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Urgent Development: Online Chat for Public to Learn More About Foster Care Changes

Cincinnati (Jan. 26, 2009) Hamilton County residents with questions concerning Hamilton County Department of Job and Family Services' decision to transition foster care to network providers can receive answers in a live chat scheduled for Wednesday.

The agency is asking more than 200 agency foster homes to transition to private networks by April 1. The move will provide the homes with greater support and resources, while allowing the agency to deploy its limited resources in areas with more urgent need, such as investigating abuse cases or providing services to strengthen families.

Many foster parents or prospective foster parents might have questions about the move. A foster care official will answer questions in a live chat from 1 p.m. to 2 p.m. Wednesday, Jan. 27. Residents can participate in the chat by clicking on a link that will be posted on www.hcjfs.org prior to the start. Also, an e-mail will be sent to subscribers to the [HCJFS Update](#) newsletter and to followers of the agency on Facebook and Twitter ([hamiltoncojfs](#)). To sign up for the newsletter, visit www.hcjfs.org.

The county has about 850 children in foster care each day. Most of those children are already being cared for in private network homes. About 200 more foster children will transition by April 1 – although the move will be seamless for them. They will remain in their home as foster parents move from working directly with the county to working with a network provider.

Network providers often have lower caseloads and can provide more individualized attention to children. They pay higher rates and can provide families with more resources. Many network homes also provide advanced therapeutic care that is not available in traditional homes operated by the agency.

Wednesday's online chat is another attempt by the Department of Job and Family Services, which handles child support collection, child welfare and public assistance programs, to be more accessible and open to its consumers and the public at large. It follows recent moves such as stationing employees in neighborhood non-profits for easier access to services and establishing a Speaker's Bureau to help educate the public on how the agency does business.

"We serve hundreds of thousands of people in this county each year and we're always trying creative ways to reach out to them," said Moira Weir, director of the department. "Our goal is to be accessible, responsive and accountable."

About Hamilton County's Department of Job and Family Services

The Department of Job and Family Services administers federal, state and local programs for those in need. The Department helps with local child protection, elderly protection, child care, child support enforcement, workforce development, cash assistance, food stamp disbursement and Medicaid disbursement. Servicing Hamilton County since 1947, the Department helps hundreds of thousands each year and is accredited by the Council on Accreditation, an international, independent, not-for-profit child and family service accrediting organization.