



Summit County  
**CHILDREN SERVICES**

*Building Families . . . Building Futures*

# 2015-2019 STRATEGIC PLAN



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## MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

For well over a century, Summit County Children Services has improved the lives of abused and neglected children and their families by promoting child safety, permanency and well-being. As the Executive Director, I want to ensure that the agency is prepared to meet the changing needs of our community.

In developing our goals and strategies, our guiding principal was “*Building Families . . . Building Futures.*” I also want to emphasize our steadfast commitment to preserving the public's trust by protecting the most vulnerable citizens within our community, while ensuring that the agency is free from waste, fraud and abuse of public funds.

I am very pleased to share our 2015-2019 Strategic Plan. Our plan will guide us as we make bold changes in technology and enhance service delivery while focusing on the needs of our clients and community partners. The plan serves as a blueprint for achieving our missions and vision, focusing on the areas of:

- **Diversity**
- **Fiscal Responsibility**
  - **Leadership**
  - **Partnerships**
- **Professionalism**
  - **Quality**

We are committed to best practices surrounding case management, which is a driving force behind each goal and objective. Each day our employees consistently service our clients with care and compassion while maintaining a focus on the best interest of the child(ren) in our care. We pledge to continue our focus to ensure that as many people as possible have a positive experience when conducting business with us. We will enhance our service delivery by leveraging the benefits of innovative technology. In addition, we will continue to utilize feedback from our clients and the community to enhance and improve our services.

Nothing in this plan would be possible without our dedicated workforce. I am very pleased with the plan's focus on our employees – our greatest asset. The plan reflects our strategies for strengthening and supporting our workforce through training and development opportunities, and emphasizes our need for succession planning. We will also ensure diversity and an open and inclusive culture that encourages innovation from all employees.

I am confident that our plan will serve as an excellent guide as we move forward. I want to thank those who contributed and took the time to provide feedback as reflected herein. This plan incorporates all of your invaluable contributions and input. I look forward to working with you in achieving our goals and serving the citizens of Summit County.

Julie Barnes, M.Ed., LSW  
Executive Director

## **AGENCY OVERVIEW**

For well over a century, Summit County Children Services (SCCS) has improved the lives of abused and neglected children and their families by promoting child safety, permanency and well-being. The agency provides an array of quality services designed to build families and build futures. In addition, SCCS has recently pioneered a variety of new specialized programs and services to meet the special needs of those we serve, such as: *Alternative Response (AR)* – a less-investigatory/more-collaborative child welfare service model, the *Serious Trauma Assessment Team (STAT)*, which specializes in cases of suspected child sexual abuse, and a community-wide fatherhood initiative called *The Father Factor* – designed to create awareness about the importance of identifying and engaging fathers of children in agency care.

### **Intake/Alternative Response**

Typically the first point of contact at the agency, Intake Services features a 24-hour hotline and response to calls of concern involving children and families.

### **Protective**

Ongoing Protective Services provides supportive counseling to children and families to strengthen family supports and maintain children safely in their own homes.

### **Kinship**

Kinship Services provides safety for children who are unable to remain safely in their own homes by placing them with relatives or close family friends.

### **Foster Care & Placement**

Foster Care and Placement Services provide substitute care resources and support services to place and maintain children in the least restrictive setting.

### **Adoption**

Adoption Services matches children in permanent custody with adoptive families that can best meet their individual needs.

## **Independent Living**

The Independent Living Program provides support to older children in agency care to help them transition from foster care to the world of work and further education.

## **Transitional Housing**

Transitional Housing Services provide temporary housing and supportive counseling to young adults aged 18-25 years who have previously been in agency foster care and become homeless.

## **Visitation/Family Interaction**

Visitation Services provides a safe, nurturing environment for family visits while children are in agency custody using a modernized, state-of-the-art facility called the 'Blazey Family Interaction Center.'

## GUIDING STATEMENTS

### Our Mission

SCCS is committed to the safety, permanency and well-being of all children served, in partnership with families and the community.

### Our Vision

Because we believe in family preservation and that all children deserve a safe, stable and permanent home, we will:

- Intervene only where necessary and only to the proper degree;
- Assess the community's concerns of abuse and neglect focusing on safety, risk and family strengths;
- Serve as partners with families and in teamwork with partner agencies in the community;
- Actively engage families, and their extended families and supports, in the decision-making process;
- Diligently work towards reunification when a child must be removed from home;
- Seek permanent homes for all children who cannot safely return to their parent or guardian;
- Remain mission-focused in our everyday work;
- Recruit and maintain a diverse staff committed to servicing all children and families;
- Approach our work with integrity, ethics and compassion; and
- Be fiscally responsible.

