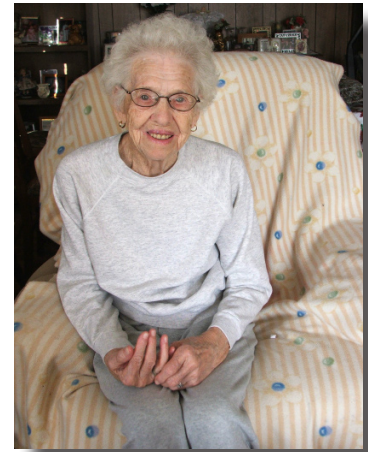




Athens County Department of Job and Family Services

“seeking a decent life for all”

2014 Annual Report



13183 State Route 13,
Millfield, Ohio 45761-9901
740-797-2523 or 1-800-762-3775
jfs@athensoh.org

Thank you for your support

This year has been a sort of mix of positive changes and those that are less desirable for Ohio's safety net.

On the positive side, the expansion of Medicaid has meant more people now qualify for health care services.

Through the Ohio Work Incentive Program, the agency paid \$355,000 in incentives to 195 newly employed individuals who had been receiving cash assistance. The program also funded another \$36,000 in supportive services to help ensure these folks were able to continue to get to work.

Another positive is that the legislature added a sorely needed \$10 million to the state's meager \$500,000 allocation for Adult Protective Services.

However, as well-intended as these changes are, they have not changed the fact that poor people are worse off than they've ever been.

The state's caseloads for cash assistance continued its three-year downward trend for most of 2014, further increasing the number of children living in households with no cash income. Food stamp benefit cuts at the end of 2013 continued to hurt our clients, many being forced to rely on food pantries to feed themselves and their children.

Despite the still struggling economy, Ohio officials once again this year opted out of a statewide exemption of the food stamp work requirement for able-bodied adults without dependents. By rejecting the waiver, the state failed to recognize that many so-called able-bodied adults are in fact individuals who suffer from numerous physical and mental health issues, are awaiting disability and/or face a long list of other barriers to employment. Thousands of people statewide and hundreds in Athens County are no longer eligible for food stamps because of this policy.

Another policy decision that hurts food stamp recipients is a decision by the state to stagger the dates food stamps are distributed. This decision fails to take into consideration the unintended consequences on the recipients, like significant gaps in benefits that could be as large as 20 days.

For over 30 years, it's been the position of this agency to always advocate for the people we serve. And for each of these decisions from the past year, our agency has championed policies that support our clients and opposed those that didn't.

We've been able to do this because of the dedication of our staff and the support from our community. We have every intention of continuing that tradition so long as there are people in need.

We thank our staff for their hard work to help the citizens of Athens County. And we are thoroughly grateful for the support of the Athens County community.

Thank you,
Arian Smedley
Community Relations Coordinator

Mission Statement

Our Mission: As the employees of the Athens County Department of Job & Family Services, we have been charged with the most serious and important responsibility in government, that of helping our fellow citizens who experience the despair of poverty, hunger, homelessness, and ill health. We believe that our programs represent the conscience of society and that our strength lies in seeking a decent life for all.

Note: Special thanks to photographer Steve Liss for allowing us to use his picture on the front cover.



Our agency

Athens County Job and Family Services is supervised by the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services and administered by the Athens County Commissioners.

We coordinate a wide range of programs for people of all ages in Athens County. We receive federal, state and local funding for our programs, and we serve thousands of people every day.

Our programs provide assistance with food, cash, medical care, child care, child support, adult education, job training, job searches, resumes, care for senior citizens, transportation and numerous other areas.

To learn more about issues related to poverty and our agency, visit our website at jfs.athensoh.org and subscribe to our agency blog at athensjfs.blogspot.com. Join the conversation by following AthensJFS on Facebook and Twitter.





Who we serve

While Athens County has many things to be proud of, life is difficult for many of the 64,681 residents. Just over 32 percent live in poverty. This means a family of four survives on \$23,850 or less each year. That's \$11,670 for an individual.

The poverty rate here is more than twice as high as the nation's and state's average, which is 15.5 and 15 percent respectively.

In addition, nearly 16 percent of all Athens County residents live at or below 50 percent of the poverty level, which is an annual income of just \$11,925 for a family of four, or \$5,835 for an individual.

