

Overview 2020

Department of Health
and Human Services



Cuyahoga County
Together We Thrive

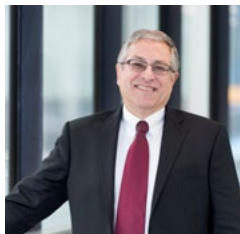
2020 was a year of unprecedented challenges. Our lives were dramatically disrupted overnight, people lost jobs, schools shut their doors, and just meeting the basic needs of our families became difficult for many. Health, education, food, and economic security became fragile. It was in this crisis that the employees and leadership of our **Department of Health and Human Services** showed what they are made of. Their dedication, innovation, collaboration, and resilience were on full display. While managing their own personal needs and anxieties, they were determined to meet the increasing and urgent needs of our community.

From home visits for child safety and senior services, to helping child care centers and senior centers navigate the ever-changing landscape of the pandemic, to helping our homeless population stay healthy and safe from **COVID-19**, to helping thousands of families get the food, cash and medical assistance they needed, so many were provided with urgent and necessary services. Even if you're not a direct recipient of these services, the value they bring to our community is immeasurable.

The pandemic revealed inequities in virtually every walk of life, which has prompted us to use a racial equity lens to examine our programs and services. We want to make sure everyone in our community is part of our recovery, from vaccinations to education and jobs. From our youngest babies to our oldest residents, all should have an opportunity to thrive. County Council is supporting our efforts, as we are investing in this work and collaborating with community partners to make it happen.

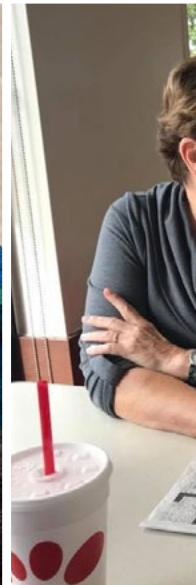
As we look forward to what comes next, I want to **thank** our **Health and Human Services employees**. None of this would be possible without their dedication to public service and making Cuyahoga County a place we can all be proud of.

Sincerely,



Armond Budish,
County Executive

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Armond Budish".





This is an annual report letter like no other – because this past 12 months has been a year like no other. I am writing to salute the amazing job that the **Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS)** has done under some incredible circumstances.

As you will see in this report, we are working to address some of the most difficult issues present in our society. Every day, we take on abuse and trauma, poverty and food insecurity, isolation, illness, and hopelessness. Our goal is to bring our residents healing, opportunity, the provision of basic needs, community, wellness, and a hope for a better tomorrow.

2020 was also a year of great disruption and threat. **COVID-19** has changed the ways we live and work, and the Department of Health and Human Services has played a huge role in responding to the pandemic, working every day in the community, doing our job -- even as that job has changed. I am especially grateful for the essential workers who have continued to make in-person visits to ensure that our residents are safe and healthy. You are heroes in my mind.

This past year was also an important time for us to challenge racism and inequity in our programs, services, buildings, and communities. We are confronting centuries of structural racism in across the country, including right here in Cuyahoga County. This work will need to continue for a long time to counter the damage done, but we are making it a priority.

As we release this report, we are still fighting **COVID-19**, structural racism, and the major problems we, as public servants, are here to address. These fights -- and our work -- are honorable, and we have had success despite the struggle. I look forward to another year of progress for the Department of Health and Human Services as it serves the residents of Cuyahoga County.



David Merriman,
Director Department of Health and Human Services

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CHILDREN



Supporting Early Care and Education During the COVID-19 Pandemic

The recognition that parents are a young child's first and most important teachers is central to how Cuyahoga County's **Office of Early Childhood -- Invest in Children** -- approaches serving families. Throughout 2020, Invest in Children mobilized resources to support parents and providers during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Beginning in late March, most preschools and childcare centers were closed to help slow the spread of the virus. The only exceptions were those centers and licensed family childcare homes that applied to become **Pandemic Care Centers** -- approved under special licenses to operate and provide care for the young children of first responders and other essential personnel. This dedicated source of available care allowed these parents to keep working without the added uncertainty of who could care for their children. Five of Invest in Children's Universal Pre-Kindergarten (UPK) sites received approval to be Pandemic Care Centers and helped meet this critical need.



Pandemic Care Centers were required to serve smaller numbers of children per classroom, maintain distancing between groups of children, use Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) and implement rigorous cleaning and disinfection procedures. Many of these same requirements must now be met by the preschool and childcare centers that were allowed to reopen as the year progressed. Invest in Children in collaboration with lead agency **Starting Point** supported these providers as they dramatically changed how they operated, and the number of children they served.

Invest in Children coordinated with the Cuyahoga County **Office of Emergency Management** to distribute packages of PPE free of charge to 50 UPK programs. With so many other challenges and limited budgets, our UPK providers were extremely grateful to receive a package customized to meet their needs, including disposable gloves, face shields, sanitizer and thermometers.

The entire childcare system has been upended by the pandemic. Yet, reliable high-quality preschool and child care options remained essential to reopening the economy and supporting parents in their ability to return to work. Cuyahoga County and Invest in Children are committed to continuing to provide leadership, advocacy, resources and programmatic guidance to help centers return to serving families with high-quality care and education.

Child Protection Specialists on the Front Lines During Coronavirus

The work of the **Division of Children and Family Services (DCFS)** became more important than ever during the pandemic. Across the nation, child abuse and domestic violence concerns were heightened as parents and children were experiencing additional stress during the crisis. Isolation and remote learning can leave them disconnected from normal sources of support. In spite of **COVID-19**, our **Child Protection Specialists (CPS)** continue their work on the frontlines to keep children safe.

