



# Mahoning Matters

1. matter (n.) – material, topic, issue or subject
2. matter (v.) – to be of importance, to count, to make a difference

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## In this issue:

- From the Director's Desk **pg 2**
  - Adoption Advocacy Day
- Quality Improvement Update **pg 3**
  - When the Going Gets Tough
    - Giving Back
- It Matters to Meghan **pg 4**
  - Taking the Lead
- English Corner **pg 5**
  - Did You Know?
- Foster Parent Association **pg 6**
  - Community Resources
- Health Matters **pg 6**
  - Reporting Abuse & Neglect
  - Newsletter Committee

## Christmas Comes to Children Services!

Every year, Mahoning County Children Services organizes a Christmas donation drive that provides gifts for hundreds of children and families. We simply could not do this without the help and support of our very generous donors who make this event possible. Without their help, many children would not receive a gift for the holiday.



Some of our very generous donors include:

St. Charles Church, Taylor Kia of Boardman, Child Support, Victory @ Liberty, Turning Point Counseling, State Alarm, Poland Post Office, Ryan's Carpet, Sandi's Family Hair Care and Bike Nashbar.

If you would like more information on how to be a part of this Christmas drive, please contact Radhika Cruz at 330-941-8852. We will be accepting contributions until December 20th.

We still have need of **exercise equipment** and **new comforters /pillows** for the beds in our Boy's and Girl's Child Care Centers. If you would like to meet this need, please contact Glenna Ress or Radhika Cruz at 330-941-8888.

*Thank you for helping us make the season bright for our families.*

Happy Holidays! Happy Holidays! Happy Holidays! Happy Holidays! Happy Holidays!

# Mahoning Matters

## From the Director's Desk By Denise Stewart

As the year draws to a close and we begin to gather data for our 2011 Annual Report, it is readily apparent that together we have accomplished much. Faced with scarce and declining resources, we have had to trim our budget and creatively manage service to children and families.

We have effectively worked to reduce the number of children in care, always striving for the least restrictive placement for the child. Our data will show **substantial reduction** in the number of residential placements along with an increase in the use of therapeutic foster care. These efforts combined support the use of a family setting to effectively move children toward the ultimate goal of permanency.

Our Differential Response program continues to inspire the use of unique responses to different situations. By partnering with families to respond to a crisis in low risk cases, often out of home placements have been avoided. In addition, we have agency staff actively serving on MCWIC (Midwest Child Welfare Implementation Center) rule review committees, providing a local voice into State Rule review. As an outcome of our recent Strategic Plan, our lead workers have emerged as a cohesive team, providing a leadership experience for staff and a support system for new workers. As we pursue our goal of accreditation, we are beginning to set our sights on the next step of the application process. Work teams have been organized and are actively meeting in line with this goal.

Finally, we are extremely proud of the partnerships that have been developed and strengthened as the result of hosting the National One Church, One Child Conference this year in Ohio. Working closely with board members, community partners, and "sister" agencies, the 2011 One Church, One Child Conference committee created a compelling and memorable experience for all involved. And--these are only the highlights. Watch for the 2011 Annual Report for more details!

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## Children Can't Wait. Support Adoption!

By Theresa Pancoe

Mahoning County Children Services was honored to be on the planning committee and to participate in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Adoption Advocacy Day Event in Columbus, Ohio on November 15, 2011. The event was organized and sponsored by the Ohio Adoption Planning Group, a public/private collective of child welfare agencies from across Ohio advocating for best practices in adoption and permanency. This year's theme "Children Can't Wait: Support Adoption" was to support the goal of raising awareness to reduce the number of children aging out of Ohio's foster care system.



The presenters at the event included Melinda Sykes, Esq., Director of Children's Initiatives, Ohio Attorney General Mike DeWine; Rita Soronen, President and CEO, Dave Thomas Foundation; Denise St. Clair, Executive Director, National Center for Adoption Law and Policy at Capital University; Senator David Burke, 26<sup>th</sup> Senate District; and Senator Charleta Tavares, 15<sup>th</sup> Senate District (see photo at left). In addition, three young adults spoke on adoption and foster care and their experiences in the Ohio Child Welfare System. The event also included volunteers visiting each Senator and Representative currently serving in Ohio's General Assembly and was provided with a legislative packet to call on them to do all they can to help ensure that every child in Ohio has an opportunity to become part of a family and that our Children Can't Wait.

