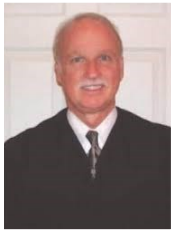




## Former President of the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges Reflects on Importance of Children's Voices



*By Judge R. Michael Key,  
Troup Co. Juvenile Court  
Troup Co. Adult Felony Drug Court*

What a haunting experience to be challenged by your own words from a decade ago, to be reminded of practice-changing lessons once learned, and to be called upon to examine if and how you are applying those lessons today. One of the special opportunities I had while President of the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges from 2010-2011 was to write the President's Message in each of four quarterly editions of the *Today Magazine*. It was in the Winter edition, 2011, that I recounted conversations with two brothers, ages 12 and 14, that are as fresh in my mind today as they were when first spoken. I am honored that Rachel Davidson has chosen to republish the article in the Office of the Child Advocate newsletter as a reminder to all of us of the importance of listening to, and learning from, what the children have to say, particularly about their own lives. As I read the article again recently, I wondered if and how things might have been different for Jason and Alan had I heard those words earlier in the case. I wondered if we could have done more to avoid removal, or to achieve reunification with their mother before moving to termination of parental rights. And I thought about the PRE Team staffings and I wondered how much of the children's voice we consider, or even hear, in those staffings, or how much balancing we do of the harm resulting from staying in the home with services versus the harm resulting from removal from the home. Identifying imminent risk of harm does not end the inquiry, but merely gives us the legal basis to continue the inquiry, to find a way to mitigate the risk of harm to an acceptable level *See REFLECT, Page 8*

### NEW FEDERAL LEGISLATION

#### Spotlighting Recently Passed Federal Legislation Relevant to Child Welfare

**The Covid-19 Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2021** recently became law. Provisions relevant to child welfare include:

- Increases age limit of Chafee services in FY20 and FY21 to age 26
- Suspends education and training requirement during duration of the public health emergency
- Permits states to use more than 30% of Chafee funds for housing
- Prohibits aging out of foster care during the pandemic
- Permits the re-entry of youth in foster care that age out during the pandemic
- Permits the Court Improvement Program to use funding for purposes related to the public health emergency
- Waives FFPSA state match requirement during the public health state of emergency (for expenditures on eligible evidence-based programs)

There are many other provisions related to human services. Learn more [here](#).

### YOUTH VOICE

#### Highlighting YouthSpark Conversation on Racial Justice and Mental Health

*YouthSpark and VOX ATL partnered to bring the mic to a group of their youth to have a roundtable discussion about police brutality, racism, and how staying at home during a pandemic can impact a young person's mental health. Here are a few things they had to say:*

"It doesn't matter of the skin color. Everyone in this world is a human being and we should be treated equally as everyone else. It makes me think about it a lot because there's no point of judging us or shooting us because of our skin color."

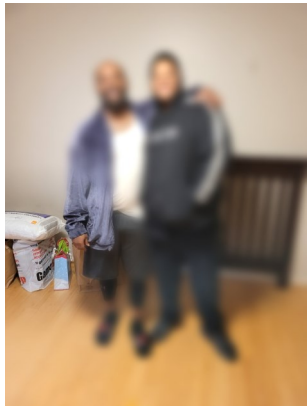
*See VOICE, Page 9*



## Home for the Holidays

Georgia's Cold Case Project (CCP) has been working on a case where a 17 year old youth has been in foster care for more than nine years. Since this case started with CCP in 2016, the goal has been to reunite the youth with his father—an expressed wish by the youth throughout the case and his 30 placements over his time in foster care. Earlier this year, the youth's siblings were adopted by a relative out of state, but this particular youth has been holding out for reuniting with his father.

Many hurdles had already been overcome and the end goal was in sight this month. DFCS had already provided assistance towards this goal, but staff reached out to the Cold Case Project for help with



*Father and son reunited! Behind the blur, these two have huge smiles on their faces!*

crossing the last hurdle: getting furniture for the youth's bedroom in his father's apartment.

Within a few short minutes of asking, CCP's lead Ashley Willcott received a commitment for the requested need plus some! On Christmas Eve, this family received the needed furniture, as well as bedding, clothes, and other Christmas gifts!

Thank you to the community of people who provided the support this family needed!