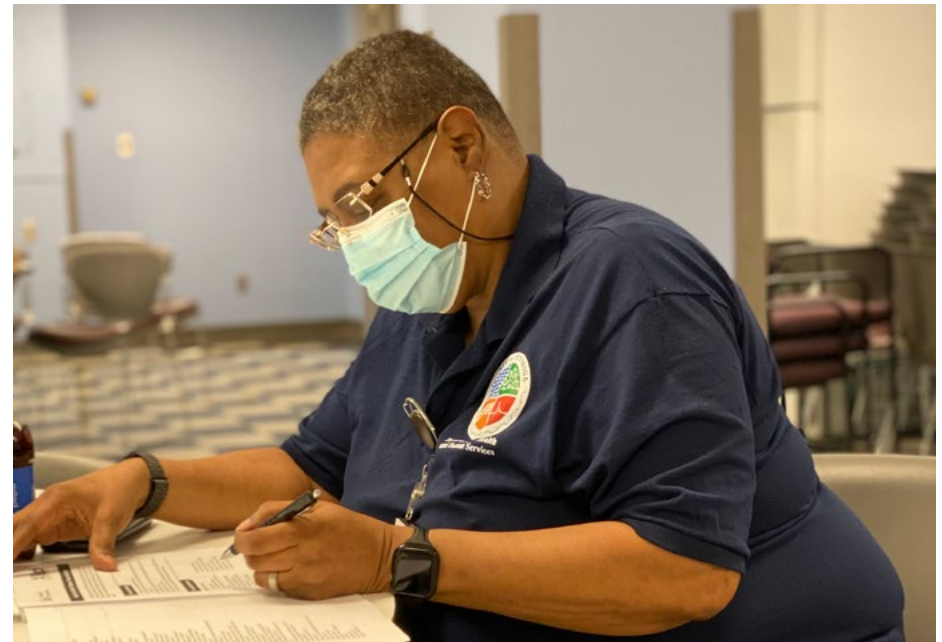
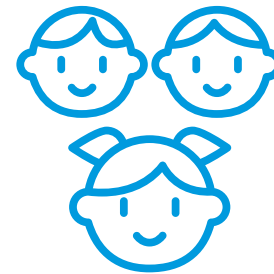
With social distancing and safety protocols in mind, our team continues to investigate allegations of abuse, make home visits to assess if children are safe, and interview young people and caregivers. Whether virtually or in-person, they are working with relatives, community partners and the courts to make decisions about custody.

Our 24-hour hotline (216-696-KIDS) initially saw a sharp drop in calls when schools closed, but eventually, call volume returned. Employees on the hotline handle allegations of neglect, abuse and dependency of children, as well as home study requests from other organizations. In 2020, hotline staff responded to more than 63,000 calls and processed more than **32,000 referrals for help or investigations.**

Because of the increased risk, DCFS looked for new ways for the public to easily report suspected cases of abuse and neglect. Now, reports can be submitted to our 24-hour hotline -- **216-696-KIDS** -- or via [email](#), [website](#) or our [Facebook page](#).

32,000

Calls for Help



Filling Backpacks, Fulfilling Dreams

As schools and families prepared for the school year, there were lots of questions about whether learning would happen virtually or in person. **The Division of Children and Family Services Community Outreach** team remained focused on preparing youth for success. Even though COVID-19 presented extraordinary challenges, the team pressed forward with its annual Fill-the-Backpack Campaign!

Through the generosity of over **100 donors**, a total of **850 backpacks** were collected from local individuals, companies, and community organizations. The team also received an additional **\$1,346** in monetary gifts that were used to purchase additional school supplies.

DCFS partnered with **Westside Community House** and **Harvard Community Services Center** to host drive-by distributions for families in their neighborhoods. Additional backpacks were distributed by agency workers to youth in our care. In total, DCFS gave out 1,123 backpacks with supplies.

Thanks to our donors, collaborative partners, and dedicated staff, we were able to help thousands of children enter the classroom ready for success.



[Watch our Outreach Team in action](#)



1,123

Backpacks with Supplies





FAMILIES

Finding Forever Families in a Pandemic

When the Coronavirus pandemic hit, most of us retreated to our homes, sequestered with our loved ones. Imagine being in foster care, not having a permanent family to help calm your fears and anxiety.

In Cuyahoga County there are more than **600 children and teens** in permanent custody of the **Division of Children and Family Services (DCFS)**. We may be practicing social distancing, but every child still needs a family.



Although it has been difficult during the pandemic, our adoption team has been very creative in finding forever families for our children. They have been diligent in completing adoptive placements, scheduling visits with families, and ensuring all the legal paperwork for the adoption process is completed by the prospective parents.”

Beverly Torres, senior manager of the Permanency Support unit at DCFS



While many other court hearings were put on hold during the pandemic, Cuyahoga County Probate Court quickly reopened to ensure children could be united with their forever families. The Court transitioned to virtual hearings for adoption finalizations, and now conducts both in-person and virtual hearings.

With the support of the Court and loving families, the DCFS Permanency team found forever families for 122 children in 2020..



122

Finalized Adoptions in 2020



[Watch our Adoption Story](#)

Spreading Smiles and Hope for the Holidays

2020 brought many changes and challenges. Nevertheless, we were determined to help our youth, families and older adults celebrate the holidays.

The Division of Children and Family Services Community Outreach team's Adopt-a-Family program went virtual with e-gift cards from donors, and our **Hope for the Holidays program** went semi-virtual, with all donating being done through a Target charitable wish list and the distribution via a drive-thru event. The annual **Fox 8 Giving Tree** drive was held with some modifications, but the response from our community was still amazing!

We were able to have **229 families -- 552 kids total -- "adopted"** for the holidays by **145 donors**, who collectively gave over **\$60,000!** Through the **Hope for the Holidays** program, we were able to serve over **317 youth** via our drive-through event, **1,040** through our toy give-away program, and **552** more through our neighborhood Collaborative Partners. We also ensured **50** young people who aged out of foster care were not forgotten. All totaled, we were able to help more than **2,500** young people celebrate the holidays thanks to more than **1,000** generous donors.

