

Portage JFS Open Lines

Portage County Department of Job & Family Services, Anita D. Herington, Ph.D., Director

PRC services cut back due to federal and state fiscal constraints

Due to fiscal constraints including decreases in the amounts of funds from the federal and state governments, the amount of funding for Prevention, Retention and Contingency (PRC) services has been reduced and some programs have been eliminated.

"In the last three years, we have been able to provide services to tens of thousands of people," Director Anita Herington said. Programs and supportive services that have been and will be offered to needy residents in Portage are more extensive than PRC programs in other counties.

"We have had to make some hard decisions and cuts at this time," she said.

The Community Planning Committee voted to approve the PRC Plan at its meeting of Jan. 18, 2008.

The need in Portage County is phenomenal, Director Herington stated. In the first six months of the fiscal year (July through Dec. 2007), \$560,000 more was spent in PRC than in the same six month period in 2006 to assist families.

JFS staff has worked to arrange and fund contracts with social services agencies to provide as much assistance in a wide variety of programs as possible.

The PRC program has \$568,000 less to spend this fiscal year due to the Federal government eliminating all Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) incentives through the Deficit Reduction Act, and the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services no longer allowing TANF incentive carryover.

The PRC Program provides benefits and services to needy and low income working families in need of temporary or emergency assistance. It is designed to include:

- Services to families to allow an employed adult member to maintain employment and achieve or continue self-sufficiency;
- Employment related service to OWF families;
- Supportive services to enhance family functioning and promote self-sufficiency;
- Supportive services to at-risk youth including, but not limited to, employment and training;
- Services to families in crisis involved with child protective services that could affect the re-

moval from or safe return of a child(ren);

- Service to families, elderly, and disabled individuals if the Governor declares a disaster/state of emergency and supplemental funding for disaster-related services is available;
- Services to families to meet an emergency need caused by circumstances beyond their control, which threatens the safety, health or well being of one or more family members;
- Services to families experiencing family violence.

Removed from the PRC plan are: Automobile repairs, children's beds, appliance purchase and repair, kinship care services for relatives caring for a minor child, and security deposits for rentals.

Children's beds and some appliances may be obtained through Children Services if necessary to keep a child(ren) in the home. Children Services also funds some kinship care services. To access these funds, residents should call the CARES line at 330-296-2273.

Reduced funding will be provided for: transportation services – gas cards will be limited to \$200 for employment related service each month for a maximum of three months, baby cribs will be limited to \$300 each, shelter expenses will be reduced to two months actual cost of past due rent or mortgage not to exceed \$1,500.

Home Repairs will be limited to \$3,500 in emergency repairs for electric, plumbing, heat and accessibility problems verified by a contractor as necessary for the health and safety of the family. Utility Assistance will be limited to \$1,000 for electric, gas, one full tank of fuel oil, one full tank of propane and water. These are not in effect until July 1.

Relocation benefits will be limited to victims of domestic violence or who have an emergency need caused by circumstance beyond their control, which threaten the safety or health of one or more family members, limited to \$1,500 one time.

Added to the plan is Information and Referral services which identify and communicate available resources by public and private providers including a brief assessment of customer need to facilitate appropriate referral to community resources.

Employment related services to obtain licenses, equipment and uniforms necessary for employment, were not reduced.

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Portage staff members serve on ODJFS and state association committees

Portage County is well represented on Ohio Department of Job and Family Services work groups and state associations which are designed to improve the process of assisting clients and increasing efficiency.

Director Anita Herington serves on The Executive Committee and the Legislative Committee of the Ohio Job and Family Services Directors' Association (OJFSDA).

Assistant Director/Fiscal Terri Burns and Fiscal Supervisor Sue Brannon serve on the County Finance Information System (CFIS) Pilot Group. Its mission is to create a reliable, secure and state supported reporting system that integrates with the state's accounting system.

system.

Linda Seeman, Public Assistance Direct Services Manager, serves on the State Hearing Core Workgroup. Its purpose is to identify and verify why there are so many state hearing requests and develop potential solutions to the problem. The goals are to increase efficiencies with the process and to increase customer satisfaction with the Bureau of State Hearings.