Keep in mind that eligibility for cash assistance, the state's safety net programs for families, starts at 50 percent of the poverty level and provides a meager \$186 per person per month on average.

It's also worth noting that the fair market rent for our county is \$882 for a three-bedroom residence, according to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. That's \$10,584 in a year.

Nearly 17 percent of all Athens County residents are enrolled in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) each month. SNAP, which on average provided \$119 per person per month, is only designed to cover 75 percent of a household's food for one month. Statewide, just over 50 percent exhaust their SNAP benefits within two weeks. Many rely on food pantries to get them through the month.

Around 3 percent of all Athens County residents receive cash assistance through the Ohio Works First (OWF) program (to compare, 17 percent receive SNAP). Meanwhile, the OWF program has seen rapid decline statewide as a result of punitive work require-

ments that are more focused on meeting the state's work participation rate than on finding people living-wage jobs.

In Ohio, approximately 72 percent of all welfare recipients are children who do not live with their parents, also known as "child-only" cases. That's an increase of 12 percent from last year. These children are often living with grandparents or other relatives. By comparison, in Athens County, 33 percent of all welfare recipients are "child-only."

Also, in Ohio, less than 8 percent of all OWF cases involve two-parent households. In Athens County, 26 percent of all OWF cases involve two-parent households.

Our agency has 85 staff members who work out of four buildings. We receive an average of 10,092 calls and 3,910 visits to our offices each month. Our employees have very high caseloads, and they work very hard to provide assistance and help to local families and individuals in need.



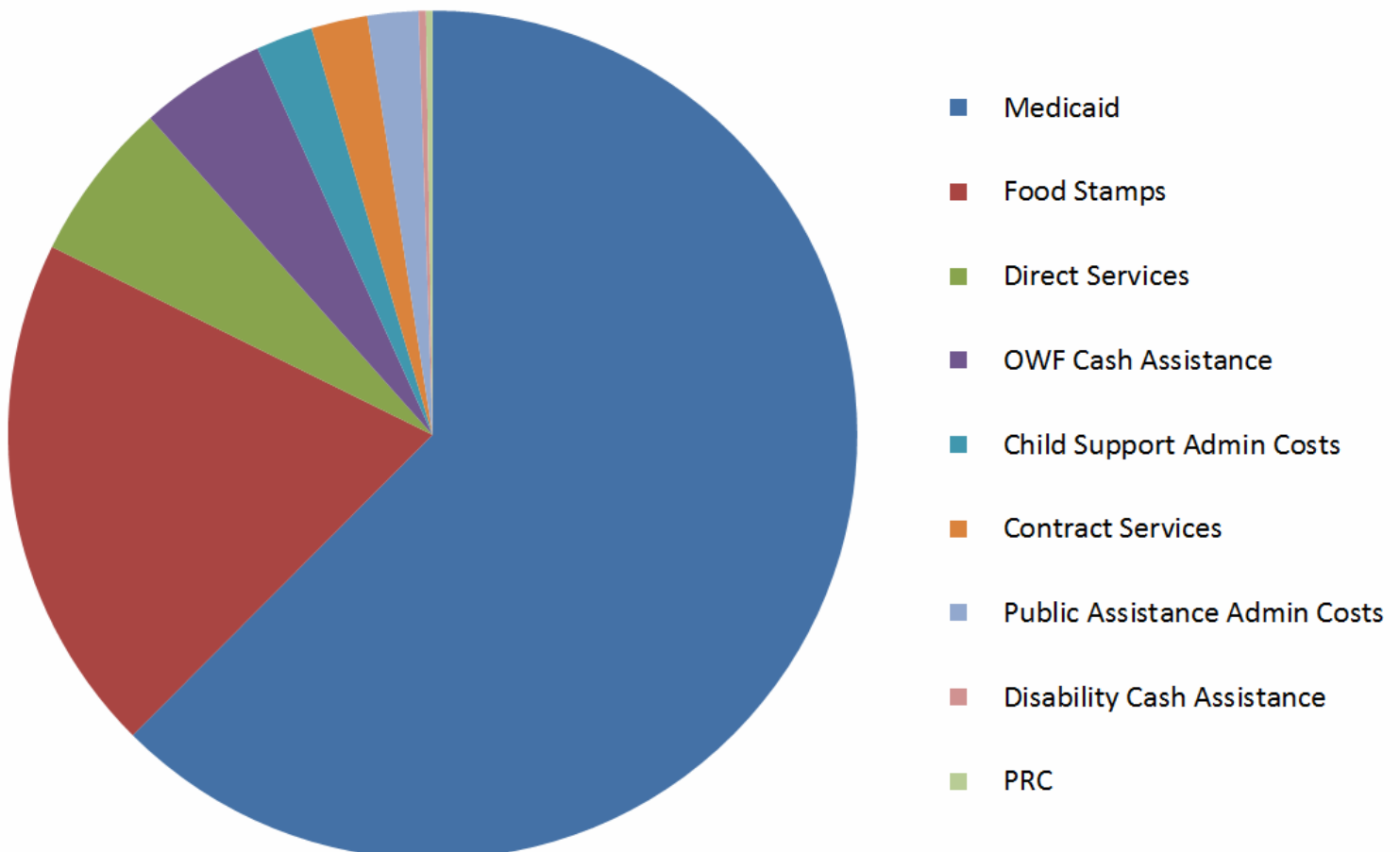
Client Thelma Trout says the help she receives from the Home Health Aide Program has allowed her to live independently in her own home