In its second year of operation, **DSAS' Community Office on Aging Elves for Elders** program was able to bring holiday cheer to nearly **150** older adults throughout the County with personalized gifts and food bags stuffed with milk, bread, vegetables and holiday fixings. Not only were the gifts appreciated, but the personal interaction was a welcome respite for our seniors, many of whom live alone.

The smiles created and hope shared with those in our community who are struggling reminds us that nurturing the soul is vital to the overall well-being of those we serve.



[!\[\]\(ec9132f1d27c8919987d92907322654d_img.jpg\) **Hope for the Holidays story**](#)

FAMILY PROGRAMS



1000+
Donors



\$62,513
Donated



2,511
Youth Received Gifts



ELDER PROGRAM



150
Donors



\$3,750
Donated



150
Older Adults Served

[!\[\]\(41aea2746216b27a6939d696d8e035da_img.jpg\) Watch our Elves in action!](#)

Finding New Ways to Reach Customers

Communicating with our customers virtually became critically important during 2020 as a safe and easy way to reach **Cuyahoga Job and Family Services (CJFS)** customers with information about **Medicaid, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)**, and cash assistance programs.

Social Media

Online tools played an important role in sharing information about new pandemic programs including extra **SNAP** benefits for students and increases to **SNAP** benefits for families due to the pandemic. We used social media to share information about extra cash assistance for families to purchase needed **COVID** supplies, and changes to Medicaid eligibility made to ensure people didn't lose their medical coverage during the pandemic.

Virtual online forums

In April, we made the decision to shift our community partner conversations and long-term care forums to an online format. The forums allow us to meet with our community partners quarterly to provide policy and agency updates and provide an opportunity for partners to ask questions of our leadership team.

The Community Partner Conversations typically cover all **CJFS** operations and our Long-Term-Care Community Forums focus on providers who work directly with our staff in our Specialized Medicaid Benefits Center. For the first time, these forums were open to all, not just long-term care providers.

Community Outreach

In-person outreach was limited in 2020 due to the **COVID** Pandemic. Many community outreach events were canceled to slow the spread of **COVID**. Still outreach in the winter was strong, and some outreach took place in the summer and fall when **COVID-19** infection rates had declined.

In late 2019, CJFS introduced the **Community Outreach, Messaging, and Education Team (COMET)**, a professional development program for CJFS staff to assist with community outreach efforts. Having the support of **COMET** to engage the community maximized opportunities for interaction in 2020.

SOCIAL MEDIA

5,413

Facebook Followers Grew From 2,786 To 5,413
(March 2020-Feb. 2021)

1,000

Twitter Followers Grew To More Than 1,000

10,000

Tweets Seen An Average Of At
Least 10,000 Times Per Month

120,700

Total Tweet Impressions More Than
120,700



CJFS FORUMS



11

11 Forums Hosted

709

709 Community Partners Attended

Topics

Medicaid, SNAP, child care, COVID-19 Response, best practices and policy changes

LONG-TERM CARE FORUMS



12

12 Forums Hosted

604

604 Community Providers Attended

Topics

Medicaid and Long-Term Care applications and renewals, information sharing, guest speaker from City of Cleveland Department of Aging, communication efforts, COVID-19 policy updates, impact on long-term care benefits



COMMUNITY OUTREACH



800

800 People Reached In Person
In 2020



430

430 People At Outdoor Outreach
Events



285

285 People At Earned Income Tax
Credit Coalition



Partnered

Partnered with 2020 Census and
Voters Registration events

Partnering to Get Assistance to Those Who Need it Most

Cuyahoga Job and Family Services partnered with Enterprise, United Way 2-1-1 and The Greater Cleveland Food Bank to help residents claim more than \$1.2 million in stimulus payments.

Individuals who did not file their taxes in 2020 or earlier may not have known they were still eligible to receive the **Economic Income Payment (EIP)** from the federal government. From August through November, **Cuyahoga Job and Family Services, United Way 2-1-1, Enterprise Community Partners and The Greater Cleveland Food Bank** teamed up to help thousands of Cuyahoga County residents access their federal **COVID-19** stimulus checks.

Cuyahoga Job and Family Services worked with partners to create and utilize social media messaging, along with a direct text and email campaign, to inform residents that help was available. This was a targeted campaign to support low income families and individuals in need to access supports to register and receive the **EIP**. County residents were directed to **United Way's 2-1-1** which connected callers to the **Greater Cleveland Food Bank's Help Center** where they were screened to determine if they were eligible for this critical financial support. The Food Bank spoke with almost **10,000** residents through this collaboration and connected callers to additional resources, including food to support their households.

Those needing further assistance in claiming their **EIP** were referred to Enterprise Community Partners. In just three short months, Enterprise's staff and volunteers helped over **1,000** residents claim their **EIP** which put over **\$1.2 million** into the households of residents who were unable to navigate the registration process alone. And because this impromptu partnership encouraged self-service at each step, many more residents likely benefitted from this coordinated outreach campaign.



**Greater Cleveland
Food Bank**



A SERVICE OF UNITED WAY GREATER CLEVELAND



It's yours, file free & keep it
earned income tax credit

Cuyahoga EITC Coalition



Enterprise®

Cuyahoga Job and Family Services helps record number of residents

In 2020, **Cuyahoga Job and Family Services (CJFS)** employees answered a record **602,731 calls** from Cuyahoga County residents in need of food, medical and emergency assistance. **CJFS** quickly implemented a work-from-home plan that began in April and allowed more than **90 percent** of **CJFS** staff to transition to a work-from-home environment to keep our customers and employees safe.

Even in these challenging times, our staff rose to meet the challenge. Cuyahoga Job and Family Services employees answered an average of **2,391 calls** per day and increased our call answer rate by **10 percent** to **73.3 percent**. Staff also decreased the average wait time by **26 percent** to **less than 15 minutes**.

Additionally, in 2020, **68 percent** of Medicaid and **70 percent** of **Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Programs (SNAP)** applicants who reached our eligibility contact center were able to get their eligibility for benefits determined over the phone the day they called.

