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Congratulations to Judge Boyd and Judge Walker!

Congratulations to Judge Boyd and Judge Walker on their retirement! Although you will be missed on the bench, your legacies in the juvenile court system will continue to be appreciated and echoed by the child welfare community.

Chief Judge Bradley J. Boyd of the Fulton County Juvenile Court has served 46 years in juvenile law in Fulton County and will be retiring at the end of 2019. Over the course of his career, Judge Boyd has witnessed and played a key role in the evolution and process of juvenile court. Click [here](#) to listen to Judge Boyd reflect on the changes he has seen and made in the juvenile court system.

Chief Judge Peggy H. Walker of the Douglas County Juvenile Court has served on the bench for 30 years and will also be retiring at the end of 2019. For 21 years, Judge Walker served as the county's sole full-time juvenile court judge, helping shape the lives of thousands of children and families.



Thank you for your exceptional service and leadership to Georgia's judiciary and to the child welfare community! We wish you the best in your adventures ahead!

>>>> YOUTH VOICE <<<<

The unedited voices
of young people who have been in foster care

*Poems by R.B. who is currently in foster care
and is 15 years old.*

My Mom

The days go by and you're not there
Years fly by and you will soon be there
With you I am your daughter
Without you I am motherless
Memories that were once there are now fading away
Making room for new ones to appear
Tears that were never there now appear

Bi-Polar

One minute I feel loved
One minute I feel hated
The next minute I feel lost
The next minute I feel found
Is it left or is it right
Is it forwards or is it backwards
In the end it really doesn't matter

From Darkness to Light

Darkness covers my eyes I cannot see
Covered in fear all alone in the wide open sea

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*Happy New
Year to All*

The Office of the Child Advocate will be
closed on January 1, 2020 to observe a
state holiday.



Unsung Heroes

Child welfare professionals don't often receive the recognition they deserve. This month, two DFCS staff have received such well-deserved recognition.

The first one is a DFCS Placement Supervisor, Jeannie Murray, who works in DFCS Region 11, recognized by County Director Catherine Cason:

One of our children in foster care is currently in RYDC. She has been in care for almost 5 years and has not always been the easiest child to deal with. She has family but they choose not to visit or speak with her. Yesterday the case worker went on her monthly visit to see this child. During the visit, she mentioned how she doesn't have anyone to come visit her during visitation and it makes her sad. The case manager shared this with her supervisor Jeannie Murray. Mrs. Murray decided that she would surprise the child and visit her that evening. Visitation starts at 7:00 pm. Mrs. Murray stayed at the office until 7:00 and then went and surprised her. Mrs. Murray could have gone home to her family but she chose to honor this child's wish.

That is the reason why we have

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Flipping the Script on Foster Care

Miss Georgia, Victoria Hill, is focused on "flipping the script on foster care". She has dedicated a lot of time and energy this year to learning more about the system and its needs.

While lending her support to many foster care organizations throughout Georgia, she has advocated for more people to fill these needs, such as through becoming a foster parent, a CASA, or a mentor.

Victoria recently competed for Miss America 2020 and placed first runner up! In doing so, she was able to further use her platform to bring more awareness to foster care and help people understand how they can help children in need.

Miss Virginia, Camille Schrier, the newly crowned Miss America, is using her platform to focus on substance use. Victoria recognizes the intersection of substance use and foster care and shared a kind message on social media with the new Miss America: "I CANNOT wait to watch your amazing year as you influence and educate young people in the world of science, and as you advocate for



Miss Virginia and Miss Georgia waiting to learn who will be crowned Miss America

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Upcoming Events:

- ✓ **Free Online Course Available Now:** Build My Brain is a cross-disciplinary online course focused on the science and importance of early childhood development. More info [here](#).
- ✓ **January 9 and 30:** Caregiver Training via webinar at 12pm-1pm. Contact Catrina Johnson with Bethany Christian Services at cjohnson@bethany.org.
- ✓ **January 18:** Caregiver Training via webinar at Hilton Garden Inn in McDonough. Contact Catrina Johnson with Bethany Christian Services at cjohnson@bethany.org.
- ✓ **January 24:** Fifth Annual Human Trafficking Forum at Agnes Scott College in Decatur. Approved for 5 POST credits for law enforcement attendees. More info [here](#).
- ✓ **January 28:** 2020 Addiction Awareness Recovery Day with the Georgia Recovery Community at the Capitol. More info [here](#).
- ✓ **February 27—March 1:** Adoptive and Foster Parent Association of Georgia (AFPAG) Annual Education Conference. More info [here](#).



