

# Athens County Children Services 2023



## Annual Report to the Community



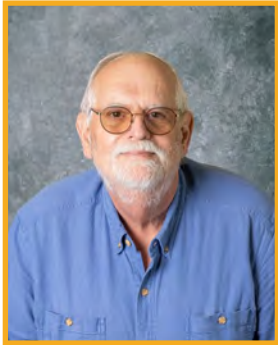
**Athens County**  
Children Services

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# Athens County Children Services Board



Chair, Nancy Schell



Co-Chair, Chris Innis



Keith Adams



Ralph Harvey



David Stretton



Susan Erlewine



Julie Lew



Reggie Robinson



Romola Hopkins

## Athens County Children Services Management Team





# A Message From Our Executive Director

To our Athens County Community,

It is my pleasure to present the Athens County Children Services 2023 Annual Report to the Community. We spent 2023 committed to strengthening and positioning our agency for the growth needed to meet the demands and challenges for children in our community. Finally, fully emerged from the pandemic, we saw a successful return to cherished in-person events such as Kidfest, Superhero and Princess Ball, Foster Parent Banquet, Champions for Childrens Dinner, and the Adoptive Family Support Group. We also continued the success from the previous year for our Santa Tree Project, Kids' Day at the Athens County Fair, and the Peanut Butter and Jelly Project, addressing hunger in Athens County throughout the summer months.

Despite these successes, ACCS faced the workforce and placement crises affecting public children's services agencies throughout the state of Ohio. We aggressively recruited caseworkers and staff to fill vacancies to improve service delivery for the families we work with. We also enhanced our foster parent recruitment and pre-services trainings to recruit and maintain a larger group of foster parents that could take placements. These efforts, among others, are positioning our agency to continue our tradition as valued community partner and maintain the high level of service delivery that our community expects from us.

This annual report will highlight the innovation and dedication our staff have displayed during this transitional year along with highlighting how our staff have adapted to continue our mission with a sense of purpose and excellence. We relish the opportunity to retain our role as a recognized leader throughout Ohio in the innovation of best practices in child welfare.

In 2024, there are big changes coming to Athens County Children Services. We will be renovating our campus to transform our office space from converted residential buildings to an office space more suited for the needs of our staff and clients. We will continue our engagement of families throughout Athens County and our focus on prevention services to assist those who need help while pioneering new ways of serving families. ACCS will be one of eight pilot agencies for the new Practice in Action Together (PACT) model of service delivery along with a Treatment Foster Home Pilot. We will also be sponsoring a 4,500 sq.ft. mural near our campus to remember our history and that of the old children's home, recognize our commitment to children in Athens County, and beautify one of the most trafficked areas in our community.

We thank all our partners for joining us in our commitment to improving the lives of children and families who struggle to find stability and who deserve every chance we can give them to thrive.

On behalf of our Board of Directors and staff, we sincerely thank the Athens County community for its continued and generous support toward our efforts to protect children, strengthen families, and secure futures.



W. Otis Crockron Jr., MBA  
Executive Director



## Foster Caregiver Spotlight: Elizabeth and Ryan Myles

Elizabeth and Ryan Myles have been foster parents for Athens County Children Services for four years, fostering over fourteen children in that time, including three in the last year. They have adopted two children and have three older biological children as a part of their family.

Their decision to foster had been one discussed since their marriage and they had considered adopting for a long time. Their biological children had even pushed them to adopt. As Elizabeth described, she grew up the oldest of eight children so she was always taking care of other kids. She even wanted to run an orphanage when she was younger. Eventually, after training opened their eyes to the need for foster caregivers in their own community, Elizabeth and Ryan decided to take the step, become foster parents, and begin caring for children who need a warm and loving home.

As they have continued their fostering journey, one of the most rewarding experiences has been to watch the children grow and change, including their own biological children whom they wanted to give a lens for compassion. They have found that through fostering, their family has been able to grieve together, navigate the intense demands of nurturing care, and strengthen their familial bonds.

Elizabeth and Ryan make it a point to have as much positive contact with the biological parents as possible. They enjoyed the remote connectivity options necessitated by the pandemic as it allowed them to provide frequent contact for the biological parents with their children through Zoom and video calls. They understand that the biological parents are in need of help working through their problems, so they like to maintain contact and give the motivation needed to do the right thing.

While they have had plenty of joy and happiness through fostering, it does not come without challenges. They, as many other foster parents have said as well, are subject to the stress of scheduling, getting the children to appointments and visits, and addressing the intense emotional needs of their children. There is a loss of flexibility in their life when they have foster placements, but they said that's why they have such a strong support network.