Expenditures for Fiscal Year 2014

Our budget is made up of a mix of local, state and federal funds. Our federal dollars come from three agencies, the Department of Health and Human Services, the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Labor. Our programs are designed to help families and individuals in need. Descriptions of each program, along with the number of people served, start on page 6.

During state Fiscal Year 2014, which ran from July 1 through June 30, our agency funneled \$77,548,035.32 into Athens County through our various programs. The vast majority of those funds, 63 percent*, supported the Medicaid program, which provides free medical coverage for low-income families and individuals. The second largest expenditure, or 20 percent, went to the Food Assistance program.



Medicaid	\$48,450,625.53*
Food Assistance	\$15,377,980
Direct services	\$4,737,645.91
Ohio Works First (OWF)	\$3,734,744
CSEA admin costs	\$1,678,283.88
Contract services	\$1,657,631.50
PublicAssistance admin costs	\$1,500,563.21
Disability cash assistance	\$216,032.25
PRC	\$194,529.04

*Medicaid figures only include expenditures from 1st and 2nd quarters

Examples of Contract Services include:

- Transportation services for Medicaid clients
- The summer youth employment program administered by the Hocking-Athens-Perry Community Action Program (HAPCAP)
- A Work Experience Program coordinated by HAPCAP

Examples of Direct Services include:

- Adult Protective Services (APS)
- Homemaker Home Health Aide Program
- Additional transportation services
- Food reimbursements to child care providers
- Client supports through the Workforce Investment Act

Our Programs

Medicaid – 13,253 clients receive Medicaid coverage each month

Since the expansion earlier this year, Medicaid eligibility is now open to more people in Ohio than ever before. Around 25 percent of our Medicaid applicants so far this calendar year have qualified under the new expansion rules.

Medicaid is a state and federally funded health program for certain individuals who are low-income and/or medically vulnerable. The program provides coverage to adults who meet income guidelines, children, pregnant women, women with breast or cervical cancer, adults over 65, those with disabilities and individuals in institutional care. This year's figures are up slightly from last year's 13,103.

Food Assistance Program – 11,481 recipients per month

Ohio's Food Assistance Program is part of the federal government's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, also known as SNAP or food stamps. The program is only intended to provide 75 percent of the monthly food needs for a family. Benefit levels vary depending on the size of a household. The average monthly benefit per household in Athens County during FY14 was \$229, down from last year's \$265.

Despite the still struggling economy, Ohio officials once again this year opted out of a statewide exemption of the work requirement for able-bodied adults without dependents. For this year, just 17 counties (not including Athens) are exempt from the food assistance work requirement. The federal government allowed states to waive minimum work requirements during the recession and from 2007 through 2012. Ohio officials had applied for and received a statewide waiver until 2013.



Emergency Food Line – Distributed 4,991 food boxes/bags during the year

The county's Emergency Food Line, which is managed by our agency, is responsible for screening telephone requests, determining eligibility, maintaining records and directing those in need to a local food distribution site.

We also provide food boxes on site. Our agency works with the Athens County Food Panty and the St. Vincent de Paul Society to provide food to local families who meet income guidelines and other requirements. Our agency routinely runs out of food boxes due to high demand from struggling families.

Staff member Joni Dumm prepares a food bag for one of our clients. Our agency distributed 4,991 food bags or boxes this year.

