

OHIO PROFESSIONAL SOCIETY ON THE ABUSE OF CHILDREN

AN INDEPENDENT AFFILIATE OF THE AMERICAN PROFESSIONAL SOCIETY ON THE ABUSE OF CHILDREN



The Focus

Spring 2009

A LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Hello OHPSAC colleagues - I have the privilege of following in Jonathan Thackeray's footsteps as the next President of OHPSAC, 2009-2011. Please join me in extending a virtual applause and recognition of his leadership and the energy that he brings to the work of the OHPSAC membership. Among the many accomplishments of 2007-2009, during Jonathan's tenure, was the initiation of a strategic planning dialogue and the development of this newsletter. Also, we are most grateful to Kristen Johnson for undertaking the task of putting the newsletter components together, including periodic reminders to submit those components on time – not an easy task for a group of busy professionals! Most notably, we would like to extend our congratulations to our own Julie Kenniston for her appointment to the APSAC Board.

Every year we hold nominations and election of one-third of the OHPSAC Board, selected by the full Ohio membership. These OHPSAC Board members will serve a three-year term from 2009-2012 to provide both fresh ideas and continuity of leadership. I'd like to take this opportunity to welcome our newly elected and re-elected OHPSAC Board members: Betsy Gordon, Patricia Harrelson, and Patrick Kelley. All Board meetings are open to OHPSAC members and interested colleagues. We meet at the Center for Child and Family Advocacy, 655 East Livingston, Columbus with future meetings scheduled for June 11th, September 17th, and December 10th from 10am-12noon. Join us! During the March 12th meeting, the new officers were elected for two year terms: Kristen Johnson (Vice president, President elect), Jill Kilanowski (Secretary), John Ladd (Treasurer), and Patricia Harrelson (Membership coordinator).

One of my goals is to continue the dialogue on strategic planning: What do you see as critical priorities for our state chapter? What are our strengths and weaknesses? What are the most responsible uses of our resources of time and treasury? How can busy professionals share the work of preventing and responding to child maltreatment? How can APSAC/OHPSAC members use our Society and state chapter connections to support, inform, train, and inspire each other?

One project that is in development is an OHPSAC Website. We have selected a web designer and have applied for an APSAC Chapter Grant to defray the costs of design and maintenance. Other state chapters have found that the addition of a website has increased their visibility in the professional community and have enhanced communication among APSAC members.

I am asking OHPSAC members to reach into their visual creativity and suggest/provide photography for the home page focus on Ohio. Other photography that is a sensitive depiction of our mission of providing the best professional response to the problem of child maltreatment can be used within the website. I have a gorgeous photograph of a sunset on Lake Erie but I "challenge" other geographic areas to send theirs. More details to follow. Please feel free to use my email (LCL7@case.edu) to share your thoughts, concerns, and ideas.

Warmest regards,
Linda Lewin



Editor: Kristen K. Johnson

BOARD MEMBERS

Betsy Gordon
Social Work
Patricia Harrelson
Socialwork
Kristen Johnson
Prosecution
Julie Kenniston
Social Work
John Ladd
Law Enforcement
Dr. Linda Lewin
Nursing
Dr. Erna Olafson
Psychiatry
Wendy Shaheen
Child Advocacy
Dr. John Thakeray
Physician
Brian Wear
Human Resources

MEET OUR NEWEST BOARD MEMBER!!

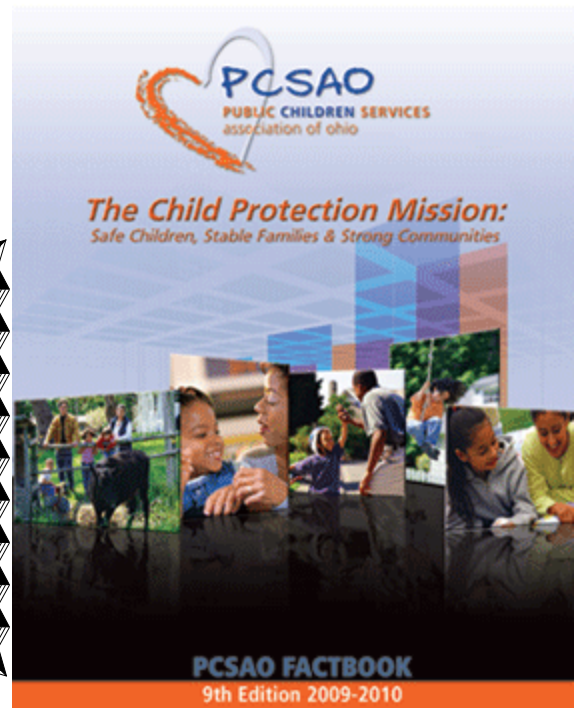
Patricia A. Harrelson, MSSA, LISW; currently serves as the Director of Casework Services for Guernsey County Children Services. She completed a Master's of Science in Social Administration at Case Western Reserve University in 1998, where she also taught as an adjunct faculty instructor for four years. Patty spent 18 years as a police officer and has worked in the fields of chemical dependency, law enforcement, juvenile justice and child welfare. Her interests are in the child welfare decision making process, coaching and supervision of line staff and supervisors, public policy as it impacts the line worker, supervisor and service recipient, and the nexus between critical incident stress and secondary trauma for child welfare professionals and agencies.

