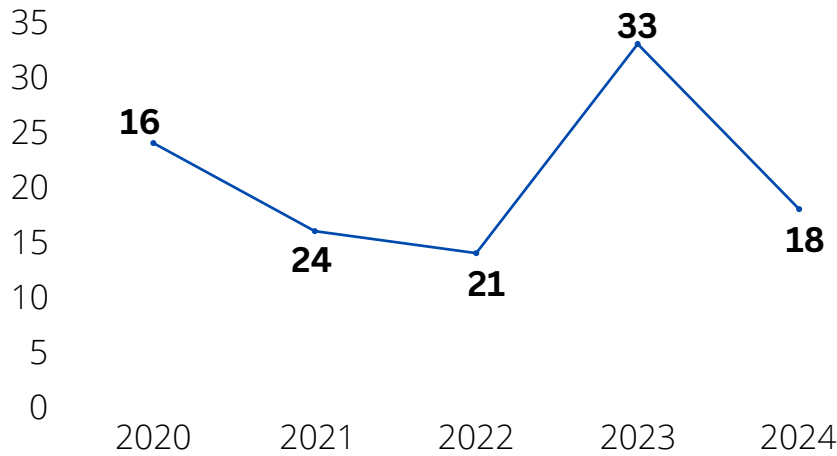
TOTAL NEW CASES OPENED

In 2023 a total of 59 new cases were opened for ongoing services following the agency's investigation of child abuse/neglect allegations. There have been no significant change in yearly case openings for the past 3 years.










AGENCY CUSTODY ENTRIES

New children entering custody decreased by 45% in 2024. In 2023, 3 large sibling groups of 5 children were removed from the care of their parents, which caused the significant increase in 2023. The number of children entering agency custody for 2024 is relatively consistent with 2020 to 2022.



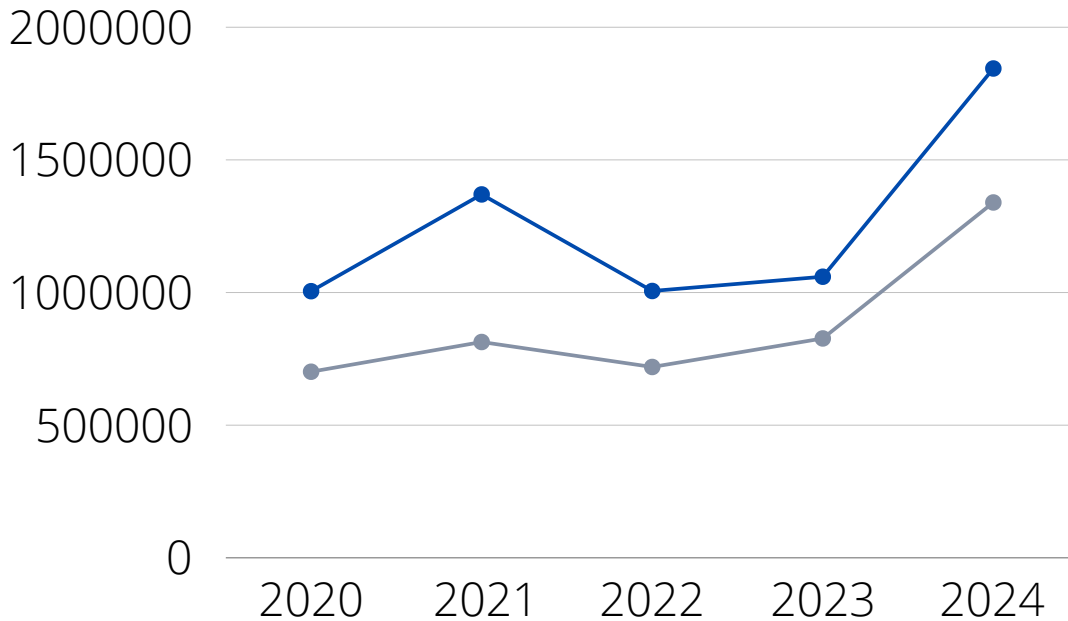
REASONS FOR REMOVAL

Parent/caregiver substance abuse was the most prevalent reason for children entering agency custody in 2024. Of the 18 children placed in agency custody, 33% (6 children) were removed due to parental substance abuse. Neglect was the other leading factor for removal which comprised for 5 children (28%).

Substance Abuse	
Parenting/Neglect	
Sexual abuse	
Physical Abuse	
Domestic Violence	
Mental Health	
Dependency	

PLACEMENT COST

The graph below shows a comparison of placement cost for children in agency custody for the past 4 years. The blue represents the actual total cost for placements, while the orange represents county costs after IV-E reimbursement. Despite the implementation of treatment foster care and the cost savings that this has brought the agency, it is apparent that there remains a placement crisis for children in congregate care, which continues to raise their daily rates exponentially.



VISITATION SERVICES

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 wellbeing.