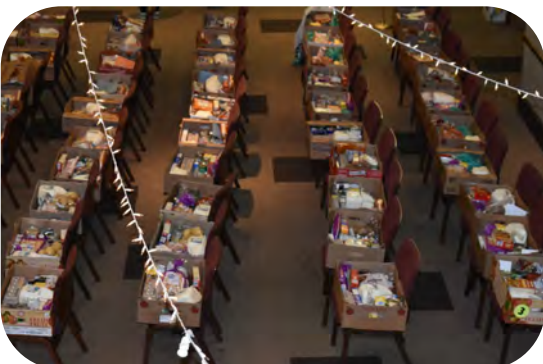
The Myles' spoke of their strong support network as something anyone considering fostering, should have in place. They have their own children, their church, other foster parents, and extended family all willing to help when needed. They recommended not being afraid to ask for help and to seize the initiative in reaching out for help and resources in the community. They each offered advice for those considering being a foster caregiver.

Ryan said "Remember what your role is. You aren't the savior nor Mister Fix It. Fostering is about trying to make the best out of a terrible situation." Elizabeth shared an inspirational quote from the Foster the Family blog, which has continued to inspire her through her fostering journey.



*Elizabeth and Ryan Myles*

I COULD BE SITTING  
ON THE SIDELINES,  
IN BLISSFUL IGNORANCE OF THE  
BROKENNESS THAT SURROUNDS ME.  
ENJOYING THE WHOLE-NESS OF  
A SWEET AND SHELTERED LIFE.  
MISSING OUT ON THE BEAUTY  
OF BREAKING OFF PIECES  
OF MY HEART AND MY LIFE  
TO MAKE ANOTHER WHOLE.  
-JAMIE FINN • FOSTER THE FAMILY



*The local Girl Scouts  
assembled and donated  
100 Thanksgiving  
food boxes to families  
in Athens County.*





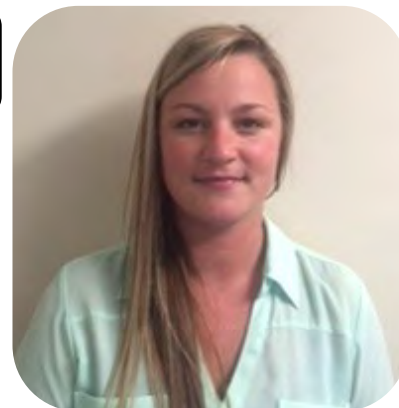
## Jenna Sweeney—Adoption Caseworker

Jenna has been an Athens County Children Services caseworker for eight years and in the child welfare field for fourteen years, also working at Hocking County and Franklin County Children Services. She attended Ohio University for her bachelors in Family Studies and Masters in Clinical Counseling. While she was initially unsure of her path right out of college, she found an opening at Hocking County Children Services, enjoyed it, and it set her down the career path that she is on today.

Jenna found her way back to Athens when there was an opening in the adoption program as the Wendy's Wonderful Kids recruiter. Currently, she is an adoption caseworker, which she enjoys because her main focus is on the child and their needs. The position doesn't come without its challenges though. The biggest challenge she faces is seeing the heartbreak of a child losing their biological family and having to explain to the children that their family will always be in their heart, but they need to move on to a safer environment. It is tough seeing and experiencing this sadness with some of the children she works with.

However, this challenge is a part of the most rewarding part of her job, which is finalization day for a child's adoption. With all the work that goes into finalizing an adoption, from ACCS, to the child, the adoptive family, and the court, getting to celebrate and see the child and family excited for the future brings no small amount of joy to Jenna's life. It's something she has taken part in where she can feel happy and proud. She had some advice for anyone considering becoming a caseworker:

**"It's overwhelming to think of what you are about to take on, but at the end of the day, it is one of the most rewarding jobs."**



*Jenna loves being around family, outdoors, and hanging out by the swimming pool.*

## ACCS Mural at the Rt. 33 Overpass of East State Street



In the spring of 2024, ACCS contracted with muralist, Mandi Caskey, to paint a 4,500 sq.ft. mural on the north abutment where Rt. 33 passes over East State St. in Athens, Ohio. The mural stands where the old children's home used to exist since 1881 before Rt. 33 was constructed and ACCS moved to our current campus buildings in 1972. The mural was designed by Mandi with input from ACCS with the goals of remembering the history of the old children's home, recognizing long-cherished community events like Kidfest, the Santa Tree Project, and the Peanut Butter and Jelly Project (all which ACCS puts on), while also beautifying one of the most travelled intersections in Athens County.

The five pinwheels on the mural were designed by highschoolers from the five local school districts—Alexander, Athens, Federal Hocking, Nelsonville-York, and Trimble. A winner was selected from each school and their design was painted on the mural by Mandi and her assistant, Liv Morris.



