



2018  
LORAIN COUNTY CHILDREN SERVICES  
**GUIDING PRINCIPLES  
AND STRATEGIC VISION**

*“Lorain County Children Services’ rich history of working in partnership with our community is rooted in our Guiding Principles, including our Central and Core Values, Best Practice Statement, Role of Management and a progressive, forward-thinking Strategic Vision. This framework informs all our planning processes from Strategic Planning, Continuous Improvement initiatives, and department goals. Many laws and rules govern the delivery of public child protection but within that construct, we have carefully and deliberately sought out the opportunities for all staff to excel and deliver exceptional services so that abused and neglected children obtain the best possible outcomes.*

---

*Our Vision: We believe all children have an absolute right to a safe, permanent, stable home which provides basic levels of nurturance and care, and is free from abuse, neglect, and exploitation.*

---

*The Guiding Principles and Strategic Vision is not just a roadmap for our staff, but a promise to the children and families served and to the larger community, that we take the responsibility entrusted to us seriously and thoughtfully. Protecting children from abuse and neglect is a team effort and we appreciate being on your team. “*

*-Lorain County Children Services, 2018*

LORAIN COUNTY CHILDREN SERVICES  
**GUIDING PRINCIPLES  
AND STRATEGIC VISION**

### **Central Value**

*“Do the right things right, on time, the first time, every time, one child at a time.”*

We, individually and as an agency, are committed to doing the right things right, on time, the first time, every time, one child at a time, no exceptions, no excuses. Our children need and deserve nothing less from us. We consistently follow our best judgment and assure that our children have the services and resources they need. We also know that things will not always work out the way we plan and expect.

These are our children in the sense that we should do what we would for our own children under the same circumstances and what we would expect someone else to do for our own children in similar situations. This means that each of us follows the central value in our day-to-day practice. It also means that agency resources are fully available to each child and on his/her behalf.

As you work with and on behalf of our children, then, you need only focus on what the right things are for each child and on doing them. You will most always be right.

### **Core Values**

- We believe children do best in a family.
- We believe a child should be better off because of our involvement.
- We believe we should be involved with a child only for as long as needed.
- We value the child as our client.
- We value keeping siblings together.
- We value maximizing resources to achieve the best outcomes we can for our children timely.
- We value being a trauma informed agency.
- We value seeing our children to ensure safety.
- We value acting with urgency on all reports of abuse and neglect.
- We value high- expectations for our staff, foster families, and volunteers to accomplish the best outcomes for our children that we can.
- We value independent and critical thinking.
- We value that every child deserves to safely grow up in a family where they are valued, protected and have the opportunity for life-long well-being.
- We value continuous improvement and accept change.
- We value our collaborative role within the community’s safety net for children.

### **Our Mission**

In partnership with the community, the staff, foster parents and volunteers of Lorain County Children Services are committed to the safety and well-being of abused, neglected and dependent children and will provide the highest quality protection, permanence and prevention services to children and families.

LORAIN COUNTY CHILDREN SERVICES  
**GUIDING PRINCIPLES  
AND STRATEGIC VISION**

### **Best Interests, Defined**

As we work with and make decisions about children our central value of “Best Interest” must be kept at the forefront of the decisions we make regarding custody and placement of children. However, we must understand that there are both legal and practice perspectives of best interest.

As social workers we have our professional ideas of best interest when determining placement of a child outside their home of origin. We think about and evaluate the child’s wishes, the child’s relationship with relatives and interested third parties, the ability to keep siblings together, the mental and physical health and financial means of prospective caregivers, special needs of the child, the child’s connection with their community, and proximity of a relative’s home to the child’s removal home.

Determining best interest from a legal view point forces one to evaluate different variables. The most critical factors that need to be considered are the rights of parents, relatives, and interested third parties. When we think about their rights, we must remember that legally, the parent’s rights are the first to be considered, then relatives and lastly interested third parties.

When it has been determined that a child can no longer remain safely in their home we are mandated to explore alternative living options for children. We are required to first look within the child’s safety net of relatives and then at interested third parties. If we identify a relative or interested third party a home study should be completed and placement may occur. If we have considered all known relatives and interested third parties, and have not identified anyone who the child could be safely placed with then the agency should look at foster placement. Legally, we must be able to demonstrate to the court that we have explored and made diligent efforts to keep the child out of foster care. It is important to emphasize that foster care is a temporary arrangement that is, at times, necessary for a child while efforts are made toward permanency. Furthermore, it is the agency’s responsibility to continuously seek out and work with parents, other relatives, and interested third-parties regarding potential placement for the entire time the child is in the agency’s temporary custody. Every day the child is in foster care must be used to pursue permanence for the child. The longer that takes, the less likely it is that the child will avoid the negative consequence of impermanence and instability in his/her life.

The agency values the sibling relationship and will diligently work to place siblings together in foster care but if that is not a possibility the agency will continue to promote and support the sibling bond.

There are times when we will approach a relative who is not currently in a position to commit to caring for a child in their home. A relative who was not previously available to commit may have a change in their personal circumstances and should be considered again; we must regularly update the interest and availability of relatives to care for the child. By doing this, we reduce the possibility that a relative will suddenly and unexpectedly become interested in a child and delay permanence due to the need to explore their last-minute interest.

If a child is placed with a relative while the child is in the agency’s custody, the relative must agree to accept custody of the child as soon as the necessary court orders can be obtained. If the relative is not able and willing

# LORAIN COUNTY CHILDREN SERVICES GUIDING PRINCIPLES AND STRATEGIC VISION

to accept custody of the child, placement of the child with that relative requires the concurrent approval of the Custody Review Team as well as the Managers of Direct Service and Family Based Care.

The central purpose of the agency is to identify children in the community who are not receiving safe and adequate care and to assure (as quickly and to the extent possible) that their circumstances change so that they are receiving safe and adequate care, with a reasonable likelihood that this level of care will be permanent. This must be done with urgency. The developmental and long-term risk to the child exists at the point the agency initiates intervention and continues until the situation is fully resolved and the agency concludes its intervention. Only then are safety, permanence and well-being reasonably assured for the child; only then are the Best Interest criteria met.

## Role of All Management

**Vision for Management: “The LCCS Management Team is committed to modeling professionalism, support, respect and collaboration for shared success across all departments.”**

- To champion our Mission
- To establish a vision that is forward focused and planful
- To create an environment that promotes learning and advances practice
- To provide clear and direct expectations to employees
- To actively assure we work within the law
- To actively engage with and support key stakeholders
- To maintain a rational and flexible organizational structure
- To reduce unreasonable bureaucratic barriers
- To empower employees by providing the tools and support needed to develop an effective and well-trained staff

## Strategic Vision

- Develop and train on a practice model
- To become a trauma informed agency.
- Maximize the use of data across program areas consistent with practice standards and core values
- Develop an onboarding and training program for supervisors
- Develop and implement a Supervisory Practice Model
- Inform and educate community about FFPA driven changes to practice
- Support staff engagement on community/external committees, boards, and taskforces
- Assure the right number of high quality resource families to meet the needs of our children
- Leverage Continuous Quality Improvement strategies and supportive oversight to strengthen the delivery of casework services.