



# Office of the Child Advocate

*For Georgia's Children*

February 2019

# AdvOCAcy

*Your child welfare update*

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## Governor Kemp Appoints Rachel Davidson as OCA Director



**On February 18, 2019, Governor Kemp** appointed Rachel Davidson as the Director of the Georgia Office of the Child Advocate.

"I am grateful to Governor Kemp for the privilege of serving Georgia's children and helping to keep them safe," Davidson said. "We will work closely with the Governor's office to ensure our state child protection system works well."

The same day, Governor Kemp also appointed Tom Rawlings as the Director for the Georgia Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS).

Both Davidson and Rawlings are eager to continue implementing improvements throughout Georgia on behalf of children and families.

View the Governor's press release [here](#).



*OCA's monthly platform for the unedited voices of young people who have been in care....*

## Youth Voice

By Emily, Alejandro, Haley, and Alexis via Jonathan Sloan, DFCS County Director

**True North** is a weekly call in DFCS' North District to examine our practice and to find real solutions to improve our service to families. On a recent call, we focused on how our agency engages children in foster care. To get a true picture, we interviewed several children about their experience and what suggestions they might have. Their answers were very revealing:

### *On their first experience...*

"At first I didn't like it, but I was thankful because I was not with a good family. I was thankful and relieved when DFCS came and got me." – Emily

"I hated everybody. I didn't want anything to do with anybody. I felt like

*See [Voice, page 4](#)*

## New "My GCAL" App: A Service of the Georgia Crisis and Access Line



By Judy Fitzgerald  
Commissioner,  
DBHDD

**It is my great honor** to write a guest column for the Georgia Office of the Child Advocate's newsletter. I am particularly excited today because I get to tell you about a new initiative that will help youth across Georgia, the My GCAL app.

Since 2006, the Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (DBHDD) has provided the Georgia Crisis and Access Line (GCAL) through our partner, Behavioral Health Link. GCAL is available 24/7/365 and offers free and confidential access to crisis and routine services for mental illness, substance use disorders, and intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Callers actively experiencing a crisis can speak with clinicians trained in crisis management and de-escalation. When needed, GCAL can dispatch mobile crisis response teams to provide evaluation on-site. GCAL information specialists can also provide referrals for treatment in a caller's area.

For more than a decade, GCAL has helped hundreds of thousands of Georgians get the care they need. Earlier this month, we enhanced this vital service by launching the My GCAL app. Available on iOS and Android, My GCAL allows users to text, chat with, or call the same caring professionals who staff the phone line.

Like the phone line, My GCAL is available to anyone in Georgia, but our primary target is Georgia's youth. Helplines get fewer calls from people under 25 than any other age group, and we know that when youth are struggling or have a friend who needs help, they are much more likely to reach out via text or chat than by phone. My GCAL is convenient and easy to use,

*See [GCAL, page 5](#)*



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## Celebrating Black History Month



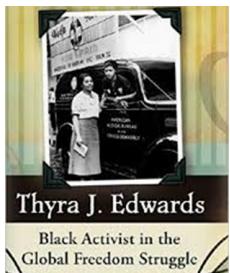
By Shantelle Whitehead  
OCA Investigator

Celebrating Black History Month, also known as African American History Month, provides an opportunity to highlight some of the influential and positive times of Black history and culture.

With a focus on the positive historical contributions that have been made to our country by African Americans, this reminds us that heroes such as the individuals mentioned below deserve to be honored for the sacrifices and strengths they displayed in order to achieve racial equality in our country. Not only does celebrating Black History Month spread awareness, it helps us to remember our past so that we can be better stewards of the rights we've gained over time.

With this in mind, OCA is recognizing a few historic social work leaders, pioneers and advocates of the African American community. The individuals below have made tremendous strides for their community while pushing for legislative change and reform. They have also developed influential organizations while leading groundbreaking movements that have certainly benefited the lives of millions of people throughout the world.