The State of Ohio also implemented waivers that allowed our agency to postpone the renewal process on some benefit programs due to the pandemic. **CJFS** took advantage of a waiver that allowed for circumventing the formal interview process for **SNAP** benefits, when all eligibility factors (including income, residency, and household composition) have been verified. Implementing these waiver options in Cuyahoga County has eased some of the burdens on our customers during this difficult time, while allowing **CJFS** to process new applications quickly.

*Calls per day average is based on the 252 days the contact center was open in 2020. The center is open 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. M-F and closed weekends and all major holidays.



602,731

Calls Answered

2,391

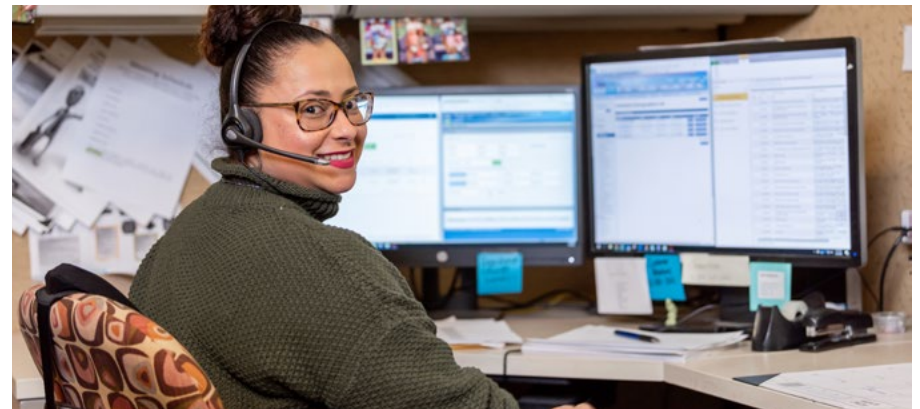
Calls per Day

14.1 minutes

Average Speed of Answer

18.4

Average Call Time



Focusing on Families in Crisis

Cuyahoga Job and Family Services Provides Emergency Assistance to Families Affected by COVID-19

Due to the state of emergency, the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services provided funding to Cuyahoga County for the relief of families impacted by **COVID-19**. The funding was provided through the federal **Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)** program, for distribution through **Cuyahoga Job and Family Services' (CJFS) Prevention, Retention, and Contingency (PRC)** program.

The **COVID-19 Emergency Assistance PRC** program accepted applications from May through September to assist **TANF**-eligible families with housing costs such as rent and utilities, food, essential supplies, hygiene products, cleaning and school supplies. **CJFS** worked closely with **CHN Housing Partners** and retailers such as **Dave's Supermarkets**, **Marc's**, and **Save-A-Lot** to ensure customers were able to use the emergency funds they were approved for.

3,042

COVID-19 PRC Program Customers Served

11,014

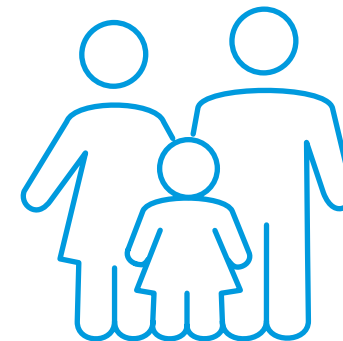
Approved Applications

14.1 minutes

Average Speed of Answer

\$2,513,472

Total Assistance



Operation Cuyahoga Cares: An Outpouring of Community Support

During the difficult days of COVID-19, we launched **Operation: Cuyahoga Cares** to help some of our hardest hit families and older adults weather the crisis. We asked the community to join us in supporting our most vulnerable residents and witnessed an incredible outpouring of support.

Through the generosity of our donors, almost **\$40,000** was raised to supply over forty struggling elders and almost 200 struggling families with gift cards for local stores where they could buy essentials such as food, hygiene and cleaning products. Deserving seniors received a personal visit from our case managers bearing a gift card, bag of food from our emergency pantry, and a box of cookies from **Girl Scout Troup #71821**.

Operation: Cuyahoga Cares was a first-time partnership between sister agencies, the **Division of Children and Family Services** and the **Division of Senior and Adult Services**. We were pleased to see the response from the community, and we look forward to growing this program to serve our residents in need.

TOGETHER, WE MADE A DIFFERENCE. TOGETHER,
WE GAVE HOPE!

[View our list of donors here.](#)



42

Elders Served

193

Families Served

\$39,988

Total Donated

159

Number of Donors



ADULTS



Virtual Employers Workshop Assists Employers with Child Support Efforts

In 2020, the annual **Office of Child Support Services (OCSS) Employers Workshop** went virtual. **OCSS** recognizes that employers play a crucial role in the child support program. We were excited to continue providing support -- despite these uncertain times of the pandemic -- at no cost. The virtual format presented the potential for sharing helpful information with more attendees through technology.

The workshop was geared towards human resources, benefits, and payroll professionals to help organizations maintain compliance in withholdings and medical obligations for child support. Ohio law requires that child support payments are remitted electronically by employers with 50 or more employees, if they withhold support for at least one employee. The training covered child support basics and more advanced topics, like how to calculate withholding limitations when there are multiple orders.

OCSS strives to make the process of paying and receiving child support manageable for everyone, including employers. Together, we collaborate to deliver quality services that support families.



Office of Child Support Services Recognized with State Performance Award

The Cuyahoga County Office of Child Support Services (OCSS) was recognized by the **State of Ohio Office of Child Support** for outstanding performance with the most improved collections on cases with arrears, and most improved collections on current support in Fiscal Year 2020 among major metropolitan counties.

The Director of the U.S. Census Bureau, Dr. Steven Dillingham, recognized OCSS as an invaluable member of the 2020 Census Community Partnership and Engagement Program in effectively helping achieve a successful 2020 census. OCSS assisted in a variety of ways, including mobile assistance in our lobby and sharing information with our clients.



