

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?

- OMJ MANUFACTURING GRADUATES READY FOR SUCCESS
- SNAP BENEFITS ADJUSTED
- CHILD SUPPORT SETS RECORD
- NEW PROGRAM OFF TO STRONG START

New Graduates Ready for Success

OhioMeansJobs Portage County celebrates latest class of manufacturing interns



Chante Nevel, 29, works on a circuit panel with instructor Nick Baughman.

Chante Nevel received a warm welcome when she started working at Smithers Oasis in Kent as part of the OhioMeansJobs Portage County Manufacturing Internship Program. “My first day, they gave me a bouquet of flowers,” she recalls. It may not seem unusual coming from a company that makes products for the floral industry, but it surprised Chante, who moved to Portage County in May 2021 after a tumultuous period in Cleveland, where she abused drugs and alcohol, experienced domestic violence and lost custody of her two oldest children.

Addiction also took hold of Anthony Bogdas in Cleveland. “I coped with whatever I was feeling about my parents splitting up with drugs and alcohol,” he said. He began using around age 15. Now 25, he wasn't sure about joining the manufacturing program. “I really hated the idea of it, but now that I’m actually doing it and I’m good at it, I’m confident. It makes it more fun.” He’s excelling in his work at Streetsboro-based Step2. “I never had a job this good before. It’s hard work, but I’ve never gotten paid so well.”

The Manufacturing Internship Program involves ten-weeks of combined work in the classroom and at a job site. Students spend three days of the week working in paid positions at a local manufacturer and two days in the classroom led by instructors from Kent State Tuscarawas campus. The final three weeks of the semester, they work solely at the job site where they may ultimately transition to full-time employment.

Eight students participated in the fall session at OhioMeansJobs Portage County in Ravenna, graduating on October 29. The students ranged in age from 19-year-old Billy Smith, Jr. of Windham to Brian Benesch of Stow who, at 62, said, “I have learned so much!” Student Emma Shannon noted, “programs like this can change your direction in life.” That is certainly true for these graduates who see a brighter future ahead after participating in the program, which costs them no money.



Anthony Bogdas

Anthony transitioned out of sober living to a place of his own which he can now afford. And professed “city girl” Chante has regained custody of her three children and found a home in Portage County. “I’ve been running all my life. I’ve been running away from everything,” she said. “It feels like I can breathe here. Since I’ve been down here, God has truly been working in my favor.”

● Interested in the Manufacturing Internship program?
 Fill out this [form](#) or email
 ● Jarrid.McIntosh@jfs.ohio.gov ●

SNAP Recipients Get a Boost



PUBLIC ASSISTANCE

Effective October 1, the USDA increased maximum allotments for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) by anywhere from \$16 for individuals to \$63 for a household of five.

The Thrifty Food Plan (TFP), which is developed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to estimate the cost of a healthy diet across various price points, is used to determine the maximum SNAP allotments.

The increase was larger than past years because USDA re-evaluated food costs. The chart below shows the new maximum allotments for which household sizes (known as assistance groups or AGs) may be eligible:



Household Size	Max Allotment
1	\$ 250
2	\$ 459
3	\$ 658
4	\$ 835
5	\$ 992
6	\$ 1,190
7	\$ 1,316
8	\$ 1,504

TAKE NOTE!

On Friday, December 3, 2021, Ohio Department of Job & Family Services has scheduled an outage of the Ohio Benefits system. That means Portage County will have no access to process applications or reported changes on any cases for cash assistance, food assistance and Medicaid. Our phone lines will remain open and all information received on this day will begin to be processed on the following Monday, Dec. 6, 2021. We appreciate your patience and understanding.

CCMEP Earns Youth Initiative Award



OhioMeansJobs Portage County Administrator Mandy Minnick (right) accepts the Youth Initiative Award from Portage County Recorder Lori Calcei at the CelebratePortage! dinner Sept. 22 at the NEW Center in Rootstown.

CHILDREN SERVICES

New Program Offers Hope for Recovery

OhioSTART aims to help families where substance use threatens child safety

“One addict helping another is without parallel,” says Ashley Mock. She understands how hard the road to sobriety can be because she’s walked it herself. She now uses her experience to help others as the family peer mentor with Portage County’s OhioSTART program, a collaborative effort with Coleman Health Services. START stands for Sobriety, Treatment and Reducing Trauma. Portage County launched the children services led initiative in October 2020 and has seen promising results.