Administrator of Child Support Enforcement (CSEA), Kevin Gowan, is a member of the Ohio CSEA Directors' Association and serves on the Ohio Office of Child Support Training Work Group. That workgroup evaluates state and county training activities for system and policy initiatives and makes recom-

mendations to the state office of child support on the direction, content, and methods of future trainings offered.

Tim Beckner, Public Assistance Special Services Manager, serves on the OJFSDA conference committee.

Becky Porcase, One Stop Manager, is serving on the committee for SCOTI power users, and worked on the Workforce Investment Act participants training committee.

Reva Weekly, Fiscal Supervisor in Children Services, serves as Chairperson of the Protect Ohio Data Committee. The central purpose of the Protect Ohio evaluation is to test whether changes in the basis of payment

changes in the basis of payment and in service system responsibilities improve the way counties manage the public child welfare system, to improve the outcomes for children and families at risk.

Barb Ludban, Income Maintenance Supervisor, serves on the ODJFS Disability Determination Statewide Workgroup. This workgroup has two primary goals: 1.) improve determination timeframes; and 2.) electronic disability determination submission by all counties through eQuILL.

Family Employment Supervisor at the One Stop, Mary Boston, serves on the Work Activity Round Table group which discusses participation rates and best practices to help people find employment and limit dependency on cash assistance.

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CSEA Seminar draws legal professionals



James Aylward, Chief Magistrate in Juvenile Court, speaks at the legal seminar, "Contemporary Issues in Child Support", sponsored by our Child Support Enforcement Agency. The day long seminar, which was approved for five Continuing Legal Education (CLE) credits by the Ohio Supreme Court, was attended by 40 legal professionals. Other presentations and a panel discussion were given by Judge Joseph Giulitto and Chief Magistrate Richard Badger from Domestic Relations Court, Prosecutor Vic Viglucci, CSEA Administrator Kevin Gowan, CSEA Staff Attorney Roxana Lyle, CSEA Administrative Hearing Officer Cyndy Hostler, and Investigator Cheyenne Carver of the Prosecutor's Office. CSEA Supervisors Jeff Mitiga, Paula Barholt and Lisa Fay also assisted with the planning of the seminar.

Free Benefit Bank tax clinic for community residents to be held at Workforce Connection

The Ohio Benefit Bank will hold a free tax clinic Saturday, February 9 at the Portage Workforce Connection, 1081 West Main Street, Ravenna from 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. Portage County Job and Family Services has coordinated with the Ohio Benefit Bank to provide the location in order to assist low and moderate income residents.

Programs include filing tax returns and making sure that consumers who are eligible for the Earned Income Tax Credit receive it. The service is provided for any household making less than \$54,000 a year.

Completed tax forms are E-filed for free and refunds can be direct deposited in order to obtain reimbursement promptly. To have a refund automatically deposited into their checking account, bank account information should be available. During a clinic last year at the Medina County JFS, the program was able to bring about \$21,000 back into the community in refunds, according to Maryjo Woodburn, Regional Coordinator for the Ohio Benefit Bank.

The Benefit Bank will determine the tax credits a person can claim, including the Earned Income Credit and the Child Tax Credit. No appointments are necessary. The tax clinic cannot do farm income, income from rental properties or Business Schedule C returns.

Trained volunteers from the Ohio Benefit Bank will be on hand to assist. Those coming to the tax clinic should bring all income information, deduction and credit information, social security numbers and birthdates of household members.

The Ohio Benefit Bank is a web-based computer program to connect low and moderate-income Ohioans

Staff members on ODJFS & state association groups

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Shawn Shaulis, MIS Coordinator, and Faith Griffith, Data Specialist, County IT, serve on the NEOTech committee. It has been heralded as one of the most cost saving groups in the state, according to Shawn. It includes idea sharing for problem solving, sharing insights on changes counties may be implementing, and recommendations on equipment purchases.

Patrick O'Keefe, Training Officer 1, Public Assistance, serves on the ODJFS Trainers Group for counties.

