

Portage JFS Open Lines

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

Portage JFS audit response strongly objects to state findings

In a 2006 review "no problems found" was the conclusion.

Portage County Job and Family Services efficiency review at this level illustrates remarkable compliance.

—Portage JFS audit response

Portage County Department of Job and Family Services has again presented objections to the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services' findings of questioned costs and the calculation of those sums in its 2002 regular audit.

After responding to all findings in November 2005, with documentation requested or clarifying any questions of office procedures, the response back from ODJFS was not received by Portage JFS until October, 2006.

Portage JFS again states that the findings and alleged costs are not supported by documentation and that the few issues remaining are only clerical errors, not any major programmatic problems.

"The questioned costs were not

in any way related to fraud or misuse of funds," JFS Assistant Director for Fiscal Terri Burns stated. "Upon analysis the majority of questioned costs tied to clerical errors made on a few selected random moments samples (RMS) in Income Maintenance, Social Services and Child Support," she said.

2005-2006 Audit Ends -In the informal exit conference with ODJFS auditors for the 2005-2006 audit, county authorities were told there were "no questioned costs." The auditors also mentioned how cooperative the staff was to work with.

"I would like to thank Public Assistance Mangers Linda Seeman and Susan Stark, Assistant Director Terri Burns, Account Clerk Supervisor Sue Brannon and Chief of the Civil Division of the Prosecutor's Office Denise Smith, for dropping everything to re-search the RMS samples and the audit report for the response," JFS Director Anita Herington said.

The response was sent to the state within the 30 day requirement. ODJFS officials have not set a timeline for when they will respond to the latest objection from Portage JFS.

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Portage JFS Public Assistance was recognized at the ODJFS Quality Performance Conference for payment accuracy in the Food Stamp program. The Office of Research, Assessment & Accountability awarded Portage for having achieved a TEER (Top Error Element Review) accuracy rating of 94.61%. Pictured from left: Kevin Giangola, Deputy Director ODJFS; Terri Brunswick, PA Supervisor; Becky Simons, PA Supervisor, and Fred Williams, Assistant Director ODJFS.



Veterans Rapid Response Program offered

A new program to assist veterans in finding employment is being offered at the Portage Workforce Connection. "Veterans Rapid Response Program" or VR2 can provide funds to train veterans for vocational, on-the-job training and to obtain licensing or certifications.

The U.S. Department of Labor has ruled that being honorably discharged from military service terminates an employment relationship between the veteran and the military, qualifying them as a "dislocated worker" and eligible to receive WIA job training benefits just as a person could who is laid off or whose company has moved. A military spouse who leaves their job to follow a spouse may also qualify.

To receive funding, a veteran should come to the Portage Workforce Connection at 1081 W. Main St., Ravenna and speak with the Veterans Intensive Services Coordinator Bill Flasiq between 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday.

In addition to the VR2 training funding, all the career search services at the Workforce Connection are available to veterans such as assistance with writing résumés to include skills learned in the military, interviewing, and the use of computer programs on job opportunities. The veteran representative can also assist them with registering into SCOTI, a state computer matching program for employers and jobseekers.

November National Adoption Month Theme: "Answering the Call: You Don't Have to be Perfect to be a Perfect Parent"

JFS sponsors adoption workshop for area professionals & families

"Surviving the Trauma Drama—Understanding the Neuropsychological Impact of Trauma on the Developing Brains of Children" was the topic of guest speaker Dee Paddock, M.A., M.T.S. at an adoption conference sponsored by JFS.

The all day workshop held at the Northeastern Ohio Universities College of Medicine brought together area professionals and families.

Paddock elaborated on the impact of abandonment, neglect, deprivation, abuse, loss and fear on the developing brains of babies and children. In her second presentation of the day she spoke about behavioral crises for traumatized children and strategies for parents and professionals.

An adoptive mother of three, Paddock used personal examples throughout her presentations.

"Change happens slowly—not in the ways we expect," she said. "My children have been my greatest teacher. Much that I've shared with you, I've learned from them."

