



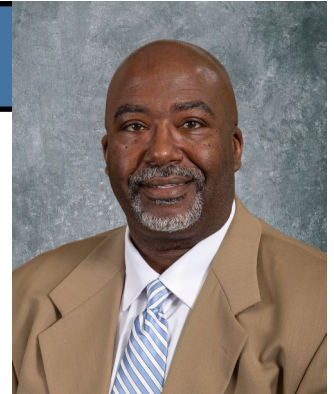
*Athens County  
Children Services*

# 2021 Annual Report to the Community





# A Message From Our Executive Director



To our Athens County Community,

It is my privilege to deliver the Athens County Children Services 2021 Annual Report to the Community. It was another year filled with adaptations and accommodations as our staff has continued to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the hardships caused by this pandemic, our dedicated staff has remained vigilant and responsive to the needs of the community and continues to innovate new ways to address the difficulties none of us could have predicted a few short years ago.

As we begin to emerge into more hopeful days, we are excited to build on what we have learned during troubling times in order to expand and improve our service delivery. We are ever grateful to the Athens County community that has continued to support our efforts in providing aid and assistance to some of the most vulnerable children and families in our community.

In my first year as Executive Director, I have been encouraged by all our agency has been able to accomplish and the manner in which our community has stepped up to help us achieve our goals. Through kind donations, we were able to ensure that the Santa Tree project, Peanut Butter and Jelly project and Kidfest were able to proceed with some normality. With superb dedication from our volunteers and staff, we were able to maintain our critical services in the face of uncertainty and aversion.

This annual report will tell the story of how the community and our staff have continually adapted to ensure that our children are protected, our families are strengthened, and our futures are secured. We look forward to continuing our role as a recognized leader throughout Ohio in the innovation of best practices in child welfare.

We eagerly anticipate a return to in-person community events where we can gather, interact and learn from one another as we once did. Our hope for the coming years is to galvanize a community-wide dedication to child welfare that will improve the lives of the children and families still struggling to find stability which the more fortunate of us often take for granted.

On behalf of our Board of Directors and staff, we would like to extend a sincere thank you to the Athens County community for your unwavering dedication and support toward our efforts of protecting children, strengthening families and securing futures.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "W. O. Crockron Jr.", written in a cursive style.

W. Otis Crockron Jr., MBA  
Executive Director



## Foster Caregiver Spotlight: Betty and Bill Lowe

In their 47 years as foster parents, the Lowes fostered over a hundred children, including many sibling groups, and generally preferred to foster teenagers and older children.

Speaking with their daughter, Terrie, she said that her parents' motivation for fostering came from her mom's desire to continue raising children after her own children had grown. Bill was a truck driver and would be gone for long periods of time, so Betty set herself to task and committed to raising and nurturing children who would come to her in need of love and stability. Betty didn't believe in respite for foster parents and told her daughter, "the harder the kid, the more you put in, the more you miss them."

Betty approached fostering with command and positivity; you knew she meant business. She liked working with the biological parents but would always be upfront with the courts, caseworkers and the parents themselves. One thing was for sure – the Lowes would fight tooth and nail for the kids they were fostering.



Terrie relayed a story that always stuck with her about her mom. She said that her mom was driving one of her foster children and saw the biological mom standing on the corner in the snow and cold. Betty drove to Wal-Mart, bought a coat and took it to her. She never had anything bad to say about biological parents and always kept an open mind – advice she passed along to others who fostered.

Sadly, Betty passed away in 2022, but her legacy lives on in all the children and families she touched along the way.



*This pink dogwood tree, Betty's favorite, was planted on ACCS grounds in May 2021 to commemorate the Lowe's 47 years of service as foster parents.*

## Foster Caregiver Spotlight: Gary and Laura Champ

The life of a foster parent is one filled with both unexpected challenges and rewards, with the call to action galvanizing each foster parent differently. Gary and Laura Champ have been foster parents for eight years and have fostered over 80 children in that time, including adopting 2 of their own. The way Laura describes her calling was that she had children who were grown but she was not done being a mom to little ones. She wanted kids in the house again. Gary was a bit unsure about it but with Laura's persistence and self-described "nagging," she convinced Gary to go to foster parent training with her and they decided that they were in the right place to become foster parents.