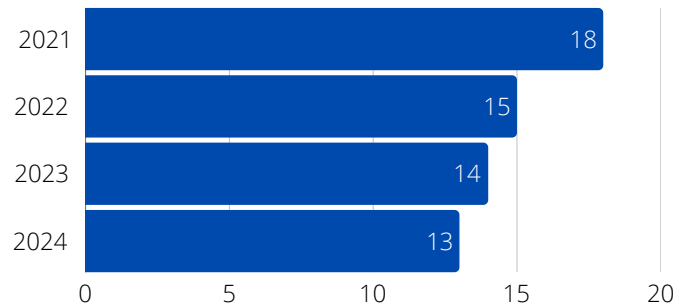
Furthermore, visits between parents and children provide parents with the opportunity to learn and practice parenting techniques/skills, give the agency an opportunity to observe and assess families and their progress and ultimately promote the goals of safety, child well-being and permanency.

The agency offers an extensive visitation program for the families with whom we work. In 2024 the agency scheduled 1041 supervised visits and 928 visits occurred.

FOSTER CARE AND ADOPTIVE 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 a foster parent can do to help with this objective include; transporting the child to visits with their family, offering support to the family by listening to their needs and offering them advice. 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 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 the 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 which allows them to accept both foster and adoptive placements. The chart to the right shows the steady decline of licensed foster and adoptive parents in Sandusky County. We are in need of local safe placements for children. If you are interested in becoming a foster or adoptive parent please contact us at 419-334-8707.



Treatment Foster Care Services



Northwest Ohio Treatment Foster Care Program continues to grow, and our collaboration now includes 6 counties: Sandusky, Seneca, Wyandot, Ottawa, Wood and Hancock. While the program has doubled in size since starting in December 2021, the goal remains the same, keeping kids with a higher level of needs out of congregate care and placing them in family-like settings, closer to home. The program provides heavy support to resource families to minimize disruptions and drafts treatment plans specific to each child placed in treatment foster care.

As of February 2025, we have 13 licensed homes and currently have 25 kids placed in these treatment homes. A benefit of treatment foster care is the ability to keep siblings together so some of these 25 children are placed at a traditional (family) level of care but placed with a sibling who has treatment level needs. Since the start of the program, we have served 56 children from counties all over Ohio. In 2024, the treatment program hired 2 full time staff members who provide a majority of the day-to-day case management. The program continues to be active with FFTA and Pressley Ridge. Additionally in 2024, the Northwest Treatment Foster Care Program worked closely with PCSAO to support other counties across the state who wanted to start a treatment program in their area and we are currently mentoring over 30 counties. Our program goals for 2025 include recruiting and licensing more treatment homes and hiring one more team member.

INDEPENDENT LIVING SERVICES

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The agency served 9 children in 2024 with independent living services. When youth in agency custody turn 14, the agency will start to prepare them for the transition to self-sufficiency. The agency will conduct a life skills assessment and determine which independent living services would be most helpful.

Once the assessment has been completed, an independent living plan will be developed. The plan will include the youth's strengths, limitations and resources and outline the services the agency will provide. The caregiver and the child will be involved in the plan's development and will receive a copy.

Topics covered in this program include; cooking 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.

In 2024, the Independent Living Worker took youth to Quarterly Ohio Youth Advisory meetings in Columbus, Ohio and accompanied youth at the Independent Youth Summit. Quarterly virtual group sessions were also held with youth focusing on resume building, CCMEP Hype Program, and other independent living topics.

Evidence Based Practice Implementation



Sandusky County Children Services has a strong belief system from management down to the caseworkers that children should be placed with kin. This is why Sandusky County has employed a Kinnect to Family Worker since 2019. Kinnect to family is a specialized, intense, family search and engagement program. The Kinnect to Family worker uses diligent search strategies to identify a vast array of connections for children and families encountering child welfare.

The goal of Kinnect is to:

- 1) Increase the number of children placed with relatives.
- 2) Ensure natural and community supports are in place to promote stability for the child.



Ohio START (Sobriety, Treatment and Reducing Trauma) is an evidence-informed children services-led intervention model that helps public children services agencies bring together caseworkers, behavioral health providers, and family peer mentors into teams dedicated to helping families struggling with co-occurring child maltreatment and substance use disorder. Since 2022, our agency has employed an Ohio Start Caseworker and contracted with a Family Peer mentor that are dedicated to helping parents recover and move forward with abuse-free and addiction-free lives.

ADULT PROTECTIVE SERVICES

Our Mission: Sandusky County Adult Protective Services is committed to protecting adults at risk of abuse, neglect or exploitation while recognizing the importance of their right to live independently. This is achieved through the provision of appropriate supportive services and referral to community resources.



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 different community organizations meets monthly and focuses on improving senior services in Sandusky County through increased communication, cooperation, and service planning.

In 2024, the agency received a total of 605 intake calls in the APS Unit and completed 61 investigations and provided services for 4 ongoing cases. The agency also collaborated with the ITEAM to host a Senior Resource Event in June that provided education, support and brought community resources to seniors.