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Reflections from #TheSummit2019

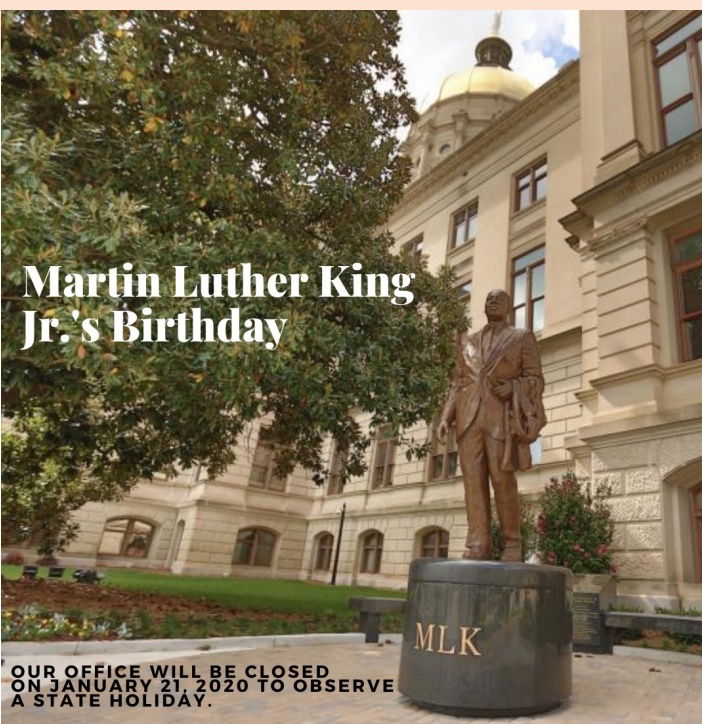
During and after #TheSummit2019, attendees had the opportunity to share their experience and thoughts of The Summit. These are just a few of the thoughts but they are representative of many other comments:

- ⇒ "Great conference. It wasn't just multidisciplinary in attendance. The topics and the environment helped the attendees to interact in meaningful ways."
- ⇒ "Overall, the conference exceeded my expectations and was time well spent."
- ⇒ "I am in a leadership position. There were many helpful workshops that helped me see the need for creating an environment to decrease secondary traumatic stress."
- ⇒ "I really enjoyed all of the speakers. More topics on maladaptive behavior, what the behavior is actually saying."

Thank you to all the presenters and everyone else who helped make this year's Summit a success! Stay tuned for details for #TheSummit2020!

Nominations are Open for the Chief Justice P. Harris Hines 2020 Award

Nominations are open for the 2020 Chief Justice P. Harris Hines Award for Outstanding Advocacy for Children in Dependency Proceedings! These awards are to recognize individual performance and achievement. Two of these awards will be given, one to a Georgia lawyer and one to a Division of Family and Children Services case manager, for outstanding work on behalf of children in dependency proceedings. The award is named in honor of the late Georgia Supreme Court Chief Justice P. Harris Hines and is sponsored by the Supreme Court's Committee on Justice for Children and the Georgia Office of the Child Advocate. The award recipients will be recognized at the State Bar of Georgia's Annual Meeting in June 2020. A nomination packet must be submitted by February 28, 2020. Click [here](#) to nominate an attorney and [here](#) to nominate a case manager. Please contact Peter Faile at peter.faile@georgiacourts.gov for any questions.



**Martin Luther King
Jr.'s Birthday**

OUR OFFICE WILL BE CLOSED
ON JANUARY 21, 2020 TO OBSERVE
A STATE HOLIDAY.

VOICE CONT'D...

Darkness covers my eyes I cannot see
Running into walls with no guidance around me
Kneel to my knees ask God for forgiveness
I can see again no more darkness for me

A Shattered Heart

My heart is broken in pieces but I still love
Fragile is my heart that still loves
A vase that is still useful
A cup that can still be poured into
All it needs is a little glue
My heart is broken but I still love
Smashed, burned, chipped, cracked, it never ends
Nothing can fix a broken heart
It screams and runs when it falls in love
Fear is all it does, brokenness is all it feels
Wondering where to go and what to do it decides to jump into a
rabbit hole.