### **Thyra J. Edwards (1897-1953)**



Thyra J. Edwards

Black Activist in the  
Global Freedom Struggle

Thyra J. Edwards has been noted as one of the most remarkable African American women in US history. The granddaughter of runaway slaves, Edwards grew up in Texas during the Jim Crow Era. She began her career as a social worker in Chicago and quickly broaden her horizon as a world lecturer, journalist, labor organizer, women's rights advocate, and civil rights activist.

"After WWII, she became the executive director of the Congress of American Women and organized the first child care program in Rome to assist Jewish survivors of the Holocaust. Edwards was one of the first African-American civil rights advocates to turn her attention to the struggles of Black people around the world. She advocated for people of all races, nationalities, and ethnicities, and worked internationally until her death in 1953". Her social work interest and international affairs combined, gained worldwide notoriety for her activism.

### **George Edmund Haynes (1880-1960)**

Social Worker, Reformer, Educator, Author, Organizer and Co-Founder of the National Urban League, Haynes was one of the first Black men to have influence at the cabinet level of government.

*See [History](#), page 5*



#### **Upcoming Events:**

- ✓ Deadline to submit a nomination for the Chief Justice Hines 2019 Awards for an Attorney and a Case Manager of the Year, February 28, 2019. More info [here](#).
- ✓ End Human Trafficking ATL Summit, Atlanta, GA, March 11, 2019. More info [here](#).
- ✓ GEERS Presents: A Film Screening and Conversation: "No Small Matter", Atlanta, GA, March 20, 2019. More info [here](#).
- ✓ Deadline for children in grades K-3 to submit a story for the PBS Kids Writers Contest, March 29, 2019. More info [here](#).
- ✓ Deadline for a scholarship opportunity from the nsoro Foundation for youth in care or previously in care, April 12, 2019. More info [here](#).



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Great turnout for **CASA Day at the Capitol** with many CASA volunteers, staff, and supporters! Thank you to all those that lend a voice to children!



## The 2<sup>nd</sup> Round of State of Hope Site Applications is Now Open

Potential State of Hope sites are encouraged to submit their 'big idea' applications to become part of the State of Hope initiative in this 2<sup>nd</sup> round of applications. The [State of Hope](#) is a movement throughout Georgia to create communities where children are safe, thriving and full of hope. Its mission is to cultivate family-centered support systems by connecting, equipping and nurturing diverse community collaborators. State of Hope seeks to activate communities including businesses, community members, government, nonprofits and philanthropies to work closely to build local safety nets to prevent conditions that contribute to disparities in education, threaten a family's self-sufficiency which could lead to child abuse and neglect.

This initiative supports grassroots innovative efforts that focus on one or more of four opportunities for hope: Education, being/becoming Trauma-Informed, Quality Caregiving and Economic Self-Sufficiency. The goal is to eventually have active State of Hope sites and members in each of Georgia's 14 Division of Family and Children Services regions. All State of Hope sites will be connected to the Hope Ecosystem, a larger learning community where they can receive technical assistance, access opportunities for funding, build partnerships and connect with each other.

All applicants will be selected for one of three categories:

- Emerging sites (may be invited to become a member of the Hope Ecosystem)
- State of Hope sites (no seed funding, but invited to become a member of the Hope Ecosystem and may receive technical support)
- State of Hope supported sites (provided one-time seed funding and specialized technical support – and will become an automatic member of the Hope Ecosystem)

### Spotlight on a 'Big Idea'

Enrichment Services Program, Inc. of Columbus, GA was selected as a designated State of Hope site and was one of only five organizations to receive funding and technical support to aid with project implementation as part of the initial round of applications.

The agency's 'big idea' for the Columbus community is to reduce poverty – specifically with families who have children birth to five years old – by utilizing the nationally recognized Circles USA model. This approach is focused on adapting typical system and process improvement practices used in business and healthcare to identify cross-sector solutions to poverty.

