

Transforming the Experience of Infants & Toddlers in Ohio's Child Welfare System

During the first few years of life, young children experience the most rapid period of brain growth that they will ever experience, laying a foundation for lifelong health, development and well-being. In order to support healthy brain development, it is important for a child to have nurturing and responsive relationships with their caregivers. When a child has adverse experiences during the early years, such as exposure to violence, maltreatment, neglect or separation from caregivers with whom babies have begun to form secure attachments, it can have long-lasting consequences. Unfortunately, infants and toddlers are vulnerable to these adverse experiences, often leading to child welfare and court involvement. Caregiver risk factors—including substance use disorder, mental health, economic challenges, domestic violence, and inadequate housing—contribute to high rates of infants and toddlers engaged in the child welfare system.

Simply put, there are too many babies entering the child welfare system during the most critical period of brain development, and this can have life-long implications for health, mental health, and overall success in life.

In Ohio:

1 OUT OF EVERY 39 BABIES

under 1 year old are victims of maltreatment.ⁱ

70% OF INFANTS UNDER 1 YEAR OLD IN STATE CUSTODY

have parents who use opiates, including heroin.ⁱⁱ

0-3 YEAR OLDS MAKE UP 29% (4,646)

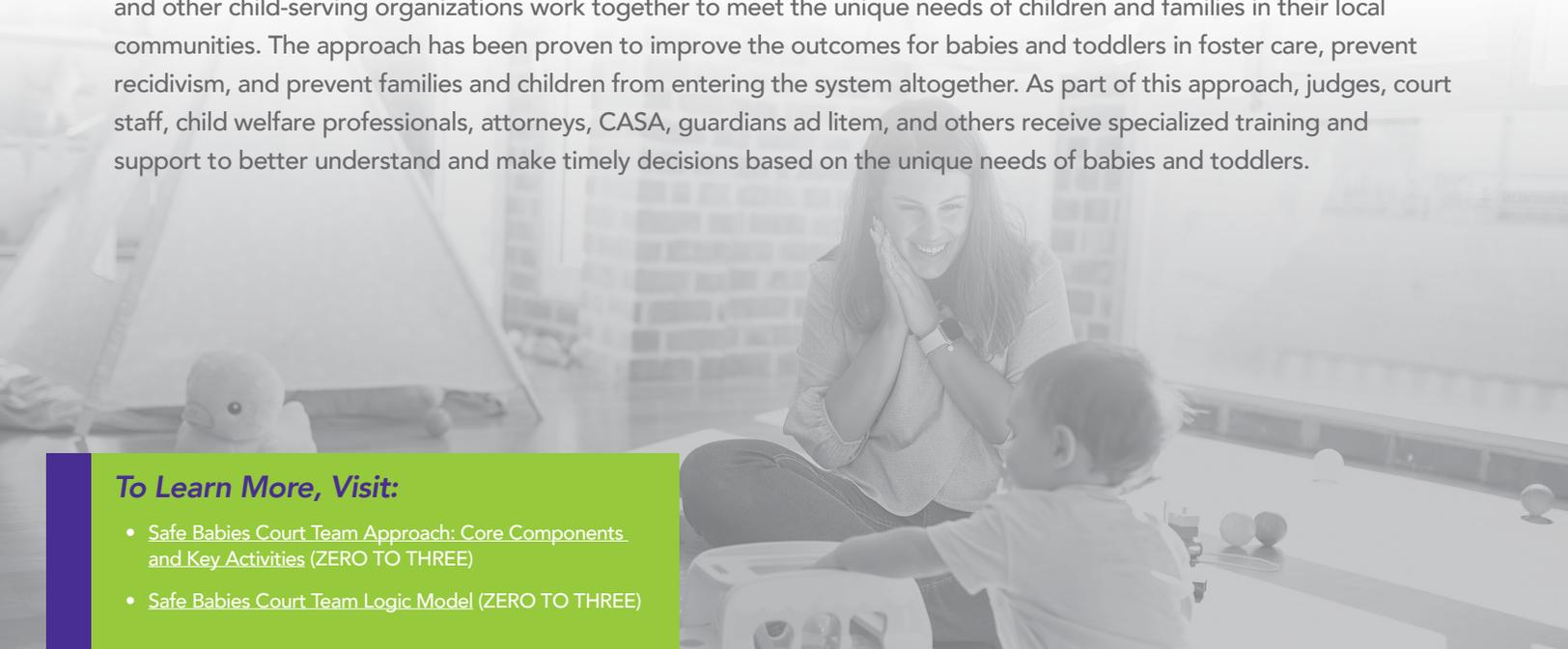
of all children in state custody.ⁱⁱⁱ

The Safe Babies Court Team™ Approach

The Safe Babies Court Team™ approach (SBCT) approach transforms child welfare by using the science of early childhood development to meet the urgent needs of infants, toddlers and their families. It does so by focusing on minimizing the trauma a child may face while engaged in the child welfare system by improving how courts, child welfare agencies and other child-serving organizations work together to meet the unique needs of children and families in their local communities. The approach has been proven to improve the outcomes for babies and toddlers in foster care, prevent recidivism, and prevent families and children from entering the system altogether. As part of this approach, judges, court staff, child welfare professionals, attorneys, CASA, guardians ad litem, and others receive specialized training and support to better understand and make timely decisions based on the unique needs of babies and toddlers.

To Learn More, Visit:

- [Safe Babies Court Team Approach: Core Components and Key Activities \(ZERO TO THREE\)](#)