Ohio Works First (OWF) – 1,973 recipients per month (down 28 people from last year)

OWF is Ohio's cash assistance program. It is only available to families with dependent children, and they can only receive it for a total of 36 months, although a certain percentage of the agency's caseload is eligible for hardship extensions.

The goal of the program, which also has work requirements, is to help stabilize families and move them toward sustainable employment. The maximum amount a family of three can receive each month is \$465.

Over the past three years, the number of families participating in this program has dropped significantly statewide due to repressive work policies. The number of adults on OWF statewide has dropped over 71 percent since January 2011.

The state makes no secret of the fact that strategies have been developed to divert applicants away from the OWF program. Our agency has advocated against these practices with little response.

Ohio Works Incentive Program (OWIP) – \$355,000 in incentives, 195 newly employed

Through the Ohio Work Incentive Program, which just completed its first year, the agency paid \$355,000 in incentives to 195 newly employed individuals who had been receiving cash assistance. The program also funded another \$36,000 in supportive services to help ensure these folks were able to continue to get to work.

Child Support Enforcement – collected \$4,339,322.81 in child support payments

The program's goal is to ensure that all children are supported financially by both parents. Services provided include: location of non-custodial parents; paternity establishment; creation and modification of support order; collection of payments and/or alimony; and enforcement of child support orders, medical support orders and alimony. The program collects support payments for around 5,156 children each month. During the last year, the Child Support Enforcement Agency completed 67 DNA tests and established.

County Medical Services (CMS) – 163 approvals this year

This program provides limited medical benefits for clients who are waiting on disability determination from the Social Security Administration and have been approved by state reviewers for this disability program.

Homemaker Home Health Aide Program – Conducted an average of 145 visits per month

This program has provided homemaker and home health aide services to clients who are 60 years of age or older. With these services, many clients are able to extend the time they live independently in their own homes. This is a uniquely Athens County program, as many agencies across the state have had to eliminate this program due to budget constraints.

IM and SPC Counseling – Helped 361 clients gain employment

Income Maintenance employees and Social Program Coordinators help clients with the different public assistance programs that our agency offers. The SPCs also assess clients to get them into work, education and job training programs designed to help them become self-sufficient. During the last year, 361 clients reported gaining employment.

Transportation Services – 31,358 one-way transports; 15,648 gas vouchers issued

Securing reliable transportation is one of the most common challenges faced by our clients. Our agency provides transportation services to and from medical appointments and social service agencies for recipients of Medicaid or Title XX (over age 60 and income eligible). Vouchers to cover gas expenses and bus tickets are also available for medical appointments in and out of the county.



A Learn and Work Program had clients serving up homemade food every Friday at the County Home. Catie Hogue, left, and Staci Stalder pause for a photo during the Friday lunchtime rush.

Child Care Assistance – 180 children served by licensed child care providers each month

This program provides assistance to help Athens County parents/guardians who are working or in school pay for child care with a licensed provider. Our agency works with on average 44 licensed child care providers in Athens County. We provided \$533,202 in child care payments for local families in the last year.

Disability Assistance – Average of 195 recipients each month

This program provides a very small and time-limited amount of cash and/or medical assistance to disabled individuals who meet income requirements, do not have more than \$1,000 in resources, and are not eligible for other assistance programs. The maximum monthly benefit is \$115 for individuals and \$159 for households with two people.

Adult Protective Services – Took on 129 new cases this year, up from 110 last year

Referrals for this program are taken from anyone having a reasonable cause to believe an individual who is age 60 or older is being abused, neglected or exploited. This program, which consistently sees increases year after year, assists Athens County adults who are in danger of harm, unable to protect themselves and have no one else who is able to assist them.

Earlier this year, legislators added a sorely needed \$10 million to the state's meager \$500,000 allocation for Adult Protective Services. At this report's publication, the allocation has yet to be distributed.

Healthchek – 10,404 visits completed during the year

Prevention and treatment services offered through this Medicaid program for children up to the age of 21. Healthchek services help children stay healthy and reduce the chances of sickness by treating health problems early.

Voter registrations – 534 Athens County residents registered to vote

In an effort to increase the number of eligible citizens who register to vote, the National Voter Registration Act of 1993 - commonly referred to as the "motor voter law" - designated state agencies, including "all offices in the state that provide public assistance," as voter registration locations. Of those who registered with our agency, 300 were new registrants and 234 changed their address.