### Our Values

We Believe:

- All children have a right to a safe and stable home.
- All children should be in permanent homes, i.e., their own home, a relative's home or an adoptive home.
- The well-being of all children is vital to us, the child, the family and our community.
- All families deserve our best efforts to partner with them and to treat them with respect and honesty.

- We have an ongoing responsibility to increase our knowledge and improve our services by learning all we can about the diversity of our families and community.
- We have a duty to remain objective and consistent in all of our interactions with families and children.
- We must be creative and innovative in the delivery of services so as to heighten the efficiency and effectiveness of our work with families.
- We have a responsibility to be able stewards of taxpayer resources.

## STRATEGIC PLAN DEVELOPMENT

SCCS' strategic plan was developed at the direction of the agency's Executive Director, and facilitated by the agency's Quality Improvement staff. In an attempt to engage a diverse cross section of the community, our clients and partners, the agency hosted three (3) community forums to solicit feedback and suggestions on programs and services offered by the agency. The agency reached out to community partners and clients specifically, and we advertised publicly to draw additional resources into the discussion. The forums were held at the Central Branch of the Akron Public Library (2 sessions) and the Akron Urban League. The forums were successful and presented the agency with a clear sense of how the community views our services, and the need for enhanced agency and community collaboration. In addition, two (2) strategic planning sessions were held at the agency where all staff had the opportunity to participate. This internal view of the agency was seen as critical in successfully completing a strategic analysis.

The community and internal agency strategic planning sessions were facilitated by Nancy Ray, Director of Licensed Products for the Goodyear Tire & Rubber Company<sup>1</sup>. Ms. Ray provided a thorough analysis of her findings from these sessions and was instrumental in identifying the core issues as seen by our employees, clients and community partners.

In addition, the agency conducted a Strengths, Opportunities, Weaknesses and Threats (SWOT) analysis with the key decision-making groups of the organization: SCCS Board of Trustees, SCCS Executive Team and SCCS Management Team.

The analysis of Strengths and Weaknesses focuses on *internal factors* over which the agency has control, whereas Opportunities and Threats focus on external factors of the environment in which the organization operates. Distinguishing between the two is critical in the development of this plan.

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<sup>1</sup> Ms. Ray presented participants in the community and employee forums with the following questions in order to guide the conversation to obtain tangible feedback for the agency:

1. Identify a community program/service that you would like to see SCCS focus on in the next five (5) years.
2. Identify a specific way in which SCCS could serve the citizens of Summit County better.
3. How can we help after families leave our services?
4. Which community resources/partner can be an asset? Which are currently underutilized?
5. If there was one thing you believe SCCS could do better, what would that be?

	<b>POSITIVE/HELPFUL To achieving the goal</b>	<b>NEGATIVE/HARMFUL To achieving the goal</b>
<b>INTERNAL Origin</b>  <b><i>Facts/factors of the organization</i></b>	<b>Strengths</b>  Things that are good now, maintain them, build on them and use as leverage.	<b>Weaknesses</b>  Things that are bad now, remedy, change or stop them.
<b>EXTERNAL Origin</b>  <b><i>Facts/factors of the environment in which the organization operates</i></b>	<b>Opportunities</b>  Things that are good for the future, prioritize them, capture them, build on them and optimize.	<b>Threats</b>  Things that are bad for the future put in plans to manage them or counter them.

Ms. Ray's analysis from the community and employee forums, accompanied with our SWOT analysis summary provided us with strong support for the goals set forth in this plan. A comprehensive report of the agency's combined SWOT analysis is attached hereto marked as *Appendix A*.

Once approved by the SCCS Board of Trustees, oversight and monitoring of this plan will be done by the agency's Executive Team through the implementation of annual goals which will be designed to support the six (6) CORE VALUES: *Diversity, Fiscal Responsibility, Leadership, Partnership, Professionalism, and Quality (See Appendix B)*. The annual goals will be created with the input of staff in each division/unit, and monitored quarterly to ensure progress or necessary re-direction. The completion of the annual goals will be the ultimate responsibility of the Executive Team. Prior to the completion of this five (5) year plan the agency will begin a new strategic planning period to continue moving the agency forward by providing quality, timely and effective services, with community collaboration, to the children and families we serve.

## ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS

### Fiscal Environment

Adequate and timely funding is critical to our ability to provide the level of services required by statute. Budget uncertainty resulting from the fiscal environment reduces our flexibility to maintain a strong level of performance in our core workloads. As the state makes difficult decisions regarding the child welfare budget, decisions made at the county level become increasingly difficult and reliant on levies and non-traditional sources (e.g. grants, partnerships, etc.).

