

Ohio State Legal Services Association
2018 Enhancing Community Responses to the Opioid Crisis Grant
from the U.S. Department of Justice Office for Victims of Crime

Project Abstract:

Appalachian Ohio Children's Victim Assistance and Prevention Project

Southeastern Ohio Legal Services (SEOLS) will be the convener and facilitator of this 17-county project that brings together community partners including, legal aid, public health and safety, school systems, courts, substance abuse treatment facilities, foster and adoptive care coordinators, child protective services, local media and kinship care managers, in a comprehensive community-based effort to address the urgent gap in crime victim services related to the opioid epidemic, to expand upon existing projects and programs and to create new strategies to provide services to children and youth who are victimized as a result of the opioid crisis.

One in 14 of all opioid overdose deaths and one in 9 of all heroin-related deaths in the U.S. occurred in Ohio in 2017. Appalachian Ohio is considered by many to be the epicenter of the opioid epidemic in Ohio. A 2016 Ohio Department of Health report shows that some of the highest rates of overdose deaths in Ohio occur in Appalachian southeastern Ohio. The opioid epidemic has devastated communities, families and children traumatized by poverty. Children are the invisible victims of this opioid crisis.

Ohio's child welfare system has seen a 19% increase in the number of children removed from parental care since 2010 and now has close to 14,000 children in custody. A recent survey by the Public Children Services Association of Ohio (PCSAO) found that half of children taken into custody in 2015 had prenatal drug use identified at the time of removal, and 28 percent of children removed that year had parents who used opioids, including prescription opiates, heroin and fentanyl.

The goal of the project is to develop a system of care that is based on a multi-agency, multi-disciplinary approach that involves both public and private sectors, and to incorporate a continuous system of evaluation that will help fill gaps and inform program development. This coordinated strategy is designed to guide objectives and activities that will result in positive outcomes for practice, children and families and system change.

This community-based partnership has been created to ensure that families impacted by substance abuse (including opioids) have access to proven and comprehensive strategies that are trauma-informed and respond to the safety and well-being of children and the whole family.