The Work Station

Located in The Plains, The Work Station houses our employment services programs, adult education programs and a variety of other services for area residents and local employers. All of the services are offered for free.

The Work Station is also a part of the state's OhioMeansJobs system (formerly known as One Stop Centers).

While the name has changed, The Work Station's mission has remained the same – to provide its services to anyone in need.



Ohio
MEANS
Jobs®



Annual Job Fair – 400 attended

For the 10th year, The Work Station worked with the OhioMeansJobs centers from Meigs and Perry counties to hold the annual regional job fair at the Athens Community Center in April. Approximately 400 area residents attended the Job Fair and spoke with employers from around the region about job opportunities. Several of the employers were hiring, and many people who attended the Job Fair reported to us they found work through the contacts they made at the event.

Employment Services – Assisted 1,448 clients, helped 212 find jobs

Our Employment Counselors provide free assistance with resumes, job searches and job interview preparation. The counselors meet with area residents individually and in group settings. Staff also host numerous hiring events throughout the year. The Work Station's employment services extend to county employers, as well. The Work Station staff, including the supervisor, had contact with 181 local employers this year to discuss the job market and their employment needs.

WIA: Adult and Dislocated Workers – Assisted an average of 32 people per month

The Workforce Investment Act provides Athens County residents with employment and training opportunities to help them obtain a job or find a better one. In addition to helping eligible residents go back to school for training, the services include resume preparation, job search and placement assistance and information on other community resources. Due to budget constraints, demand for this program is frequently higher than we can accommodate.

WIA for Youth – Assisted an average of 55 people per month

This program provides employment and training opportunities for low-income Athens County residents between the ages of 14-21. Enrollment is also limited in this program due to funding constraints.



An employer talks with a job seeker at the annual Job Fair.

ABLE program – Helped 37 students earn their GEDs

The Adult Basic Literacy Education program provides educational support to adults who want to improve their basic literacy skills and for those who want to earn their GEDs. One-on-one and classroom-like settings are provided by our teachers at The Work Station and Tri-County Career Center.

Students of all ages study at The Work Station throughout the year as they prepare to take the GED exam. Each year in the spring, the ABLE program holds a graduation ceremony in order to honor all of its graduates.

Since the switch in January 2014 to a computerized version of the GED test, many adult learners have found success in obtaining their GED. Students are also given the opportunity to take a free computerized practice version of the GED test before attempting the real thing.



Workshops

The Work Station hosts free workshops on a wide range of topics of interest to Athens County residents. Some of the workshops are targeted toward specific audiences such as ex-offenders, veterans, and grandparents raising their grandchildren, while others are beneficial to all area residents.

Veteran Services and Mature Services

Representatives from Veteran Services and Mature Services had offices in The Work Station

this past year and provided specialized assistance to residents. Mature Services operates the Senior Community Service and Employment Program in Athens County and served 8 seniors in the last program year. Veterans Workforce Services assisted 59 veterans within the county, which resulted in 48 obtaining employment.

Staff member Sally Young works with client Melanie Aune during The Work Station's weekly Job Search workshop.

Athens County Reentry Services - Assisted 516 individuals

The Athens County Reentry Program, which is housed in The Work Station, provides guidance and assistance for ex-offenders who are preparing to leave the prison system, as well as those who have been out of prison for any length of time. Our Reentry Coordinator meets with clients, takes part in judicial hearings and helps clients find jobs, housing and support in the community. In 2014, our program added 195 new clients to the caseload and assisted 516 individuals.

Athens County Reentry Task Force

In 2009, our agency helped create this community coalition, which is co-chaired by our agency's director. Since that time, an average of 20 local community partners have met monthly to help ex-offenders transition back into society and become independent. All meetings, which are open to the public, result in productive and meaningful discussion on the topic of offender reentry.

Citizen Circle

Our agency hosts the monthly Citizen Circle meetings, which are designed to provide support for ex-offenders. Meetings are held at the County Home office. Representatives of several community organizations attend the Citizen Circle meetings to talk with ex-offenders about the challenges they are facing and to see how they can provide assistance.

GED attainment sends student on new course

Ernest Abbott has spent his working life in what he describes as “dead-end jobs” – grounds keeping work that left him unemployed six months out of the year and construction or manufacturing jobs that ended in layoffs.