Northeast Ohio Adoption Services, (NOAS) of Warren and Garfield Heights helped facilitate the conference. NOAS is a specialized agency that has found adoptive homes for over 1,100 Ohio children, mostly school-aged.

Portage County has been recognized by the state for its success in finding adoptive homes for children over the age of nine.

Those wishing to add to their own families through adoption should call JFS Social Services Worker Rosemarie Stegh at 330-297-3745 or Social Services Worker Teresa Adkins at 330-297-3462 regarding foster care.

CSEA exceeds performance goals

Portage County Child Support Enforcement Agency (CSEA) reports that it has shown great improvement in all areas when compared to September 2005. "We've exceeded our required goals for this federal fiscal year in all four incentive categories," CSEA Administrator Sylvia Strasshofer said.

The greatest change was in Support Establishment. At 71.32%, this was 5.4 % higher than 2005. The highest performance incentive percentage was in Paternity Establishment at 88.41%. Current Support Collections is 72.84% and Arrears Collection for fiscal 2006 is at 70.79%.

Ms. Strasshofer expressed her thanks to the CSEA Staff for all they have done and continue to do to improve child support services in Portage County.

ODJFS officials welcomed to Portage County

Officials from the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services were welcomed to Portage County by Portage County JFS Director Anita Herington, her administrators, Public Assistance management team and Portage County Commissioner Chuck Keiper recently.

Among the topics discussed were concerns the counties and state have over stricter federal regulations covering those needing assistance for their families while enrolled in education and training programs, and the upcoming state transition.

ODJFS officials have not visited Portage County since 1998. Both Assistant Director Fred Williams and Office of Family Stability Deputy Director Jeanne Carroll praised Portage County JFS as one of the departments in the state most organized and most concerned with quality control.

New Medicaid citizenship rules prove challenging for clients, staff

The federal government has issued guidelines for implementation of a new rule which requires persons applying for Medicaid to document their citizenship when renewing eligibility or applying for Medicaid for the first time. Portage County Public Assistance staff will be following the directives of the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services on this issue.

“Our workers have been explaining this requirement to the clients and we are getting information to the public also, to clear up any information out there that has been confusing,” Linda Seeman, Manager of Public Assistance explained.

The regulation requiring citizenship verification was effective in Ohio as of September 25, 2006.

American citizenship or legal immigration status has always been a requirement for Medicaid eligibility, however, beneficiaries could assert their status by checking a box on a form. The federal government will now require actual documentation before Medicaid eligibility is granted or renewed. Both citizenship and identity will have to be proven now. A passport, certificate of naturaliza-

tion or certificate of U.S. citizenship would meet both qualifications.

But if secondary documentation is used, such as a birth certificate, final adoption decree, official military record showing a U.S. place of birth, U.S. Citizen ID card, or a certification of birth abroad, the individual will also need evidence of their identity such as a current drivers license, draft card, state ID card, or an identity document of the Immigration and Nationality Act.

A nursing home or other institution admission paper created at least 5 years before the initial Medicaid application showing U.S. birth place can also be used as a birth document.

A child under 16 can use a school ID card with photograph, military dependents ID card with photograph, school record showing date and place of birth and parents; clinic, hospital, doctor or day care record showing date of birth, to document identity.

Babies born in the United States whose mother is on Medicaid do not need the necessary citizenship documents until their first reapplication for benefits.

Those on Medicare or SSI are

exempt from the citizenship requirement.

States must implement an effective process for assuring compliance with documentation of citizenship in order to obtain federal matching funds.

A person already enrolled in Medicaid will remain eligible if he or she continuously shows a good faith effort to present satisfactory evidence of citizenship and identity. New applicants for Medicaid will not be eligible under the federal rules until they have presented the required documentation.

If families have difficulty obtaining the necessary citizenship verifications, the agency may be able to assist them in obtaining them.

Help Me Grow Playgroup

The Help Me Grow Parent and Child Playgroup will meet Friday, Dec. 8 and Friday Jan. 12 at the United Church of Christ, 1400 E. Main St., Kent from 10-11:30 a.m. The Playgroup is open to Portage County residents with children under three years of age. Toys and snacks are provided. For more information, call Judy at 330-298-4545 or Cheri at 330-298-4229.