## Welcome to OCA's Newest Advisory Board Members!

Lieutenant Governor Geoff Duncan appointed two new members to the Office of the Child Advocate's Advisory Committee.

**Dr. Carla Santiago-Barbosa** is the clinical coordinator for Ser Familia whose mission is to equip Latino families with the tools, resources, and skills necessary to move from crisis to thriving and which provides education and counseling services.

**Nikki Raymond** is the CEO of Georgia Hope which is a community-based provider of family preservation, mental health, and substance use services.

"I am proud to announce the appointment of two incredible Georgians who will faithfully serve on the advisory committee and diligently provide oversight to ensure that victims of child abuse or neglect are not lost in our system and are also afforded meaningful protection and support," as announced by Lt. Gov. Duncan.

OCA Director Rachel Davidson, the OCA staff, and the additional advisory committee members are pleased to welcome our newest members to the team!

## Helping Others in Need

Are you or your faith community looking for a way to support local families in need? DFCS staff share the needs of local families via CarePortal, which allows individuals and churches to respond in real-time to local requests.

A recent request through CarePortal aimed at helping prevent two young children from entering care was met by LaMarva Ivory's church. Ms. Ivory is DFCS' Deputy Director of Strategy, Innovation & Engagement and appreciated her experience as her church's point of contact with the case manager, Ms. Haven Bell, who had submitted the request. The two connected, resulting in the church meeting this family's need and the family and case manager being extremely appreciative.

Visit <https://www.careportal.org/> to learn more about how you and your faith community can make a difference!

## Communication in Action

Thank you to DFCS state office section directors Carmen Callaway (Well-Being), Tammy Reed (Permanency), LaResa Price (Safety), and Laurence Nelson (Training & Professional Development) for joining recent OCA staff meetings to ensure OCA staff remain informed of current processes and contacts and to hear from OCA about trends and issues encountered in our work. This type of communication and collaboration helps us ensure we are best serving Georgia's children and families.



*Laurence Nelson speaking with OCA staff*



## Mediation

**Mediation, a meeting between parties** facilitated by a trained neutral mediator to discuss and resolve issues, is an option available in dependency, delinquency, and CHINS proceedings pursuant to O.C.G.A. § 15-11-20. During a recent meeting, mediator and attorney Lynn Goldman, discussed mediation as part of dependency proceedings underscoring the concept that mediation can help support and build families.

The average length of a mediation session is 3 hours with 75% of cases settling with a “full” agreement, 17% settling with a “partial” agreement, and 8% reaching an impasse. Various studies in multiple jurisdictions have shown a significant cost savings in foster care, case processing, and court costs when mediation is utilized.

Juvenile court mediation programs are currently established in the 9th judicial district, and Chatham, Clayton, Cobb, DeKalb, Fulton, and Gwinnett counties. Funding may be available to establish a mediation program in your jurisdiction. If you’re interested in training or otherwise learning more, contact Georgia’s Office of Dispute Resolution via their website at <https://godr.org/>.

## COVID-19 Community Resources

**The Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA),** Georgia Emergency Management Assistance (GEMA), Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (DBHDD), and Department of Public Health (DPH) collaborated to provide access to a variety of resources. These resources include links to information and services related to homelessness, special needs housing, and drug overdose prevention, among others. Check it out [here](#).

## Peace, Prosperity, Happiness, Joy, and Love!

**OCA was pleased** to receive a card with holiday wishes from Georgia’s Department of Juvenile Justice. We were even more pleased to learn that DJJ’s holiday cards were designed by youth in a DJJ facility. DJJ Commissioner Tyrone Oliver, shared these with DJJ staff, saying “I want to thank the youth designers from Wilkes and Metro RYDC who spent

time creating these outstanding works of art.”

Thank you, DJJ, for supporting the youth you serve with this opportunity.

And thank you to all those who support youth in need, whether those youth have come to the attention of DJJ, DFCS, or both.

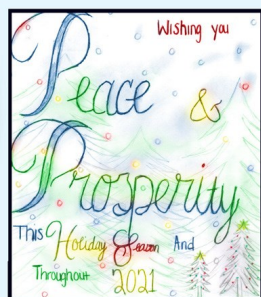
We hope you enjoy their artwork as much as we have!



