



mdcps

Mississippi Department of Child Protection Services

THE WAY FORWARD

Protecting Children and Nurturing Mississippi Families

November 2016

MDCPS Celebrates National Adoption Month this November

November is National Adoption Month! Last month, there were 5,557 children in foster care in the state of Mississippi. Of those, 468 were available for adoption and 74 did not have adoptive homes identified.

MDCPS partnered with Governor Phil Bryant and adoptive mother, Judge Rhea Sheldon, to film a new Public Service Announcement focusing on adoption. Both radio and television versions will be aired state wide to let Mississippians know: there are kids right here at home that need you! Please consider opening your heart and your home through adoption by calling 1.800.821.9157.

Southern Christian Services for Children and Youth recently collaborated with MDCPS to construct a large portable gallery containing professional photographs of 42 children currently anticipating finding their forever families through adoption. This Heart Gallery display was revealed last month and will travel to events across the state not only to raise awareness about the local children awaiting adoption, but to also put faces to the cause. Every single one of these children deserve a safe and loving home.

MDCPS has also launched an online Heart Gallery, which displays a complete listing of all the

Mississippi children who need adoptive homes, including photographs and profiles. Visit mdcps.ms.gov/mississippi-heart-gallery/ to view these precious children and to learn more about becoming a foster or adoptive parent.

Additionally, there are numerous Adoption Events taking place across the state in November to help raise awareness, while also celebrating the miracle that is ADOPTION! Visit our website for more information.



Pictured above: Caitlynn poses with her own photo in the Heart Gallery and is anticipating finding her forever home.



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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

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Permanency: What does it really mean?



The Mississippi Department of Child Protection Services utilizes the guidance set forth through Permanency Roundtables to clearly define the foundation of permanency. The ultimate goal of our agency is to achieve the “Gold Standard,” by procuring legal permanency for our youth. Legal permanency includes reunification, Durable Legal Custody, and adoption. There are times when legal permanency may not be feasible for various reasons. However, we make it our duty to help our youth obtain it whenever possible. The reality we must believe is that a placement is not equivalent to permanency. Permanency plays a significant role in helping our youth acquire legal permanency, but it does not define it.

When focusing on child welfare, Goldstein et al.(1993) states, “Child Placement, for our purposes, is a term that encompasses all legislative, judicial, and executive decisions concerned with establishing, administering, or rearranging parent-child relationships.” A placement serves the purpose of meeting a child’s need for continuity of healthy development. However, multiple moves adversely contradict this theory. Research and the study of human development has indicated that to evolve into a psychologically healthy human being, a child must have a relationship with at least one adult who is nurturing, protective, and fosters trust and security (Lutz, 2003). This type of relationship promotes the idea of permanency. If we cannot identify the most appropriate placement and resources that support healthy development, we will not attain our goal to achieve permanency for our youth.

According to the Permanency Roundtable follow-up, many of our youth are leaving custody without reaching legal permanency. During Round II of the Permanency Roundtables, 1,004 youth were presented, of which, 39% achieved legal permanency as of September 2016. Although that number seems small, this is a great accomplishment for our youth as well as for the dedicated staff of MDCPS. In addition, 11% of our youth were either emancipated, aged out, ran away or left due to other circumstances. Improvements can be made by increasing the number of youth who achieve legal permanency and decreasing the number who leave without having any permanent connections.

Although we strive to meet the “Gold Standard,” we must acknowledge that sometimes, to our youth, permanency can mean having one person they can depend on. During the last Roundtable session, the discussion turned to the case of a child who had been previously adopted, but then returned to custody. The child’s case worker appeared to be very dedicated and committed to helping the youth attain legal permanency. Be it not surprising, when identifying permanent connections for this child, the case worker identified herself. This fact was both moving, yet heartbreaking all at the same time. Child welfare workers are often the only positive permanent connection that our youth maintain after leaving custody. MDCPS is making strides to move forward in a positive direction, so that our youth won’t have to continue depending on their social workers as a mother or a father figure. Child Protection staff should be the bridge that helps connect youth in custody to the permanent connections that they need. Everyone deserves permanency.



*References: Goldstein et al., *The Best Interests of the Child: The Least Detrimental Alternative* (The Free Press 1996) (hereinafter Goldstein et al., *The Best Interests of the Child*), p. 6.

Lutz, *Achieving Permanence for Children in the Child Welfare System: Pioneering Possibilities Amidst Daunting Challenges*, The National Resource Center for Foster Care and Permanency Planning at Hunter College School of Social Work, A Service for the Children’s Bureau, November 2003, pp. 4, 5, 12.

