



**By: Executive Director, Karen Balconi Ghezzi, Esq. and Deputy Director of Social Programs
AJ Lill of Erie County Department of Job and Family Services**

Child Abuse Prevention month recognizes and brings awareness to the importance of communities working together to help families thrive and to prevent child maltreatment. The goal is to educate the public and encourage people to speak up and protect the most vulnerable among us: children, and as we conclude April, it is extremely important to thank the overall community for their commitment and continuous effort to assist the families and children of Erie County. Unfortunately, the Erie County Job and Family Services touched the lives of over 1,300 children through investigations of child abuse, neglect and/or dependency in 2022. It's a regular occurrence where a child has serious physical harm inflicted on them. It's also routine for a newborn at a local hospital to be born positive for an illicit substance. It's also routine for one of our investigators to be assigned to a sexual abuse investigation. Additionally, it's routine for the agency to receive concerns for neglect. Items that are usually taken for granted: food, clothing, shelter, supervision may be sadly lacking or even absent altogether. Lastly, parental substance abuse remains a very pervasive problem. In fact, close to 70% of our agency's court involved cases have a component of parental substance abuse.

We're extremely lucky that here in Erie County, we have so many strengths to assist in addressing the issue. We have fantastic resources, service providers, community partners, community leaders, foster parents and a Children Services staff that have a relentless commitment to ensuring the safety of our children. Certainly, one of our key partners in the community is the ADAMS board which assists us in various ways. Many of the parents and children with whom we work have dual diagnoses, that is more than one illness/issue that is negatively impacting their lives. We also appreciate and recognize the contribution the ADAMHS board has made to help facilitate and enable the success of Team Court.

ERIE COUNTY
Job & Family Services
Children Services