THIS CARD WAS DESIGNED BY A YOUTH AT WILKES REGIONAL YOUTH DETENTION CENTER



FROM THE STAFF AND YOUTH AT GEORGIA DEPARTMENT OF JUVENILE JUSTICE



THIS CARD WAS DESIGNED BY A YOUTH AT METRO REGIONAL YOUTH DETENTION CENTER





## 30th Successful Year for Clark's Christmas Kids

This year, an abundance of love and kindness throughout the state fulfilled the Christmas wishes of more than 8,000 of Georgia's children in foster care. OCA joined countless state agencies, other organizations, and individuals in donating and purchasing gifts from the children's wish lists. Thank you to Clark Howard, 95.5 WSB, Chris 180, and the Georgia Division of Family and Children Services, and everyone who made this program successful for its 30th year and making the holidays special for children in foster care.

Below are some of the many photos shared on social media!





## Accepting Nominations for the Chief Justice P. Harris Hines 2021 Awards

Nominations are open for the 2021 Chief Justice P. Harris Hines Awards! The Supreme Court of Georgia's Committee on Justice for Children and the Office of the Child Advocate will honor one Georgia attorney with the Child Advocacy Award and one DFCS case manager with the Case Manager of the Year Award, both for dedicated services on behalf of children. The awards are named in honor of the late Chief Justice P. Harris Hines of the Supreme Court of Georgia. Click [here](#) to nominate a Georgia attorney and [here](#) to nominate a DFCS case manager.

Nominations must be submitted by February 28, 2021. The award recipients will be recognized at the State Bar of Georgia's Annual Meeting in June 2021. The award is given based on an individual's personal achievement and commitment. It is not given to groups of people, organizations, or posthumously. Previous nominees not selected may be re-nominated.

Pictured to the right are the 2020 Hines Awardees, DFCS Case Manager Charles Williams and attorney Afiya Hinkson. Click [here](#) and [here](#) to hear them speak about what the Hines Awards meant to them.



## Meet DFCS' Ms. Claus

*(Originally shared by DFCS on social media in 2017)*



"Nearly 10,000 kids in foster care awakened this morning to at least three gifts under their tree, thanks to generous Georgians who gave during our Secret Santa gift drive.

Meet the woman behind the drive: Donna Pettigrew-Jackson. Our very own Ms. Claus, Ms. Donna has worked tirelessly for the last 12 years to put gifts under the tree for thousands of Georgia's children who spent the holiday in foster care. And, as she shares in the video below, the cause is close to her heart.

This year's Secret Santa gift drive was the largest collection of gifts in the program's 27-year history with more than \$1.5 million in purchased gifts and monetary donations.

None of this would have been possible without Ms. Donna, our friend Clark Howard at WSB, and the thousands of Georgians who donated gifts or money to help us reach our goal.

So, today, as we gather with our families to celebrate the holiday, we hope you are surrounded by love and filled with the same joy you brought to children in our care.

We are so grateful of your support for Secret Santa and for all you do to bring hope to our children every day."

Watch the [video](#) to learn more.

**Share your Summit photos on social media and use #Summit2020 to tag us!**





## Reflections from the #Summit2020

During and after Georgia's Child Welfare Conference, attendees had the opportunity to share their experiences and thoughts whether they attended virtually or in person. These are just a few of the thoughts, but they are representative of many others we received.

- ⇒ "Excellent virtual experience. Looking forward to the next one and I loved the conference materials I received in the mail."
- ⇒ "This Summit was the best one yet. I appreciate the diversity of topics. There was something for everyone."
- ⇒ "I've listened to the Evidence presentation at least three times, maybe four. Each time I become better because of it."
- ⇒ "Great conference! I miss in-person conferences and this was as good as it possibly could be, considering our circumstances."
- ⇒ "Very well organized despite Covid-19. Presenters seemed prepared [and] made efforts to engage and communicate with virtual participants."
- ⇒ "The audio and visual for the virtual platform was very clear which enhanced participant engagement."
- ⇒ "Very well executed. I felt safe attending in person."
- ⇒ "Each year it has gotten better and I look forward to the time away with colleagues and friends, co-laborers in this difficult field."
- ⇒ "Repeat what was done this year!!"