- [Safe Babies Court Team Logic Model \(ZERO TO THREE\)](#)



How the Safe Babies Court Team Approach Makes a Difference in the Lives of Families

ZERO TO THREE reports the following outcomes for infants, toddlers, and their families served by the SBCT approach:

Permanency & Reunification:



97.2% achieved permanency within 12 months → compared to the national standard of 40.5%. Children were also more likely to be reunited with their parents/relatives compared to national standards.

Placements & Transitions:



94.2% of children in custody for 12 months or less only had one or two placements → compared to the national average of 86%.

Maltreatment:



0.7% rate of recurrence of maltreatment → compared to the national standard of 9.1%.

Substance Abuse Treatment:



73.8% of parents with substance abuse disorders received a first appointment within a week.

Mental Health Treatment:



Among families at SBCT sites in need of child-parent psychotherapy (CPP), **93.9%** received CPP → compared to the national average of 66%. Additionally 71.8% of SBCT families received an appointment in 30 days.

EXPANDING the Safe Babies Court Team™ Approach in Ohio

In the fall of 2020, Groundwork Ohio and the Children's Defense Fund-Ohio, alongside the expert guidance and coordination of Cindy Oser, formerly of ZERO TO THREE, received a 12-month grant to provide leadership in scaling the SBCT approach across Ohio. Currently, the approach is utilized in Lucas County under the leadership of Judge Denise Navarre Cubbon who has operated the Lucas County Healthy Baby Court program since 2016. The Ohio expansion grant provides financial support and technical assistance to local judicial and child welfare leaders and community stakeholders to stand up infant-toddler court teams in Cuyahoga, Montgomery, and Scioto counties under the leadership of Judge Kristin Sweeney, Judge Helen Wallace, and Judge Alan Lemons respectively, over the course of a year. The Lucas County Healthy Baby Court also received funds to expand their capacity to serve more families and children.

Learn how YOU can help support this critical work.

Contact **Julia Jackels**, Assistant Project Coordinator
JJackels@groundworkohio.org

ⁱ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, "Child Maltreatment." (2017).

ⁱⁱ Ready, Set, Soar Ohio, "The State of Infants & Toddlers." (March 2020)

ⁱⁱⁱ Ohio Department of Job and Family Services, "Heroin, Cocaine and Child Protection." (July 1, 2014)

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