This statewide event was to advocate to Ohio Legislators regarding the **16,800** children currently in Ohio's foster care system and the **2,897** children awaiting an adoptive family. **These children awaiting an adoptive family will wait in foster care for an average of 3.5 years before being adopted.** Think about that, 3.5 years, that is a lifetime when you are a child. The reality is that **1,042** youth will never be adopted and will age out of the foster care system. In fact, a child has a one in three chance of not being adopted before aging out of foster care.

If you are interested in finding out more about how to become a foster/adoptive parent please contact Peggy Messer at 330-941-8888. Mahoning County Children Services has a high percentage of waiting children that are teens in need of the support and guidance necessary to reach their unlimited potential! Remember....Children Can't Wait!



# Mahoning Matters

## Continuous Quality Improvement Update

By Julie Rudolph

January always brings a flurry of resolutions and for good reason. What could be a better time than the start of a new year to re-focus on making improvements? Usually resolutions are made after some consideration as to the current status of our lives and as part of a larger, broader goal; to be healthier, to be more productive, and to achieve greater success. Some resolutions challenge us to implement a new habit and others, to give up a bad habit.



As the CQI Department at Mahoning County Children Services enters its second year after expansion, we have learned a great deal from our development over the past year and are excited to continue to learn and grow over the next year, as we become more experienced and knowledgeable. We will continue to focus on agency wide evaluation and improvement and strive to achieve the goal of accreditation.

At the fore front of our intentions for the upcoming year is the quote by William A. Foster, a U.S Marine who was awarded the Medal of Honor for his courageous acts in WWII. *"Quality is never an accident; it is always the result of high intention, sincere effort, intelligent direction, and skillful execution. It represents the wise choice of many alternatives."* We are looking forward to a year full of positive progress and continued success in fulfilling Mahoning County's mandate to provide children with safety, permanency and well-being.



We have all heard that it is more blessed to give than to receive and at this time of year, people tend to be in a more giving mode than usual. However, we must remember that throughout the year, there is always someone less fortunate.

Giving should not be for a season, it should be a part of what defines you. Giving does not have to mean gifts, money or food. We all have talents with which to "give" to others. One might be a good listener; one may be

very good in encouraging others. When you have some quiet time, look into your heart and see what gifts and talents you have been blessed with, then give it away! As you give, you will be filled, and you will discover that it really is more blessed to give than to receive!

## Giving Back!

By Radhika Cruz (adapted from *7 Good Reasons to Give Back* by Leanne Beattie)

You don't have to be rich and famous to make a difference in the world and research has shown it is truly **"better to give than to receive."** Not only does giving back make you feel good, it can also be good for your health. A Canadian study has shown that 85% of volunteers rated their health as good compared to 79% of non-volunteers. Other studies have shown an increase in self-esteem amongst those who volunteer. There are countless reasons and benefits to volunteering but here are just a few for you to consider.

\*Volunteering can help you stay socially **connected** to others. It can relieve boredom, loneliness and help you fill the hours of your day in a productive way.

\*Volunteering is also a way to **give back** to your community. It shows selflessness, kindness and appreciation to those in the community who need a friendly smile or encouraging word.

\*Volunteering helps you to **grow** as an individual. You can explore your likes and dislikes which could in turn influence your decision to pursue a new or different career. It also helps you to redirect your attention and energy toward others rather than fixing your eyes on your own problems.

\*Volunteering also helps to boost your **self-esteem**. It feels good to give and meet the needs of others. It can be as simple as mowing someone's lawn, buying them groceries, reading stories to children or binding up wounds. You can and do matter to the world. So get moving and be determined to give back through your time, smile and encouraging words. It only takes just one to make a big difference in the world! Please read *"It Matters to Meghan"* for more tips on volunteering and giving back!



# Mahoning Matters

## It Matters To Meghan

By Meghan Tarantino

There is always time in the year to give back and to help others. With the holidays coming, it is an extra special time for all, and many find time in their hearts to do more for those who have less.

The holidays can be a joyous time and it's also a perfect opportunity to get out into the community of which we are all an integral part of.

