

CHILD WELFARE IN LORAIN COUNTY

EARLY HISTORY:

Lorain County's first permanent settlement was in Columbia Township in 1807, and the first school was begun in Mrs. Bela Bronson's home in 1808. There is nothing in early history which describes what happened to children in need. One might wonder if Lorain County, being situated on the New York Central Railroad might have been a stop along the way of the "Orphan Trains."

On March 17, 1866, the County Commissioners began efforts toward construction of the Lorain County Infirmary (which was on Murray Ridge Rd at Infirmary). This was the forerunner of today's Golden Acres. The first "inmate" was admitted December 1, 1868. In those post Civil War days, all ages were housed together. Inmates that first year ranged from age 11 months to 90 years, and were admitted for reasons of 'insanity, intemperance, imbecility, loss of property, shiftlessness,..." Children were admitted with or without parents, often for reasons of "desertion or poverty." The first young child was an 18-month-old boy who was indentured to a Huron County couple a month later.

GREEN ACRES:

The County Infirmary was the only local source of care for dependent and neglected children for the rest of the century. However, in 1898, the voters approved a measure authorizing the Commissioners to build a children's home, because they felt the need for a separate plan for children. Rev. F. C. Eldred of Elyria led this effort. Col. J.W. Steele took the matter to his town of Oberlin and obtained certain concessions (probably free water and sewer services) for the home to be located there. The Commissioners purchased 15 acres (at the corner of Oberlin Rd. and E. College St.) for \$3675, and the Green Acres Children's Home was built at a total cost of \$32,500.

Three siblings, ages 6, 8, and 12, were the first children placed there on August 4, 1900. 445 children had been admitted in the first 10 years. 411 of them were subsequently placed elsewhere. Family breakdown was the main reason for placements. A few were orphans, but most were placed due to "drunkenness or infidelity" of parents. The original Children's Home was capable of housing 65 children at any given time, and during World War II there were as many as 100 housed at a time. The garden, poultry, and fruit trees were depended upon to help feed the children, and the children provided much of the labor to keep them going, and heating fuel was provided by two gas wells on the property. Until fall, 1908, the children attended school on the grounds. Thereafter, they attended the Oberlin Public Schools.

In 1969, with a campaign of "Once in 70 Years" the voters approved a special levy to replace the old Green Acres Children's Home with a modern one. Neil Zurcher and the local Channel 8 television crew filmed the old structure after the flood of July 4th, 1969. The movie showed children walking through several inches of water to use the bathrooms in the basement, and to pull the cord for the light switch. It also showed a bird's nest in the junior girls' clothes closet. That dormitory setting of bed, dresser, bed, dresser... was replaced with a three winged building which had two to four children sharing a room in a senior boy dorm, senior girl dorm, and junior dorm. Each dorm had a recreation area and living room. At a cost of \$800,000, the new Green Acres building was ready for occupancy in 9/72. Initially, as with the original home, couples were hired

as houseparents who lived on the property. Later there were three shifts, so living on the grounds was no longer necessary. The facility became more impersonal. Because it was no longer cost effective, (daily cost of care for a child exceeded \$100), nor did it provide the home atmosphere that children need, Green Acres was closed in 1995. The property has been returned to the Commissioners.

FOSTER CARE AND ADOPTION (NKA FAMILY-BASED CARE)

It seems that even in the early days, efforts were made for the children to be placed with other families. However, some children experienced multiple placements if they didn't work hard enough, didn't have a pleasing enough disposition, weren't grateful, etc. Thus, for them, they were placed to be free laborers more than members of the family, and the families weren't compensated financially for their care of the children. There was a preponderance of this in the 1930's, and review of some of those children's records shows repeated rejections for inconsequential reasons. The practice of placing children into free wage homes continued into the 1950s. However, the quasi-adoption placement of very young children for indenture seems to have ended in the 1920s.

Among requirements for receiving a child were that the parents "were of good moral character, would teach habits of industry and economy, had references, would give the child a fair trial" (a trial placement of two or three months to see if they fit), "clothing, medical care, and would protect them from evil examples and immoral influences." The child was to be freed at age 18 and to receive a good outfit of clothing and a bounty of \$50 to \$200.

Now prospective foster parents go through a thorough home study and must obtain initial and ongoing training to be licensed. They receive reimbursement for their work. It is expected that they will keep the children they take in as long as those children need a home, and that the children will be treated like members of the family while living there. The foster parents are to attend to the children's medical and school needs. If the children need counseling or the foster parents need support in dealing with special behavioral problems, that is available to them through an arrangement with the local Mental Health Board. If the children will not be able to reunite with their own family members, the foster parents are encouraged to consider adopting them. Clearly, it is important that the children be placed in the right home for them the first time.

The Lorain County Probate Court began in 1824. It is difficult to determine when adoptions began, but in May, 1869, record was found of a step-father adoption. Between August 1900 and August 1910, the Children's Home placed 13 children for adoption. Though foster parents would occasionally adopt the children in their care, it wasn't until the 1990's that they were openly encouraged to do so, if the children had to be permanently separated from their own family.

AGENCY GIRLS' GROUP HOME

In 1980, a teenage girls' group home was opened to help those who would not likely return to family, learn the skills to become independent. This home could accommodate up to eight girls at a time. The girls were partially responsible for the home's upkeep, their laundry, and meal preparation. It was able to offer a warmer and more personal atmosphere than our Children's Home, as well as more freedom. By 1996, the agency

was more successful at finding family members to take the girls, and the home wasn't being used to its capacity. Therefore, it was closed.