HEROES CONT'D...

people like Mrs. Murray that work for our agency. They care about our kids and it shows. Mrs. Murray is not about getting kudos for anything she does which is why I wanted to let you know what she did. I am very proud of my staff and the extra efforts they go to for our children. Mrs. Murray is one of the many unsung heroes with our agency. I'm so thankful for people like Mrs. Murray. Maybe this will lift your spirits as it did mine.

Thank you Mrs. Murray for being a hero to this child! And thank you Ms. Cason for highlighting Mrs. Murray's efforts!

.....

The second person to receive public recognition for her hard work is Case Manager Asia Chatman, who works in Clayton County. Juvenile Court Judge Steven Teske was impressed by Ms. Chatman's presentation in court during a termination of parental rights hearing. While she was very knowledgeable, articulate, and professional, Judge Teske was most impressed by her heart. Says Judge Teske:

There was a moment when she was asked to describe how the parents' neglect has affected the children that she had to pause in mid-sentence to try and gain her composure because what she had to describe was indeed heart-breaking. This is not an indication of unprofessionalism, but quite to the contrary in this business of child welfare. Her moment of heart-brokenness reflects the very type of social workers we need among the ranks because it demonstrates how much she truly cares for the children in her care.

Thank you Ms. Chatman for your heart and dedication to this work! And thank you Judge Teske for recognizing Ms. Chatman's efforts!



Judge Teske with Case Manager
Asia Chatman

Helping Teens Prepare for Adulthood

During the Teens are 4 Me Conference this month, teenagers in foster care were provided with multiple opportunities designed to help them with their transition to adulthood. Among these opportunities was a reality fair.



For this Reality Fair, the DFCS Independent Living Program teamed up with Creative Community Services. The youth were assigned a job and income and were required to work their way through various stations while managing their budget and meeting their needs.

This exercise illustrated the need to balance all the responsibilities of adulthood—from housing

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Holiday Happenings

Hall is Home for the Holidays!

The Hall County community hosted a holiday celebration at the Gainesville Civic Center for children in foster care and their caregivers. Activities included:

- ◆ Facepainting and a dance party with the Brenau University Cheerleaders
- ◆ Visits with Santa and Mrs. Claus
- ◆ Crafts, coloring, and science experiments
- ◆ A science demonstration
- ◆ An ugly sweater contest
- ◆ Giveaways, including a birthday party package from [Super Science Kids](#), a nonprofit founded by a teenager with the aim to bring the joy of science to at risk children

The event had an amazing turnout with so much community support. Thank you to Hall County for helping bring some Christmas magic to children in foster care and their caregivers while showing them the community loves and supports them! Read more about it [here](#).



Santa and one of his elves ready to spread Christmas cheer!



Dance party with Brenau cheerleaders

Another Successful Year for Clark's Christmas Kids!

This year, an abundance of love and kindness throughout the state provided toys and gifts to about 10,000 children in foster care. For the 29th year, children in foster care were able to submit their wish lists for Christmas. With great kindness and generosity, countless individuals, state agencies, and other organizations granted these wishes. Thank you to Clark's Christmas Kids, 95.5 WSB, St. Vincent de Paul Georgia, the Georgia Division of Family and Children Services, and everyone who participated for sharing in the holiday spirit and helping make the holidays special for children in foster care! Below are some of the many photos shared on social media:





A Holiday “Thank You” from DFCS Director Tom Rawlings

Dear friends and colleagues,

We’ve reached the end of another year in which each of you has done his or her best to serve Georgia’s children and families through your work with DFCS. At times many of you have likely felt frustrated: by problems with technology, or a heavy caseload, or a supervisor who doesn’t understand what you need, or slow bureaucratic processes, or sometimes just the feeling that you are spinning your wheels and not making progress.

Fortunately, just as our daylight shortens and our nights become long, we are presented with an opportunity to remember that your work does matter, and that you are making a difference for families all across Georgia. Whether you call that opportunity Christmas, or Hanukkah, or the Holidays, this is a time to be reminded of your value to Georgia’s most vulnerable children and families. As I have said before, it is in you that the people of Georgia have put their confidence, knowing that you will do your best to help families struggling to put food on the table; to move folks into productive lives; to protect children from abuse and neglect; and to build community partnerships that help serve as local sources of help across the state.