If you have a big idea that could bring hope to children and families in your community in one of the four opportunity areas above, submit it [here](#) today!



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## Voice, cont'd...

running away, which I never really did. Yeah, I just hated being here.” – Alejandro

“It was upsetting for one. It was weird because there were like sixteen kids and they were all like five feet bigger than me. I was mad, because DFCS took me. It was rough – I didn’t even know what DFCS was.” – Haley

“My first experience with DFCS was disturbing because I was taken from my family at school. My grandmother was crying and it was hard on me. My first thought was, ‘Why me? Why are they taking me away? What did I do wrong? If I did something, I want them to tell me...’ My thoughts were scattered all over the place. I was scared. I didn’t know what to think and when I went to my first foster home, I broke down and lost it.” – Alexis

### ***On their experience with case managers...***

“They’re pretty nice. Usually whenever you call them, they can help you out. That’s whenever they answer the phone. Seems like the number one thing, if they can answer their phone.” – Alejandro

“I think the one I have now is my fifth one. I don’t really talk to any of my case managers. They just drop us from place to place and then leave us... Sometimes they have someone else you don’t even know come visit you.” – Haley

“I never did have a problem with any of my caseworkers. Sometimes I’ll ask for things and think they’re being unfair, but when I think about why I can’t do it, it’s for my safety.” – Emily

“I don’t even know why I was removed to begin with. I still don’t know. People are not telling me anything, where am I going, what is the background of the foster home or group home. I’m always the last to know. I would like to be the second to know.” – Alexis

“I feel like my needs are being met perfectly. Whenever I wasn’t in foster care, I went 6 years without dental visits. All my medical stuff is taken care of. That is really nice. It is nice to be taken care of for once.” – Brittney

### ***On whether they feel their case manager cares for them...***

“Yes, because yesterday I got mad. I had an interview that didn’t go so well. I decided to walk off, but my case manager stopped me. I was thinking ‘why did she stop me?’ She could have just let me go.” – Alexis

“Some do, the rest do it for the paycheck. They care when they pop up, not just for the visit – like take me out to eat or shopping and stuff like that. When they do it on their own free time. They don’t care when they come for like five minutes and ask you like two questions.” – Haley

“Yes, because of what I’ve been through. I don’t have someone to confide in, but she’s been there for me. I don’t have to fake it with her. I let her know how I’m feeling and she understands. Her name is Karla Bryant and she works for Gordon County DFCS and she’s the best case manager I’ve ever known. She’s like a second mother to me.” – Brittney

### ***On one thing they would change about DFCS...***

“To be able to see the kids more often, interact with them more. I would say three times a month is pretty nice, but at least at the beginning and end of the month.” – Alejandro

“The one thing I would change would be instead of once a month, case managers visit twice a month. Once a month doesn’t really say how everything is going. Maybe visits at the beginning and end of the month, then you will get to see progress they made.” – Brittney

.....

If I could summarize what the kids wanted, it would be more of their case managers. I found it interesting that not just one, but a few said that if they could change anything at all about DFCS, it would be more visits with their case manager. More visits and more time. And that makes sense. After all, is that not the basis of all relationships? The time you spend with someone? We never have enough time for everything, but we always have enough time for the important things.

*See [Voice](#), page 6*



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## History cont'd...

"In 1910, Haynes was the first African American to graduate from the New York School of Philanthropy (now the Columbia University School of Social Work). During and after his studies, he was one of the leaders in uniting several associations and committees working toward Black civil rights to create the National Urban League. He went on to work as a special assistant to the secretary of labor (under the title of director of Negro economics), making him one of the two highest ranking Black federal employees and the first African American to have influence at the cabinet level".



## Dorothy Heights (1912-2010)

**"Known as the Godmother of the Civil Rights Movement,** Heights began her lifetime of advocacy by campaigning against lynching and as a social worker. Can you believe Dorothy's first job was a case worker in New York City Welfare Department?