Thank you to our attendees, presenters, and co-hosting organizations for their time in planning and participating in the Summit. We appreciate your flexibility, patience, and understanding as we carefully planned a hybrid conference to ensure the safety of our participants. For the Summit 2021, we will continue to monitor and follow the guidelines and mandates from government officials related to the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. Stay tuned! And in the meantime, save the date for November 18-20, 2021!

## Safe Sleep

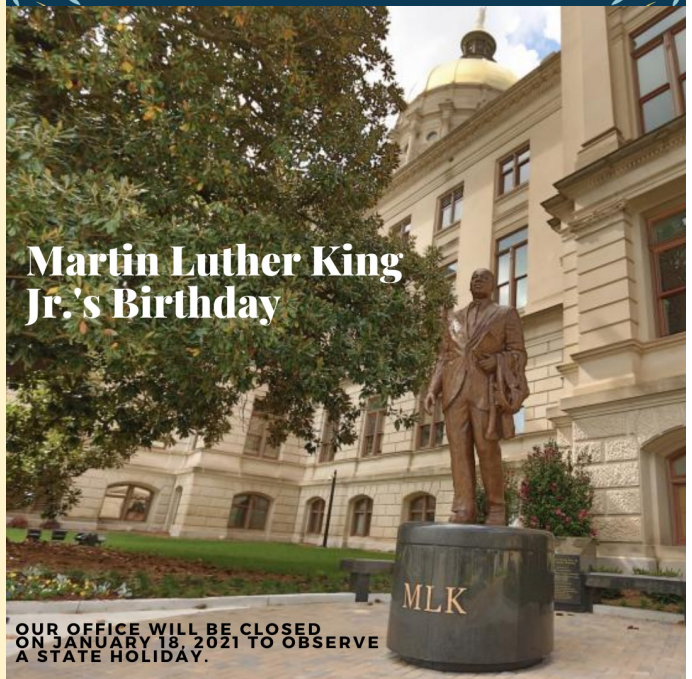
We promote safe sleep practices to prevent sleep-related deaths. When purchasing a gift this year, OCA Director Rachel Davidson was pleased to see this note on a baby blanket. Thank you to Twig & Bale and all the other retailers who help to promote safe sleep practices. Learn more about Georgia's Safe Sleep Campaign [here](#).



*Happy New  
Year to All*

The Office of the Child Advocate will be closed on January 1, 2021 to observe a state holiday.

## Martin Luther King Jr.'s Birthday



**OUR OFFICE WILL BE CLOSED ON JANUARY 18, 2021 TO OBSERVE A STATE HOLIDAY.**



## PCA Georgia Helpline

*Highlighted by Clarissa Seay, Helpline Coordinator*

It takes parents, caregivers, and supportive **RESOURCES** to help children thrive. As family serving professionals you know parents are often in complex situations and need professional and community support. Here's how you can help:

1. Encourage families you serve to **call the 1-800-CHILDREN (1-800-244-5373) Helpline** to talk to trained, bilingual professionals to connect them with supportive programs in their area.
2. Go online to use the 1-800-CHILDREN Resource Map, which contains over 3,000 local and statewide programs designed to assist and support families. See what services are available in the areas where you serve families.

[www.PCAGeorgiaHelpline.org](http://www.PCAGeorgiaHelpline.org)

**1-800-CHILDREN**  
Here to Listen. Here to Help.  
1-800-244-5373 | [PCAGeorgiaHelpline.org](http://PCAGeorgiaHelpline.org)

- Readily Available**  
Available online 24/7 and by phone Monday to Friday, 8 am to 6 pm
- Bilingual**  
Connect with English and Spanish speaking resource navigators by phone
- Accessible Resources**  
Connects parents and caregivers with state/regional resources
- Free**  
Private and available statewide to families and professionals

## Legal Job Opportunity

**DFCS is seeking candidates** for the position of Associate General Counsel. The position focuses primarily on the review of contracts, MOUs, DSAs, and BAAs. The position serves as the open records officer for DFCS.

Visit the website [here](#) if you are interested or would like to share this job opportunity. The job posting closes on January 4, 2021.

## WHEN KIDS SAY "NO!"

### OUR INSTINCT

### \* OUR GOAL

**WE MODEL REVENGE**

"Then no TV for you!"

**WE MODEL CURIOSITY**

"You don't want to. How come?"

**WE MODEL GASLIGHTING**

"You're totally overreacting."

