

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

Providing children, adults, and families an effective support system to assist in obtaining self-sufficiency and a safe, stable, healthy living environment



What's inside?

- PUBLIC ASSISTANCE PARTNERS WITH KENT STATE TO INFORM STUDENTS
- PRODUCE PERKS ENCOURAGE HEALTHY USE OF SNAP BENEFITS
- OMJ HELPS LOCAL EMPLOYERS
- NEW VIDEO OFFERS CHILD SUPPORT INFORMATION

Agency Partners to Promote Kinship Connections

Child & Adult Protective Services

Portage County Job & Family Services is investing in a new partnership to foster kinship connections that can benefit children. About 40% of the children currently in the agency's care are placed with kinship caregivers. Kin are not just blood relatives; they can be close friends or others who have a connection to the child. Research has shown children experience better outcomes when placed with kin.

A new caseworker will specialize in working with Cleveland-based nonprofit Kinnect and its Kinnect to Family Program. The goal is to find connections for children within 30 days of entering JFS custody. "It is important that the agency do all we can to keep children connected to family and friends hopefully in the community in which they lived," said Darlene Baad, administrator of Child & Adult Protective Services.



Kinnect believes every child has a family and "finding them changes everything." Partnering with Kinnect will assist child welfare workers as they seek placements for children.

Ohio Kinship & Adoption Navigator Offers Help for Families

Child & Adult Protective Services

Once a kinship placement is made, a state program—OhioKAN (Kinship & Adoption Navigator)—can help families facing the challenges of raising a child.

The county supports kinship families through its Prevention, Retention, and Contingency (PRC) program. Families can also receive financial assistance through the state's kinship support program and the kinship permanency incentive. But OhioKAN helps address other needs. It is "100% committed to making sure every kinship and adoption family in Ohio who is looking for support will get it."



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An OhioKAN coach said, "We really take the time to hear the family on their individual circumstances and tailor resources to exactly what they need."

OhioKAN seeks to be innovative, individualized, and intentional offering passionate, family-oriented care to everyone who seeks their services. Of the more than 2,000 calls received in 2021, OhioKAN reports most families need support meeting basic needs, childcare challenges and caregiver social support. You can reach OhioKAN at the number below.

Ohio Kinship & Adoption Navigator

1-844-OHIOKAN
(1-844-644-6526)

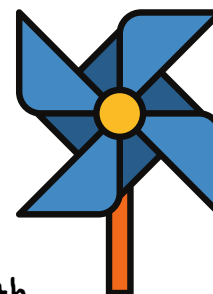
Monday-Friday 8:30 a.m.- 6:30 p.m.



Portage County is in region 4 of OhioKAN's ten regions.



April 13, 2022 is **WEAR BLUE** day, a day we encourage people to wear blue to support child safety and the prevention of child abuse. Look for Pinwheels for Prevention around the community during the month of April, designated as Child Abuse Prevention Month.



Work from home

Be your own boss

Enjoy caring for children

Become a Licensed Child Care Provider

Qualified individuals are needed to provide quality home-based child care for children birth to 12 years of age. Provide a safe, fun, learning environment in your home and earn money at the same time!

Contact Portage County Child Care Certification Specialist at
330-541-0299

Providers must adhere to all rules and regulations set by ODJFS found at ODJFS eManuals > Family Assistance - Child Care > Family Child Care Manual > Family Child Care Rules (ohio.gov)

Lack of affordable child care can be a barrier to getting and keeping a job. The state seeks to help parents through publicly-funded child care centers licensed by the Department of Job & Family Services.

Portage County is looking for more people interested in becoming a child care provider. Child care providers must:

- Be at least 18 years old
- Have a high school diploma or GED
- Be in good health (verified by a physician)
- Obtain and maintain CPR & First Aid Certification
- Obtain and maintain Communicable Diseases and Child Abuse Recognition Certification
- Pass a criminal background check

If you're interested in learning more or applying, please call our child care certification specialist, Diane Rogers, at (330) 541-0299. You may also email Portage_Childcare@jfs.ohio.gov.



COVID Changes Expand Benefit Eligibility for College Students

PUBLIC ASSISTANCE

COVID college student benefit eligibility expansion:

- Expected Family Contribution of \$0
- Federal work study participant, even if not working

KSU CARES Center
(330) 672-7575

Portage County Job & Family Services is working to inform college students about benefits that could help them during what are often financially difficult years.

It's estimated up to 8,000 Kent State students may be eligible for assistance under pandemic eligibility expansions, whether it be the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) or Medicaid.

KSU reached out to the agency about educating students. Wendy Knauer, supervisor in Public Assistance developed a presentation that is being offered monthly through the University's CARES (Crisis, Advocacy, Resources, Education and Support) Center. "When we first started this initiative with them, our intake of applications approximately doubled within a week," Knauer said. The agency has also arranged a presentation for students who are parents, that will include information about daycare benefits.

"We have changes in eligibility all the time," Knauer said, "so if you've been denied before it doesn't mean you'll be denied now." She advises people to reapply if their circumstance has changed.

Produce Perks Available for SNAP Recipients

PUBLIC ASSISTANCE



SNAP recipients have an opportunity to purchase healthy foods at the Haymaker Farmers' Market in Kent. The market offers a Produce Perks program.

