

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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HEAD START AND KINSHIP CARE

Head Start and Early Head Start are federally funded comprehensive school readiness programs that offer valuable and often life-changing resources for families in need. Many families may not realize that they are eligible for this free, high-quality early education program. In addition to serving low-income families, Head Start is also available at no cost to children in foster care or children in “kinship care” who are being raised by grandparents or other relatives due to family issues.

“Head Start is designed to provide social and educational experiences to ensure children are ready for school,” says WCCS Early Learning Centers Director, Lisa Cayard. “Children learn through hands-on, individualized activities with an evidence-based curriculum. Each child receives health and developmental screenings, so that any needed intervention can be provided as early as possible. Head Start is a uniquely comprehensive program that includes healthy meals, nutrition education, collaboration with medical and mental health agencies to make sure children are healthy, and family services to support parents in their role as the child’s most important teacher.”

In recent years, Warren County has seen a growing number of families in crisis due to substance abuse. Among families served by Head Start in Warren County, the number of children with a family history of substance doubled from 16% in 2015 to 32% in 2016. “The number of children in Head Start with an incarcerated parent increased from 10 children last

year to 36 children this year,” noted Cayard. “We also have enrolled 28 children being raised by grandparents or other relatives, an increase from 9 children last year.” This striking increase points to a growing need for supportive services for these vulnerable children and their families.

Children who have been removed from their homes often have experienced significant trauma in their young lives, and this impacts their behavior and development. Grandparents who accept custody of their grandchildren are doing the best they can in these difficult situations, but they often need support. Head Start is available to connect these families with resources, and to provide a stable, supportive learning environment for the children.

Warren County Community Services receives federal Head Start and Early Head Start grants to serve infants, toddlers and preschoolers in a variety of program options, at no cost to eligible families:

- Home-based services for infants and toddlers include a weekly 90-minute home visit, plus play groups for socialization twice a month.
- Head Start for three and four year olds is available in part day three and a half hour classes, or six-hour extended day classes.
- Child care is available for working parents at the Lebanon and South Lebanon sites, for children ages birth to five. Parents pay for the hours of before and after care through child care subsidies or a small fee.

All four centers operated by Warren County Community Services have earned five-star ratings through Ohio’s Step Up to Quality rating system. The Helen Centers Early Learning Center in Franklin currently has several openings, and the program is actively seeking eligible children. To apply for Head Start, call 513-695-2213, or print an application from the WCCS website, www.wccsi.org/earlylearning.

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About WCCS:

For more than 50 years, WCCS has served as the community's primary link for social services in Warren County. WCCS operates a wide range of programs and services that:

- Allow seniors and families to obtain and maintain long-term housing.
- Assist families and individuals with emergency needs, employment, and rising energy costs.
- Help older adults to remain active and independent.
- Prepare children to succeed in school.