New Mobile App Facilitates Access to Child Support

The Cuyahoga County Office of Child Support Services (OCSS) strives to provide superior customer experience with services that give customers useful information and improve client communications.

The **State of Ohio Office of Child Support (OCS)** has expanded the **availability of child support information to a mobile app platform.**

The “Child Support” app provides secure and easy access to child support information on the go. It is free, voluntary and provides the same familiar information and access as the web-based **Child Support Customer Service Web Portal** with some additional benefits.

This mobile application supports all Android and Apple Mobile devices. Parents and caretakers simply download the “**Ohio Child Support**” app from the **AppStore** or **Google Play**.

USERS OF THIS APP CAN:

- access their child support case and order information
- make payments by credit/debit card or checking/savings account debit
- receive payments
- review their payment history
- receive helpful notifications and alerts
- view case/order details for their Ohio child support cases
- view and update personal information
- contact their local child agency by safely and securely sending messages and/or attachments





From Incarceration to Inspiration

In Cuyahoga County, well over **4,000** restored citizens return home every year from local jails, and state and federal prisons. **Reentry** is a broad term used to refer to this transitional process of individuals re-entering their respective communities. This process is often difficult and poses challenges because, although they have paid their debt to society, many of these individuals continue to face barriers stemming from their incarceration. These barriers include the inability to secure employment, stable housing, adequate health care, quality education, and even the right to vote.

The **Office of Reentry's** mission is to remove the social stigma and burdens that challenge returning citizens by partnering with our judicial system and actively engaging reentrants. The Office serves as the backbone for a community-wide movement that guides individuals in a new direction—moving them towards stabilization and growth. We partner with a wide range of stakeholders who are invested in making a positive systemic change, reducing recidivism, and creating safer communities. The Office strives to assist partners and collaborators in improving service coordination and outcomes.

In 2020, the Office of Reentry invested \$1.5 million in several critical programs and two partnerships with the Cuyahoga County Court of Common Pleas Courts:

- Cuyahoga County Reentry and Reintegration Program
- Adult Transitions Model staffed by Oriana House
- Lutheran Metropolitan Ministries' Chopping for Change Culinary Training Program
- North Star Neighborhood Reentry Resource Center
- Aspire Greater Cleveland Adult Education Program
- Achieve Staffing (housed at Towards Employment)
- Exodus Planner (online resource tool for returning citizens)
- Reentry Continuum for Juveniles Effective Leadership Academy
- Open Door at CMHA / YMCA
- Cuyahoga County Court of Common Pleas Veterans' Treatment Court
- Second Chance Reentry Legal Clinic at Case Western Reserve University

ASPIRE GREATER CLEVELAND

Adult Basic Education Program for Incarcerated Persons
(paused in March 2020)



50

Students Enrolled for Minimum of 12 Hours

18

Students Who Successfully Passed a
GED Section



4

Students Who Successfully Passed
The GED Test

15

Students Who Passed The Tab Test
Achievement



[Watch our Reentry story video](#)

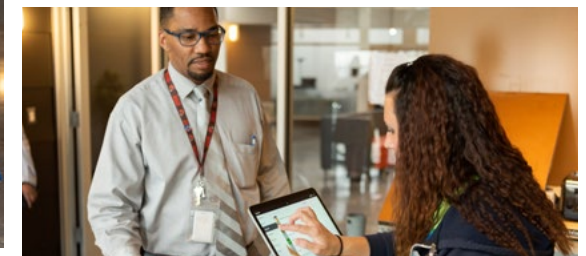
Reentry Week Spotlights Success Stories

In 2020, the **Cuyahoga County Office of Reentry** worked quickly with community partners to host Reentry Week virtually, when it was first announced that the COVID-19 pandemic would make in-person gatherings impossible. From April 26 to May 1, 2020, the Office and its community partners hosted a Twitter Chat, a virtual highlight of returning citizens' local businesses, a small business workshop, a viewing of the ACLU of Ohio's Collateral Sanctions 101 series and a watch party of the highly acclaimed film, *Imperial Dreams*.

These events sparked broad community conversation and educated the public about the stigma and challenges of carrying a criminal record. More importantly, the businesses started and managed by returning citizens were highlighted through a social media sharing campaign. In total, there were over 2,500 engagements on social media for the week, seven participating community partners and dozens of interactions.

Cuyahoga County Reentry Week has been taking place since 2018, when the Cuyahoga County Executive and County Council declared the last week in April a time to recognize returning citizens and raise public awareness of legislative, economic, and social barriers that affect them.

Given this, the Office of Reentry, the **Greater Cleveland Reentry Leadership Coalition**, and its community partners have remained committed to using this week to profile successful returning citizens and educating the public about criminal justice and reform initiatives, with hopes that it will create a better transition experience for others.



Supporting the Homeless During COVID-19

For homeless families and individuals, the Coronavirus pandemic became a very serious threat. When stay at home orders were issued many retreated to a warm, safe home. But homeless individuals and families often became isolated, confined to shelters and sometimes unable to interact with friends or get certain in-person services in the community.

For the **Office of Homeless Services** and their partners, normal operations were not enough. Measures needed to be taken to ensure that safety net services continued while intensifying efforts to ensure the health and safety of the homeless community. There was no playbook for the new challenges they faced. Partners in the **Homeless Services Continuum of Care** all jumped in together, expanding the definition of what it meant to take care of our neighbors in the homeless community. Their health and wellness, access to services and resources, and prevention measures became just as important as making sure there was a roof over their head.

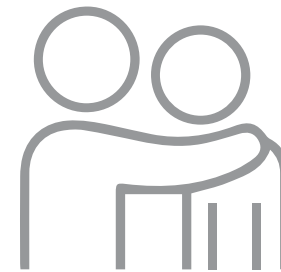
Other businesses and medical professionals joined the team.