There are many things each and every one of us can do to make the holidays better for others: Give to your local food bank, Volunteer at a local shelter or soup kitchen, donate to Operation Christmas Child, Donate a gift from a giving tree, take Christmas cards and goodies to local nursing homes, give cash donations, hold a benefit to raise money for a charity or donate a Christmas tree to a needy family/organization just to name a few.



Be creative and bring the holiday spirit to all around you by volunteering and giving back! Happy Holidays!

## Taking the Lead! By Radhika Cruz

Leadership can be defined in many ways. Leadership expert John Maxwell sums up his definition by stating "**Leadership is influence-nothing more, nothing less.**" The Roman Catholic Diocese of Rochester defines it as "**the process of influencing the behavior of other people toward group goals in a way that fully respects their freedom.**"

Last November, our agency embarked on new approach to providing leadership and influence to others and termed this approach "**lead caseworkers.**" These specialized workers are responsible for providing mentorship and guidance for newly hired caseworkers and Youngstown State University interns. There are currently 8 lead caseworkers who represent each unit and department in our agency. These lead caseworkers have been busy coordinating training opportunities for new workers/interns and providing them with many job shadowing experiences including home visits, emergency placements and testifying in court to name a few.



The lead caseworkers have also been busy creating events to provide support, encouragement, camaraderie and fun in the work place. Some of their activities have included pot luck luncheons, hot chocolate socials and after work "wind downs".



They have also organized a community food drive where canned goods are collected every Friday in exchange for a work "dress down" day. All donations will be given to the Second Harvest Food Bank & Warriors. Inc.

The leads have also created a bi-weekly "**shout-out**" that serves as an encouraging word to a fellow co-worker in regard to his/her service delivery, support and positive attitude demonstrated on the job. These **shout-outs** are also posted publicly for all others to see.

The lead caseworkers at Mahoning County are excited to be a part of this innovative leadership approach and truly work together as a unified team. They have accepted the challenge of leading by example and strive to be the voice of positivity daily. Their motto can be summed up in the words of Edward Everett Hale, "**I am only one, but I am one. I cannot do everything, but I can do something. And I will not let what I cannot do interfere with what I can do.**" So we encourage you to take the lead as well. Find a need and fill it! The world is waiting for you. The world needs YOU!



(in photo from Left to Right: Cynthia B.-Abuse Lead, Radhika C.-Foster Care Lead, Kristy G.-Family Services Lead., Amy T.-Neglect Lead, Victoria L.-Family Services Lead, Marisa L.-Family Services Lead) Other lead workers not in photo: Becky H.-Residential Lead and Jason Moore-Family Services Lead

# Mahoning Matters



*Lit* and *lighted* are interchangeable as the past tense of the verb *light*, but use of the latter is rare in American writing culture. For example, few would write/say “All at the vigil *lighted* a candle before singing a familiar hymn” but doing so would be grammatically correct and just fine.

**The spelled-out versions of fractions are hyphenated:**

Leesel has completed *one-fourth* of the math problems, yet she still must write approximately *two-thirds* of her research paper.

**For numbers 21 through 99 that require two words to spell out, the spelled-out versions are hyphenated:**

Carson bought *thirty-six* loaves of bread and made sandwiches for the football team’s *fifty-seven* members.

By the way, it’s “...cool, calm, and *collected*” NOT “...cool, calm, and *collective*.” One who is unfazed by in-the-moment pressure is a *collected* individual.



E-mail me your English questions at [pkm32mpf@aol.com](mailto:pkm32mpf@aol.com) and I’ll give you my words.

## Mahoning County Foster Parent Association

By Peggy Messer

The Foster Parent Association would like to thank everyone who bought and/or sold pies during their 9th annual pie fundraiser.

Thanks to your generous support this was their **most** successful year. All proceeds from this sale go to the Christmas Party held annually for the children in foster care. We wish you a very Merry Christmas & a Happy New Year!

## Did You Know?

[greatfacts.com](http://greatfacts.com)

That...One out of 20 people have an extra rib

That...The name Wendy was made up for the book “Peter Pan”

That...It costs about 3 cents to make a \$1 bill in the United States

## “Quotes”

“You must be the change you wish to see in the world” –Mahatma Ghandi

“Do not let what you cannot do interfere with what you can do” – John Wooden

“ Find a need and fill it” - Ruth Stafford Peale

## Community Resources

### • Mahoning County Children Services

Offers **FREE Child Safety** Presentations in the community & for children in the Mahoning County School Systems. We also offer **Mandated Reporter Trainings**. For more information contact Radhika Cruz at 330-941-8852.