Through it, SNAP recipients get a matching benefit of \$25/week that can be used to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables at the market. Market Manager Andrew Rome says in 2021, the market accepted \$31,000 in SNAP benefits and customers received an additional \$26,000 worth of Produce Perks.

"We know it is a small proportion of SNAP users in Portage County who use their benefits at farmers' markets," Rome said. "We are looking for ways to better reach that population."

During the winter, Haymaker Farmers' Market is indoors at United Methodist Church of Kent, 1435 E. Main Street in Kent. It's open Saturdays from 10 a.m. - 1 p.m. through March 26.



Resources for Local Employers

OhioMeansJobs Portage County

Nearly three dozen Portage County employers participated in a recent Business Roundtable sponsored by the Portage Development Board to learn how to more effectively utilize OhioMeansJobs.com. The presentation covered everything from posting jobs to screening candidates and resumes and creating personalized reply letters.

OhioMeansJobs Portage County recently created a new resource guide to help local employers understand all the services available to them at no charge. The guide provides information that can help businesses:

- *Connect* with OMJ to find and train workers and access benefits
- *Assess* the labor market, local workforce, and their human resource management
- *Grow* their business with state supported tools and benefits associated with hiring specific populations.

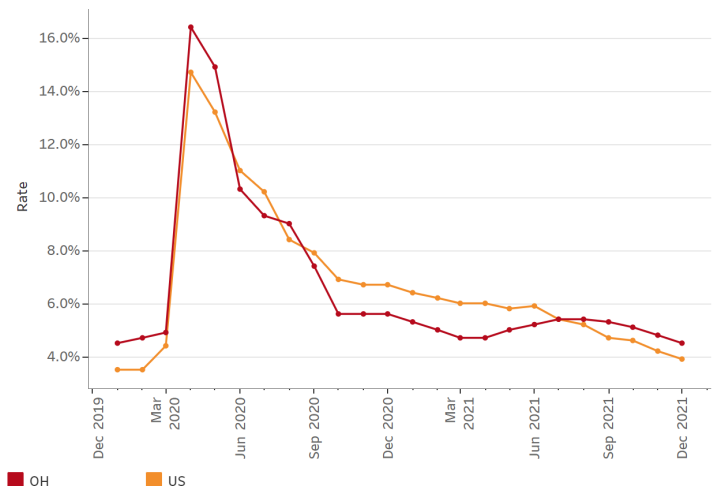


You can find the guide online under the Business Services tab of OhioMeansJobs Portage County. If you need help with employee recruitment, email Portage_Recruiter2@jfs.ohio.gov or call (330) 296-2841.

Portage County ended 2021 with an unemployment rate of 3.2%, ranked 36th among Ohio's 88 counties. The lowest unemployment rate in the state was 2% in Holmes County.

Statewide, unemployment was 4.5% at year's end.

The chart at right tracks Ohio and national unemployment since just before the pandemic began to the end of 2021.



New Video Explains Options

Child Support Enforcement



It can be difficult to catch up if a person gets behind on paying child support. A new video shares all the ways the state makes it easy to pay by scheduling electronically, sending by mail, visiting the agency in-person or calling 1-888-965-2676. You can watch the video in the child support payment section of our website, where you can also find information about how to get help locally.

The state suggests people register for the customer service portal at jfs.ohio.gov/ocs for on-demand access to relevant information related to their case. These features are also available on the Ohio Child Support mobile app.

Portage County's Child Support division manages more than 6,700 cases, collecting vital support for more than 9,500 children. In federal fiscal year 2021, this support totaled \$23,109,270.98. These funds were received using all of the methods to pay, including employer payments.



Bruce "Boo" Walker and wife, Debbie, with some of the blankets they've made and are donating to youth in foster care.

Boo's Blankets Share Love

Children in foster care, who sometimes endure frequent moves, don't often have many things of their own. Bruce "Boo" Walker of Kent and his family want to share love, warmth, hope, and caring with them through "Boo's Blankets."

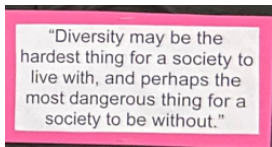
The effort was inspired by Boo's fight against cancer. His wife, Debbie, and their daughter, Shannon Rower, have created dozens of fleece, no-sew blankets, tailored to individual interests, to share with Crossroads Hospice, Safer Futures, and Freedom House. We thank them for expanding their efforts to include children in foster care! If there are others in need, especially children, they encourage people to reach out to them through their Facebook page.

Agency Celebrates Diversity

The Cultural Diversity Committee at Portage County Job & Family Services seeks to foster respect, appreciation, and understanding of diversity. The committee crafted the display at right, highlighting some of the different ways each of is unique.

The bulletin board helped raise awareness during Black History Month in February and remains on display during March, which is Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month.

In April, they'll be collecting small donations for the Portage Senior Center to recognize Older Americans Month in May.





Job & Family Services

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THE COMMUNITY CONNECTION IS A PUBLICATION OF PORTAGE COUNTY JOB & FAMILY
SERVICES. IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS PLEASE
CONTACT PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICER
SARAH TAYLOR AT (330)357-7190 OR SARAH.TAYLOR2@JFS.OHIO.GOV

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LIKE US ON FACEBOOK! WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/PCJFS
FOLLOW US ON TWITTER! @PCJFS*