"Ohio is currently ranked fiftieth (50<sup>th</sup>) in the nation for state funding for child welfare. In no other state in the nation is there less support to protect abused and neglected children. It should be noted that county governments have stepped up to support our children, and local investments for child welfare in Ohio are ranked number one (1) nationally.

Unfortunately, local funding is heavily dependent on the ability of communities to pass levies, with forty-five (45) counties supporting children through the levy system<sup>2</sup>. Summit County is fortunate to have an existing levy through 2019 but the value of this levy is potentially insufficient to support the agency for the long term.

### Changing Demographics

Families who come to the attention of the child welfare system are vulnerable families with complex needs. The parents experience multiple stressors that weaken their ability to appropriately parent.

Children who come into our care often live in fragile family systems experiencing multiple stressors such as poverty, substance abuse, mental illness, physical illness, and domestic violence. Societal and familial problems such as human trafficking, parental incarceration and increased drug abuse/dependency can also lead to involvement with the foster care system, yet our understanding of these connections can be limited. Moreover, these family challenges tend to coexist and interact, presenting a complex family dynamic and a complicated

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<sup>2</sup> Ohio House of Representatives Finance and Appropriations Committee HB483; Testimony of Joel Potts, Executive Director, Ohio Job and Family Services Directors' Association April 2, 2014  
*2015-2019 SCCS Strategic Plan*

set of service needs. Strengthening fragile families is a major challenge. Any efforts to stem the flow of children coming into foster care must provide comprehensive and coordinated support to these families.

Securing the appropriate kind and level of resources for children and families is also an ongoing challenge for child welfare agencies for several reasons. Often, there is a mismatch between services offered and what families actually need to resolve their difficulties. For example, birth parents may be offered parent training classes or counseling when concrete services such as housing assistance or child care are needed more critically. Moreover, the challenges birth families face are often overlapping, complicated, and multifaceted, and public child welfare agencies do not have control over the numerous resources needed to serve these families. Often, agencies such as SCCS, must develop cooperative agreements and mutual understandings with numerous public and private agencies to provide needed services, making for a complicated service-delivery network. Negotiating a fragmented service-delivery system can be confusing and frustrating for birth and foster families, as well as social workers.

## **Technology**

Advances in computer technology, the increase of high-speed networks and mobile innovations have introduced new products and provided new opportunities for service delivery. As a result, internet services, use of mobile devices and social media networking continues to increase. These rapid advancements continue to challenge the balance of security against access and usability for all child welfare agencies.

The amount of data we retain is so large and changes happen so rapidly that we can no longer use traditional tools to perform our work. We must have a complex structure and develop processes to meet mandates, develop insights, and predict outcomes and behaviors, which will help us better handle our client needs, and meet staffing needs. We must also continue to evaluate our emerging technologies to identify solutions to improve our services, increase deadline compliance and enhance security, efficiency and stability of our systems.

Although this seems simple enough, according to the Center for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare's (School of Social Work at the University of Minnesota) Spring 2011 Child Welfare and Technology newsletter, "technology in child welfare has a long and contentious history."

## **Workforce Trends**

Anticipated workforce trends will call for a change in how we use our workforce to deliver service to the public. We project that more than 1/3 of our workforce can retire within the next ten (10) years. This ongoing attrition, coupled with budget restrictions and lack of qualified candidates (licensed social workers) will cause a loss of institutional knowledge and impacts succession management and knowledge transfer. The inability to mitigate workforce losses through recruitment and hiring will also affect our ability to maintain and increase the diversity of our workforce. Further, as the Baby Boomers retire, the workforce will continue to include a high concentration of Generation X and Millennials, requiring a shift toward employment strategies that enhance our ability to retain talent with those generations. Together, these workforce trends could negatively affect employee engagement, productivity and ultimately, our ability to meet the ever-changing needs of the public. We must conduct sound human capital planning and embrace robust workforce initiatives, including a thorough skill-gap analysis, that address the different generational expectations of the future workforce to retain talent and remain an employer of choice within Summit County.

