



THE WAY FORWARD

Protecting Children and Nurturing Mississippi Families

January 2017

New Agreement Reached in *Olivia Y.* Settlement

Just before Christmas, the state of Mississippi was presented with a wonderful gift—the opportunity to do the right thing by the children and families in our state. By negotiating a new settlement agreement in the *Olivia Y.* foster care lawsuit, the Mississippi Department of Child Protection Services (MDCPS) has reached another milestone in its mission to protect the children of Mississippi.

The new agreement, approved on December 19th by the U.S. District Court, creates clear, obtainable objectives and enhances the ability of the newly-formed MDCPS to direct its full attention to protecting Mississippi’s children.

“This agreement will clear the way going forward for Mississippi to ensure the safety of all our children,” said MDCPS Commissioner David A. Chandler. “Our agency is working diligently to protect Mississippi’s children and nurture families by providing effective and efficient delivery of services statewide.”

Although the court’s approval of MDCPS’ progress is acknowledged as a positive indicator of the agency’s ongoing work to improve child welfare services, Chandler underscores “a lot of hard work” remains to be done, and this is simply the latest step in the reformation of the state’s child welfare system.

Under the new agreement, many unnecessarily rigorous reporting requirements under the 2012 settlement agreement have been lifted, freeing MDCPS to devote full attention to accomplishing its mission of protecting children and working to enhance the foster care system. As the system is further improved and critical performance measures are met and maintained for a 12-month period, the individual measures will be removed from monitoring, creating an achievable path toward the eventual end of court oversight.

Key to these reforms is increasing the number of social workers across the state. Under the new agreement MDCPS is now able to hire recent college graduates with social work or related human services degrees, and then provide on-the-job clinical training to enhance the skill sets of the new hires. Increasing the number of highly trained social workers will play a tremendous role in optimizing the level of care for children.

“This new agreement wisely measures the steps that are most important to reaching our goal of protecting Mississippi’s children and nurturing families—and it will provide quantifiable evidence that we are, indeed, significantly improving the child welfare system in our state,” said Deputy Commissioner of Child Welfare Tracy Malone.

Looking for More Information?

[2nd Modified Mississippi Settlement Agreement And Reform Plan Stipulated Third Remedial Order](#)

MDCPS State Office
P.O. Box 346 (39205)
660 North Street, Suite 200
Jackson, Mississippi 39202
contactus@mdcps.ms.gov
www.mdcps.ms.gov
601.359.4368

.....

Report Child Abuse
& Neglect by calling
1.800.222.8000
or 601.432.4570

.....

THE WAY FORWARD
is authored by Communications Manager,
Chris Alexander

2016 Accomplishments

- By hiring more frontline staff and providing a higher pay, MDPCS has been able to retain more qualified child welfare professionals and improve its ability to protect the children and families it serves more efficiently. MDPCS has been able to uphold its commitment to providing Mississippi with a child welfare workforce that is dedicated to protecting children and nurturing families.
- In 2016, Child Welfare hired 478 new frontline staff: 52 area social work supervisors, 344 family protection specialists, and 78 family protection workers. A Direct Service Salary Realignment program was enacted to bring frontline and supervisory workers' salaries to a more competitive level to increase staff retention and to attract qualified new employees.
- Children who come into state custody are placed in licensed foster care—either with a relative through emergency placement, or with a licensed foster family, therapeutic foster home, group home, or at a residential treatment facility. A child's placement is determined by what level of care best meets each child's individual needs. As of December 19, 2016, there were 5,869 children in MDCPS custody receiving foster care services.
- The Licensure Unit erased a backlog of 478 emergency (relative) placement homes awaiting licensure as foster homes between August and December of 2016.
- The MDCPS Adoption Unit Serves children enrolled with Mississippi Medicaid who are adopted in Mississippi, as well as in other states. During 2016, the agency finalized 330 adoptions of children from foster care.

What Can **YOU** Do to Help?

Be a part of the Safety Net!
Everyone has something to contribute.

Volunteer. Contact your county MDCPS Office for opportunities to help local children and/or families.

Offer to assist a struggling family in your community. Help by picking up the children from school or fixing something around their house.

Sponsor a child for Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, or a ball team.

Be an adult that a child can count on and can trust.

Listen. If a child (or a stressed-out parent) needs to talk with someone, offer a sympathetic ear.

Meet concrete needs. Perhaps, provide a baby bed, car seat, or infant clothing.

Provide a helping hand. For example, offer to drive a parent who needs a ride to take their child to a doctor's appointment.

Become licensed as a foster parent or offer to be a respite care option for foster parents.



To report child abuse and neglect:
(800) 222-8000 | mdcps.ms.gov

SPOTLIGHT ON CQI

CFSR Preparation

The Evaluation and Monitoring Unit recently committed to logging on to the CFSR Portal and conducting a mock case review on that site in preparation for next year's Child and Families Services Review, or CFSR. The site provided the team with a case history, mock interviews, documentation like you would find in an actual case file, and other supporting documentation. Additionally, the team was able to conduct the review using the CFSR On-Site Review Instrument, or OSRI, as this will be what is required of us when the actual review takes place next year. Foster Care Review Director, Alice Adair, is also reviewing the site and getting her staff ready for the CFSR. While 2018 may seem far off, we in CQI realize it is right on top of us, and are working, right now, to get ready for this very important review. Hat's off to EMU and FCR for getting ahead of the curve, and for providing valuable feedback on the process, so that we can best prepare for what is to come as we lead our agency forward.

