

Press Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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STARK JFS EMPLOYEES HONORED WITH STATEWIDE OHIO START AWARDS

Canton, Ohio - Stark County Job & Family Services is proud to announce that two of its dedicated employees were recognized with top honors at the 8th Annual Ohio START Summit held May 4–5 in Columbus.

Kensington Thomas was named the 2026 Ohio START Caseworker of the Year, while Erica Gross received the 2026 Ohio START Family Peer Mentor of the Year award. The awards were presented during the annual summit, which brought together more than 250 Ohio START team members and partners from across the state to celebrate excellence, collaboration, and innovation in serving families impacted by substance use disorders.

Ohio START (Sobriety, Treatment and Reducing Trauma) is an innovative program focused on helping families affected by substance use disorder recover safely together while improving outcomes for children and parents.



Kensington Thomas & Erica Gross

“Kensington and Erica exemplify the compassion, dedication, and teamwork that are at the heart of Ohio START,” said Tricia Mayle, Deputy Director of the Division of Children Services. “Their commitment to supporting families through recovery and healing has made a tremendous impact in our community, and we are incredibly proud of their accomplishments.”

The Ohio START Summit featured keynote speakers, breakout sessions, networking opportunities, and statewide recognition of outstanding staff and families who embody the mission of Ohio START.

According to the Ohio START program, its mission is to empower families affected by substance use disorders to recover safely and together, supporting children and parents in building healthy, stable, and thriving lives through collaboration, compassion, and accountability.

Stark County Job & Family Services congratulates Kensington Thomas and Erica Gross on these well-deserved honors and thanks them for their continued service to children and families in Stark County.