Together, the partners were able to:

- **Reduce population in traditional/existing shelter locations to reduce COVID exposure and ensure safety.**
 - **Men's shelter population reduced 65%**
 - **Women's shelter population reduced 58%**
- **Deploy sanitation stations for proper hygiene in the community**
- **Conduct health screenings and COVID-19 testing at homeless shelters**
- **Provide a safe place for people who tested positive or needed to recover after leaving the hospital**
- **Provide healthcare, meals, and cleaning services in those facilities**

Reducing the number of people in shelters was accomplished through creative thinking and deploying new resources. Gift cards and vouchers helped some people stay with family or friends. Local hotels were also used as alternative shelter spaces, with one site dedicated to COVID-19 isolation and quarantine.

IN 2020, THE COUNTY'S CONTINUUM OF CARE PROVIDED:



43,000+

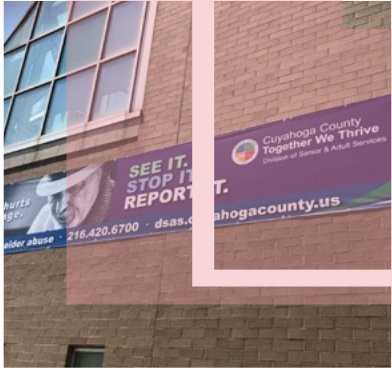
Nights Of Alternative Shelter Space To Over 600 People

250,000+

Meals In Those Locations

3,500+

COVID-19 Tests



OLDER ADULTS

Responding Together to Support Our Seniors

The onset of **COVID-19** raised concerns for us all, both personally and professionally. The new reality of social distancing and the fear of the unknown caused everyone to pause and face the pandemic.

As we gained perspective, the **Division of Senior and Adult Services (DSAS)** swiftly laid out a plan to support the safety and well-being of our older adults and adults with disabilities during this crisis.

To protect both clients and staff, service modifications happened swiftly. Ninety-percent of DSAS' staff transitioned to working remotely, while calls for service remained consistent. We increased the frequency of communication, to share resources and rapidly changing information. We developed stringent worksite cleaning protocols and implemented COVID-19 screenings in four County buildings to ensure onsite employees could continue to safely serve our clients. In 2020, DSAS' staff conducted more than 50,000 wellness checks and 25,000 home visits to clients.

All DSAS units began managing stable clients by phone, while making face-to-face visits to urgent or emergency cases in accordance with the new safety guidelines. Our contracted providers pivoted as well, to ensure uninterrupted medical transportation and safe, no-contact meal delivery. Our on-site food pantry assistance surged, as clients faced resource shortages.

Within our Senior Center partners, transportation and in-center activities decreased, while meal deliveries and virtual activities increased. In 2020, we provided nearly **500,000 meals** and over **120,000 hours** of programming for clients. We are still working diligently to address the key issues of food access, social isolation and the digital divide.

While this shift in service delivery has presented challenges, we are adapting to reach our seniors in new ways. Innovative ideas we are exploring include a new tele-health program to enhance the core services our older adults and adults with disabilities rely on, and a wellness check initiative in partnership with the County's senior center network.

Overall, this crisis has helped us broaden the ways we engage our older adults. Our programming is becoming more robust and varied to benefit our residents, supporting their needs, wherever they may be.

PARTNER THANK YOUS

- [BKO Distillery](#)
- [Bolt and Spool](#)
- [Cathy Rush](#)
- [Cleveland Sewing Solutions](#)
- [Community PPE donors](#)
- [Cuyahoga County Senior Services Network](#)
- [Denise Robinson](#)
- [Girls Scouts of America Troop #71821](#)
- [Greater Cleveland Food Bank](#)
- [Nancy Svec](#)
- [The Masked Seamstress](#)

Reaching older adults in despair as protective calls increase

One of our most basic tenets is to ensure our older residents live a life of dignity, free from harm. That's why **DSAS' Adult Protective Services (APS)** unit investigates allegations of elder abuse across the County. This year, we provided adult protective services to **2,340 clients**. Lifting defenseless seniors from harm to safety requires dedication and determination.

To align with new state guidelines, all 88 Ohio counties migrated to a new statewide database for **Adult Protective Services (ODAPS)**, helping to improve elder abuse data accuracy and collaboration. The new system shares referrals, investigations and case management activities for every adult abuse case reported in the state, allowing us to provide seamless services to those who leave the county but remain in the state and are still in need of protection.

Mental health and substance abuse disorders among older adults are on the rise, so we launched a behavioral health program to address them. In 2020, this unit conducted over **200 mental health assessments**, allowing us to refer clients to services vital to their well-being.

Fighting abuse is a community effort. That's why we continue to reach growing audiences with free virtual trainings on both child and elder abuse reporting for mandated professionals. Close to **200 citizens** received this critical training in 2020. By participating in public forums with partners such as the **Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the Department of Justice and the Cuyahoga County Department of Consumer Affairs**, we continue to keep the issue of abuse at the forefront, as we work to protect our most vulnerable residents.

We convene a monthly **Adult Protective Services collaborative** of more than **100 community experts** who meet to share solutions for challenging cases. Solon Senior Services Social Worker, Yvette Hasan, notes that this broad-based approach is making an impact in her city.



“

Being a part of the APS Collaborative keeps me informed and helps me better serve my community. We have many seniors in Solon who need assistance, and I can definitely say there are seniors thriving here thanks to APS. When we call, they assist immediately without hesitation.”

Yvette Hasan, LSW
Solon Senior Services

Food insecurity projects provide lifeline for our elders during pandemic

Food insecurity has been rising in the county's older adults, nearly twenty-percent at the latest report. The **COVID-19** pandemic exacerbated this problem, as closures and stay home orders left many wondering how to find their next meal.

The County's [Division of Senior and Adult Services \(DSAS\)](#) recognized this crisis and began working with community partners to find new ways to provide meals to residents in need.

DSAS is exploring new ways to address food insecurity, including implementing **The Hunger Vital Sign™**, a two-question screening tool that measures food insecurity; expanding our home-delivered meal program to long weekends and holidays; and increasing our onsite food pantry to include more perishable items. We also seek to add community leaders versed in food security to our [Advisory Board](#), to glean their expertise as we develop future strategies.