**WE MODEL EMPATHY**

"I get that! Tell me more..."

**WE MODEL INTIMIDATION**

"Ten, nine, eight..."

**WE MODEL DIVERSITY**

"We've got different needs here."

**WE MODEL CONDITIONAL LOVE**

"You're disappointing me."

**WE MODEL CREATIVITY**

"We need ideas! How can this work?"

**WE MODEL MANIPULATION**

"How about a cookie after?"

**WE MODEL SELF-REGULATION**

"I'm going to take some breaths."

**WE MODEL SHAMING**

"Go to your room!"

**WE MODEL VALIDATION**

"You REALLY don't want to!"

**WE MODEL DOMINATION**

"Then I have to MAKE you."

**WE MODEL BOUNDARY-SETTING**

"I can't let you hit me, honey."

**WE MODEL JUDGEMENT**

"You're being so selfish."

**WE MODEL RESPECT**

"Totally. Can I tell you why?"

RAISE & RESIST! #jointheupbringing @upbringing.co WWW.UPBRINGING.CO

## Events: Available Now and Upcoming!



- ✓ J4C Webinar on GAL Advocacy. Access webinar [here](#). Use access passcode: **2Z@8+\$51**.
- ✓ Webinar on Protecting Children in a New Normal—Resources for School Personnel provided by PCA Georgia, GaDOE, DFCS, CHOA, GCCA, and ProSolutions. Access webinar [here](#).
- ✓ Webinar on Deepening Engagement—Keeping Kids in School during a Pandemic by Georgia Ap-pleseed and Truancy Intervention Project. Access webinar [here](#).
- ✓ Webinar on Georgia's Response to Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children provided by PCA Georgia and CACGA. Access webinar and materials [here](#).
- ✓ Jan. 4: CIP Talks Webinar with Judge Ernestine Gray - Uprooted and Traumatized: Avoiding Un-necessary Removals. More info [here](#).
- ✓ Jan. 19: Mental Health Day at the Capitol. More info [here](#).
- ✓ Mar. 9-13: CWLA 2021 National Conference in Washington, D.C. More info [here](#).
- ✓ Mar. 21-24: 2021 National Conference on Juvenile Justice in Dallas, Texas. More info [here](#).



## REFLECT, CONT'D...

just for another day, and for another day after that, and another day after that. Let us be challenged by Jason's words to weigh heavily the voice and perspective of the children we serve from the point of referral to case closure, and to ensure that not a single child spends a single day more separated from his or her family that is absolutely necessary to ensure the child's safety. Thanks for all that you do!

With his attorney child advocate and CASA present, Jason was focused and respectful when he spoke to me in chambers. It was like his soul opened up before our very eyes when this fourteen-year-old young man talked to me like I am told he had never talked to anyone before. Seated at a small conference table, he looked squarely at me and said in the voice of a child, with the mature and deliberate purpose of a grown man:

*"First, I want to talk about what you have done to me.....and DFCS. You took me away from my mom. Sure, she was on drugs, but so what? I know plenty of kids whose mom is on drugs and they're still with their mom. What makes me any different from them? My mom wasn't on drugs all the time, but when she was, I knew I had to take care of Alan. I knew what to do...that was normal for me. I had watched her do it. So what I had to wash clothes-I have to wash clothes now. We always had food and a place to live. Let me put it to you this way, if President Obama got really stressed out by his job in the White House and got addicted to drugs, would his kids be taken away from him? Probably not. Even if he moved out of the White*

*House, his kids wouldn't be taken away from him. But I was taken away from my mom and I was put in foster care and I didn't do anything. It's like if I was out with a friend and he decided to rob a store. He goes into the store and robs it with a gun while I stay outside. When the police come, they take me to jail too. But, I didn't have the gun and I didn't rob the store. I was just there. That's what it was like for me. I went to jail with my mom, but I didn't do anything."*

*"I don't want to be adopted with Alan because I feel like I have to take care of him. I can't help it...that's what I was used to doing. I've seen things grown men and women haven't seen. I just want to be a 14 year-old-kid. I love Alan and want to still visit him. He's my brother and when I'm grown I will live close to him, but right now I don't want to live with him."*

Next, I talked to Alan, Jason's twelve-year-old brother, who said that he did not want to be adopted with Jason because Jason disrupts all of the placements they are in. Then he said:

*"I want to be in a family where the family makes the rules instead of the government. I don't mind the rules, but I want my family to be able to*

*make them. Like, shooting a BB gun. I can't shoot a gun like other kids can because I am in foster care. That would be ok if my mom made that rule."*

***I learned about the importance of weighing all the relevant factors in determining permanency plans for each individual child and not relying on checklists and formulas.***

It hurt to hear what Jason had to say, but I had a responsibility to listen. We all have a responsibility to listen to the children we serve no matter which door of our system they enter. And we can't discount what they say just because they are children. After all, they are living what we are learning and, even in a thorough hearing, they will still know more about what goes on in their home than we will ever know.

I can't possibly write anything more powerful than what Jason and Alan shared with me. I have learned more from this experience than I have room to relate in this space, and the more I reflect on their words, the more I learn. I learned things about personal responsibility for the children





## Trafficking Hotline: 1-866-END-HTGA

Effective October 1, 2020, the Children's Advocacy Centers of Georgia (CACGA) CSEC Response Team Georgia began operating a new trafficking hotline number: **1-866-END-HTGA**. This 24 hour hotline receives reports of suspected trafficking, provides assistance to victims of human trafficking, and connects callers to additional resources. In addition to this new CSEC Response Team, CACGA and local Child Advocacy Centers (CACs) will continue providing the services they currently provide. For further information, visit [here](#). For additional information on recognizing the signs of human trafficking, visit [here](#).



## As Seen on Social Media

The question, "What has been the greatest "gift" you have received while being a foster parent in 2020?" was posed on Facebook by Dr. John DeGarmo. It's a great question which garnered some heartwarming responses:

"Seeing our very first reunification in June & staying in contact with the family. ❤️" - Sandy Ambrose Riley

"This sweet baby girl we have currently and the developing relationship with her (young) mom who had been in foster care growing up. She has no support and we have created this bond to be a team going forward. She asked me to be her baby's grandma. She just needed to have someone to help voice her opinions and bounce ideas off. Baby girl was not eating nor gaining weight...she tried telling the doctor but she was told "she needed to offer more." Once she was placed in our care I was able to share that baby girl indeed has an issue...acid reflux medicine started and magic is happening. All parties happy to see!!!" - Lindsey Seubert

"My child is kin who came to me from a foster home. The greatest gift is that we get to be friends with her foster family who love her as much as we do. Our family has expanded not by 1 member but by a whole family." - Brenda Marie

"watching our 1st foster sons mom achieve her recovery goals, lead a healthy life and reunite her family. ❤️" - Chrissy Pearce Jeffries

## VOICE CONT'D...

"We don't feel safe and we feel angry about what's happening around the world. It's not fair to treat us based on skin color, or how we dress, or how we walk because that doesn't really represent who we actually are."

"We don't feel safe with it going around because the police will judge us by our color, or by our hair, or how we dress."

"Just because you don't like someone doesn't mean you can or should hurt us."

"It makes me feel sad and angry at the same time."

"They should not be doing it because everyone wants to live."

"I get mad about racism because people just can't get past the skin color. Everyone is special in their own way."

The podcast is available [here](#). Thank you to the youth who felt comfortable sharing their personal feelings in this conversation.

Editor's Note: The views expressed and shared in this podcast are representative of each youth personally who spoke.



## **REFLECT, CONT'D...**

and families we serve, about the impact our decisions (or failure to make timely decisions), and about the importance of ensuring that our children are a meaningful part of the court process, with information flowing both ways. I learned something about how children view foster care and the court system. I learned something about the need for intervening in the lives of children and families in a way that, to the extent possible, allows children to be children and families to be families. I learned about the importance of weighing all of the relevant factors in determining permanency plans for each individual child and not relying on checklists and formulas. I learned that we can't assume that the decisions we make are always right. In Jason's case, either we did not do a good job of making sure he understood why we had to take him away from his mom, or I have to consider that perhaps he was right and I was wrong. I learned anew the importance of balancing the harm to which a child is exposed in the home against the harm a child suffers when removed from the home. I was reminded that we do not have the luxury of making the decision that is safe for us. We must make the choice that is as right as it can be for the child whose life we hold in our hands.

