



Protecting Children by Strengthening Families

media release

April 8, 2009

Honoring Those Who Help Prevent Child Abuse *Agency Recognizes the Successes of Youths, Families, Social Workers, and Community Advocates*

Franklin County Children Services and the Citizens Advisory Committee hosted the annual Child Abuse Prevention Breakfast recently. Because April is Child Abuse Prevention Month, it is a time for Children Services to focus on educating the community about the effects of child abuse and its prevention. At the breakfast event the agency honored those who have promoted child abuse prevention and those who have overcome its effects.

Youths and a family were honored for making positive life changes, including youths who received college scholarships. A front-line child protection social worker was honored for extraordinary efforts to help children in need and community advocates were honored for their contributions.

Scholarship and Award Recipients

Jack Donahue College Scholarships Winners Ty'eisha Jones and Dustin Smith Jr.

Ty'eisha Jones is described as smart, responsible, persevering, and bright. Currently a senior at Fort Hayes High School, Jones is an accomplished, dedicated student who is set on making the most of every opportunity that comes her way. Despite facing challenging circumstances throughout her young life, Jones has always maintained an upbeat, positive attitude. She is an exceptional student with a 3.6 grade point average. Jones is a member of the National Honor Society, Who's Who Among American High School Students, and the United States Achievement Academy.

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An aspiring scientist, Jones plans on attending college this fall at Ohio University, where she will major in Chemistry. She then plans on pursuing a graduate degree in forensic science and ultimately, working for the FBI.

Dustin Smith is dependable, hard-working and motivated. He is a senior at Academic Acceleration Academy, where he ranks first in his class and is the class Valedictorian. A survivor in every sense, Smith has dealt with tremendous adversity to get where he is today. A turbulent family life, child abuse, gang involvement and substance abuse are just a few of the challenges and hardships he has overcome.

While he was not always on the right path, Smith has stepped up and turned things around for the better. As Smith he said: "I am proud of the things I have accomplished. I seem to be headed in the right direction with my life."

After he graduates this June, Smith plans on attending Columbus State where he will major in Business Management. An aspiring business owner, he would like to eventually run his own sporting goods store. He would also like to become a basketball coach and help other kids succeed.

Alvin Hadley United Negro College Fund Scholarship Recipient Charles Ervin

Charles Ervin is a senior and honor student at Marion Franklin High School where he has made quite an impression on a lot of people. Despite a difficult start in life, this young man has maintained a positive outlook and embraced every opportunity to learn. Ervin has been involved with Children Services most of his life due to a variety of family problems. He has been with his mother, with relatives, and in and out of foster care over the last 10 years. Things finally stabilized for Ervin when he became a part of the Halloran foster family where he has resided for the past four years.

A very goal oriented young man, Ervin is determined to be the first member of his family to attend college. Well on his way to achieving that goal, he has a 3.5 GPA and has been on the honor roll throughout high school. He plans to attend Columbus State Community College this Fall and then possibly pursue a teaching degree in Mathematics. According to his teachers and those who know him, Ervin is a young man who anyone would enjoy meeting. They describe him as witty, determined, honest, knowledgeable, self-disciplined and dependable.

Rising Up and Moving On Award Winners Antornet Drone and John Doss

Antornet Drone - When 17-year-old Drone and her infant daughter, ChaMya, arrived in Columbus two years ago, she came filled with many hopes and dreams. But her life took a significant turn when ChaMya became critically ill and was hospitalized with a serious immune disorder. Drone also was diagnosed with the same immune disorder. Then ChaMya miraculously made a turn for the better.

Drone and ChaMya came to the attention of Children Services when both were struggling with significant medical needs and were placed in foster care to receive some support. While in foster care, Drone linked herself with various agencies that could provide support to those with similar health issues. Soon she and ChaMya were able to transition into their own apartment.

In August 2008, she received her much awaited high school diploma and this past January enrolled in Columbus State Community College. She plans to become a registered nurse and work with children who have medical challenges. In addition to advocating for children, she hopes to also mentor parents who may have had similar struggles.

John Doss is 18 years old and has been involved with Children Services for most of his life, due to abuse and neglect. His parents were unable to properly care for him, and because of this, Doss struggled with severe anger and emotional problems. Doss was in and out of foster and residential care. Finally, in 2006, he went into a residential treatment facility to address his many issues centered around abuse and abandonment.

Doss began making great progress and was matched with a mentor, Jack. He opened up to support and advice from his mentor, which enabled him to become a leader at the facility and viewed as a role model by his peers. The bond between mentor and youth became so strong that when Doss was discharged from residential care, he went to live with Jack.

Doss has remained on the right path and continues to make tremendous improvements. He has worked at Kroger for a year, where he is viewed as an excellent employee. Attending school is now something that Doss enjoys. His grades have greatly improved and his relationships with peers have been positive. Doss is attending technical school and is studying auto mechanics. In the past, he never considered going to college, but now he plans to attend college in the fall and study auto mechanics.

