

THE WAY FORWARD

DIVISION OF FAMILY AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES

April 2016

NURTURING AND PRESERVING MISSISSIPPI'S FAMILIES

LEADING THE WAY

DFCS recognizes April as Child Abuse Prevention Awareness month.

FORWARD THINKING

DFCS embarks upon innovative ways to license homes that care for children in custody.

VISIONARY MOVEMENT

Judges, the courts, churches and DFCS partner to Rescue 100.

APRIL IS CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION MONTH!

The Blue Ribbon movement began in the spring of 1989 when a concerned grandmother, Bonnie Finney of Norfolk, VA, took a stand against child abuse after experiencing the death of her grandson, Michael Dickenson. The three year old died at the hands of her daughter's abusive boyfriend. Bonnie tied a symbolic blue ribbon to her van as a signal to her community of her personal commitment to involve everyone in the battle to stop child abuse and to encourage her community to do the same.



THE WAY FORWARD:

MISSISSIPPI'S DFCS NEWSLETTER

Welcome to DFCS's monthly newsletter: THE WAY FORWARD. THE WAY FORWARD orients you to who DFCS is, what we do, and how we are moving Mississippi forward in child welfare.

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Mississippi Child Welfare Quick Facts

- DFCS has 5,055 children in custody state wide (03/31/16).
- The average stay in foster care is 19 months.
- There are 1107 children and 502 families in prevention cases. This means they are at risk for child abuse but are not in state custody.
- There are 1804 children and 3884 families in protection cases.
- The state has 1585 licensed resource homes, as of 3/31/16.
 - 724 are Relative homes
 - 864 are Non-Relative homes

Studies show that the shorter the time a child is in custody, the better the chances are for successful family reunification.



Leading the Way: Prevention is Protection

From the Delta to the Gulf coast, public and private agencies are preparing to conduct events that highlight child abuse prevention. Prevention is more than just awareness that child abuse exists, but supporting protective factors that strengthen our families.

The Blue Ribbon has been widely recognized as a national symbol of child abuse prevention. It is used as a positive reminder for all of us to do our best when it comes to strengthening the lives of children and families.

Over the next few months, the DFCS Prevention Unit will be highlighting the six protective factors: *Nurturing and Attachment, Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development, Parental Resilience, Social Connections, Concrete Support for Parents, and Social and Emotional Competence of Children.* For more information regarding the protective factors, you can check out the FRIENDS Network at www.friendsnrc.org. Contact us at prevention.dfcs@mdhs.ms.gov.

Together we can raise awareness of Child Abuse Prevention and support children and families in living more productive and positive lives.



Dr. Chandler talks with MPB about Rescue 100.

Leading the Way: Innovation in Licensing Resource Homes

Tremendous power exists in communities to address the problem of child abuse and neglect. There are many ways to achieve this. Rescue 100 is an initiative between a Gulfport church, the courts, and the Division of Family and Children's Services to ensure that we protect children and that they grow up to achieve their full potential, free from abuse and neglect. This pilot project reflects the DFCS goal of providing a community focused forum on intersections of research, policy, and practice related issues while also promoting child and family well-being through licensing resource homes in Mississippi.

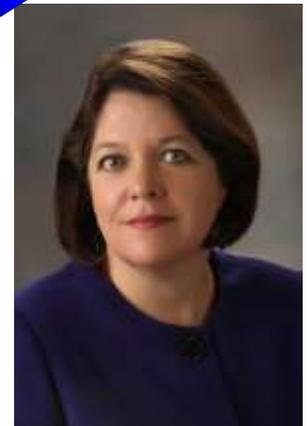
Eighty-eight people who have signed up to be foster parents in Harrison County will spend three days of intensive training on April 15th, 16th, and 17th in a program put together by Michael Memorial Baptist Church, the Division of Family and Children's services, Harrison County Court Judge Margaret Alfonso, and Supreme Court Justice Dawn Beam.

"What we are trying to do is partner with the faith-based community," said Justice Beam. "The whole community is stepping up to take care of our kids."

"At this point in time, it's important that the court lead the way in encouraging DFCS, the courts, and the community at large to come together to affect positive change in child protective services," Justice Beam said.

About 50 new foster homes may be licensed as a result of the upcoming training. Executive Director David Chandler said that licensing 50 more foster homes will make a huge difference. "That will go a long way toward curing the problem there on the Coast."

The Rescue 100 Project started last year after Michael Memorial Pastor Rev. Tony Karnes asked to meet with Judge Alfonso to find out what the local needs were. Karnes said he came away astonished at the scope of the problem and committed to help fix it.



Judge Alfonso and Justice Beam

Rescue 100 (continued)

“She began telling me story after story about the situation and the desperate need for (foster) homes. I had absolutely no idea that conditions were so dire,” Karnes said. “How can we not know this is going on right under our noses? I was completely astonished....I knew from that point on that I had to do everything in my power to get involved.”