After a couple months of agonized waiting, they were in the process of setting up a Christmas photo shoot (Laura is a photographer), they got a call for a placement, and they began their journey as foster parents.

This journey has been tough at times, they said. At first, Laura faced what many foster parents encounter, where it is tough giving a child back after growing to love and cherish them. Laura says that she has overcome that difficulty and sees it as a positive – she feels that the attachment is necessary to being a good foster parent.

They said the rewarding part of the experience is when, through love and affection, you can mend a broken child and see families get reunited. They always try to maintain good relationships with the birth parents, when possible, and they can see the fruits of their labor when the children they foster are reunited with their birth parents to grow and flourish.

When asked about advice for parents thinking of fostering, Laura said, "do it." Despite the trials and tribulations, she said that you are providing these children the stability and affection that they need to grow and be successful.



## Maya Oshita—Family Services Caseworker

Our caseworkers come to us from different professional and personal backgrounds. For Maya Oshita, her interest in becoming an ACCS caseworker came from her internship with the adult parole authority. She shadowed an officer and saw the interactions with the adults of the family but felt that in order to address the problems that affected the whole family, she needed to work with the children as well.

Maya has been with us for about a year and half as a Family Services caseworker and, in that time, she has gleaned some insight on what families need. She identified that even though Athens County provides more educational, financial and support resources to families than some surrounding counties, more is needed to help them stabilize and grow. She identified a lack of good, affordable housing in the region as one impediment to the families with whom she works. She said that families aren't always able to relocate away from bad influences despite needing to, which can lead to a feeling of being trapped.

Maya said that one of the toughest parts of her job is doing a removal. Many times, she said, the parents will know it's coming and the children will be oblivious. "Splitting up a family is hard," she said, "and it weighs on you."

Conversely, Maya said that getting to go to court and seeing a family reunify with their children after a long road of recovery is the most rewarding part of her job. When she can do a home visit and the children are doing well back at home for the first time in months, or longer, she said it makes some of the tougher parts of her job worth it.

Maya said that her advice for anyone interested in becoming a children services caseworker is to try it as an intern first to get a real sense of what it would entail. Many parts of the job are tough, both mentally and emotionally, but seeing the families reunified and succeeding makes it worth it in the end.



*Maya enjoys taking her dog to the dog park in her free time.*



## Jacelyn McGaughey—Ohio START Caseworker

Jacelyn was inspired to pursue a career in child welfare in part because she grew up involved with the child welfare system and saw the difference that a good caseworker could make with a family. She has been with us for four years and is currently our Ohio START Caseworker. Her personal experiences gave her the empathy to understand the challenges the families she works with confront daily. One of the biggest challenges, she said, is the stigma attached to the child welfare system and treatment programs, which is why she is working through Athens HOPE to reduce some of this stigma.

As the Ohio START Caseworker, she confronts the realities of drug dependency every day. She relayed a story of a mom who was using methamphetamine which led to her children experiencing neglect through truancy, a lack of food, unsafe home conditions and unsafe people. In this case, children were removed, and the mom entered rehab for nine months becoming substance free. She got her kids back after her time in rehab, got a job, bought a car, got car insurance and was able to turn her life around. It's these types of positive outcomes that Jacelyn said is the most rewarding part of her job and really keeps her going through the tough parts.

The toughest part of her job, Jacelyn said, is when she sees parents who are trying their hardest to provide and take care of their children but lack the cognitive ability to provide a safe environment. It's in these cases where she can see the parents doing the best they can, but still fall short due to the lack of understanding. She said more support systems are needed in the community for cognitively impaired individuals.

When asked about her advice for anyone interested in child welfare or becoming a children services caseworker, she said, "You don't work with children, you work *with* parents, *for* children." Parents have the needs that need to be fixed so they can care for the children. She also said you need to be comfortable having difficult conversations and entering unclean environments.

She added, "there are places cops won't go that we have to go on a regular basis."

## Intake & Assessment

The Intake Unit assesses and investigates reports of child abuse, neglect or dependency. Child safety and family needs are assessed during the investigation process. The goal of the assessment is to engage families in a problem-solving process to mitigate risk factors. Court intervention may be needed to mitigate safety and risk factors. During the investigation, families are often provided with referrals to community partners as well as provided education in areas related to child abuse and neglect.