PROTECTIVE AND IN-HOME SERVICES

It has only been within the last 50 years that there have been identifiable efforts to provide services to the family as a means of preventing placements. The Legislature created the Child Welfare Board in 1946, in part to reflect the increased duties of the Boards to the counties' children. In 1953, the General Code of Ohio was revised and became known as the Ohio Revised Code. On September 14, 1957, the former chapter of the Ohio Revised Code, which described the purpose of the Board, was repealed and became Chapter 5153 of the Ohio Revised Code. Chapter 5153 preserved the prior law. On August 13, 1969, by law, the name Child Welfare Board was changed to the county Children Services Board.

In the 1970's, considerably more attention was brought to the areas of abuse and neglect. The agency developed the first County Plan of Cooperation, with the county's law enforcement departments, for dealing with cooperative investigations of allegations of abuse and neglect. It also began a Speaker's Bureau which met with groups of mandated reporters to train them about how to recognize and report abuse.

In the early 1980's, attention was finally paid to the issue of sexual abuse. Prior to that, there was little common response, and perpetrators, if jailed, were back in the home quickly. If the systems believed that a child had been molested, placement was nearly the only option. As our county gained more knowledge about the family dynamics of sexual abuse, the agency developed what became known as the STOP program. Prosecutors, caseworkers, and police officers received training together so that there could be a united approach to allegations. Children were generally believed when they reported being molested. Perpetrators were often ordered out of the home, if not to jail, so that the victim didn't have to be placed. Support groups were offered to children and non-offending parents. In 1987, that treatment programming was transferred to the mental health system.

In the mid 1990's, the agency took part in several initiatives aimed at improving the child welfare system and the outcomes for our children. The Kellogg Foundation promoted one caseworker or team, one placement for a child, and permanency in a year, along with other initiatives. The Casey Foundation promoted community collaboration in planning, and development of neighborhood supports and placements, as a few of their initiatives. The Family Stability Initiative promoted community collaboration to plan and provide services to families before placement would be needed. The goal was to reduce the number of children placed in the county by all placing agencies by 25% in three years. Pooled funding brought about collaborative planning, shared financial responsibility, and use of managed care principles to address the needs of children who couldn't be served in their own, relative, or foster homes. Therefore, for a child to be placed into group or residential care, the Cluster, a group of managers from child-serving systems, needed to approve same and share responsibility for the child. In 1998, as the Cluster increased its scope and agencies contributed more to its funding, it changed its name to the Integrated Services Program. Lorain County became one of four in the nation to receive another grant, which promoted collaborative efforts. That led to the Integrated Services Program's decision to contract with Pressley Ridge to

provide early intervention services to teens (and their families) involved with the Court, in order to prevent escalation of the problem, and eventual placements. This program would also more closely manage the care which youngsters in residential treatment were receiving.

Agency caseloads were greatly reduced so that there could be adequate time spent helping to strengthen a family.

Now the agency continues to posture itself to be a state of the art agency for the 21st century. The central value is "Do the right thing right, on time, the first time every time, one child at a time." With this in mind, staff are able to be more creative in their approach, and to offer sometimes unique solutions to helping children become safe or achieve permanency.

Agency offices were in various locations, once removed from the Children's Home. In the '50's the office was in a building on Commerce Court, behind the telephone company. Initially, it was entered from Second St., and LCCS had the use of the upstairs. In 1969 the entire building at 356 Commerce Court was rented by LCCS. The agency moved to the new Lorain County Administration Building in 1974. At that time, there was ample space, and most caseworkers had individual offices. By the 1990s, despite the fact that the agency's space expanded to include two more areas of the third floor, two to four caseworkers shared an office. Renovation to work stations began in 1997.

For the sake of comparison, a trip down nostalgia lane, and a view of how the cost of living has changed, a few other facts are listed below:

1967:

Agency budget was \$676,205.47

Base salary for a caseworker, with Bachelor's degree was \$5100.

Per diem cost of care for a child at Green Acres was \$6.06.

Foster care board rate was \$1.75 per day.

A caseload had approximately 40 families and over 100 children. Caseworkers presented their cases in court, and families rarely had attorneys. Cases would be kept open for years at a time.

1973:

Foster care board rate was \$2.25 to 3.25 per day, depending upon the child's age.

1977:

Agency budget was \$2,073,178.83. Also at about this time, it became increasingly necessary to request legal representation from the Lorain County Prosecutor's office. Parents were now having legal representation, making it prudent for the agency to do the same.

1987:

Agency budget was \$4,763,323.80

1994:

Base salary for a Bachelor's degreed caseworker was \$20,660.

1997:

Agency budget was 9,974,805.

Foster care board rate was \$22.50 per day.

Base salary for a Bachelor's degreed caseworker was \$21,424. But primarily, caseworkers with a Master's degree in Social Work were being hired, at a base salary of \$27,851.

A large caseload size for ongoing cases was 14 families with 35 children. There was an emphasis upon short term service and having a permanent plan for children within one year.

**Numerous excerpts were taken from the 1976 Annual Report, researched and written by Loretta Farley, an administrator at the time.