## STRATEGIC GOALS, OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES

Based on the compilation of the data collected and articulated herein, the agency developed Core Values for the strategic planning period. These Core Values define where the agency strives to be at the end of this five (5) year period, and incorporate the information identified in the SWOT analysis and employee/community forums. (see also Appendix B)

### Our Mission

*SCCS is committed to the safety, permanency and well-being-of all children served, in partnership with families and the community.*

### DIVERSITY

- Encourage diversity by fostering a respectful, culturally competent, and diverse workforce and response to clients
- Promote an environment of tolerance and acceptance
- Build a positive team and service mentality

### FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY

- Manage resources with fiscal responsibility
- Meet operational needs efficiently and cost effectively
- Achieve optimal operational effectiveness

### LEADERSHIP

- Promote leadership ideals and opportunities amongst agency staff
- Build open and honest relationship with communication
- Guide and mentor staff to achieve optimal results with clients as well as career advancement

### PARTNERSHIP

- Develop and strengthen community partnerships and collaborative efforts
- Maximize available resources
- Increase community awareness of agency services and programs

## **PROFESSIONALISM**

- Promote a culture of distinction and advancement
- Promote honest and respectful interactions among staff and with clients
- Promote a culture of accountability

## **QUALITY**

- Recruit and support qualified and competent staff
- Embrace and drive change that supports quality services to clients
- Promote an environment of innovation and excellence
- Engage in continuous quality improvement planning
- Strive for optimum performance of all outcome measures

From these over-reaching Core Values, the agency will create annual goals. The annual goals will be designed to support the strategic plan and will be monitored closely to ensure compliance & completion. Annual goals will be developed at the unit/division level with input from line staff and supervisors, and will clearly fit into one or more of the core values.

Throughout the year the goals will be updated quarterly and communicated to staff at management team meetings, divisional meetings and unit meetings. This communication effort will encourage staff buy-in into the process and understanding of their role in the overall success of the agency. At the conclusion of this five (5) year plan, the agency will be able to concretely demonstrate if and how we met each of these Core Values.

## PERFORMANCE MEASURES

In the next five (5) years we must match our customers' need for efficient and innovative communication. This includes enhanced community partnerships, enhanced technological resources, and a positive working relationship with the media and legislature. In order to achieve these initiatives we must have a system and strategy to support growth in new directions. Over the course of this strategic plan, the agency must invest (time, money, effort, etc.) into the development of systems, processes and personnel who can advance our agenda. As such, we must explore alternatives on how to achieve objectives amidst difficult external realities.

The ultimate responsibility to move the organization forward resides with all employees but most specifically with the Executive Team, led by the Executive Director. Based on the Executive Team's "hands-on" approach to the direction of this strategic plan, follow through and accountability will be a top priority for all staff. Specific monitoring and oversight of this plan will fall on the agency's Quality Improvement Department as a function of the overall duties within that area, with guidance and input from members of the Executive Team.

Annually, the Executive Team will also evaluate the agency's budget to determine staffing needs, capital improvements, and resource needs. This evaluation will be enhanced by periodic updates to ensure that the agency is meeting objectives set forth in this plan, and assessment of financial stability will be an on-going reality, especially in an environment where funding cycles vary among local, state & federal guidelines.

In order to implement this plan the agency will need to educate staff, community partners, community members and customers on our Mission, Vision & Values. Once these have been communicated, the objective of implementation is to enforce them.

Staff members will receive training on the plan's objectives and their involvement in the completion of same. This will be done by training the management team who will then provide education and updates to their staff.

The plan will be made available to community partners with an online version available to all customers, community partners and community members.

Success of the plan will be measured in a variety of ways including annual goal completion, customer satisfaction results, and communication with community partners & community members to solicit feedback. In an industry such as ours, we cannot measure “success” in terms of profits & loss, or increases/decreases in customers. We must measure our success more in terms of perceptions and attitude toward our agency. These tools are not scientifically accurate and are not a concrete measure of “success” vs. “failure”, but reflect the reality in which we work and provide service to this community.

This strategic plan serves as a formal guide on where we hope to be in five (5) years. However, it is not a definitive recipe for success. The employees and management team of this agency must work together to achieve established goals and to move this organization forward. We are committed to the vision that has been created.

## COMMUNICATIONS/OUTREACH

In developing this strategic plan, we consulted with employees, community partners, clients and other stakeholders. We solicited feedback and will continue outreach and engagement with appropriate external and internal audiences. Specifically:

- Provide periodic reports on our progress to all interested parties;
- Educated and inform internal and external audiences about our activities to innovate and improve service;
- Collect ideas and feedback from internal and external partners about ways to improve our programs and services;
- Consult with our stakeholders on technological developments aimed at improving efficiencies and client services; and
- Host mid-plan review forums to further engage in two-way dialogue with our community partners and clients.

We continue to use our website, social media and our community education and outreach services as a platform for engaging the public. We share information and provide opportunities for collaboration and participation through collaborative initiatives and programs.

As a public agency we also routinely report on the services provided by the agency via our monthly Board meetings. The transparency of the agency must continue to evolve and afford our constituents with a level of comfort in understanding how tax payer dollars are used, while maintaining the core mission of this agency.