Ohio START (Sobriety, Treatment and Reducing Trauma) is a children services-led intervention model for families experiencing both substance use disorder and child maltreatment. Ohio START is an affiliate of the national START model and it emphasizes a wraparound approach for at-risk parents.

It is led by the Public Children Services Association of Ohio (PCSAO) and was established in 2017 by then Attorney General DeWine.

Ohio START currently serves **46 counties** with **6 more counties** in the process of joining in 2021.

We approach substance use disorders with compassion, understanding and hope for recovery. We work as a team, supporting and holding each other accountable.

We believe in family, love and redemption.

Ohio START does not operate according to the standard children services model.

It brings together children services caseworkers, behavioral health providers, and family peer mentors into teams that can wrap supports around the family.

Ohio START helps families with additional needs related to housing, employment, food, parenting skills and education. Caseworkers see families weekly in the beginning.
I have my first apartment. I was homeless for about 12 years. So, I have my first apartment away from everybody that I knew, everything.
Family Peer Mentors

Ohio START provides peer support to help families navigate child welfare and other systems while also providing hope and motivation to promote healing to keep children safe and families together.

Families are assigned a Family Peer Mentor who has lived experience with substance abuse and children services involvement.

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**Clients:**

“This was a woman just like me, who has been on my end of a CPS case and had been successfully reunified with her children. All I had to do was breathe and listen. Take the next right steps. Work with CPS instead of against them. And my life has been better because of it.

To have somebody who’s actually been there to talk to and that you can relate to, was really helpful.”

**Family Peer Mentor:**

“By allowing me to be of service to others over the past three years, I have been able to continue to heal the devastation that I created in my active addiction.

I have formed meaningful, mutual relationships with colleagues and community partners. I have a sense of peace and purpose that continues to grow. I have a renewed sense of HOPE that I can share with others. Every facet of my life has been touched.

I am the one who owes the greatest debt of gratitude to this program. From the bottom of my heart, Thank you for being the conduit for a such an important part of my recovery.”
Ohio START screens all clients for trauma because there is a strong link between traumatic experiences and substance use. Adults in the Ohio START program are screened for Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). ACEs include all types of abuse and neglect as well as parental mental illness, substance use, divorce, incarceration, and domestic violence. Children are screened using the Trauma Screening Checklist from the Children’s Trauma Assessment Center (CTAC).

Providing comprehensive strength-based, family-centered, and community-focused resources is a sound approach for children and families.

All Ohio START participants are screened for trauma because of the link between trauma and substance abuse.

Ohio START shows that recovery heals families. With intensive services and support, parents can overcome addiction and children can remain safely in the home or be reunified as part of their recovery.
Ohio START has built an extensive technical assistance (TA) and training infrastructure, offering individualized support to each of the 46 counties implementing the program. This support is provided by regional TA consultants through monthly one-on-one meetings, and by a comprehensive training program that provides education on the START model and related topics that will advance the practice of the Ohio START teams.

The annual START Summit focused on reducing the stigma around substance use disorder, and education on the effects of SUD on the brain.

The summit received positive feedback on the workshop's evaluations.

- **219** attendees
- **31** training sessions
- **900+** total attendance
- **90%** rated the summit as relevant
- **95%** rated their knowledge good/excellent at the end vs 64% at the start
I personally pray that more women get involved with that and actually take this as a good thing. Me, it was like I said, a life changing experience for the better, and I felt like it was truly a blessing. The women that was involved with me, in that program, I owe my life to that program, is the way I feel about it. Turned me around for the better. For the long haul, it wasn't just temporary; it was life-changing for the rest of my life.
A report of a young mother who had lost custody of her newborn infant and her four-year-old daughter due to substance abuse and drug exposure brought me to the house. Drug paraphernalia strewn across the yard let me know we were in the right place. After two knocks at the front door, we heard the second story window open.

“What do you want?” the client's grandmother called.

“We are from Franklin County Children Services and Eden Counseling Centers,” I said.

“Ma’am, we are here to save your granddaughter’s life. Is she home?”

The grandmother’s face filled with tears.

There was a small outdoor table in front of the house. After a five-minute wait, the 28-year-old woman came outside and sat down. Being a single mother of two, having children services remove your kids, and having a serious substance use problem is grounds for any person to break and crumble.

But there was something exceptional about this woman and her motivation to be a better mom. She knew what she wanted: sobriety, recovery, family, and safety.

As my partner explained the Ohio START program to the client and clarified the goals of her case plan related to treatment, she immediately expressed interest in becoming involved. She accepted responsibility for her choices and made a verbal agreement to change from the very first day of engagement.

Having a family peer mentor guide her through the treatment process and being able to see her caseworker weekly for support would increase her chances of success.

“If I continue living like I am, I will die. I am losing friends and family. Now my kids are gone. I will do anything to get them back.”

At that point I looked at my partner and I knew we had made significant progress. “Anything?” I said. “OK, let’s get you in to detox. We have a few options for you, but let’s go today.”

She had already formulated a plan to get clean and was mentally preparing herself for treatment.

We contacted a local Safe Station that was located at the local fire department. Safe Stations have a social worker on staff and can provide quick access to treatment. From there, our new client was able to transfer to an inpatient medical stabilization unit. She spent 30 days there. The facility included free sober housing and daily Substance Use Disorder groups. Our client was able to work her way from Inpatient Hospitalization (the highest level of care) through Partial Inpatient, Intensive Outpatient, Outpatient and now all the way down to the lowest level of restriction, Aftercare. During that time, our service team ensured continuity of care through Eden Counseling Centers.

During her treatment, this mom was extremely motivated. Treatment, processing trauma and mending family relationships were all major focus points for her. She was able to evolve and grow into a young woman who is family- and recovery-orientated and safe. She is now working a steady job, has her own apartment, and is a productive contributing member of society. She can see her children unsupervised whenever she wants and has them on the weekends. She will officially complete her case when she next approaches the judge.

She had this to say about the program:

“I would be dead on the streets without y’all. I lost my kids, family and friends. I was ready to give up. Having those extra people who actually care makes a difference. I can’t believe how much life has changed.”