Don’t see the results, you say? Well, think of the fact that this calendar year, you helped distribute about \$2 billion worth of nutritional food to economically struggling families and helped over 1.5 million Georgians receive medical assistance benefits. You came to the aid of thousands of families whose circumstances were putting their children in danger of suffering serious harm and abuse. Working with our State of Hope program, you added dozens more community-based organizations to our “coalition of the willing” whose desire is to help vulnerable families in their own communities. There are families out there who wouldn’t be together this holiday season without your help. And you did this work quietly, without the sort of praise often lavished on other community heroes.

At this time of year, when the nights are long and cold, two of our major religions celebrate miracles reminding us that better days are coming. In the Jewish faith, this is a time of remembering that God provides and overcomes evil, as He did when He led the Maccabees to redeem the desecrated Temple in Jerusalem and made the little bit of consecrated oil keep the temple lights burning for eight straight days. Christians also celebrate the lighting of a “candle” in the form of Jesus Christ, the “light of the world.”

In my own church, at this time of year we often refer back to the prophet Isaiah, who in the midst of foreign invasions and times of trouble promised that “the people who walk in darkness will see a great light.” From my point of view, all of you who work for DFCS are that light. You bring safety to children. You fill the hungry with good things. You help families gain the confidence that comes with financial independence. And people respond to the work you do: think of the thousands and thousands of Georgians who lined up to purchase Christmas gifts for our children and youth in foster care through Clark’s Christmas Kids. Your hard work inspired their generosity.

So whatever your traditions this holiday season, I hope you will take time to remember that, thanks to you, better times are coming for struggling families, children, and youth in our state. We may sometime feel we’re working with insufficient fuel or surrounded by donkeys and sheep, but we will succeed. When you get down, it’s our job as leaders to help you get through the obstacles, so let me know how I can help. Enjoy the holiday, and then let’s spend the next year together spreading light and joy to those we serve.

Thank you so much for all you do,

Tom



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Troup County Jail Supports Visitation Between Children in Foster Care and Incarcerated Parents



This month, the MDCANI faculty had the opportunity to make a special visit to the Troup County Jail. Juvenile Court Judge Michael Key worked with Sheriff Woodruff to develop a plan for children in foster care to visit with their parents when they are incarcerated in the local jail.

Using a trauma-informed lens, Sheriff Woodruff and his team selected a spot within the jail to house such visits in an attempt to make it as comfortable as possible for the children while also ensuring safety measures continue to be followed. All the furniture, décor, and other items were donated by the community. These children now have a comfortable space to visit with their parents.

As a result, DFCS has noticed that children's behaviors have improved and the jail has noticed that parent's behaviors have also improved.



Part of the MDCANI team outside the Troup County Jail

While this initiative is still in its infancy, it is already showing great promise. Sheriff Woodruff has expressed a willingness to speak with other sheriffs interested in developing a similar visitation space and to share with them measures they implemented to ensure safety is not compromised.

SCRIPT, CONT'D...

people struggling with drug abuse. Honestly, most children are placed into foster care because of issues of substance abuse in the home, so I am extremely thankful that you're addressing this huge issue! I am here to support you in every way dear sister. Please let me know if I can serve you in any way as you serve others! You Go Girl! Long Live Science!!!! [#mindyourmeds](#)"

We are grateful for these young women who dedicate their time to making the world a better place! Thank you for your hard work!



Miss Georgia spending time at the DFCS State Office.

Left: DFCS Director Tom Rawlings and Victoria Hill.

Right: LaMarva Ivory, Victoria Hill, and Dahlia Bell Brown



REALITY, CONT'D...

and childcare to transportation and giving. If their income allowed, there were also entertainment opportunities!

The experience was definitely educational for all and also eye-opening for some of the participants!



Volunteers ready to help make sure youth check out with a balanced budget!



Left: Housing options available to choose from

Right: Georgia ILP Director Candis Jones with Master of Ceremonies and foster care alum J.R. Henderson





**Office of the
Child Advocate**
For Georgia's Children

AdvOCAcy
Your child welfare update

December 2019

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HAPPY
2020
NEW YEAR

As we close out the year and move into the next, we congratulate and thank you all for the great work and efforts made in continuing to advocate for and protect our youth in foster care! We reflect on the successes of 2019 and look forward to even more in 2020. Cheers to you all!

- Georgia Office of the Child Advocate

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- Internet: <https://oca.georgia.gov/webform/request-oca-assistance-or-investigation>

To submit a photo/article for the newsletter, contact Deputy Director Jansen Head at jhead@oca.ga.gov.

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