She quickly became a prominent civil rights advocate, establishing the Young Women's Christian Association's (YWCA) Center for Racial Justice, founding the National Women's Political Caucus, leading the National Council of Negro Women for 40 years, and co-organizing the famous 1963 March on Washington. Just two years after meeting the founder and president of the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW), Mary McLeod Bethune, Heights became the fourth president of NCNW.

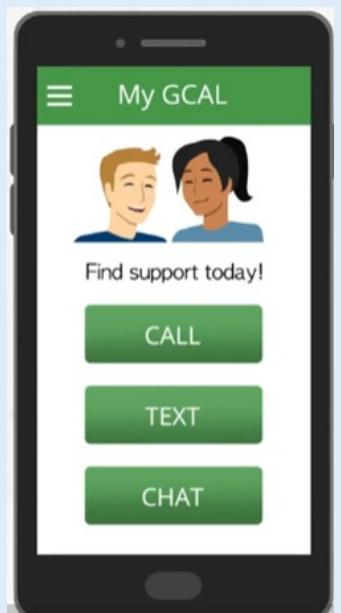
Additionally, she worked with every major civil rights leader of the period including Dr.

*See [History, page 6](#)*

## GCAL cont'd...

and with a few taps, users are connected with GCAL staff.

The app provides the same professional, confidential response as the GCAL call center through a method that works for teens. Even if you don't think you need GCAL right now, I encourage you to download the app, so that it's available if you or a friend ever needs it. Individuals who prefer to use the phone can still call GCAL at 800.715.4225.



We hope that this exciting feature will become a lifeline for youth seeking help.

## Mental Health Day at the Capitol

**Mental Health Day at the Capitol** was held February 8, 2019 and attracted more than 1000 people. Several of our staff attended and learned about a variety of resources, including the National Alliance on Mental Illness



OCA Investigator Eboni Woodbury and Intern Lakisha Pitts learning about resources



DBHDD Commissioner Judy Fitzgerald addressing attendees

(NAMI) Georgia, Youth M.O.V.E. Georgia, the Georgia Advocacy Office and the Georgia Parent Support Network. These are all great places to connect with if you need mental health resources.



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## Voice, cont'd...

To be clear, I did not interview their case managers. If I did, their case managers would probably say they would love to spend more time with their children. But they do not have just one child on their caseload and many of their duties pull them away from visits. Case managers have a lot on their plate and a lot of responsibilities. They would love to spend more time with the children, but the work is massive, because the need is great.

To put it another way, it seems to be a systemic issue. One might say if you want to see our kids twice, then you need to cut caseloads in half. But that is not what this is really about. It is the difference between policy and a practice model. Policy is like a stone tablet written from heaven saying, "Thou shalt see every child every month." How often do we limit ourselves by our focusing on what is required by us, rather than what inspires us?

A practice model, however, is more like a compass. A compass that points in the direction we need to be going. We may not be there yet, but if we did not have that needle always pointing due north – we would be lost. What is your True North?

.....

*Want to hear the entire message directly from these youth?*

[Click here.](#)

## History cont'd...

Martin Luther King, Jr., Roy Wilkins, Whitney Young, and A. Philip Randolph. "During the 1960s she coordinated "Wednesdays in Mississippi," where both black and white women throughout the nation met to discuss racial justice issues. She also personally encouraged President Dwight Eisenhower to desegregate public schools, and urged President Lyndon B. Johnson to appoint black women into governmental positions".

### Did You Know?

In 1986, Dorothy Heights organized the **first Black Family Reunion Celebration** designed to reinforce the strengths and traditions of the African American family.

Like many other African – American traditions, the Black family reunions have roots entangled in African ancestry and American slavery. African American families today have family reunions for fun and celebratory purposes.

"Over the course of her lifetime, Dorothy Heights became well respected across the nation for her leadership in the campaign for women's *employment, education, and equal pay*. She is best known, however, for her efforts on behalf of racial equality. Her awards stretch over half a century. In 1944, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt honored Heights with the Freedom from Want Award. In 1989 President Ronald Reagan awarded Heights with the Citizens' Medal Award for distinguished service. President George W. Bush presented Heights the Congressional Gold Medal and the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2000."

