FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Healthier Buckeye Council to Bring New Focus to Poverty-Fighting Systems in Fairfield County

Lancaster, Ohio- The Fairfield County Board of Commissioners is pleased to announce receipt of a $402,684.69 grant from the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services to implement anti-poverty programs in Fairfield County through the Healthier Buckeye Council.

Last year, legislators required formation of a Healthier Buckeye Council in every Ohio county. In response, the Fairfield County Board of Commissioners established the local Healthier Buckeye Council on December 11, 2015, with Family, Adult and Children First Council serving as membership. As a leading non-profit agency serving low-income families in Fairfield County, Lancaster-Fairfield Community Action Agency will implement programming for activities associated with the grant.

"The Healthier Buckeye Initiative fits perfectly within the mission of Community Action to help low-income residents of Fairfield County attain self-sufficiency" said Kellie Ailes, Lancaster-Fairfield Community Action Agency Executive Director. "This program will allow local social service providers and our community partners to better promote optimal overall health and well-being for those in need in Lancaster and Fairfield County."

Healthier Buckeye Council funds will be used to implement comprehensive anti-poverty programs that are designed to lift families out of poverty and support them to reach self-sufficiency. The programs will be advised by representatives from multiple social services agencies, local businesses and the faith-based community that formed a group in 2012 called Sharing Hope, which utilizes the Bridges Out of Poverty model for programming.

Up until now, Sharing Hope relied mainly on volunteers to implement Bridges Out of Poverty and Getting Ahead Programs, which are designed to address poverty and increase awareness of the differences in socio-economic designations. With the Healthier Buckeye Council grant, programming will be expanded and paid staff added to support more comprehensive programming that will reach more Fairfield County families in need.

According to Deb Smith, Sharing Hope volunteer coordinator, there are increasing requests for Bridges Out of Poverty training as all sectors of our community are working to remove barriers for success to those in poverty. Educators, health care providers, employers and the faith based community are embracing effective approaches to strengthening our communities by learning to recognize strengths as well as weaknesses.

Smith said, "Sharing Hope has taught me that building relationships based on respect for differences and recognition of shared strengths is a powerful way to effect change. I leave each of our dinner meetings with a sense of joy and faith in our community's future."

Katrina Metzler, Executive Director of Family, Adult and Children First Council, said "Strong families make strong communities. The Healthier Buckeye Council grant will give us the means to cast a much wider net and reach more families with more intensive programming. It is exciting to imagine the impact this funding will have on struggling families in Fairfield County. The best part of the Bridges Out of Poverty model is the belief that people are interested in helping one another, and that everyone has a part to play in eradicating poverty. By coming together, we can make
a difference in the lives of many families with these additional funds and make Fairfield County a better place to live and work."

Healthier Buckeye Council will be a community-driven initiative to support effective teams of community partners to work together to support families in their journey from poverty to self-sufficiency. The goal of the program is to provide low-income individuals support to achieve long-lasting financial self-sufficiency, negate high-risk behaviors including substance abuse, overcome barriers, set and achieve educational goals, enter the workforce and/or complete workforce training, and meet personal goals for success. Opportunities for mentoring will be expanded and new pathways created for civic engagement in the program.

For more information, contact Kellie Ailes, Executive Director of Lancaster-Fairfield Community Action Agency at 740-653-4146 or KAiles@faircaa.org.

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