In 2021, ACCS had 2,072 referrals of suspected abuse or neglect:

- ⇒ 599 were screened in for assessment
- ⇒ Includes 904 children
- ⇒ 54 referrals involved drug-impacted infants

ACCS is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year to respond to reports. An answering service is utilized on weekends, holidays and after hours with caseworkers as responders and a supervisor as back-up.



*Intake caseworker Melissa Walker poses with her two dogs for Hug your Pet day.*

## Family Services

Our Family Services unit provides ongoing services when a case needs more extensive intervention or a longer term to resolve family concerns. The families served by this unit have complex needs and are often involved with Juvenile Court, either through an order that requires the family to work with the agency while their children remain in their home, or the court has determined it is unsafe for the children to remain home, and have placed the children in the temporary custody of the agency. Reuniting and restoring families is Family Services' primary goal.

In 2021, Family Services worked with 124 families including 251 children.



*ACCS's Family Services team*

## Alternative Response

The Alternative Response Unit assesses child safety and family needs when reports of abuse or neglect do not allege serious or imminent harm. The goal of the assessment is to engage families in the problem-solving process to mitigate risk factors. During the assessment, families are often provided with referrals to community partners as well as provided education in areas related to child abuse and neglect.

In 2021, AR worked with 583 children from 278 families



*ACCS's Alternative Response team*

## Family Support



*ACCS's Family Support team*

The Family Support unit provides supervision and monitoring of in-person and virtual parent and child visitations. Our unit consists of a supervisor, a parent mentor, a transporter, a clerical person, intermittent and full-time family support workers. The parent mentor provides individual support, child development and parenting information to families with children who are placed out of the home and those who remain in the home. Transportation services are dedicated to providing assistance to parents and children who need transportation support. Family Support staff are dedicated and trained to provide services that assist with protecting children, strengthening families, and securing futures.

In 2021, Family Support:

- ⇒ Worked with 59 children
- ⇒ Supervised/monitored 1,254 visits
- ⇒ Provided 631 transports to families and children working with the agency
- ⇒ Completed 672 virtual contacts with families

# Substance Abuse and Ohio START

In 2021, substance abuse was a factor in:

- ⇒ 225 of the screened in referrals
- ⇒ 96 (64%) of the 149 total Family Services/ Alternative Response Ongoing cases
- ⇒ 54 referrals involving drug-impacted infants
- ⇒ Opiates counted for 25% of the drug cases



Ohio START (Sobriety, Treatment, and Reducing Trauma) is a program to provide intensive trauma counseling and other services for the children who have been victims of abuse and neglect because of parental drug use. Additionally, this program provides specialized drug treatment for the parents of the children referred to this program.

- ⇒ Clients are screened for substance abuse using the UNCOPE tool and CTAC checklist
- ⇒ Clients receive services from Peer Mentors at Integrated Services
- ⇒ 10 START referrals were received in 2021

*Ohio START caseworker Jacelyn McGaughey and Family Services caseworker Mary Timms bring awareness to opioid abuse at the Alexander School carnival.*



## Foster Care and Beyond

The ACCS Placement unit manages all child placement-related services. This includes recruiting, training, licensing, and supporting a dedicated group of foster and kinship homes caring for children in agency custody. In an effort to minimize the trauma to children coming into the agency's custody, ACCS Placement staff strive to place children in the most family-like setting. Ideally, this is with relative or non-related kinship caregivers. However, if a child is unable to be placed with kinship caregivers, then the agency has a network of foster families available to provide a safe home environment for children in the agency's custody. The agency continuously recruits new foster parents needed for sibling groups, children and youth of all ages in the Athens County school district. Our Life Skills Caseworker is assigned to foster youth ages 14 and older to ensure youth are prepared for adulthood by providing training, education and support on necessary life skills.



