



NEWS RELEASE – Sept. 1, 2004

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Job and Family Services projects win national awards

A forum for child care providers and a massive home visiting effort for all children in foster care today received awards from the National Association of Counties (NACo) and the National Association of County Information Officers (NACIO).

At their meeting today, Hamilton County Commissioners presented the awards to the Hamilton County Department of Job and Family Services (HCJFS). Commissioners also presented awards to other county departments, which received a total of eight NACo Achievement Awards and 17 NACIO Awards of Excellence.

HCJFS held the forum for in-home childcare providers in May 2003, the first time the agency had hosted a gathering of this kind. A capacity crowd of more than 400 providers attended and learned about important changes to the program. This project received the NACIO award.

The Children's Services Quality Assurance Audit Project won the NACo Award. This was a point-in-time safety check and data update for all children in county custody. Children's Services is the child protection division of HCJFS. Children come into custody – usually temporary - because of abuse and neglect.

HCJFS officials believe this was the first project of its kind in Ohio. The impetus came from a tragic case in Florida involving a 5-year-old girl who was missing. The child, who was a ward of the state and had been living with relatives, was missing for nearly a year before the situation came to light. HCJFS wanted to make sure such an incident did not happen here.

As part of the project, some 400 HCJFS employees (from divisions other than Children's Services) visited more than 1,000 children in the homes of their foster parents or kinship care providers. Because children move in and out of the child protection system, the project had to be designed and completed within two months.

The project validated that children in custody were where they were supposed to be and receiving appropriate care. Visitors took photos of each child, which were placed in the child's case file. Inaccurate data was corrected, updated and entered into Children's Services new computer system. Staff members followed up on concerns or questions expressed by caregivers.

As a result of the project, HCJFS changed several procedures to ensure that:

- data on each child is entered or changed in the computer system within 24 hours of receiving the information;
- a photo is taken annually of each child in custody;
- each child is visited in his or her home at least once every 30 days. (Previously, visits were mandated every 30 days, but did not have to be in the child's home.)

HCJFS takes its responsibility to children very seriously. When children are in placement – such as living with foster parents or kinship providers – their safety and well being are the county's

legal responsibility. The audit project helped HCJFS meet that responsibility and improve services to its clients.