What else can we learn from what Jason and Alan said? Please reflect on the words of these children and share the lessons you have learned with me at [mkey@troupc.org](mailto:mkey@troupc.org). We will compile the responses and get them back out to you in the next issue of TODAY. Thanks for all that you do.

*Editor's Note: We are upon the 10th anniversary of this article's original publication in the [National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges](#)' Juvenile and Family Justice Today, Winter 2011. In light of the unique circumstances placed upon the child welfare community to ensure the safety and well-being of children and families, sharing this article on this anniversary serves as a reminder of the heart of the work we do: Georgia's most vulnerable children and their voices. For more information about NCJFCJ and to become a member visit <https://www.ncjfcj.org/>.*

## **"Fixing" Mental Health**

*(Originally [posted](#) on Tumblr by "missmentelle")*

Health insurance is a mental health issue. I can't help a client who can't afford to see me.

Housing is a mental health issue. I can't use therapy to help a client whose depression and anxiety come directly from sleeping in the streets.

Food insecurity is a mental health issue. I can't help a client who isn't taking their medication because their pills say "take with food" and they have nothing to eat.

Healthcare is a mental health issue. I can't help a client whose "depression" is actually a thyroid condition they can't afford to get treated.

Wages are a mental health issue. I can't help a client whose anxiety comes from the fact that they are one missed shift away from not being able to make rent.

Child care is a mental health issue. I can't help a client who works 80 hours per week to afford daycare, and doesn't have the time or energy left to come see me.

Drug policing is a mental health issue. I can't help a client who ended up in prison because they got caught self-medicating with illegal substances.

Police brutality is a mental health issue. I can't help a client whose 'anxiety' is a very real and justified fear of ending up as a hashtag.

If you're going to make a stand for improving mental health, you have to understand that addressing mental health goes way beyond hiring more therapists and talking about mental health on social media. If we're really serious about tackling this mental health problem as a country, it means rolling up our sleeves and taking down the barriers that prevent people from getting the help they need - even if those people are different than us, lead different lives, and make choices we don't agree with.

We aren't "fixing" mental health unless we're fixing it for everybody.



# TOP TEN THINGS YOU NEED

*\*Before You Leave Foster Care*



### HEALTH INSURANCE

If you were in care on your 18th birthday, you are automatically enrolled in Amerigroup Georgia Families 360. **You can call their member line 24/7 at 1-855-661-2021**



### PERSONAL DOCUMENTS

Per **OCGA 49-5-3**, you should have access to and copies of: Your birth certificate, your Social Security card, and any medical documents or your green card, if applicable.



### WRITTEN TRANSITIONAL LIVING PLAN

You are entitled to a Written Transitional Living Plan (Form 391). If you're not sure what is in your plan, you can ask to review it. You have a right to help make decisions about your future after foster care.



### DRIVER'S LICENSE

**The following people can take you to get your license:** A DFCS or DJJ employee, your foster parent, a foster care agency or group home employee, or a designated official for a private agency or group home.



### OPPORTUNITY PASSPORT

This program can match your savings with additional money towards adult purchases like a car, house, apartment, and more. For more info, **email IDA@maac4kids.org**.

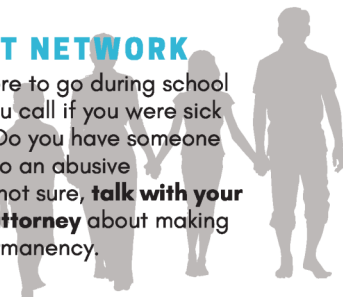


### HOUSING

It's important to know where you plan to live after transitioning from care! **Make sure you know your options**, including support from ETV and Opportunity Passport!

### YOUR SUPPORT NETWORK

Do you have somewhere to go during school breaks? Who would you call if you were sick or in a car accident? Do you have someone to talk to if you get into an abusive relationship? If you're not sure, **talk with your case manager and attorney** about making sure that you have permanency.



### ETV/EMBARC

If you're planning to attend college or trade school in GA, **make sure you take advantage of your Educational Training Voucher to pay for it!** Contact your Independent Living Specialist for more information.



### ILP GRIEVANCE PROCESS

If you have an issue, you have a right to use the grievance form! Download one at **www.garyse-ilp.org**



### CONNECTED BY 21

You can stay in care until age 21, so you now have to elect to sign yourself out at 18.