*ACCS staff holds a foster parent drive-thru to honor foster parents while still adhering to pandemic guidelines*

In 2021, ACCS had custody of 172 children throughout the year, supported by:

- ⇒ 41 licensed foster homes
- ⇒ 28 kinship homes, providing care for 49 children

## Adoption

Permanency is a sense of stability, support, and connection most of us take for granted. It is a vital component for lifelong well-being. Our primary goal is to restore and reunify children with their birth families whenever possible. A child may be placed in the permanent custody of ACCS by the juvenile court if a parent willingly surrenders, abandons a child, or is unable to adequately address safety factors in the home.

In 2021, ACCS was awarded permanent custody of 16 children:

- ⇒ Finalized the adoptions for 8 children
- ⇒ Ended the year with 27 children available for adoption



ACCS has an Adoptive Family Caseworker that provides post adoption services to families in Athens County that have finalized adoptions (public, private, kinship, or international). This is a voluntary program in which the worker can provide support in areas such as crisis management, behavioral management, and referral to services. In 2021, there were 464 contacts with adoptive families made by this worker.

## Quality Assurance

In 2021, Quality Assurance facilitated 555 case reviews, a 19% increase from 2020

In order to assure the best possible outcomes for children and families, the Quality Assurance (QA) unit is responsible for training staff and monitoring compliance with administrative rules. The QA unit facilitates important case review meetings for ACCS, parents, and partner agencies to measure progress and plan services.



Quality Assurance Supervisor, Barb Cline, and Intake Caseworker, Paige Graham, pose while at the 2021 Kids Day at the fair.

## Regional Training Center

The Southeast Ohio Regional Training Center (SEORTC) is hosted by ACCS and is one of eight sites of the Ohio Child Welfare Training Program sponsored by the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services. The SEORTC provides high-quality, family-centered, competency-based training to staff and caregivers of public child welfare agencies in thirteen surrounding counties.



Tracy Reichardt, the Foster Parent Training Coordinator, posed with her dog for ACCS's Hug your Pet day.

In 2021, SEORTC:

- ⇒ Hosted 145 child welfare workshops
- ⇒ Attend by 1,428 child protective service professionals for a total of 986 training hours
- ⇒ Hosted 136 foster parent trainings
- ⇒ Attended by 1,085 foster parents for a total of 469 training hours

ACCS staff takes part in the Ohio University Homecoming parade

## Blessing Boxes

Responding to the food insecurity experienced by many children and families in Athens County, ACCS teamed up with partners all across the county to build, install, and maintain food pantries known as Blessing Boxes. Pantries are filled with shelf stable food items, hygiene supplies and other essentials. Each pantry displays a sign that instructs families to take what they need and donate what they can. Each of the 9 pantries were designed and constructed by ACCS facilities staff.



ACCS Facilities Manager, Rob Marcum, and Glouster Public library branch manager, Sarah Fisher, pose with the food pantry built at the Glouster Public Library.

### Community Partnerships & Blessing Box locations:

- ⇒ Waterloo Township and Volunteer Fire Department
- ⇒ Carbondale Community Center
- ⇒ Columbia Township and Volunteer Fire Department
- ⇒ Kilvert Community Center
- ⇒ Rome Township and Volunteer Fire Department
- ⇒ New Beginnings Church
- ⇒ Hope Drive Apartments and Metropolitan Housing Department
- ⇒ Job and Family Services of Athens County
- ⇒ Glouster Public Library





# Community Engagement

Despite the challenges presented by the public health emergency, ACCS sponsored a number of community events in 2021. With the proper health and safety protocols in place, ACCS offered modified versions of the Kicks for Kids, Santa Tree Project and Kidfest at Home.

In 2021, ACCS:

- ⇒ Provided gifts for 859 kids through the Santa Tree Project
- ⇒ Sent over 240 children back to school with new shoes from the Kicks for Kids project
- ⇒ Distributed 1,000 take home bags for Kidfest at Home 2021

*The Gift of Music. Every year, the Athens Musicians Memorial Project and Blue Eagle Music donate guitars to children through the Santa Tree Project.*



*Volunteer & Intern Manager, Katherine Marshall, leads an intern orientation during the 2021 Fall Semester.*

In 2021, ACCS started to rebuild our volunteer program after having limited opportunities due to Covid restrictions. We look forward to continuing to grow our volunteer program as we are able to get back to more in-person events. During 2021, we supervised 14 interns from 5 different majors that were placed in 7 different units at the agency.