### • Akron Children’s Hospital - Child Advocacy Center

Offers FREE Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Training. To learn more please contact Andrea Mistovich at 330-743-2539.

### • Help Hotline 2 – 1 – 1

Providing Information and Referral Services. **Get connected. Get answers.**

### • CASA – A child’s voice in court.

Mahoning County Court Appointed Special Advocate Program  
“Speak up for a child.” CASA is a volunteer organization –  
for more information contact: Renee Battafarano, Executive Director at 330-740-2239.



# Mahoning Matters

## Health Matters

By Melinda Lackner



Sometimes taking small steps/changes in improving our lives is the longest lasting. Developing new healthy habits one at a time rather than trying to make a complete change at once, may be easier to make a part of your life rather than something you have to constantly work at.

A habit by definition is “**an acquired behavior pattern regularly followed until it has become almost involuntary.**” By changing your current bad eating habits with new healthy ones in steps, you will be picking and eating good foods without even thinking about it before long!

Below is a list of “Super Foods” according to Women’s Day magazine which can be incorporated into your new healthy eating life style.



**Leafy Greens** such as Spinach, Swiss chard and Kale can help improve your body’s response to stress and because of the antioxidants, help protect blood vessels. These greens are packed with magnesium as well as folic acid which may also help reduce depression.

**Yogurts** that contain live active cultures, not only contains calcium for bone health but also helps to keep your digestive and immune systems healthy.

**Oranges** are full of antioxidant vitamin C and fiber. They will give you a steady stream of energy due to the fiber and thanks to the vitamin C; they can help to lower stress hormone levels which is perfect during the holiday season!



**Tomatoes** are also loaded with vitamin C and fiber. Research is indicating that lycopene, an antioxidant found in tomatoes, may help to fight cancer growth.

**Pomegranates** also are being studied for their phytochemicals that are also believed to have cancer-fighting properties. They have antioxidants too, which help protect your blood vessels from hardening and narrowing.



## Recognizing and Reporting Child Abuse & Neglect

By Radhika Cruz

How much do you know about child abuse and neglect? Do you know how to recognize the signs of child maltreatment? Do you know how to report your knowledge or suspicion of child maltreatment?

Here are some **basic** tips to help you answer these questions. Please note, the following information is not all inclusive and does not guarantee abuse is occurring. Additional information may be needed to verify an actual occurrence of abuse/ neglect.



### Recognizing the Signs:

**Physical Abuse:** Child may have unexplained bruises, burns, lacerations, head injuries. Child may seem frightened of parent and shrink at his/her approach.

**Sexual Abuse:** Bathroom difficulties, somatic complaints of genital pain and irritation, sexually transmitted disease, bedwetting, running away, self-mutilation, sexually promiscuous and unusual sexual knowledge or behaviors inappropriate for child’s age.

**Neglect:** Unsuitable clothing for the weather, untreated illness or injury, poor hygiene, frequent school absence and inconsistently dirty and has **severe** body odor.

### Making the Report:

Provide us with your *name, address and phone number*. Your name is not required, but is helpful and useful for follow-up. Anonymous reporting is acceptable however, if you are a **mandated reporter**, your name, phone number & place of employment is needed to provide you with verification of fulfilling the legal responsibility to report as outlined in the Ohio Revised Code section 2151.421.



Provide us with the name age, date of birth and address of the child you are concerned.

Provide us with the names & addresses of the parents and/or caregivers/legal guardian.

Provide us with information concerning the child’s current condition, injury, suspected perpetrator and direct statements from the child regarding his/her maltreatment.

Your identity and all information will be kept confidential.

## Newsletter Committee

**We are looking for agency staff to be an active part in the Newsletter. Would YOU consider contributing to the Newsletter? If the answer is “Yes”, please contact one of the members below.**



Radhika Cruz, Editor  
Floree Stubbs, Supervisor  
Peggy Messer, Caseworker

Theresa Pancoe, Co-Editor  
Philip Murphy, Abuse Supervisor  
Meghan Tarantino, Caseworker

Julie Rudolph, CQI Supervisor  
Ruth Parker, Case Aide  
Melinda Lackner, File Clerk