## COVID-19 Economic Impact Payments: FAQs for Child Welfare Attorneys



The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act, also known as the CARES Act, is a federal statute intended to help mitigate the significant economic consequences of the COVID-19 epidemic. Signed into law on March 27, 2020, the Act provides financial relief to individuals, organizations and businesses. The National Association of Counsel for Children (NACC) published a FAQ sheet that summarizes NACC's current understanding of how the CARES Act (and related legislation) may impact youth and families in the child welfare system. It aims to provide child welfare practitioners with information that may be relevant to their clients and to raise awareness regarding eligibility for these payments. Click [here](#) to access NACC's FAQ sheet.

## Tip Sheet: Advocacy and Child's Attorney-Client Relationships During COVID-19

In the uncertain times of the COVID-19 pandemic, many aspects of life have dramatically changed — schools, court hearings, social events. What has not changed, however, are the critical and urgent needs of youth involved in the child welfare system. Many attorneys, and particularly those who represent young people, may be struggling with questions regarding their obligations in a moment of social distancing and widespread anxiety. Youth involved in the child welfare system need and deserve robust advocacy in this time period. The underlying needs of youth — the what — remains the same; it is the method of advocacy and service delivery — the how — that may need to be adjusted. Click [here](#) to access NACC's tip sheet.



## Keeping Yourself and Your Kids Safe and Health in the Pandemic: Tips for Judges, Legal Professionals, and Court Personnel



Helping the kids that we serve stay safe and healthy can be a challenge under ordinary circumstances, but now with the health hazards of COVID-19, the various guidance around what is safe, and the stress associated with social distancing or not being able to socially distance, the challenge may feel insurmountable. The calming presence and steadying influence that you provide to youth, their families, and your co-workers is the single most powerful antidote to the fears, frustrations, confusion, and grief caused by these uncertain times that can escalate into a meltdown or crisis. To have that crucial positive influence, it's essential that you "put on your oxygen mask first" by monitoring how you are handling the stressors that we are all facing. The National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) published a fact sheet that offers helpful questions to think about it and provides basic steps to help youth navigate through their stress during the pandemic. Click [here](#) to access NCTSN's tip sheet.



**Hotline Help: Connecting Your Needs to Resources**

*A Highlight of Many Free Resources Available to Assist You*

**GA Crisis & Access Line  
1-800-715-4225**

GCAL is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and 365 days a year to help you or someone you care for in a crisis.

**1-855-GA-CHILD  
(1-855-422-4453)**

Report concerns or suspected child abuse.

**CRISIS TEXT LINE**

Text HOME to 741741 to connect with a Crisis Counselor. Free support is available 24/7.

**GA COVID-19**

**Emotional Support Line  
1-866-399-8938**

The Georgia COVID-19 Emotional Support Line provides 24/7 free and confidential assistance to callers needing emotional support or resource information as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Emotional Support Line is staffed by volunteers, including mental health professionals and others who have received training in crisis counseling.

**National Suicide Prevention Lifeline  
1-800-273-8255**

The Lifeline provides 24/7, free and confidential support for people in distress, prevention and crisis resources for you or your loved ones, and best practices for professionals.

**National Domestic Violence Hotline  
1-800-799-7233**

Highly trained expert advocates are available 24/7 to talk confidentially with anyone in the U.S. experiencing domestic violence, seeking resources or information, or questioning unhealthy aspects of their relationship.

**CARES Warm Line  
1-844-326-5400**

Call or text the CARES Warm Line for substance abuse challenges every day of the year from 8:30AM - 11:00PM.

**Peer2Peer Warm Line  
1-888-945-1414**

The Warm Line provides Georgians the opportunity to receive peer support over the phone 24 hours a day.

**SAMHSA's National Helpline  
1-800-662-HELP (4357)**

Free, confidential, and available 24/7/365, this service from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) can help you find treatment facilities, support groups, and community-based organizations in your area.

*Georgia Office of the Child Advocate*  
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*For general inquiries, assistance, or to file a complaint, please contact us by phone at (404) 656-4200 or on our website at <https://oca.georgia.gov/webform/request-oca-assistance-or-investigation>*

*To submit an article, photo, or event for the newsletter, please contact Deputy Director Jansen Head at [jhead@oca.ga.gov](mailto:jhead@oca.ga.gov).*

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