Our **Advocacy Committee** continues to dialogue with legislators on the importance of SNAP and the increased need for home delivered meals, while strengthening our partnership with our sister agency – [Cuyahoga Job and Family Services](#) -- to connect seniors to public benefits.



2020 MEALS PROVIDED BY DSAS AND CONTRACTED PARTNERS



3,872

DSAS In-House Emergency
Food Pantry meals



30,002

Seniors Connected with SNAP Benefits
through DSAS' Information Services Unit



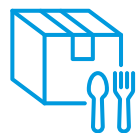
270,352

Home Delivered Meals through DSAS'
Options for Independent Living Program



124,083

Congregate/Home-Delivered/Curbside Meals
distributed by DSAS' Community Social Service
Program Providers (senior center partners)



58,000

Western Reserve Area Agency on Aging
Contracted Meals



[Watch Food Security video](#)

Let's Get Social: Helping Our Elders Make Connections

Social isolation is a growing public health crisis among older adults. Recent studies indicate that one in three elders are experiencing loneliness, with half of lower income older adults facing debilitating isolation. We understand that connecting with our seniors is critical to their wellbeing.

In 2020, our staff conducted over 25,000 face-to-face visits and more than 50,000 wellness phone calls with older adults in our community, engaging with them while providing skilled care, personal care, transportation, meal delivery and more.

We are also fostering connections through programs that encourage seniors to get out into their neighborhoods and interact. In 2020, our **Community Social Services Program (CSSP)** provided 120,564 hours of enrichment activities including games, performances, lectures, exercise and art classes hosted in-person and virtually by senior centers throughout the county.



These programs have a real impact. One example is Clay and Linda Leroux, two aspiring bridge players who met at the Rocky River Senior Center. Both widowed in 2016, they decided to take advantage of the social opportunities available at the Center. As they polished their card-playing skills, they developed a unique social connection which blossomed into a romance that today they happily share as newlyweds.

The **COVID-19** pandemic challenged us to look at social connection differently. This led to virtual innovations that provided seniors with thousands of hours of online programming, keeping them safe at home, yet socially connected.

We continue to explore new ways of connecting with older adults. From **Matter of Balance** training that helps overcome the fear of falling, to our **Digital Equity Initiative** which seeks to put computers in the hands of eligible older adults to bridge the digital divide, we are creating meaningful connections to ensure our seniors feel safe, supported, and vital.



ADMINISTRATION



IT Earns State's Top Honors for Rapid Response to Work-From-Home Challenge

When the Coronavirus pandemic hit Cuyahoga County and stay-at-home orders were put in place, the **Department of Health and Human Services** (HHS) faced critical challenges that required quick decisions and innovative solutions. While the Department's nearly **2,000** employees needed to remain safe and healthy, we also needed to deliver critical services to clients and residents who needed our help more than ever before.

The **HHS Information Technology** team quickly partnered with each division and office to offer technology solutions so employees could work remotely. Their heroic **COVID-19** efforts were recognized with a "**Best of Ohio**" Award presented at the Ohio Digital Summit in October.

This was a big undertaking for the entire Department, but especially so for Job and Family Services, which must work in secure state systems that were not accessible remotely. The **HHS IT** team partnered with state to host internal applications, allowing staff to access them without a **Virtual Private Network (VPN)**. Modifications were also made to our reporting systems to allow critical data to be accessed by social workers in the field. As more workers were sent home, the team provided nearly **800 VPN** accounts.

To improve communication and facilitate remote meetings, they introduced the **Microsoft Teams** virtual meeting platform and made modifications to internal systems to allow tracking of **COVID-19** related cases for emergency assistance. They secured **200** Surface tablets and upgraded the **VOIP** phone system to be cloud based, allowing more staff to work and answer calls from home.

The **HHS IT** team's work isn't done yet. Currently they are completing additional projects to support remote working conditions. These projects include a mobile expense tracking and reimbursement system, exploring possible telehealth solutions for older adult clients, electronic **COVID-19** screening, and shared drive migrations to SharePoint. They continue to rise to the challenge, helping our employees stay safe and healthy, while delivering essential services to Cuyahoga County residents.



Ensuring Everyone Counts and Votes

2020 was a momentous year for democracy. With the **2020 Census** and a presidential election cycle, the County mounted strong campaigns to ensure our residents completed their Census questionnaires and registered to make their voices heard in the November election.

Our extensive strategy linked together partners far and wide, representing city governments, businesses, non-profits, libraries, schools, religious and community organizations, chambers of commerce and more. With everyone focused on the goal of a **“Cuyahoga Complete Count,”** we launched a year-long initiative to reach every resident with this message.

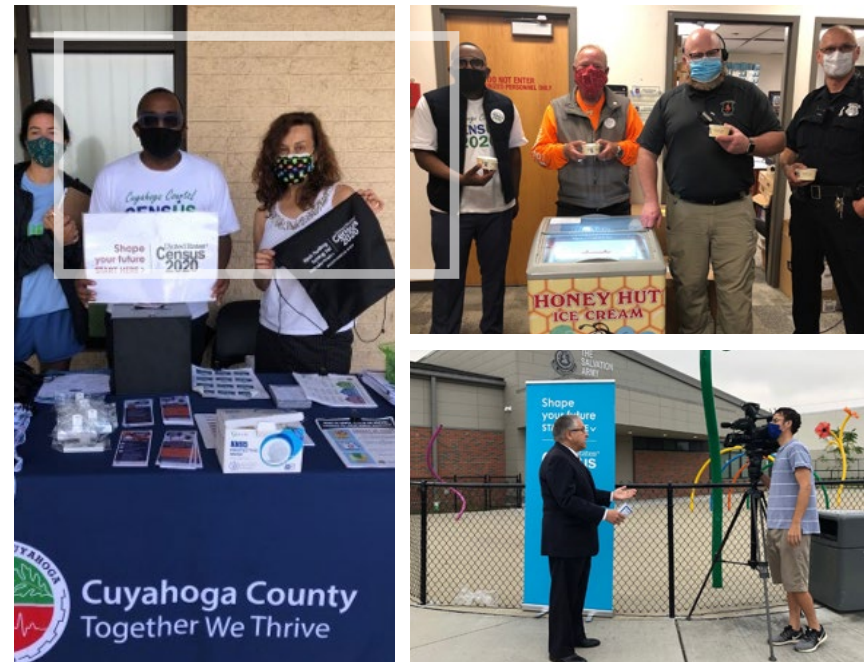
This **“Cuyahoga Complete Count”** committee contributed countless hours to phone calls, events, media engagements, marketing, door-knocking, public presentations and more, reaching residents in every Census tract with the important message about being counted. Our voter registration team worked in tandem with our Census committee, covering all sections of the County to ensure those who desired to exercise their right to vote were promptly registered.

