

THE WAY FORWARD

Protecting Children and Nurturing Mississippi Families

December 2016

Progress in the *Olivia Y.* Settlement

The Mississippi Department of Child Protection Services (MDCPS) has made considerable progress related to the *Olivia Y.* litigation. The agency has complied with all the requirements of the December 2015 Interim Remedial Order and the May 2016 Second Stipulated Remedial Order. Both orders required MDCPS to complete specific tasks to remain free from contempt, and MDCPS is very pleased to have met the specifications outlined by Public Catalyst, the court appointed company responsible for certifying progress in the case.

In collaboration with Public Catalyst, MDCPS has implemented strategies to reform Mississippi's child welfare system. These plans include steps to address recruiting and hiring new staff, realigning the salaries of current workers in the family protection series, supervisors, and regional directors, increase the number of family based placements, and create a stronger, centralized field operations team.

Working with Public Catalyst to accurately assess the number of children in unlicensed placements and the number of available resource homes, MDCPS has established the plan of action needed to reduce the number of children in unlicensed placements. In order to increase productivity, all investigators and case workers have been equipped with smart phones or tablets.

MDCPS acknowledges that although significant progression has been made, much remains to be done. With new leadership, as well as the support of the legislature, the governor, and the people of Mississippi, the newly established agency will succeed in making reform a reality.

We would like to thank everyone for their support since the separation from the Mississippi Department of Human Services, and express gratitude for each one of the valued partnerships we have built. Every member of our staff is so grateful for the given opportunity to affect real change in the lives of Mississippi's children and families. MDCPS recognizes the determination and relentlessness of countless individuals both inside and outside the agency, and it is with great appreciation we announce this update of shared accomplishment and hope this holiday season. Warm wishes to you and yours from everyone at MDCPS! We cannot wait to see the advances that 2017 will bring!



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Commissioner Chandler Visits Mississippi Rotary Clubs



Regina Taylor, Deidra Calamese, Kerry Shelley, and Veronica Smith are pictured above with Dr. David Chandler at the Booneville Rotary Club in Prentiss County.

It has been a busy year at the Mississippi Department of Child Protection Services (MDCPS). We've seen the appointment of our new Commissioner, Dr. David Chandler, continued negotiations with the plaintiffs as part of the *Olivia Y.* settlement agreement, and made significant progress in the de-coupling of our agency from the Mississippi Department of Human Services.

The responsibility of caring for the children of our state rests not just on the newly established agency created to ensure their protection, but also on the very special citizens who have made the important decision to foster Mississippi's orphans. MDCPS staff alone cannot raise the thousands of children who have found themselves without a loving family and a safe home to grow up in; we need help. Finding that help starts by addressing the heart of our communities and appealing to those who have joined an organization whose motto is "Service Above Self," the members of Mississippi's Rotary Clubs.

From Booneville to Meridian to Pascagoula, Dr. Chandler has made it his mission to visit Rotary Clubs across our great state to meet members face to face, introduce our agency, and share our mission. According to their website, "Rotary is an organization of business and professional leaders united worldwide who provide humanitarian service, encourage high ethical standards in all vocations, and help build goodwill and peace in the world."

MDCPS currently has 5,805 children in custody, and every single one deserves to build relationships with caring adults whose first priority is to act on behalf of their best interests. Many of these children have experienced abuse or neglect at the hands of their care givers, some have even been exposed to drug use. There is an immediate need for safe homes across Mississippi. The foster parent "supply" is low, however, demand is high. Considering the theory of "Supply and Demand," and knowing that demand for the valuable resource of foster parents is high, we can conclude that the cost will, in turn, also be high.

However, MDCPS believes there is no price too high when it comes to the safety and protection of a child. Our agency has been restructured, rebuilt, and reborn. Under the leadership of our Commissioner, we will ensure the safety of every child in Mississippi while recruiting, training, and partnering with foster parents across the state, as well as other institutions committed to this same goal.

If you're interested in joining MDCPS on our mission and would like to learn more about becoming a foster parent, contact MDCPS online at mdcps.ms.gov/become-a-resource-fosteradoptive-parent/ or call 1.800.821.9157.



What's 330?

The number of
foster children
MDCPS finalized
adoptions for in 2016!

SPOTLIGHT ON CQI

A graphic of a spotlight with a blue beam of light shining down onto the letters 'CQI'.

YEAR IN REVIEW

The Office of Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) has undergone some major changes and made significant progress affecting multiple areas across MDCPS. With the appointment of Cindy Greer to Deputy Commissioner of Information Technology, the CQI Review Units were placed under the oversight of new CQI Director, Tom Farley.

The Foster Care Review Unit (FCR) continues to be the driving force in CQI, giving feedback to field staff on more children than any other review unit. Reviewing almost every child in custody, the FCR Unit continues to be a tremendous source of information and support to field staff across the state. FCR Unit Leadership Staff recently partnered with members of the Evaluation and Monitoring Unit (EMU) to help conduct a Maltreatment in Care review for the Court Monitor and her staff. That review helped the agency to identify needed improvements in the area of Maltreatment in Care investigations and reviews, and the agency has already moved forward with improvements in these identified areas. Additionally, the FCR Unit is currently partnering with practice coaches across the state to provide training to field staff on how to properly prepare for county conferences, so that staff understands exactly how their preparation translates into providing excellent services to the children and families of Mississippi.