Suzanne Dougherty, Fraud Investigator, Public Assistance, serves on the board of the Ohio Conference on

with access to work supports such as tax credits and public benefits. The Benefit Bank is offered through a public-private partnership between the Governor's Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, the Ohio Association of Second Harvest Foodbanks and more than 400 faith-based, non-profit, governmental and private sector partners.

Trained counselors are currently staffing more than 150 Benefit Bank sites. Ohio Benefit Bank Tax Clinics across the state are also helping to prepare and file federal and Ohio income tax returns at no cost to eligible Ohioans. Free income tax assistance is also available through an on line, self-service program. More information on the on-line program can be accessed at OBB.Ohio.gov.



HERO Committee Valentine's Day basket raffle

Drawing will be held Thurs., February 14
ticket sales end at Noon

Tickets are \$1.00 for 1, \$2.00 for 3 or \$5.00 for 14

Proceeds go to local charitable causes and employee events

Turn Around Ohio increases health care access

With the Turn Around Ohio Initiatives, Governor Strickland plans to: "Stabilize health costs for government and businesses alike and advance the health of our citizens by increasing the number of Ohioans who have access to affordable, high-quality healthcare, preventing illnesses and injury and focusing on community-based services for children, families, older adults and persons with disabilities."

Joanne Hynes, Training Officer 2, is a member of the Turn Around Ohio (TAO) county work group. The group is studying how CRISE will handle the programming of the initiatives which will increase the number of Ohioans who have access to affordable health care.

Three changes that were effective Jan. 1 had been topics of the work group: covering families within 90% of the federal poverty level with no time limit; expanding medical coverage for foster care children to age 21; and expanding coverage for pregnant women from 150% of the FPL to 200%.

There are also plans for Healthy Start Expansion for children with family income more than 200% federal poverty level (FPL) up to 300%, who do not have creditable health insurance, with family premiums for this group. A children's buy-in program is being discussed for children with disabilities who participate in Bureau of Children with Medical Handicaps, with a countable income over 300% of the FPL, as is the Medicaid Buy-In for Workers with Disabilities (MBIWD), which will enable workers with disabilities to earn income and have resources without the risk of losing health care coverage.



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Mary Boston to receive Real Heroes Award

Congratulations to Mary Boston, Employment Services Supervisor, who will be recognized by the Red Cross as a recipient of the Real Heroes Award. Mary's efforts in donating her time and funds to brighten the holidays for senior citizens at Longmeadow Care Center, has earned her this well-deserved recognition.



Looking over the gift baskets at the very successful holiday luncheon sponsored by the Coordination of Services Committee are (from left) Janet Kovick, Administrative Assistant, and Faith Griffith, Data Specialist, County IT. Raffle ticket sales for the 12 gift baskets took in \$471.50 for the committee, which will sponsor the 2008 holiday luncheon.

Congratulations and thank you for 30 years of county service reached in

Jan. 2008: Linda Siltz, Administrative Assistant, Children Services and Debbie Smith, Income Maintenance Worker 2, Public Assistance

Feb. 2008: Terri Brunswick, Supervisor, Public Assistance

Moving In, Moving Up

New Hires:

Jessica Gregory - Clerical Specialist - Child Support Enforcement Agency

Cynthia Pickens - Income Maintenance Aide 2 - Public Assistance Adult/Family Unit

Melissa Basham - Income Maintenance Aide 2 - MIS Unit

Vicki Komara - Custodial Worker - Facilities

Noreen Siegner - Income Maintenance Aide 2 - Public Assistance Intake Unit

Kathleen Guckelberger - Training Officer - Children Services

Charlene Wolfe - Social Services Worker 3 - Children Services

Catherine Shipp - Income Maintenance Aide 2 - Public Assistance PRC

Kay Dillon - Social Services Worker 3 - Children Services

Nicholas Anderson - Employment Service Counselor - One-Stop

John Donat - Social Services Worker 3 - Children Services



Public Assistance staff enjoyed punch and homemade cookies to celebrate the holidays, sponsored by the PA Managers, Supervisors and the JFS Director. Supervisor Becky Price serves Income Maintenance Worker Heather Kimbrough as PA Direct Services Manager Linda Seeman chats with staff.