Whether staging a pop-up table at a local market of food distribution, hosting virtual townhall events, judging video and coloring contests, canvassing neighborhoods with music and information, or competing for the “coolest” prize of **\$2,000 in ice cream in Executive Budish’s Census Ice Cream Challenge**, our team stretched the bounds of partnership in innovative and successful ways.

 [Census Ice Cream Challenge story video](#)

Voter registration efforts resulted in nearly **900,000 registered** voters in Cuyahoga County, and nearly **632,000 ballots** cast – a 71-percent voter turnout.

[Cuyahoga County’s self-response rate for the 2020 Census was 67.6%, up 2.3% over 2010.](#) County population totals have not been released yet by the Census Bureau, but reports and data are expected in August 2021. We made great strides towards being a community where everyone counts and everyone is heard.



HHS Launches New One-Stop Website

From babies to older adults, the Cuyahoga County Department of Health and Human Services provides programs that help thousands of residents from all walks of life. Some services are critical for safety and basic needs, while others help individuals and families build a brighter future through education, training, and jobs.

Before, residents had to visit ten different websites to get all this information. Now it's all in one place. The new website [HHS.CUYAHOGACOUNTY.US](https://www.hhs.cuyahogacounty.us) has information from eight agencies so residents can easily find what they need.



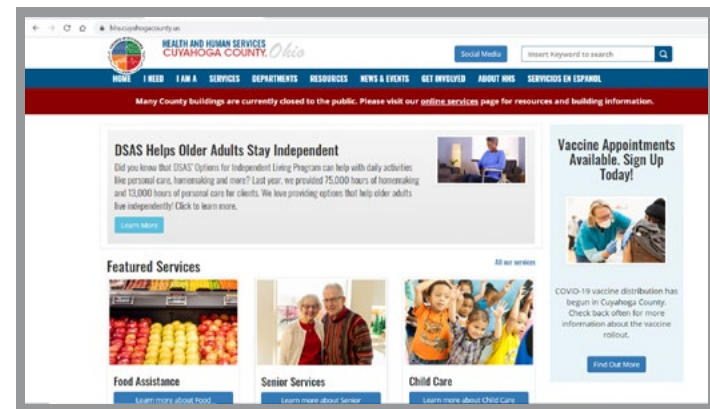
This is a big step toward helping Cuyahoga County residents get the help they need during an historically challenging time. Many people who never needed our help before are reaching out and we want to give them quick and easy access to information and services. Having everything in one place helps people learn more about what we do, how we can help them or their neighbors, and the value we bring to the community.”

David Merriman, Director, Cuyahoga County Department of Health and Human Services

FEATURES INCLUDE:

- A listing of all our departments and services by topic
- Don't know what program you're looking for? Just click on "I Need" and discover all the ways we can help
- Services for moms, dads, teens, seniors, and more using the "I Am" feature
- Select a program for details and how to apply
- Online Community Resource Guide has information on other agencies where residents can find help close to home
- Get Involved section provides opportunities to help your community by donating, volunteering, mentoring, or becoming a foster parent

Get help. Give help. Find everything you need in one place at [HHS.CUYAHOGACOUNTY.US](https://www.hhs.cuyahogacounty.us). You can also find us on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.



Formalizing Our Commitment to Racial Equity and Inclusion

The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) **Racial Equity and Inclusion (REI) Steering Committee** was formed in August 2020. Since its inception, members of the **DHHS REI Steering Committee** have been working to recruit other staff members to assist with addressing issues related to racial inequity, diversity, and inclusion. Through mass communication and recruitment, five **Employee Resource Groups (ERG's)** were formed. The following **ERG's** consist of over **80 members** of the DHHS workforce:

- [Communications and Outreach](#)
- [Policy](#)
- [Resources](#)
- [Process Development and Measurements](#)
- [Reporting Success and Progress](#)

The groups meet every month to discuss potential issues and strategize on the best ways to address them.

In addition to the creation of **ERG's**, the Steering Committee has collaborated with the **Department's Communications** team to create an **REI** resource page. The resource page defines key **REI** terms, highlights the Department's **REI** mission, vision, and goals, and displays the **DHHS REI** plan, logic model, and timeline. The Steering Committee continues to look for ways to engage staff and leadership. One of its first methods of engaging staff was a **"Crucial Conversations"** series. The series offered employees the opportunity to dialogue with their peers regarding **REI**-specific topics and consider solutions from varying perspectives.

As the **DHHS REI** team works to keep **REI** at the forefront of every conversation within our organization, we look forward to working with our sister agencies to normalize conversations surrounding equity, reviewing our policies and practices to ensure they reflect **REI** principles, and supporting our Employee Resource Groups as they continue their important work. We invite you to learn more about this Countywide initiative by viewing the [County Executive's Internal Equity Commission Report](#).

 [Citizens Advisory Council on Equity video](#)





Cuyahoga County Together We Thrive

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