



TRUMBULL COUNTY CHILDREN SERVICES:

# Working to put Every Child in a Safe Home

The message is everywhere — on billboards, at community health and safety events, open houses, county fairs, everywhere families gather.

The message is, simply, that All Children Belong in Families. For the staff at Trumbull County Children Services, the message serves as a goal and a mission.

“Every child needs and deserves the warmth and security of a family,” says Marcia Tiger, Executive Director of Children Services. “That’s an inescapable and unarguable truth, but one that is not all that easy to actualize.”

Through no fault of their own, Tiger says, too many children don’t have that basic need filled. “The challenges of today’s society put pressure on biological parents, who sometimes turn to substance abuse or fall victim to depression or anger. The result, too often, is that children are physically or sexually abused, or neglected. We’re here to protect children and to help them until their parents are able to resume caring for them. If that is not possible, we must provide permanency for them, so we seek to locate a home where they can get the love and guidance they need.”

To provide the support that children in crisis need, Children Services has a network of people and programs

in place. Paramount are the people – the staff, foster parents and adoptive parents who are the cornerstone of a successful caring effort.

“Foster parents provide for a child’s physical, emotional, and social needs on a temporary basis, until the birth families are ready to resume caring for them,” Tiger says. “Sometimes these children have physical, behavioral and developmental challenges, and the foster parents must be able to provide special care and attention. Our foster parents never cease to amaze us with their capacity for caring, understanding and loving; they truly are a lifeline to the agency.”

To provide the support foster parents need to undertake the sensitive and challenging task of caring for children who have been removed — sometimes abruptly — from their homes and parents, Trumbull County Children Services provides training and education, as well as ongoing contact by agency caseworkers.

Other programs provide family support and outreach: Family-to-Family Team meetings allow the people most involved in a child’s life to come together to share knowledge and experiences for the child’s greatest benefit; in Family Unity Meetings, agency staff partners with the members of the extended birth family and other community supports in a team effort to strengthen

the family and facilitate the child's return home as soon as possible. The Children's Center and the Secure Care for Children unit partner with Valley Counseling, Inc., to provide short-term residential care and counseling to emotionally troubled children right on CSB's property.

In addition, caseworkers act as Service Coordinators for the *Help Me Grow* program to provide developmental screenings, education and support for families with children ages birth to 3. And a grant from the Ohio Department of Job & Family Services allows the agency, in partnership with the Burdman Group, to offer a Self Sufficiency, Opportunity & Safety (SOS) Project, providing help to families who are likely at



*Children don't need perfect parents ... they need loving individuals willing to meet the unique challenges of parenting and ready to commit to caring for them." ~ Marcia Tiger*

**Trumbull County Children Services Board's Mission: Trumbull County Children Services, in partnership with families and the community, protects and advocates for children in crisis or at risk of abuse and neglect. The Agency assesses risk and builds on family strengths in seeking to maintain or reunite children with safe families. We perform this mandate with compassion, respect and professionalism.**



risk of child welfare issues because of unemployment or under-employment, domestic problems, or a lack of educational and behavioral skills.

"Although our prime concern is the child, our work is very family-centered," Tiger says. "We know that most of all, children want to be with their biological families. Knowing that, we work toward making the biological-family atmosphere one of security and warmth, so that the child can safely return home."

As mentioned, for those children who come into agency care with emotional challenges, Trumbull County Children Services provides residential services right on its own grounds. Ground breaking took place this year for a new 20,000-square-foot residential treatment center to replace three "residential cottages" that were more than 40 years old. "The vast majority of the 88 public child welfare agencies across Ohio do not have their own residential treatment centers, so they must send children with these needs out of the county — many times out of the state — to costly facilities. This makes reunification with their families much slower, if not impossible," Tiger says. "Keeping these children close to where their parents and relatives reside helps to make a return home quicker and more successful."

When, despite all efforts, it is not possible to return a child from agency custody to his or her birth parents, the court grants Children Services permanent custody and the agency must locate a permanent placement with adoptive parents.

"Adoption, too, can be a challenge," Tiger says. "Many people still think of the stereotypical adoptive child: newborn, white, healthy. Today's children in need of adoption are very often school age or even young teens; they are often part of a minority group, and they sometimes have emotional or physical difficulties. Some are sibling pairs or groups that we don't want to separate."

And to those parents who can make a lifetime commitment, there are special rewards, Tiger says: "It's about doing something for someone else, not just yourself. It's how adoption improves not only a parent's life, but a child's, too."

Adoptive and foster parents need patience and perseverance, a sense of humor, the ability to accept without judging, resourcefulness, the awareness that healing doesn't always come quickly, and above all a love of children and parenting. Parents may be married, single or divorced; they must be 21 years old to foster and 18 to adopt; there can be other children in the home, which can be owned or rented; each child must have his or her own bed; income must be sufficient to meet the basic needs of the household; and security clearances, medical exams and psychological exams are required.

To round out the picture of how Trumbull County Children Services works, Deputy Director David Barran offers solid financial and statistical data. In 2006,




for example, income generated from the countywide Children Services Levy, just over \$7.83 million, was matched by federal and state reimbursement and support payments to provide a total income of \$14.24 million. Expenditures, in casework services, placement services, special direct-service programs and administrative services, totaled some \$13.79 million.

That spending covers a multitude of services: for example, in 2006 the agency provided services to 4,823 children in 2,758 families; assessed 1,677 referrals, concerning 3,469 children; received 2,146 referrals concerning maltreatment; and conducted 377 investigations of serious sexual abuse, physical abuse, neglect and dependency allegations. Protective services were provided to more than 1,800 children and 4,968 days of care were provided to children in the Children's Center. A total of 206 children were cared for in 138 foster homes, 51 children were placed for adoption,

and 36 adoptions were finalized. At the same time, 30 children were prepared for emancipation from agency care through the Independent Living Initiatives Program.

“Our community has been for some years in an economically challenging climate,” Tiger says. “The pressures created on families and children are intense.

“The challenges can be daunting to the foster and adoptive parents we rely on. We are blessed with so many strengths: We have a strong, supportive community that continues to support us financially; we have a solid board that serves our children with dedication; we have a well-trained, highly committed staff. And finally, we have an agency that is nationally accredited through the Council on Accreditation, assuring that high standards are followed in provision of services, accountability, and administration.” 

*To learn more about foster parenting or adoption, contact Children Services at 330.372.2010 or (TDD) 330.545.6133*

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