

Federal grant enhances services for kinship families in Ashtabula County

BY BRIAN M. EWIG

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ASHTABULA TOWNSHIP A \$100,000 federal grant will help the Ashtabula County Children Services Department expand the number of families to which it offers services in 2010.

The grant -administered by the Children's Bureau at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services -has already made a positive impact during the 2009 holiday season, said Nick Kerosky, director of the Ashtabula County Children Services Department.

Kerosky said the grant funding will be used to help meet the needs of so-called kinship families which are clients of the county department. Traditionally, the county agency has helped both foster and kinship families. Foster families are those in which a child or children are placed in a home where they have no relatives.

Kinship families -as the name implies -are families in which the placed child or children have at least one blood relative at a given address. Kerosky said the kinship family is more ideal than the foster family in most cases.

That said, the county department has typically not have all the funding it would like to have to work with kinship families, Kerosky said. The new grant (specifically earmarked for kinship families) will help to resolve this problem, Kerosky said.

Thanks to the grant, the county child services department was able to provide additional food and gift packages to kinship families in 2009. In past years, the department budget was only large enough to provide this program to foster families, Kerosky explained. A typical kinship family is taking on a big responsibility, and so the county agency is very happy it can help to support these families, Kerosky said. "We feel these are families who have really stepped out for the kids, and we want to do what we can to support them," he said.

Terms of the grant are that the county children services department will receive \$100,000 in 2010 and 2011. (The first installment of \$100,000 was provided to the county this year.) "In Ashtabula County, the (grant) will directly support kinship caregivers through enhanced services and financial assistance," said agency spokeswoman Kathryn Whittington.

The \$100,000 provided to the county can be stretched quite a ways, Whittington said. "Ashtabula County Children Services will now be expanding current services to include a support group, informational website, a resource library, assistance with legal filing fees; and other short-term and onetime expenses," Whittington said.

The grant also will be used to help with distribution of book bags and school supplies to kinship families, as well as the purchase and distribution of Christmas gifts, food, and clothing. "All services will be provided by existing staff," Whittington said.

If you would like more information on the county's Kinship Program or the Grant, please contact Whittington or Katie Lane at the Ashtabula County Children Services Department, (440) 998-181 .

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