

# 2021-2025 Strategic Plan

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Summit County

**CHILDREN SERVICES**

*Building Families . . . Building Futures*

Summit County Children Services

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# Executive Director Message

Thank you for reviewing the SCCS Strategic Plan. This plan sets our course as we uphold SCCS' mission, vision and values. The plan will guide our decision making and help us identify opportunities to best serve children and families in this community.

SCCS is committed to building upon our **Core Values** with a focus on helping children and families build lives of support, connections, and success. We will partner with stakeholders at all levels. We will measure and report on areas where we succeed, struggle, and adjust this plan as needed. Throughout the next five years we will honor the commitments we have made in this plan.

I invite you to engage with us in the necessary work of supporting children and families – we value your input and suggestions. We are grateful to the many community members, families and children, and our own staff who contributed to this plan. 2021-2025 will likely be an exciting but challenging time amidst many new realities in our country. I believe this plan contributes to the greater success of our community and the persons we serve.

Sincerely,

**Julie Barnes, M.Ed., MSW**  
**Executive Director**



## Who We Are

For more than 130 years, Summit County Children Services (SCCS), serving Summit County, Ohio, has provided a safety net for abused and neglected children. Our goal is to ensure that children in Summit County have the ability to grow up in a safe environment.

We operate a 24-Hour Child Abuse Hotline (330) 434-5437 which enables mandated reporters and interested parties to report concerns regarding suspected child abuse or neglect. These reports are carefully investigated to assess safety and risk of children.

Our philosophy is always to maintain children in their own home and provide services that can reduce barriers that may put their safety at risk. Often, this involves developing a plan for services with input from the family. When children cannot remain safely in their own homes, our goal is always to utilize relatives and kin (someone who has a relationship with the child) to care for the children. We also utilize foster homes for children if relatives and kin are not available and work toward permanent resolutions that are in the best interest of the child with the first goal being reunification with family.

Child abuse and neglect occurs in every community in Summit County. In recent years, the opioid epidemic and other substance use disorders have increased the need for our services with one in every eleven children in Summit County served by SCCS.

Our mandated services are primarily funded through levy revenue supported by our taxpayers. The community has also been very generous with donated funds to support special needs, activities, and gifts throughout the year for the children we serve.

**24-Hour Child Abuse Hotline**  
**(330) 434-5437**

# Child Welfare Mandate

## The Five Mandates: Cornerstones of Today's Child Welfare System

Throughout the history of the United States, the child welfare system has evolved according to changing beliefs and attitudes about what role government should play in the protection and care of abused and neglected children. The great debate and dilemma for child protection services is the rights of parents versus the best interests of the child. During the last half of the twentieth century, federal and state laws have evolved dramatically within the context of a changing society highlighted by the establishment of five major child protection mandates among many other less significant but equally compelling expectations on the child protection services system.

### I. Investigation

Ohio law ((R.C. 5153.16(1)) mandates the public children services agency in each county to “(m)ake an investigation concerning any child alleged to be an abused, neglected, or dependent child.” Federal and state laws also detail how such investigations are to be done.

A child protection services investigation is the **assessment of allegations** into the neglect, abuse or dependency of a child or children. It is an administrative investigation and not a criminal investigation and is done for the purpose of determining whether intervention is necessary to protect a child and to determine what services should be provided to a family. The investigation process begins with a report of child abuse and/or neglect of a child. Reports are screened to determine if the reported information constitutes a report of child abuse and/or neglect in accordance with **federal and state law**. In Ohio, an investigation can result in one of three findings: substantiated, indicated, or unsubstantiated. The child protection services caseworker is also responsible for assessing the risk of further harm or injury to a child.

The report must concern an alleged child victim under the age of eighteen, a parent or caregiver as the alleged perpetrator, or an unknown perpetrator, and an allegation that the condition of the child presents a substantial risk of harm to the child's health or welfare.

Child protection services investigations are separate and serve an altogether different purpose than police investigations into allegations of child abuse.


## **II. Reunification**

During the 1970s, as the number of children entering care significantly increased, so, too, did their length of stay in care. Lawmakers became increasingly concerned that many children were being removed from their homes unnecessarily, and that, once they entered foster care, inadequate efforts were made to either reunify them with their biological families or place them with adoptive families. By 1980, more than 550,000 children were placed in temporary foster care homes across the nation. In that same year, the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980 (P.L. 96-272) was passed establishing a "reunification" mandate.

A major goal of the Act was to encourage social workers to work toward reunification of the family by making "reasonable efforts" to avoid long-term foster care for the children if possible. If the child could not be returned to the family, another plan was to be sought- adoption, long-term foster care or another permanency plan.

The Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (P.L. 105-89) made the most significant changes to the child welfare law since they had been established in their current form in 1980. ASFA principally addressed three general perceptions about the current child welfare system:

- **Children continued to remain too long in foster care;**
- **The child welfare system was biased toward family reunification and preservation at the expense of the safety and well-being of children; and**
- **Inadequate attention and resources were devoted to adoption as a permanent placement option for abused and neglected children.**



As a result, three new major mandates were added to the child protection system, i.e., child safety, permanency, and child well-being.

### **III. Child Safety**

Child safety is of the utmost importance as it reflects the root purpose of the child protection system. As a result, much closer monitoring of child maltreatment in a child's own home, foster home, pre-adoptive home, or other placement is occurring. One of the major tools available to improve the safety of children in the child protection services system is face-to-face contact with each child and their family on a regular and frequent basis.