She also provides limited training through the Ohio Child Welfare Training Program after spending 11 years doing so full-time. She resides in Cambridge Ohio with her cat (Shadow), while her life partner dedicates 27 months of service to the Peace Corps in Ukraine. She enjoys photography, learning new computer-based and technical skills and video games. She is a member of the Guernsey County Board of MRDD Human Rights Commission, and was named to the OHPSAC Board in 2009. She looks forward to her service and wants to grow the Ohio membership to APSAC as the singular organization which dedicates its passion, its collective wisdom, and energy to the work of professionals engaged in working with abused and neglected children. She feels APSAC is meant to be the professional organization for the dedicated people who work in the trenches, who know children and families and who have the most profound impact on the lives of children. She wants everyone who can to join APSAC, benefit from the materials and become a part of shaping a major chapter growth which can only help us help families and children better each day. Welcome Patty! We're so glad to have you!



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OHPSAC Spotlight: Kristen Johnson

By Chris Julian. JD



When asked what she likes to do in her free time, Kristen Johnson's response is "What free time?" Kristen is a working mother who is married with four kids....so....she spends her "free time" driving her children to soccer, baseball, basketball, tennis, Chinese or junior engineering classes. When she is off duty as a mom, Kristen's other fulltime career is to serve the public as Chief Juvenile Assistant Prosecuting Attorney for the Hancock County Prosecutor's Office, where she has worked since graduating from the University of Toledo College of Law in 1993. She started in the civil division and now handles juvenile abuse, neglect, and dependency as well as adult felony child abuse cases.

As you have guessed, Kristen Johnson is the Featured Member for this addition of The Focus. You may also recognize her name as the Newsletter's Editor and an OHPSAC board member. Kristen also serves as Board President of the Hancock County Center for Safe and Healthy Children, which is their CAC. She is also a member of the local Child Fatality Review Board and a member of the Hancock County and Ohio State Bar Associations.

Prior to her legal career, Kristen received her undergraduate degree in Imaging Science from the Rochester Institute of Technology in New York and worked as an applications engineer in the semi-conductor field in Vermont. Before coming to the Hancock County Prosecutor's Office, Kristen interned in US Bankruptcy Court for Judge Spear and also the Toledo Municipal Prosecutor's Office and then the Public Defender's Office.

When asked what she enjoys about OHPSAC, Kristen responded that the coordination of all the different disciplines is helpful, interesting, and informative. Her goal is that all kids in her jurisdiction receive the most comprehensive, well-trained team so that each child's needs are met. She is doing her part for that to be a reality by sharing her knowledge with others through trainings and she also arranged and sent 7 members of her multi-disciplinary team (MDT) to a week long training course at The Childhood Trust in Cincinnati several years ago. Kristen regularly trains Beyond the Silence for the Ohio Network of Children's Advocacy Centers and was interviewed for this article while driving to Cincinnati to present at a Guardian ad Litem training that is sponsored by the Supreme Court of Ohio.



SACWIS: by P. A. Harrelson, MSSA, LISW

SACWIS”, say this word to any child welfare worker in the state of Ohio and you will quickly see and hear a variety of reactions from intense anger and frustration, to resignation and satisfaction. Inevitably however, there will be mixed reactions and lead to discussions which not only need to be heard but headed by the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) as the manager of the Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS). The promises of the system have been many, but frequently un-fulfilled.

While I do not doubt that ODJFS wanted a system which embodies these wonderful ideals, as an agency administrator that not only needs the management reports noted above, but works cases from time to time, I can tell you the system is not user-friendly. SACWIS still requires significant redundancy in data entry, and the ticklers are rarely correct, therefore depending on them only brings an agency to non-compliance, the very thing ODJFS was seeking to eliminate.

The problems with SACWIS are many. First, in one single child protective services assessment, a worker must make a minimum of three entries which might document one single contact with a family in order to ensure the “system” logs the proper data. Second, producing reports is generally very difficult. Most valuable reports are not actually available in SACWIS, but through various data-mining processes including something called BIC, and Crystal. Third, the tickler or alert system is only rarely accurate. The system does not follow the Ohio Administrative Code requirements in several key instances. Fourth, though there are numerous areas of problems with SACWIS, one of the most critical is the random loss of activity logs which have been previously entered into the system. Fifth, supervisors now must approve portions of worker activities in what can only be described as a piece-meal basis.

While these are just some of the challenges of working in a SACWIS environment, it is not without its benefits and in the long run, should Ohio actually put the needed resources to its challenges, SACWIS will no doubt continue to improve. To its credit ODJFS seems willing to try hard to make the system work, and there is little doubt a major case management system is a significant undertaking which is never perfect. The development of this case management system within a computing environment, with its own limitations is also a major achievement. Those of us working in the system hope that someday it actually is worthy of the words “user-friendly,” reducing the time needed for the management of cases, creating a better process for documenting activities, and providing managers quality real time data in an easy to utilize manner. To be sure, the ability to see a family’s history is a great advantage and has been responsible for the safety of many children to date. I have had first-hand experience with this strength of the system, and can say without it, a new baby would not be placed with a sibling already adopted in another county, and we would be seriously behind in learning about a mother with serious and dangerous mental health deficits. Without question, the safety of this infant was greatly enhanced by the cross-county knowledge base available because of SACWIS.

Finally, while I have reservations about the SACWIS system, and believe its challenges are many, I also believe that as county –agency staff, we all must own this system. We must make it ours, continue to report deficits, and answer the call from ODJFS for help improving the program. ODJFS cannot respond to that which it does not know, and we must continue to press for improvements that matter to workers and families. We have a responsibility to continually seek improvement in all of our work, and SACWIS is no different. In this time of economic crisis, it is easy to turn our attention from SACWIS, and give up to apathy or other priorities, we must not. SACWIS is our reality, we must force that reality to service the needs of our children, our families, our staff and our agencies.