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## The Ripple Effect

Trauma is a pervasive, long-lasting public health issue that affects not only individuals but entire organizations and systems



One of the presentation's during this month's **Court Improvement Initiative** meeting included a discussion around trauma and included very powerful real-world quotes from parents, youth, and staff involved in the child welfare system. One such quote related to trauma from a parent was:

*"During every incarceration, every institutionalization, every court-ordered drug treatment program, it was always the same: I was always treated like a hopeless case. All people could see was the way I looked or the way I smelled. It wasn't until I finally entered a recovery-oriented, trauma informed treatment program a little more than four years ago, where I felt safe and respected, that I could begin to heal...Someone finally asked me 'What happened to you?' instead of 'What's wrong with you?'" - Tonier Cain*





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## Investigator Insight

### OCA's own Eboni

Woodbury recently spent

time with DFCS staff in Clayton County. During her time there, she learned that Monica Jones, a Social Services Supervisor, partnered with the FBI during Super Bowl weekend to assist children rescued as part of the FBI's efforts to combat human trafficking.



Human trafficking is already a concern for Georgia. Major events, such as the Super Bowl, tend to create additional opportunities—both for abusers as well as those combating this epidemic. As the FBI recovers children during special operations at these major events, they need immediate assistance to ensure children are appropriately identified and receive an appropriate response.

Ms. Jones and other volunteer workers were able to screen rescued victims. During her shift, more than 20 children were screened. Ms. Jones described the experience as “intensive, yet rewarding.”

This initiative sounds like an ideal collaboration with frontline workers to provide immediate assistance in reunifying victims and getting them necessary services.

*Georgia Office of the Child Advocate  
for the Protection of Children*

**Rachel Davidson, Director**

<https://oca.georgia.gov>

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Atlanta, GA 30334

*For general inquiries, assistance, or to file a complaint:*

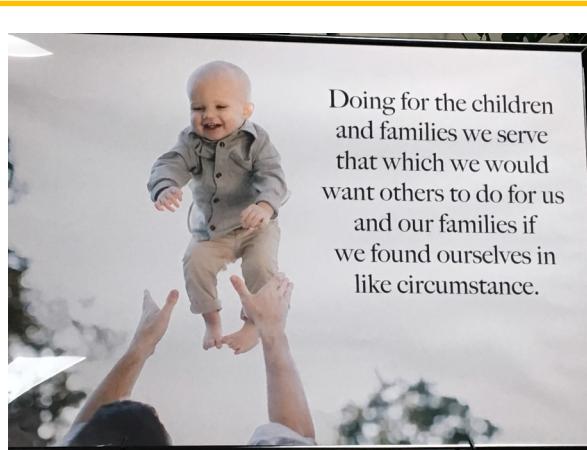
- Phone: (404) 656-4200
- Internet: <https://oca.georgia.gov/webform/request-oca-assistance-or-investigation>

*To submit an article for the newsletter: [r davidson@oca.ga.gov](mailto:r davidson@oca.ga.gov)*

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This image is posted in Troup County Juvenile Court, serving as an important reminder of the need to treat each child and family as if they were our own and to ensure all children feel as safe and secure as the happiness on this child's face has suggests.

## Not “Goodbye”, Just “See You Later”

For the past 2 years, we have had an amazing office administrator, Diana Summers. Diana's last day with OCA is February 28, 2019. She will be starting a new job with Rockdale County Juvenile Court in March 2019. Since we know where to find her, it's not “Goodbye”, just “See you later!” Please join us in thanking her for her service and wishing her well!

JOIN  
OUR TEAM



It will be hard to fill her shoes, but we'd love for you to try. If you are interested in joining our team as the Office Administrator, please apply [here](#).

### Join us on social media!

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