The Safety Review Unit continues to serve the agency by reviewing every investigation of Maltreatment in Care, to ensure that all appropriate practice and timeliness is followed in reviewing these investigations. During the past year, a second Maltreatment in Care Reviewer, Miracle Matlock, was hired and has been a great asset to the CQI Unit. The employees in that unit attended conferences for professional development in June and September and held an internal training to review policy and SRU Procedures as they move forward.

The Consumer Solutions Unit, which was simply referred to as “the complaints line” took on a new identity this year, as well as additional responsibility in tracking not only complaints, but also general inquiries about MDCPS. With the additional responsibilities came a need for more staffing, so Stacy Curry came on board to assist in the Consumer Solutions Unit. Both Stacy and her counterpart, Quiness Culberson, are dedicated to helping consumers find answers to any issues they feel need addressing.

The Evaluation and Monitoring Unit (EMU) has made a recommendation for a new Supervisor to fill the vacancy left by Tom Farley. The new supervisor is expected to take on the new role soon and we are excited to see what new leadership will do to help grow the EMU. In addition to this change, new EMU Liaisons were also hired in 2016 for Regions 2-West, 7-West, and 7-Central. Region 5-West has also hired two Liaisons and plans to hire another to manage the duties of performing workload audits in addition to assisting with EMU Reviews. The EMU will be fully staffed once these positions are finalized.

Eric Burden was promoted to Director of the Data Reporting Unit, and that unit has grown significantly this past year. In addition to Eric, the Data Reporting Unit has two Business Systems Analysts and three report validators. There are plans to hire an additional Program Administrator for further support within that unit. The need for agency data continues to grow, and the Data Reporting Unit is growing with it.

CQI is not just these units, it is not just these dedicated staff members, and it is not just these efforts that are underway. CQI is, in fact, the way of doing business that we should all embrace as we serve the community and provide the best services possible, in order to keep families intact and children safe from maltreatment. The CQI Units are committed to being a support and source of information to Field Operations so that those on the front lines have the best information available to them as they make the hard decisions every day for Mississippi's children and families. Whether that means helping staff by providing or interpreting data reports, modeling and coaching for exceptional practice, being a sounding board for ideas and feedback, offering guided trainings, or by simply listening when someone has a problem, we are here to be that partner and offer ourselves up for that very purpose. It is our mission to be a resource to the field, to Administration, and to all support areas within MDCPS so that we make this the greatest agency in the State of Mississippi. We are well on our way, but as CQI suggests, the best is yet to come!

Human Resources & Professional Development Update

H·u·m·a·n R·e·s·o·u·r·c·e·s (noun)

The division of a company that is focused on all activities relating to the employees.

P·r·o·f·e·s·s·i·o·n·a·l D·e·v·e·l·o·p·m·e·n·t (noun)

Process of improving and increasing capabilities of staff through access to education and training opportunities.

MDCPS has undergone countless changes over the past year, many of which continuing to take place within the Human Resource (HR) Department. In order to fulfil the requirements set forth by the Remedial Orders stemming from the *Olivia Y.* litigation, HR was faced with the enormous task of recruiting, hiring, training, and retaining additional staff in every county of the state. As anticipated, MDCPS employees rose to the challenge at hand and successfully hired 509 new employees during 2016. Of those, 476 filled positions in the field and 33 were hired into roles within the state office.

The last 12 months also saw the enrollment of 369 employees in Pre-Service Training, a 41% increase over the 216 recruits who were trained during the previous calendar year. (Pre-Service Training is required of all newly hired case-workers and supervisors and totals 9 weeks of training time both at field level and in the classroom.) Beginning in July of 2016, additional classes were offered to accommodate the staff increase and growing need for more opportunities to complete the required training. This coupled with condensing many HR processes through implementing standard hire dates has proven to be a positive shift for the agency with regard to hiring and training staff quicker and more efficiently.



HR hasn't stopped there! They've taken the opportunity presented by this new growth as the appropriate time to launch DocuSign, which will automate much of the paperwork required during the hiring process going forward. In the coming months, they plan to begin accepting more and more documents, as well as recommendations via DocuSign as well.

Retention is also on the forefront of the minds of everyone at MDCPS. Now that all of these new employees have been recruited, hired, and trained, how can the agency ensure that those employees continue to serve the children and families

here in Mississippi? HR is currently working to create a more streamlined program for tracking employee terminations that will include demographic information as well as reason for separation.

By strengthening internal HR and Professional Development processes, MDCPS has become an overall healthier and better equipped entity that can properly serve one another and their community.

2016 Brought Updated Information Technology

The MDCPS Information Technology (IT) department has had a busy year as well! As the agency began to transition, IT moved forward in recruiting employees to strengthen the current team of technical and program staff. Network unit and customer support (previously help desk) additions were made in order to increase support to workers state wide, and the department continues to hire network and auxiliary staff to aid in the many IT projects that are underway.

The network team is working hard to build a brand new MDCPS network. This team is also working diligently to improve the MACWIS 'Citrix' environment for all staff and have begun installing new equipment to improve connectivity across the state. They will soon be upgrading that network environment which will result in even more connectivity improvements. We are excited about this project and know that all staff will see great results from this!

The hardware/phone auxiliary support team distributed 1,200 tablets across the state in early 2016. Providing new technology to all field staff was a huge project and the team continues working diligently to keep those tablets, laptops, and printers going for everyone. The iPhone rollout project is underway with new hires receiving iPhones as they begin employment. Existing employees can expect to begin receiving new iPhones in January.

These are just a few of the projects the IT team has in the works. There are many, many more! The hope is that all of the new technology will be beneficial to the agency as MDCPS continues to progress while providing the best services to our clients creating better outcomes for all children in Mississippi.