FLIGHT program for children and teens promotes healthy lifestyles

Today's children are the first generation of children in the U.S. that will probably not outlive their parents, according to data viewed by Child Health Services.

“This is related to the numbers of children overweight and experiencing many of the secondary illnesses associated with middle age adults such as high blood pressure, heart and joint disease and diabetes,” Clinic Pediatric Nurse Jill Smith, RN,MSN,CPNP explained.

Child Health Services is trying to help children develop better eating habits with a healthy lifestyle program and fitness program. FLIGHT (Families Learning Individualized Guidelines for Healthy Tomorrows), is a program designed for children who reside in Portage County and are between the ages of 3-18 years old, with a BMI (body mass index) in the 75 percentile or greater.

It is a healthy living program focusing on a balance between calories consumed and activity expenditures.

FLIGHT is designed to recognize the individuality and uniqueness of each family and the holistic needs of the child.

The FLIGHT program will make available an opportunity for exercise and information about dietary choices at the Boys and Girls Club of Ravenna, 519 Walnut St., Mondays and Wednesdays from 6 to 7 p.m.

The program will include physical activity led by a fitness trainer from the Ravenna Athletic Center. Anyone interested in the free programs can sign up at the Boys and Girls Club or call Child Health services at 330-297-5437 for more information.



Portage County Job and Family Services

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Congratulations on 30 years!

Three employees with 30+ years service were honored at a celebration party. Plaques were presented by Director Herington and the staff members were thanked for their dedication by County Commissioners Chris Smeiles, Maureen Frederick and Chuck Keiper. Refreshments were provided by the Recognition and Awards Committee chaired by Sue Stark.

Thirty year staff members pictured are: Becky Porcase, One Stop and Daycare Manager, Kathi Ehasz, Income Maintenance Aide and Penny Ray, Manager of Children Services.

Happy Retirement wished to Ruth Carnes

Ruth Carnes, Child Health Services Administrator, has announced her retirement effective January 2, 2007. Ruth has over 25 years of public service, including serving as Child Health Manager or Administrator for the past seven. Prior to coming to Child Health, she served as a nutritionist at the OSU Extension office in charge of the F-NET program and as a supervisor at Hillcrest Hospital.

"It has been exciting and challenging to be part of the clinic growth as a result of its incorporation into the Department of Job and Family Services," Ruth said. "I have valued the collaboration and support of my peers making it possible to facilitate benefits to the clients that we all serve."

"I want to personally thank Ruth for her unwavering commitment to the needs of the children of Portage County," JFS Director Anita Herington said.

Ruth plans to spend more time with her family including visiting her granddaughter in Tennessee.

PA Special Services Manager takes new position

Susan Stark, Public Assistance Special Services Manager, has taken a new position with the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services in the Cleveland office. She will be working as a Case Management Analyst doing food stamp reviews. She will be visiting other counties within the region to check on food stamp quality assurance. Sue joined the staff in 1991.

"I am excited for the change, but I will miss everyone. I'll be in GroupWise if anyone needs to contact me," Sue said. We wish Sue well. Her last day at Portage JFS will be Dec. 15.

Maggie Baier, Ken Townend say goodbye to JFS

Maggie Baier, Income Maintenance is retiring with 28 years public service having been recognized over the years for outstanding performance. She will be greatly missed by JFS.

Also retiring after spending 5 1/2 years assisting employees is Custodial Worker Ken Townend. Enjoy your retirements Maggie and Ken!

Moving In, Moving Up

New Hires:

Jennifer Skinner - IM Worker 3 (Public Assistance)

Paula Bartholdi - IM Worker 3 (Public Assistance)

Lynne Porter - IM Aide 2 (One Stop)

Rebecca Abbott - IM Supervisor 1

Promotions:

Tammy Hickman - from IM Aide 1 (PA) to IM Worker 3 (PA)

Renee Baka - from Case Manger (CSEA) to IM Worker 3 (PA)

Detra Tabor - from Clerical Specialist (CSEA) to Case Manager (CSEA)

Kimberly MacPhail - from Social Services worker 3 to Social Service Supervisor 1