### **IV. Permanency**

Permanency means a permanent, legally secure, safe, and nurturing home for every child leaving the child protection services system. It includes reunification with the birth family, placement with a relative or foster family who have legal custody of the child, adoption, and independent living programs. Permanency is a critically important goal of the system, which establishes the expectation that no child should leave the system without a permanent family and home.

### **V. Child Well-Being**

The child protection system today goes well beyond the traditional role of safety and permanency and recognizes the need to address the whole child and all his or her needs. Thus, we are increasingly addressing child well-being indicators such as the child's mental and physical health, including access to health care, cognitive functioning, social and emotional health, and a wide range of variables including education, economic security, food, and housing as well as family/neighborhood environments.

# SCCS Mission Statement

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

# SCCS Vision Statement

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

- Intervene only where necessary and only to the proper degree;
- Assess the community's concerns of child abuse and neglect, focusing on safety, risk and family strengths;
- Serve as partners with families and in teamwork with partner agencies in the community;
- Utilize team decision-making meetings to engage families;
- 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 diverse staff committed to serving all children and families;
- Approach our work with integrity and ethics;
- Be fiscally responsible.



# SCCS Values

At SCCS we believe:

- All children have a right to a safe and stable home.
- All children should be in permanent homes.
- The well-being of all children is vital to us, their families, the child, 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 children services by learning all we can about the diversity of our families and community.
- We have a duty to remain objective and consistent in our interactions with families and children.
- We must be creative and innovative in the delivery of services to heighten the efficiency and effectiveness of our child protection work with families.
- We have a responsibility to be able stewards of taxpayer resources.
- We believe in creating a culture of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. We will cultivate an environment that respects, celebrates and supports the differences of our employees and the people we serve.





# Monitoring Performance

Our 2021-2025 Strategic Plan is a living document that will drive new initiatives, create broader opportunities, and cultivate deeper relationships. Therefore, routine monitoring, feedback, and accountability is key to ensuring progress is being made in achieving our goals and vision.

The Strategic Plan is divided into multi-layered sections to represent our **4 Core Values**, themes and broad concepts within those **Core Values**, goals that are driven by these **Core Values**, and task items recommended by participants. Each goal section has a designated division or Executive Team leader that will drive the multidisciplinary workgroup to goal attainment.

Progress toward achieving strategic goals will be tracked through quarterly updates by the work groups under each **Core Value**. These work groups will report out to the Executive Director routinely. Progress and outcomes will be presented to the Board of Trustees and Citizen's Advisory Committee at least annually.

# Methodology

The Strategic Plan is the culmination of research, analysis and planning led by the Quality Improvement Department. In keeping with SCCS' Mission and Vision, a collaborative process was utilized that drew valuable input from a variety of individuals and groups that SCCS influences and is influenced by each day. Activities included research about national, regional, and state trends impacting child welfare; mission review; internal and external stakeholder gatherings; organizational performance analyses; input from staff, youth, parents, caregivers, and focus groups; employee forums; and planning workshops.

The journey outlined for this Strategic Plan is a product of invested participants from every level of the agency. This is a living document that was created through an all-inclusive diversified process.



# 2021 - 2025 SCCS Core Values

## Quality Programs & Services

DEVELOP NEW AND SPECIALIZED SERVICES THAT MEET THE EVOLVING NEEDS OF THOSE WE SERVE

- **Implementation of Family First Prevention Services Act**
- **Implementation of Kinship Support Services**
- **Sustained Compliance with Child & Family Service Review (CFSR) Mandates**

## Quality Workforce

ATTRACT AND RETAIN A QUALITY WORKFORCE THROUGH EFFECTIVE RECRUITMENT, SELECTION, TRAINING, SUPERVISION AND RECOGNITION

- **Continued Support of Direct Case Work Staff Through the *Coach Ohio* Model (Resilience Alliance)**
- **Development and Implementation of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Plan**
- **Development of New Hire Pipeline with Local Secondary Schools, Colleges & Universities**
- **Development of Retention Initiatives to Maintain Skilled Workforce**
- **Development of Succession Plan to Address Pending Retirements**
- **Evaluation of Continued Flexible Work Options**

## Quality Relationships

CULTIVATE VALUED AND COLLABORATIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH STAFF, DONORS, COMMUNITY PARTNERS AND THOSE WE SERVE

- **Continuation and Implementation of Grant-Funded Programs to Support the Community & SCCS Clients**
- **Coordination of Efforts with Summit County Partners to Address Substance Abuse Issues Among SCCS Clients**
- **Development of Community Education/Outreach Plan**
- **Evaluation of Foster Home Recruitment Plan**
- **Increased Collaboration with Juvenile Court and Prosecutors to Ensure the Legal Process Meets the Needs of SCCS Clients**
- **Increase Communication with SCCS Stakeholders**

## Quality Infrastructure

ENSURE THAT SCCS HAS THE FINANCIAL, TECHNOLOGICAL AND PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE TO ACHIEVE OUR MISSION

- **Development of Capital Improvement Plan**
- **Enhanced Technology & Training to Support SCCS Hybrid Work Program**
- **Increased Education and Training to Maximize Allocations to SCCS**
- **Monitor & Plan for Long-term Financial Stability of SCCS**

# 2021 Board of Trustees

Summit County Children Services is guided by a distinguished Board of Trustees, whose members comprise leaders in business, law, education and social services in local companies and organizations. All appointments to the Board of Trustees are made by the Summit County Executive with the exception of one who serves on the Board by virtue of their election as Chair of the SCCS Citizen's Advisory Committee.

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