SPOTLIGHT ON CQI

Social Worker Katina Wilson

Foster Care Review Supervisor Billy Williams recently recognized Social Worker Katina Wilson of Monroe County for her outstanding work in her cases. Billy reports that he recently reviewed Ms. Wilson's work in Monroe County, Aberdeen office. Ms. Wilson was assigned several cases where workers had left the agency, and she had made great efforts to correct all the previous issues noted on the Periodic Administrative Determination. She had either corrected, or addressed, all the issues in each case. She displayed great knowledge of the cases and had engaged case members in case planning. She had great rapport built with the children that she serves and strives to be a positive influence for them. Furthermore, Katina has also been a support to new workers in the office, and recently sat in on the County Conferences, to mentor and support them, all while maintaining on her own cases. Billy, and CQI Administration, would like to praise Ms. Wilson in her efforts and for the service that she provides the children and families that she serves.

Congratulations Region VI

The weekly AFCARS' comprehensive review conference call for Forrest, Lamar, Perry, and Stone Counties' AFCARS tracking reports was completed on October 19, 2016, and all children's custody start dates and custody end dates were entered in MACWIS. Shirley Johnson from the Data Reporting Unit provided the following: Ramona (Lockett), Kim (Rider), Kendon (Ellerman), and Sammie (Bullard) are always on top of the children entering custody as well as working together as a team on the AFCARS' data exception errors cleanup. They set aside time solely to work on the cleanup even if it involves staying late or working the weekends to meet the deadlines. That's dedication! Ramona doesn't just delegate, she jumps in with both feet alongside her team. They do whatever it takes to make a difference. Great job, Region VI; you all are raising the bar!

Data Reporting Unit Director Eric Burden

CQI Director Tom Farley would like to recognize Data Reporting Unit Director Eric Burden for his "can do" attitude and never ending dedication to providing information to whomever needs it in a timely manner. Whether it is for a colleague at MDHS, Justice Dawn Beam, the Children's Bureau, or simply a request for information from a consumer, Eric finds a way to get the information gathered, simplified, and presented to the requesting parties. That is leadership in action! Thank you Eric for all that you do for the agency.

JACKSON STATE UNIVERSITY
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SAVE THE DATE

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15TH ANNUAL MISSISSIPPI CHILD WELFARE INSTITUTE CONFERENCE

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February 8-10, 2017

**Marriott Hotel Downtown
Jackson, Mississippi**

**12.00 Continuing Education Hours
Multiple Workshops
including Ethics, Diversity, and
LMSW Supervision**

**For more information contact
Dr. Theresia Ratliff at
601.979.8899 or email:
theresia.johnson-ratliff@jsums.edu**



**Pictured above: Dr. David Chandler
speaking at the 2016 Mississippi
Child Welfare Conference.**

Prevention Corner

SOCIAL CONNECTIONS: Protective & Parental Factors



As we approach the holiday season, it is fitting that we address the Protective Factor of *Social Connections*.

Parents with a social network of emotionally supportive friends, family, and neighbors often find that it is easier to care for their children and themselves. Research has shown that parents who are isolated, with few social connections, are at higher risk for child abuse and neglect.

People need people.

Parents need people who care about them and their children, who can be good listeners, who they can turn to for well-informed advice, and who they can call on for help in solving problems. Thus, the availability and quality of social connections are important considerations in the lives of parents. Parents' constructive and supportive social connections and their relationships with family members, friends, neighbors, co-workers, community members, and service providers are valuable resources that provide:

- Emotional support (e.g., affirming parenting skills or being empathic and nonjudgmental)
- Informational support (e.g., providing parenting guidance or recommending a pediatric dentist)
- Instrumental support (e.g., providing transportation, financial assistance, or links to jobs)
- Spiritual support (e.g., providing hope and encouragement)

Conversely, inadequate, conflicting, or dissatisfying social connections can be the source of parental stress, rather than a buffer. For example, maternal and paternal grandparents may be very willing sources of informational and instrumental support to new parents, but their advice and manner of caregiving may be at odds with the new parents' beliefs and preferences.

At the extreme end of the continuum of poor social connections are social isolation, the lack of available and quality relationships, and feelings of disconnectedness from others. Social isolation is a risk factor consistently associated with disengaged parenting, maternal depression, and increased likelihood of child maltreatment, specifically neglect. Similarly, feelings of disconnection may be a major stressor that inhibits parents' ability to provide consistent, nurturing, responsive care to their children. Constructive and supportive social connections help buffer parents from stressors and support nurturing parenting behaviors that promote secure attachments in young children. Therefore, parents' high quality social connections are beneficial to both the adults and children.

Remember to nurture social connections in the families with which you work, including being a part of their supportive and encouraging social connections.

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