One participant, Nicole, is thriving with the supports START offers. Families who voluntarily enter the program are partnered with the family peer mentor and a caseworker who visit with them at least once a week. Services are wrapped around the family to get them into recovery and begin the healing process as quickly as possible.



Portage County's START team includes, from left, Chad Dye, Clinical Director of Case Management Services at Coleman Health Services, Karen Kubinski, OhioSTART Social Service Worker III, START family peer mentor Ashley Mock and START supervisor Kaylyn Kane.



Portage County is part of the third cohort in the state to launch OhioSTART.

Nicole has completed IOP (Intensive Outpatient Treatment) and has become active in the recovery community. She’s working to regain custody of her five children, ages 1 through 16.

The father of one of Nicole’s daughter’s is also involved in START but has had a more difficult time remaining sober. Ashley visits him regularly in the Portage County jail. “Sometimes, for people like us, [jail] becomes comfortable and we know we’re safe,” she said. “A question I ask is not why the drugs, but why the pain? Because drugs are not the problem. They are their solution to a problem that already existed.”

The father was doing well and even had a successful visit with his 3-year old daughter who he had not seen in years. But a few missteps and he lost his place at an intensive outpatient treatment program and ended up back in jail until next March. Ashley says one of his challenges is learning how to feel safe and comfortable outside an institution.

Her experience has taught her that recovery takes time and every person’s path is unique. The people she helps know she’s there to support their sobriety. “I start to see the light come back on in their eyes, see them smile, laugh; feelings that you’re incapable of when you’re in addiction. It’s a breath of fresh air to be able to know somebody got to the other side of this.”

Seeing the Fruits of Their Labor

CHILD SUPPORT ENFORCEMENT

When the federal fiscal year ended on September 30, 2021, Child Support Enforcement celebrated its highest performance ever in Support Establishment, which tracks cases with support established in compliance with all standards.



Scott Hendon

"Financial support for children doesn't start until we can establish that order for them," said Scott Hendon, Child Support supervisor. The numbers show the child support team was able to establish support in 92.93% of cases. It's a 3.4%

increase over fiscal year 2020 and the highest number ever for Portage County.

How did they achieve this success? Hendon says it was a combination of initiatives they've been working on for years. "Targeted reports and fine-tuning procedures," he said. Some legislative initiatives have also helped increase the efficiency with the way support orders are processed.

The strong performance contributes to statewide data that shows Ohio in the top five consistently for how much child support it collects (see a chart at right). State performance is assessed by the Federal Office of Child Support Enforcement, which determines operational funding states receive based on this data.



2020 CHILD SUPPORT COLLECTIONS

TEXAS	\$4,793,733,362
CALIFORNIA	\$2,724,898,585
NEW YORK	\$1,874,792,698
OHIO	\$1,700,628,966
FLORIDA	\$1,608,720,580
MICHIGAN	\$1,437,241,761
PENNSYLVANIA	\$1,215,460,362
NEW JERSEY	\$1,076,389,041
ILLINOIS	\$ 819,154,085



APP OFFERS EASY ACCESS

If you owe child support, the recently-released Ohio Child Support app makes it easy to make payments by credit card. You can check your payment history or contact your child support worker. Users can also choose how to receive payments and set up notifications and alerts.

If you prefer in-person service, Portage County Job & Family Services can take payments by cash, check or credit card at the reception window located on the 2nd floor of the County Administration building, 449 S. Meridian St., Ravenna, 44266.

OhioMeansJobs Portage County joined partners including Portage DD, Mantaline, Paris Linens, and others for a career exploration and job fair Oct. 20 at Crestwood Middle School.



Portage County JFS welcomed State Rep. Gail Pavliga to the agency on Nov. 16. Rep. Pavliga delivered a state commendation to the CCMEP team and spent an afternoon learning more about the work of Child Protective Services. "Rep. Dr. Gail Pavliga is truly vested in her role and genuinely wants to understand the needs of the community," said Portage JFS Director Dr. Kelli Jo Jeffries. "I am very grateful for her representation and the initiatives she has set, especially those that will address adverse childhood experiences."



Rep. Gail Pavliga (2nd from left) with, from left, caseworker Amanda Snider, Supervisor Keena Reiss and Portage JFS Director Kelli Jo Jeffries



Educators from around Portage County attended a brunch & learn Oct. 19 where OhioMeansJobs Portage County shared information about services they provide to help students explore careers and train for in-demand jobs, including new tools that use virtual reality. Look for more about them in an upcoming edition of this newsletter.





Job & Family Services

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