*Volunteers distribute Kidfest bags to children out front of Trimble Elementary School.*



# School Outreach



*School Outreach partnered with the Athens Country Club to provide three-course meals to families throughout the year.*

School Outreach seeks to strengthen families and promote positive school relationships to enhance student school success. We partner with local school districts to have a school outreach caseworker in the following schools:

- ⇒ Alexander Elementary
- ⇒ Morrison-Gordon Elementary
- ⇒ Amesville Elementary
- ⇒ Nelsonville-York Elementary
- ⇒ East Elementary
- ⇒ Trimble Elementary

In 2021, School Outreach:

- ⇒ The 14<sup>th</sup> annual PB&J Project served 3,366 children
- ⇒ Hosted 81 group support sessions
- ⇒ Received 4,275 referrals for services
- ⇒ School Outreach Caseworkers made 1,253 referrals for additional services
- ⇒ Addressed 571 attendance and tardy concerns
- ⇒ Provided 15,988 direct units of service in 6 schools in Athens County. These services are directly or indirectly provided to, on behalf of or in collaboration with, a student, family, service provider, school or other entity



*PB&J interns, volunteers and an Americorps worker help School Outreach staff throughout the Summer PB&J Project.*

# 2021 Financial Summary

## Executive Director

Otis Crockron, MBA

## Deputy Director

Wendy Shields, MPA

## 2021 Athens County Commissioners

Charlie Adkins

Chris Chmiel

Lenny Eliason

## 2021 Board Members

Nancy Schell, Chair

Chris Innis, Co-Chair

Shelley Lieberman,  
Secretary

Reggie Robinson

Timarie Francis

Ralph Harvey

Doug Orr

Dr. Tanisha King

Dr. Jenny Shadik

Beginning Balance	\$5,049,029
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## **2021 Revenues**

Local Operating Levy	\$5,991,682
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Federal Funds	\$3,374,464
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State Funds	\$1,533,261
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Other Local Funds	\$287,219
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<b>Total Revenue</b>	<b>\$11,186,626</b>
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## **2021 Expenditures**

Employee Salaries	\$3,402,887
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Employee Healthcare and Benefits	\$1,608,818
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Placement Care	\$2,290,797
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Clothing, Food, and Transportation	\$210,533
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Health-Related Expenses for Children	\$293,115
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Building, Supplies, & Contracted Services	\$513,245
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Community Education & Staff Training	\$62,686
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Other Expenditures	\$624,527
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<b>Total Expenditures</b>	<b>\$9,006,608</b>
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<b>Ending Balance</b>	<b>\$7,229,048</b>
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ACCS Board Chair Nancy Schell

In 2019, Athens County voters approved a 2.5 mill, ten-year replacement property tax levy. Athens County Children Services staff and board greatly appreciate the continued support of the Athens community. The primary funding source for Athens County Children Services is that and a 3 mill ten-year property tax levy approved by the voters in 2015. These operating funds are vital for ACCS to be responsive to the ever-changing needs of the children and families of Athens County.

# 2021 in Numbers



(Left) Executive Director Otis Crockron and Deputy Director Wendy Shields do a radio spot for WATH 970



(Right) ACCS staff Sarah Spence and Barbara Cline setup at the Athens County fair with games and prizes.

## Protecting Children, Strengthening Families, Securing Futures

**Athens County Children Services**  
 18 Stonybrook Drive  
 P.O. Box 1046  
 Athens, OH 45701  
 Phone: 740.592.3061  
 Fax: 740.593.3880  
[Athenschildrenservices.com](http://Athenschildrenservices.com)

To report child abuse or neglect:  
 M-F, 8:00am to 4:30pm  
 Please call 740.592.3061

After-hours or emergencies:  
 Please call 1.866.863.7373



ACCS staff and volunteers placed hundreds of pinwheels in the ground for our annual Pinwheels for Prevention display in April. The pinwheels represent the instances where someone in the community acted courageously and called to report suspected child abuse or neglect.

# Athens County Children Services Support Staff



ACCS's Clerical Team



ACCS's Human Resources Department



ACCS's Fiscal Operations Team



ACCS's Maintenance Team



ACCS's Community Events Team