It was a lifestyle he tolerated because – without a high school diploma or GED – his options were limited. But all of that is about to change, or at least he hopes. Abbott was one of 36 individuals to graduate so far this fiscal year from the agency’s GED program. He celebrated his achievements alongside his family during the official ceremony in April.

Through the agency’s GED/Adult Basic Literacy Education (ABLE) program, staff members Scott Hatfield and Sally Young work with students individually to improve their skills and prepare them to take the equivalency exam. They work from two locations, The Work Station in The Plains and the ABLE Lab at Tri County Adult Career Center in Nelsonville.

“Not having a high school diploma or GED was like putting a big bull’s-eye on my back,” said Abbott, a 26-year-old father of two. “It’s really hard. If you don’t have a diploma or a college degree, finding a job is almost impossible.”

Abbott decided to focus on his education last summer, his most recent stint on unemployment. He had just received callbacks on two good jobs that he couldn’t get because he lacked the proper education or certification.

“I thought to myself, ‘I’m not having this problem again,’” he said. “So I went down to The Work Station to talk with Scott (Hatfield).”

This wasn’t his first attempt at getting his GED. Abbott had tried once before in another county, but he said he wasn’t comfortable with their approach. Athens was different.

“With Scott, we attacked what I was struggling in instead of worrying about everything else,” Abbott said.

That one-on-one attention that Hatfield and Young provide has helped thousands of individuals over the years. Some can pass the exam in a few months. For others, it can take years.

It took Abbott about six months, more than one attempt and a few nudges from both his supportive wife and Hatfield to pass the exam in December 2013. Less than a week later, he enrolled in Tri County Adult Career Center’s industrial welding course.

“It’s got its ups and downs,” Abbott said of his experience getting his GED. “I was pretty fed up when I failed the first test, but I didn’t let it get me down. I’m like the Little Engine That Could.”

The agency’s GED/ABLE program is free and open to the public. Individuals who want to improve basic skills have the option of enrolling solely in the ABLE program. The programs operate on an open enrollment schedule, and so walk-ins are welcome.



Abbott poses with Scott Hatfield during The Work Station’s annual GED graduation ceremony in April.



Less than a week after passing the GED exam, Abbott enrolled in Tri County Adult Career Center’s industrial welding program.



“I had my first eye exam in 15 years”

The expansion of Medicaid has meant more people now qualify for free medical services than ever before. Locally, that’s meant nearly 2,300 people now have coverage, people like Kelly.

Kelly, 60, was employed 20 hours a week at minimum wage and was not offered health benefits, making her a perfect candidate. The new Medicaid rules expanded coverage to income-eligible adults between the ages of 19 and 65.

Kelly signed up on the first day of open enrollment. After working through many of the technical and bureaucratic hurdles that many experienced, she finally receive her card and had her first eye exam in 15 years.

“Having someone to talk to gives me hope”

Rodney learned about our Reentry Services while he was in the SEPTA Correctional Facility. Since his release, he has worked closely with our Coordinator, Shawn Stover, for help transitioning back into the community.

Even with Shawn’s support, Rodney has faced many hurdles due to his felony. Despite his good work history, he has not yet landed a job. He has filled out many applications, but he hasn’t received a call back. Rodney survives on odd jobs and has a supportive family to help him.

With no living-wage job to support himself, Rodney stays with family. Even subsidized housing is out of reach for Rodney because of the regulations regarding someone with a felony.

Even though he has served his time, he feels like people who know about his felony judge him now, and he has to try hard to impress them. And he feels employers don’t want to take a chance on him. One mistake, he said, seems to define him now.

Because of these struggles, Rodney said he’s glad he has the Reentry program. He’s received help applying for food stamps and medical assistance. He’s updated his resume and has been given guidance on how to interview for a job. Shawn has even helped him identify employers that are more likely to hire someone with his record.

Having someone to talk to gives him hope about his future.

Other comments from clients

For several years, our agency has sought feedback from clients about the hardships they face to meet their basic needs.

In an effort to help educate ourselves, elected officials and members of the community, we request each and every client to fill out a form asking the question: What financial or medical hardships are you facing?

Completion of the form is voluntary. Clients have the option of sending in their comments anonymously or to include their name and contact information. A postage paid return envelope is sent along with the letter.

We appreciate our clients' willingness to share their struggles. We hope it will continue to help us in our advocacy efforts.

