



## **FULTON COUNTY JOB & FAMILY SERVICES**

604 S. Shoop Ave. Suite 200 Wauseon, OH 43567

Phone (419) 337-0010 Fax (419) 337-0061

**For Immediate Release**

**Contact:** Toni Schindler  
419-337-9699

### **Ohio's opiate epidemic takes toll on Fulton County children services**

**November 1, 2016 Wauseon, OH** – As Ohioans continue to struggle in the grip of heroin, fentanyl and other opioids, attention is turning to the often invisible victims of the epidemic: children and the related impact on county child protective services.

Statewide, the number of abused or neglected children in agency custody has increased 19 percent since 2009. In Fulton County alone, the count of children removed temporarily from their homes has increased 67%, including the children being placed in the care of relatives.

A recent survey of county children services agencies revealed that in 2015, half of children taken into custody have parental drug use identified at the time of removal from their homes, and the drug of choice for more than half of those parents is opiates. Overall, 28 percent of children taken into custody statewide that year have parents who use opiates, including heroin. For Fulton County, 43 percent of children taken into custody in 2015 have parents who use opiates.

“The impact of the opiate epidemic goes well beyond the numbers collected by the survey,” states Amy Metz-Simon, Director of Fulton County Job and Family Services. “The numbers do not factor in the faithful grandparents who take on the responsibility of raising their grandchildren to provide a sense of normalcy in their young lives.”

The influx of children and families into the system comes as state resources have actually declined. During the same period those custody numbers increased 19 percent, the state investment in child protection was reduced by 17 percent. County governments have been responsible for a rising share of every dollar spent on child protection – a state average of 52 cents. Meanwhile, the state commitment to child protection is down to just 9 cents on the dollar, compared to an average of 43 cents nationwide.

Many of the children coming into care are infants in need of a loving family until the parent recovers from addiction. Because addicted parents' recovery can be extensive, children linger in foster care longer than other abused or neglected children. Community members interested in becoming foster parents may contact Fulton County Job and Family Services at 419-337-0010 Option 3, then 3.

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