Foster Care Review Support in Rankin County

ASWS Morgan Boyles has provided Foster Care Review Supervision some positive feedback on recently having Beverly Strong as a reviewer in their county. She expressed that Beverly is a positive mentor for their new workers, taking the time to explain policy and why things need to be in the file and in MACWIS, taking the time to explain noted issues, and if there will be a Heat Ticket to follow.

Additionally, ASWS Cynthia Moore gave some positive feedback regarding Beverly Strong's performance as their reviewer in Rankin County. Cynthia expressed appreciation that Beverly goes over what needs to be completed and asks questions that lead the agency workers and supervisors to think about how to achieve permanency and meet the needs for the children.

Thank you, Beverly, for your contributions to CQI and to MDCPS, overall.

CQI: Behind the Scenes

The Office of Continuous Quality Improvement would not be able to do all that we do, as effectively as we are able to do it, without excellent support staff in place. In CQI, that supportive work is provided to us all by John Porter and Paula Griffin. Both John and Paula complete a wide array of tasks for CQI, often without any recognition or acknowledgment, but we know that without them, life would be so much harder for us all. Whether it involves John compiling Foster Care Review Schedules, e-mailing Regional Staff about needs or concerns, or simply ensuring that all staff are safe and accounted for during bad weather, John does all that is asked of him with a smile on his face and a servant's heart.

Likewise, Paula helps the CQI Unit in a number of ways. Whether it is completing time card entries into SPAHRS for all of CQI, going and scouting onsite review locations, submitting hotel room requests for traveling staff, helping to coordinate and plan reviews, or pulling up data reports, she too, does whatever it takes to keep us moving along. Like John, Paula is happy to help anyone, in any way that she can. We in CQI are very fortunate to have these folks working behind the scenes, and we truly, truly appreciate all of their efforts.

Rescue 100 Event to be Held Next Month

The Mississippi Department of Child Protection Services has again partnered with Mississippi Supreme Court Justice Dawn Beam, Mississippi Children's Home Services, Southern Christian Services for Children and Youth, the Mississippi Community Education Center, and 200 Million Flowers to host another foster parent training weekend, this time, in North Mississippi **February 24-26, 2017.**

Potential foster parents are required to first attend any one of the one-hour Orientation Classes listed below and can attend ANY class, no matter their county of residence.

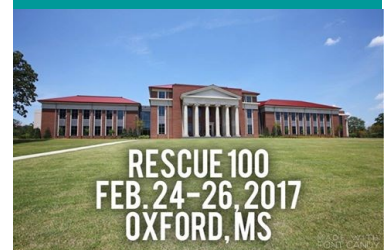
Monday, February 6
Lafayette County Chancery Building, Oxford

Tuesday, February 7
DeSoto County Courthouse, Hernando

Monday, February 13
Lowndes County Courthouse
Columbus

Tuesday, February 14
Lee County Justice Center,
Tupelo

Visit [200 Million Flowers](#) online for additional details about Rescue 100 and to register for the North Mississippi Event!



Prevention Corner

Concrete Support in Times of Need



As we embark on a new year and make resolutions, we resolve to help those less fortunate than ourselves. In order to strengthen families, we need to make this a year-long goal, helping others when they need it.

Meeting basic economic needs like food, shelter, clothing, and health care is essential for families to thrive. Likewise, when families encounter a crisis such as domestic violence, mental illness, or substance abuse, adequate services and support need to be in place to provide stability, treatment, and help for family members to get through the crisis. Everyone needs help sometimes, and families that can get help when they need it are able to stay strong and healthy. It is important for families to know that it is a sign of strength to ask for help when you need it. Whether the need is caused by a sudden crisis—like a death in the family or loss of employment—or an ongoing issue, such as substance abuse or depression, being able to ask for and receive help is important in keeping our families strong.

Sometimes the first step in getting help is seeing that our children’s well-being depends on it. Often it takes a caring person in the community to help connect people to what they need, whether it is job training, transportation, food assistance, or mental health services. Parents and staff of family-serving programs must band together to help families going through difficult times and provide all types of concrete support, including food and clothing. The core meaning of “Concrete Support in Times of Need” is:

- Being resourceful
- Seeking help when needed
- Being able to identify, find, and receive the basic necessities everyone deserves in order to grow (e.g., healthy food, a safe environment), as well as specialized medical, mental health, social, educational, or legal services
- Gaining knowledge of relevant services
- Understanding one’s rights in accessing eligible services
- Navigating through service systems
- Having financial security to cover basic needs and unexpected costs

Finding out what basic resources are available in the community and how to access them to address family-specific needs such as childcare, respite, housing, etc. will help families meet those basic needs and allow parents to attend to their role as care-givers.

Families need to know how to find help. Our Prevention Unit and Field Support are two great resources to utilize within the Mississippi Department of Child Protection Services.

Source: Center for the Study of Social Policy

To learn more about the Protective Factors contact the Prevention Unit at prevention@mdcps.ms.gov.