The following are a selection of those responses:

"I live with two disabled persons, work at a minimum wage job and struggle paying rent and the full cost of food. Many months we barely make ends meet, and I often eat once a day because my children come first."

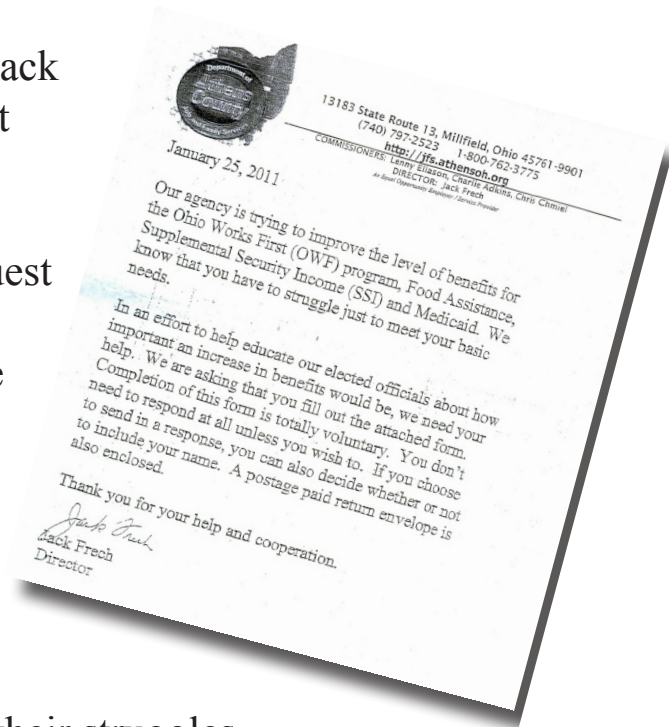
— Anonymous, Nov. 4

"I work as many hours that are offered. With minimum wage only at \$7.95 even at 30-35 hours per week after taxes, I may bring home between \$190-\$230 per week. After paying child care, skyrocketing gas prices, rent and utilities, and some food, there is nothing left to live on. I hate not having enough, even that little extra to buy my kids new clothes or a pair of shoes. I feel like I'm letting my kids down and failing as a mother because I'm barely making ends meet but trying so hard."

— Shannon of Albany, Oct. 22

"I often eat once a day because my children come first."

"I'm barely making ends meet but trying so hard."



“Recently, I have had major car repairs that have left me broke, unable to buy food and to pay my bills. I am now facing even more car repairs that will total another \$400. Without a car, I will be without a job! I am currently in debt to Cash Advance for the recent car repairs. This has the potential for major calamity. I only want help for a short time. I want to be free from this mess.

– Anonymous, Dec. 1

“We attend a Suboxone clinic, which costs us both \$200 each a month. I just got laid off from work with no income as of now. I am looking for another job and will also be trying to find out about unemployment. As of right now, though, we have nothing coming in and only receive a little over \$300 in food assistance.”

– Michael of Stewart, Nov. 14

“Without a car, I am without a job!”

“We have nothing coming in.”

Thank you, Jack Frech

Jack Frech, the agency’s longest-serving director, retired at the end of 2014. During his 33 years of service, Jack implemented a wide variety of innovative programs and initiatives that improved the lives of the poor in Athens County and the state of Ohio.

His advocacy and his dedication will be missed at the agency. We thank him for his service and commitment to our mission, which he helped craft 33 years ago. We wish him the best in his retirement.





Athens County Department of Job and Family Services

"seeking a decent life for all"

Contact information

County Home Building

13183 State Route 13, Millfield

Family Services

(740) 797-2523 or 1 (800) 762-3775

Child Support

(740) 593-5046 or 1 (800) 436-8933

Mailing Address:

13183 State Route 13
Millfield Ohio 45761-9901

E-mail: jfs@athensoh.org

Website: jfs.athensoh.org

Denver White Building

184 N. Lancaster St., Athens

(740) 592-4477 or 1 (800) 338-4484

The Work Station

70 North Plains Road, The Plains

(740) 797-1405 or 1 (877) 351-0405

Administrative Office

99 Connett Road, The Plains

(740) 797-2523 or 1 (800) 762-3775

For additional information on our programs and/or information on poverty-related issues, visit our website or contact our Community Relations Office at (740) 677- 4258 or 1 (800) 762-3775.

Athens County JFS is an equal opportunity employer and service provider.