As of April 1, 2016, there were 727 Harrison County children in Department of Human Services, DFCS custody. About 50 families signed up for training, said Gulfport attorney Michael Dickinson, a member of Michael Memorial Baptist Church.

Chandler said he was excited when he learned that 50 families had volunteered. “All they needed were the certification credentials to help children. I got so excited. I thought it was something that we could do in a couple of weeks. I was the new man on the block. I didn’t know how involved it was,” Chandler said. Foster parent training was going to take months.

Those who missed a session had to wait five or six more weeks for the next time training on that topic was offered, Dickinson said. Church members involved in Rescue 100 wanted a way to expedite. About a month ago, Dickinson turned to family connections. His father is Supreme Court Justice Jess Dickinson.

They and others met with Chandler, who previously served on the Supreme Court. Recently appointed Supreme Court Justice Dawn Beam asked to help. Chandler asked Justice Beam to take charge of moving the effort forward.

Judge Alfonso said the back-to-back classes over the course of three days are unprecedented. Chandler said, “We are not creating a shortcut to the requirements of becoming a foster family. We are looking for and finding ways to better serve the prospective foster parents, and the children in our care.” Earlier estimates from a private vendor put the cost of the training at about \$250,000. “These folks are getting it done for peanuts compared for what it was going to cost.”

“Volunteers including nurses, Youth Court staff, Harrison County CASA workers and others have stepped in to help with the training,” Judge Alfonso said. Justice Beam is cooking to feed participants. Karnes said, “We realized that they have an incredible struggle that they face every day. They face extraordinary challenges. We just want to come alongside and help in the only way we can.”

Chandler said that he is interested in replicating what Rescue 100 is doing. “There is no way to do it without community involvement and without the churches’ involvement.” *Statewide, about 5,000 children are in DHS custody. The state needs about 3,000 certified foster families willing to take in children.*

SAFETY AND WELL-BEING: OUR TOP PRIORITY

Promoting safe and stable families is the top priority of the Division Family and Children’s Services

PROGRESS IN THE *Olivia Y.* REMEDIAL COURT ORDER

- Negotiations are slated to occur this month
- “In but not of” Agency Structure
 - Divisions are being reorganized
 - Staff are receiving additional training
 - Memoranda for continued partnerships are drafted
- A better resourced field operations
 - Pilots implemented for licensed resource homes
 - Workload audit is completed
 - Workforce plan submitted
- Technology (see back page)
 - Tablets and smart phones are procured
 - Positions are posted for additional technology support
- Legislative Agenda
 - The budget should be announced by April 20th!



Pleadings, reports, and the Public Catalyst assessment are available to the public at:
<http://www.mdhs.state.ms.us/olivia-y-lawsuit/>.

DFCS Information Technology Update!

Olivia Y. Remedial Order Progress

THE TABLETS ARE COMING!

The DFCS Information Technology (IT) Department has exciting news to share! The Dell tablet rollout period has arrived! We will be issuing a Dell 2 in 1 tablet to our frontline workers. Our frontline workers include our Division of Family and Children's Services caseworkers, and supervisors. Our 2 in 1 tablet provides the option to communicate better and work more efficiently on the go. The Dell 2 in 1 tablet offers easy access to a laptop option with a keyboard, as well as a detachable touchscreen option. The tablet will help our frontline workers complete tasks more efficiently, and electronically. In return our Mississippi Families and Children will benefit. The DFCS IT Team looks forward to traveling to your location over the next few months for the tablet rollout. Make sure to be on the lookout for an email from us letting you know we are coming your way!

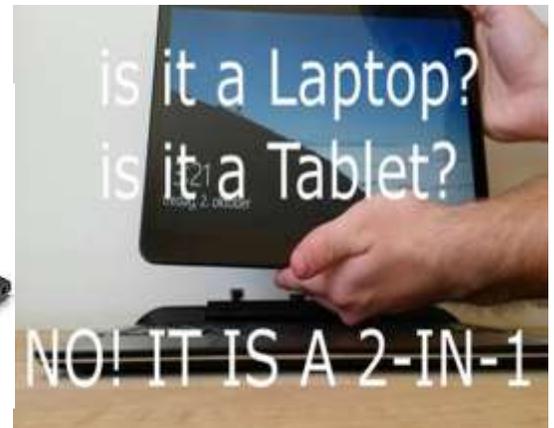
NEW EMAIL SYSTEM

Over the next few months all DFCS staff will change from using Lotus Notes email system to Microsoft Exchange email system. The email migration will be completed by county. You will be notified by email prior to your email box being moved. Instructions and tips for using the new email system will be sent in the email notification.

**Please contact your IT Help Desk for assistance with any computer issues.
1-877-244-2528 or helpdesk.macwis@mdhs.ms.gov**

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Report Child Abuse

Call **1-800-222-8000** to report abuse, neglect, or exploitation of a child in Mississippi or report on-line at www.msabusehotline.mdhs.ms.gov