*ACCS Children's Home Admin. Building which is reflected on the mural*

ACCS worked with ODOT District 10 and the City of Athens to get approval for the mural and the local Sherwin-Williams to troubleshoot painting the mural on an ODOT abutment. Since completion of the mural, there has been overwhelming public support for the project.



*Muralist Mandi Caskey*

## Assessment

The Assessment team 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 assessment, families are often provided with referrals to community partners as well as provided education in areas related to child abuse and neglect.

In 2023, ACCS had 2,647 referrals of suspected abuse or neglect, of which:

- ⇒ 735 were screened in for assessment.
- ⇒ 1,040 children were involved, and
- ⇒ 50 included drug-impacted infants.



*Assessment Team*

## Screening

The Screening team is responsible for processing all reports of child abuse and neglect made to ACCS. The Screening Supervisor also provides mandated reporter training to individuals and groups in the community who are mandated reporters by law.



*Screening Team*

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 for emergency reports with caseworkers and supervisors assigned to respond.

If you are interested in mandated reporter training, please call Mindy VanBibber at 740-592-3061.

## Family Support



*Family Support Team*

The Family Support team provides supervision and monitoring of in-person and virtual parent and child visitations. 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 2023, Family Support:

- ⇒ Worked with 191 children,
- ⇒ Supervised/monitored 2,085 visits,
- ⇒ Provided 1,306 transports to families and children working with the agency, and
- ⇒ Completed 349 virtual contacts with families.

## Family Services

Our Family Services team provides ongoing services when a case needs more extensive intervention or a longer term to resolve family concerns. The families served by this team 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 2023, Family Services worked with 120 families including 250 children.



*Family Services Team A*



*Family Services Team B*



# Permanency Services

The ACCS Permanency Services team encompasses the four areas of foster care, kinship care, independent living, and 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.

The ACCS Permanency Services team 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.



Placement Team

## Foster Care

In 2023, ACCS had custody of 191 children throughout the year, supported by:

- ⇒ 52 licensed foster homes, and
- ⇒ 34 kinship homes that provided care for 55 children.

The agency continuously recruits new foster parents needed for sibling groups, children and youth of all ages in Athens and the surrounding counties.

*If you are considering becoming a foster caregiver, please scan the QR code to take you to our inquiry form to find out more.*



## Kinship Care

For children placed with relatives who are in the custody of Athens County Children Services, the agency offers ongoing support and case management services to those families and children. These services are provided by our Kinship Care workers.

## Independent Living

Our Life Skills and Permanency Caseworkers are 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.

## Adoption

In 2023, ACCS was awarded permanent custody of 24 children. The Adoption team:

- ⇒ Finalized the adoptions for 20 children, and
- ⇒ Ended the year with 32 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 2023, ACCS created the new position of Permanency Caseworker to work with youth in permanent custody, aged 15 years or older, who have been unable to find a permanent home. The Permanency Caseworker thinks outside the box and creatively to help the children feel connected and heard.



Adoption Team

## Case Review Coordinator

In 2023, as a part of overall case planning service delivery and programming, our case review coordinator assisted in the facilitation of 429 case reviews.

## Quality Assurance

To assure the best possible outcomes for children and families, the Quality Assurance Officer is responsible for monitoring compliance and ACCS's internal measures. The agency promotes excellence and continuous improvement through addressing data related to federal indicators, risk management, and stakeholder feedback.



*Quality Assurance Officer, Emily Kresiak, gets ready to hand out candy for Ohio University's Homecoming parade.*

## 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.



*SEORTC Team*

In 2023, SEORTC:

- ⇒ Hosted 136 child welfare workshops
  - Attended by 1,264 child protective service professionals for a total of 955 training hours
- ⇒ Hosted 111 foster parent trainings
  - Attended by 1,295 foster parents for a total of 244 training hours

*(Right) ODJFS Director Matt Damschroder visits ACCS and meets with our board and management team.*



## Ohio START



Ohio START (Sobriety, Treatment, and Reducing Trauma) is a children-services-led initiative that has been shown, when implemented with fidelity, to improve outcomes for both parents and children affected by child maltreatment and parental substance use disorders.

The model is specifically designed to transform the system of care within and between child welfare agencies and substance use disorder (SUD) treatment providers and other family serving systems and agencies. START uses a family centered approach and services that help the child, parents, and the entire family. START recognizes that SUD/addiction is a family disease, recovery occurs in the context of families, and adult recovery should have a parent-child component.



*OhioSTART Team*

In 2023, substance abuse was a factor in:

- ⇒ 233 (32%) of the screened in referrals,
- ⇒ 96 (71%) of the 135 total Family Services/Alternative Response Ongoing cases, and
- ⇒ 50 referrals involving drug-impacted infants.