Nancy Fitzgivens Child Protection Award Winner Erika Gunnell

Franklin County Children Services established the Nancy Fitzgivens Child Protection Award to honor Nancy Fitzgivens who was killed in the line of duty during a home visit in October 2001. The Nancy Fitzgivens Child Protection Award for 2009 went to **Erika Gunnell**. Gunnell is a dedicated child protection caseworker. She exemplifies what it truly means to be a social worker by consistently taking extraordinary measures to advocate for the families on her caseload. While she worked full time at the agency, she completed her Bachelor's and Master's Degrees in Social Work. Gunnell completed her Master's program while also winning a battle against breast cancer and never let down the families on her caseload in the process. She has also been a mentor to her co-workers and a constant source of reliable support for her colleagues.

Gunnell is an ardent supporter of reunifying children with their biological families and does not give up on this possibility – no matter what the circumstances. She encompasses all of the things it means to be a social worker – compassion, integrity, service, and the belief in the dignity and worth of each client whose life she touches.

Family Achievement Award Winners The Trueblood Family

Each year, Franklin County Children Services honors a family who has overcome serious challenges and made significant strides to strengthen their family. This year we were pleased to recognize Earl and Latoya Trueblood and their five children, Imani, Keith, Ishana, Iyanla and Earl Jr.

The Truebloods have come a long way in only two years. Just a short while ago, the overwhelmed couple, dealing with issues of domestic violence and child neglect, lost custody of their five children. Later, when the devastating reality of possibly losing permanent custody of their children hit home, the Truebloods decided to turn things around for the better.

Rising above their adversity, the Truebloods have devoted themselves to resolving their issues and bettering their situation. They have demonstrated a firm commitment to their case plan, taken every advantage of available resources, diligently attending individual counseling, couples counseling and family counseling.

Despite ongoing challenges, the Truebloods have stayed the course and kept it together. Now reunited with their children, this family has taken their once challenging circumstances and changed them for the better.

Pinwheels for Prevention Winner Danella Hicks

Children Services recognized Danella Hicks for her selfless love and commitment for helping six siblings remain out of the child welfare system by awarding her the Pinwheels for Prevention Award.

Danella Hicks thought she was done with active parenting as her two daughters were well on their way to independence and out of the home. Hicks had visions of the “good life” with fewer commitments and responsibilities. But in February of last year, her world changed dramatically. Her cousin died, leaving behind six children. Hicks stepped up and received guardianship of the children.

To ask Hicks today, she will tell you this IS the good life. She marvels at the accomplishments of her new family. All of the children are improving in their grades and attendance at school. In spite of limited resources, Danella is turning trauma into triumph. And Marcus, Shawna, Aaliyah,, Jasmine, David, and Darius are grateful for her sacrifice.

Community Advocate Awards

The Community Advocate Awards recognize people and organizations who commit to helping the children of Franklin County Children Services.

Kate Gatch is known to many of us at Children Services as The Bike Lady. As a foster and adoptive parent, she realized that many children under agency care may not have wonderful memories of the holidays. Her efforts paid off – nearly \$15,000 was donated in bikes and accessories. It was a wonderful sight to see 125 bicycles of all sizes with helmets filling the Holiday Wish workshop.

Royal Family Kids Camp is a free summer camp designed for abused and neglected children. The Central Ohio camp is run under the direction of **Steve and Ciella Fox**, who are instrumental in providing agency youths with this memorable experience.

Nicholas Woo- Sixteen-year-old Woo came up with an Eagle project for the Boy Scouts of America, that would donate backpacks to children in need at Children Services. Although his original goal was to deliver 40 backpacks to Children Services, Woo delivered 200 backpacks for the holidays.

Insight Media - Through a joint venture between Franklin County Children Services and Insight Media, a television show, Children Services Today, was created that showcases how the agency is protecting children by strengthening families. **Scott Cramblett** was instrumental in making this show happen. He was thrilled to work with the agency on this project because he and his wife were just finalizing the adoption of their daughter from Children Services.

Walmart Distribution Center in Grove City employees have been participating in the agency's Holiday Wish program for more than 10 years. Each year, 700 employees make the holiday wishes of 150 children come true. For this past year, through the combined efforts of grant money and employee fundraising efforts, the Walmart Distribution Center collected a total of \$9,200.

More than three million children are reported abused and neglected in the United States each year and abuse causes the deaths of three children every day. In 2008, Franklin County Children Services provided services to 28,643 children. Services are provided to strengthen family life to enable children to remain safe in their own homes.

Franklin County Children Services is the agency mandated by Ohio law to provide protection and care to children in need. Services are provided to strengthen family life to enable children to remain safe in their own homes.

Preventing and reporting child abuse is one of the most important things a community can do for the future of its children. To report child abuse or neglect, anyone can call the Franklin County Children Services 24-hour child abuse hotline at (614) 229-7000. Visit www.franklincountyohio.gov/children_services for more information.

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