

Children Services Spotlight: Jesse Looser

By Pam Prosser

Jesse Looser began working at Franklin County Children Services straight out of college 16 years ago. His first job as a child welfare caseworker at Intake has now led him to directing a regional casework office.

While in college at the Ohio State University, he was having difficulty deciding what to do after graduation and had switched his major several times. Then his advisor mentioned that Looser might want to try an internship at FCCS. "Before my internship here, I was trying to decide between a career in education or criminology," said Looser. "I got to Children Services and instantly loved it." The work as a child welfare caseworker was exactly what he had been searching for. "I loved going out into the field doing home visits and working with children and families. I know this statement can be overused, but nothing else describes it as well...I chose child welfare because I felt I could make a difference."

Now, as the director of FCCS's East Region (roughly the area east of interstate 71 in Franklin County), Looser supervises 139 employees who work on ongoing cases to make sure children are safe and help families through troubled times. For the first 14 years, he worked at the agency's Intake and Investigations Department,



where he would often be the first contact families and children had with FCCS. He was an Intake caseworker investigating calls of physical abuse, sexual abuse and neglect of children. Over the years, his commitment and dedication led Looser to be promoted to casework supervisor, Intake associate director and region director for the past two years.

"One of the key things I've seen in this work is that our clients are often portrayed in a negative light," says Looser. "But once you sit down and talk to them, you see that they aren't that different from us. They just have a few more challenges."

Looser also serves as the administrator of the FCCS Best Practice Council and is the project lead on the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services' Committee on Engaging Fathers. He is married to his high school sweetheart, Barb and has two sons, Jonny and Jack.

TAP Experience Provides Healing for Young Artist

By Marion Thompson

Chel-C has been making art as long as she can remember. Her ability to express herself through drawing, painting, sculpting and working with found objects has led her through some tough times in her life. The young artist has refined her talent and influenced others by participating in Franklin County Children Services' Therapeutic Arts Program (TAP) over the past 10 years. Now 22, she remains involved with TAP and shares her skills and insights with others in the program.

Chel-C spent much of her young life moving from place to place and dealing with the trauma of abuse, while being involved in the child welfare system. She credits the TAP program with helping her to feel understood. "It's a place where people were patient with me. I didn't find that in other places," she said. TAP not only helped her develop into an accomplished artist, it also helped her work through feelings of loss, low self-esteem and being disconnected. "I have an ability that can't be taken away from me and I have accomplishments," she said. In the near future, Chel-C plans to get her GED. Her ambition is to learn to weld, so that she will have not only a trade, but another powerful skill to use in creating art.

A great deal of Chel-C's work is an expression of her feelings about the difficult relationships she's had with family members and others. In the past, she clung to individual pieces for comfort and



Chel-C poses among her artwork as well as two pieces created by her 2-year-old daughter, Onie, during a recent agency art show.

security. Now that she is a mother and feels permanently connected to family members, friends and mentors like FCCS Assistant Deputy Director Kim Toler, TAP Program Coordinator Cheri Johnson and her former caseworker, (now Associate Director) Monica Civils, Chel-C believes she can share her art with others. Her pieces were featured prominently during the agency's recent art show and silent auction.

Johnson is awed by Chel-C's work. "I haven't taught Chel-C about art," she said. "I just show her different techniques and she lets her imagination take off and does

amazing things."

Chel-C enjoys working alongside the youth in TAP. "We just share what we do. I feel like the younger ones look up to me and can talk with me, because it was not that long ago that I was going through what they're going through," she said.

Johnson is gratified by what TAP has done for Chel-C and others. "When I look at where she came from and the young lady that she's become, I'm so proud of the healing that we've helped her to have. As an agency, this is what we've accomplished for many kids who are involved with TAP."

To learn more about the TAP program, visit childrenservices.franklincountyohio.gov.