OhioSTART clients are screened for substance abuse using the UNCOPE tool and CTAC checklist. Clients receive services from Peer Mentors at Integrated Services.

**In 2023, START accepted seven referrals to the program.**



# Community Engagement

2023 saw a successful return to in-person events for all the traditionally held ACCS events. Kidfest and the Superhero and Princess ball were successful, once again, and the new partnerships led to new events like the Bikes and Badges bike giveaway and the Reindeer Fun games day in December.

In 2023, ACCS:

- ⇒ Provided gifts for 1,156 kids through the Santa Tree Project,
- ⇒ Sent over 514 children back to school with new shoes from the Kicks for Kids project,
- ⇒ Signed up 39 new ongoing volunteers and had 20 interns from 5 different majors.

COMCorps reprised their role running an obstacle course and activity area at Kidfest 2023 for the first time since the pandemic.



Volunteer and Intern Coordinator Katherine Marshall and Trimble School Outreach Worker Becky Handa celebrate their Field Instructor and Task Supervisor Team of the Year Award from Ohio University with Foster Parent Recruiter Tanja Kuhre

In 2023, ACCS volunteers helped with events like Kidfest, Color in the Hills, Paw Paw Festival, OU Homecoming, PB&J Distribution, the Superhero and Princess Ball, and the making and planting of Pinwheels, among other events. They also provided tutoring for children and childcare for parent teacher conferences and the Adoptive Family Support Group. During 2023, we supervised **twenty interns** from **five different majors** that were placed in **six different units** at the agency,

(Right) Athens Noon Rotary club donates Thanksgiving food boxes to help families in Athens County.



# School Outreach



School Outreach Team

In 2023, School Outreach:

- ⇒ Served 5,346 children during the 16<sup>th</sup> annual PB&J Project,
- ⇒ Hosted 255 group support sessions,
- ⇒ Received 1,778 requests for family financial assistance,
- ⇒ Provided 251 child abuse and/or neglect prevention consultations,
- ⇒ Addressed 457 attendance and tardy concerns, and
- ⇒ Provided 33,457 direct units of service in six 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.

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 worker in the following schools:

- ⇒ Alexander Elementary
- ⇒ Amesville Elementary
- ⇒ East Elementary
- ⇒ Morrison-Gordon Elementary
- ⇒ Nelsonville-York Elementary
- ⇒ Trimble Elementary
- ⇒ Tri-County Career Center



The School Outreach team and the Southern Ohio Copperheads partnered for a week of the Peanut Butter and Jelly Project distribution.

# 2023 Financial Summary

## Executive Director

Otis Crockron, MBA

## Deputy Director

Wendy Shields, MPA

## 2023 Athens County

## Commissioners

Charlie Adkins

Chris Chmiel

Lenny Eliason

## 2023 Board Members

Nancy Schell, Chair

Chris Innis, Co-Chair

Sue Erlewine, Secretary

Reggie Robinson

Keith Adams

Ralph Harvey

David Stretton

Julie Lew

Romola Hopkins

Beginning Balance	\$7,738,497
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## **2023 Revenues**

Local Operating Levy	\$6,207,344
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*Federal Funds	\$5,240,641
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*State Funds	\$1,909,854
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Other Local Funds	\$370,111
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<b>Total Revenue</b>	<b>\$13,727,950</b>
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## **2023 Expenditures**

Employee Salaries	\$4,681,922
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Employee Healthcare and Benefits	\$2,084,009
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Placement Care	\$4,516,449
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Clothing, Food, and Transportation	\$277,694
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Health-Related Expenses for Children	\$406,027
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Building, Supplies, & Contracted Services	\$505,221
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Community Education & Staff Training	\$107,991
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Other Expenditures	\$3,388,161
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<b>+ Total Expenditures</b>	<b>\$15,967,473</b>
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<b>Ending Balance</b>	<b>\$5,498,974</b>
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\*Figure includes overstated revenue of \$67,580.00 for Athens County FCFC state and federal pass-through funds. These funds were passed through to ACFCFC in early 2024.

+Expenditures reflect \$2.5 million transfer into capital reserve account in December 2023.



Director Otis Crockron and Deputy Director Wendy Shields attend the 2023 Summit for Children.

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.



# 2023 in Numbers



*(Left) Director Otis Crockron addresses foster parents during the annual Foster Parent Appreciation Dinner*



*(Right) ACCS staff runs the game and activity area for the 2023 Kid's Day at the Fair.*

## 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**  
**[athenschilchildrenservices.com](http://athenschilchildrenservices.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 740.400.7059



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



Athens County  
Children Services

*Protecting Children  
Strengthening Families  
Securing Futures*



*Office Management Team*



*Business Operations Team*



*Human Resources Team*



*Community Events Team*



*Maintenance Team*



*Family and Children First Council  
Team*