

## Giving families struggling with substance use disorder a brand-new START



"I didn't think I deserved my kids and they deserved better than me, even if it was with a stranger or my mom. I didn't fight hard enough for them or for myself. And as soon as that case got opened, they were there. They were like, 'Straight up. Put your Big Girl pants on. You messed up. Get over it. This is what we're going to do from this point on.' And it was amazing."  
- START Parent



**For information about Ohio START contact Fawn Gadel at the Public Children Services Association of Ohio.**

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Ohio START is led by the Public Children Services Association of Ohio in partnership with the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services and the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services.



**Ohio START** (Sobriety, Treatment and Reducing Trauma) is an affiliate of the National Sobriety Treatment and Recovery Teams (START) Model. START is an evidence-informed children services-led model. When implemented with fidelity, this specialized child welfare service delivery model has been shown to improve outcomes for children and families affected by parental substance use and child maltreatment. The model uses a variety of strategies to promote collaboration and systems-level change within and between child welfare agencies, substance use and mental health treatment providers, the judicial system, and other family-serving entities.

# Success Stories

"There is nothing that is going to be done in your child welfare case that is going to be done without you knowing. Our goal is for you to be well aware of what is going on and what the repercussions may be. We are going to make sure you are really informed as we go through."

– **START Caseworker**

"What's special about Ohio START is that we have family peer mentors that have lived experience in both recovery as well as having experience with the child welfare system as a client. It makes people believe that if you did it, I can do it, too."

– **START Supervisor**

"My experience, it was a amazing. It was a blessing. I never realized how many people was in my corner until I actually STARTed this program. ... They really, really saved my life in a lot of ways."

– **START Parent**



A mother was referred to START after losing custody of her newborn infant and her four-year-old daughter due to substance use and drug exposure. She was ready for change from the very first day of engagement.

"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."

Her START team quickly identified treatment options and helped her enter inpatient treatment, where she spent 30 days before transitioning to outpatient treatment and aftercare. Treatment, processing trauma, and mending family relationships were all major focus points for her. She evolved and grew into a mother who is family- and recovery-orientated, and safe. She is now working a steady job, has her own apartment, and has relationships with her children.

"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."

When this mother signed up for Ohio START she was all in.

"I've been willing to do whatever it takes to better myself and my children."

She benefited from family support as she fought for recovery, including support from family who was caring for her two children. Her battle with substance use disorder began with 18 months of sobriety, but a return to use took her to inner-city Cleveland, where she endured traumatic abuse and exploitation. She was alone, struggling, and seven months pregnant. She entered residential treatment, followed by Intensive Outpatient Treatment (IOP), aftercare, and trauma therapy, all with her new baby in tow.

"Having a newborn and trying to do sobriety is very, very, very hard. I'm not gonna lie."

She is also grateful that her baby's development is on track, with no adverse effects from her substance use. She is grateful for Ohio START.

"It's an amazing program!"



"A lot of our cases have burnt a lot of their bridges... so it's being that one person that meets them where they're at, having that understanding, giving them that hope, being that one person that hasn't given up on them yet."

– **START Family Peer Mentor**

## Ohio START in Action

Families who agree to participate in Ohio START are assigned an Ohio START caseworker and family peer mentor (the START dyad). The parent is quickly referred for a substance use assessment and treatment recommendations. Parents and children are screened for trauma, and receive referrals for further assessment and treatment based on the results. At the beginning of the case, the family receives weekly visits from their Ohio START caseworker and family peer mentor. Thereafter, the family continues to meet at least twice a month with the START dyad. Also during this time, parents begin intensive treatment for substance use disorder. Through the dedicated START dyad—and collaboration with treatment providers—the family receives coordinated wraparound services

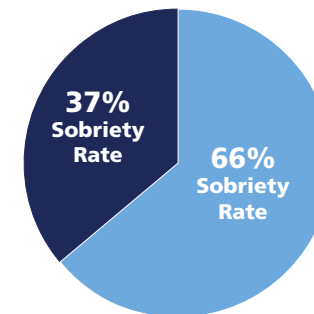
targeted to their needs. This intensive care enhances opportunities for positive outcomes for more families.

### What is a Family Peer Mentor?

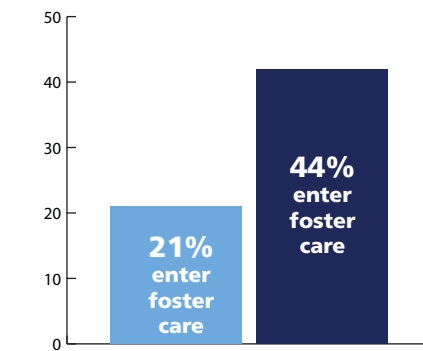
Family peer mentors are individuals who are in long term recovery from a substance use disorder and have prior experience with the children services system. Because the mentors have real-life experience in these areas, they can connect with families in a way that most caseworkers cannot, providing support, accountability, and serving as role models for parents.

## Success in Figures

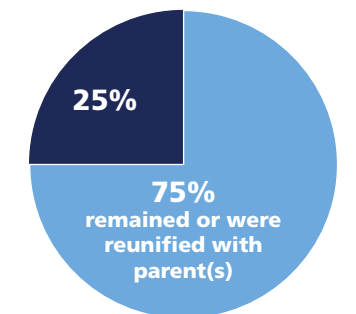
The model was first developed in 1997 and has since been replicated and scaled to meet the diverse needs and policies of both rural and urban jurisdictions within public and privatized child welfare systems. Kentucky began implementing START in 2007, and it continues to deliver very positive results:



Women in START have nearly double the sobriety rate of non-START women (66% vs. 37%).



Children in START are about half as likely to enter foster care (21% vs. 42%).



At case closure, over 75% of children in START remained with or were reunified with their parent(s).

For every **\$1.00 SPENT**



**\$2.22 is SAVED** in offset foster care costs