



>>>> YOUTH VOICE <<<<

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



**By Anthony Stover,
Youth Engagement Coordinator
Georgia EmpowerMent**

Georgia EmpowerMent is a youth-driven initiative housed within the Multi-Agency Alliance for Children (MAAC). EmpowerMent offers unique opportunities for youth to get involved and ensure their voices are heard. Learn more and share this invaluable resource with youth in foster care!

Mentoring, whether it's one to one, group or peer mentoring, is an impactful tool for young people regardless of background but can be especially impactful for young people facing adversity- such as young people in foster care. However, the natural conditions of being in foster care – transportation challenges, confidentiality issues and frequent moves- can make it challenging to link youth to formal mentoring programs. Holding the wisdom from this experience first-hand, young people in foster care, and those formerly involved in the system recognized this gap that they could fill in partnership with each other.

GA EmpowerMent, as a peer-driven network of young people currently and formerly impacted by foster care, provides an informal, peer mentoring opportunity and community for youth across the state while also supporting individual normalcy opportunities, leadership growth and skill development through participation in advocacy. This "learning through doing" approach is grounded in Adolescent Brain Research, which indicates that opportunities for young people to have exposure to positive opportunities, social connections, and build skills through experiences can help to heal the growing brain from previous trauma. Young leaders endorse this, as it encompasses also their value that their past does not define their present, or most powerfully, their future. Qualities such as survival and resilience are assets of system expertise to be cultivated and celebrated.

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OCA Investigator Insight on Sex Trafficking



**By Renee Moore,
OCA Senior Investigator**

In the past several years we have all heard about sex trafficking as it becomes more prevalent in our communities and throughout our state. I have had the opportunity to work with external stakeholders, community partners, GBI and the Department of Family and Children Services to help identify our vulnerable youth that have fallen prey to these traffickers. I would like to tell you a story of one such youth.

This child was adopted as a young girl and as she grew older she began to display behaviors stemming from trauma she had experienced. The adoptive parents tried to address these behaviors but felt lost as to what to do, who to ask for help and became increasingly frustrated resulting in an out of home placement. This young girl ran away and was not heard from again until almost a year later. This young girl had been trafficked and taken through multiple states by her "pimp" who bought her "presents" and encouraged her to solicit other young girls into "trafficking". During this time this young girl turned seventeen and had been trafficked for over a year. Through sheer luck, this young girl was able to escape from her "pimp" and go to local law enforcement authorities for help. A success story yes but it does not end here. This young girl needed extensive therapy to address the trauma of being trafficked. She believed her "pimp" loved her and would always take care of her. I am happy to say OCA was a part of getting this young girl back to Georgia to begin the healing process and hopefully move forward as a young adult.

During the process of trying to rescue this child it became both a professional and personal

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Office of the Child Advocate

For Georgia's Children

AdvOCacy

Your child welfare update

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NATIONAL HUMAN TRAFFICKING HOTLINE

CONTACT THE NATIONAL HUMAN TRAFFICKING HOTLINE

Do you want to get out of the life?
Are you being forced to work against your will?
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Do you know someone who may be?



CALL
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✓ Get help.
✓ Report a tip.
✓ Find services.
✓ Learn about your options.

24/7 • Toll free • Confidential • 200+ languages



Polaris received \$1.75 million through competitive funding through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Grant #2019CA-01-01. The program will be renewed with 45.75% of federal funds and \$6,276,582.25 in non-federal sources. The contents of this flyer are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families.

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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 for individual performance and achievement, not for groups or organizations. 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.

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CALL 404.268.0115

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](#).
- ✓ **Feb. 6:** Middle Georgia School-Based Behavioral Health Forum in Dublin, GA. More info [here](#).
- ✓ **Feb. 7:** Mental Health Day at the State Capitol. More info [here](#).
- ✓ **Feb. 12:** 2020 Legislative Reception hosted by Voices for Georgia's Children in Atlanta. More info [here](#).
- ✓ **Feb. 13:** CASA Day at the State Capitol. More info [here](#).
- ✓ **Feb. 13:** Anti-Sex Trafficking Lobby Day at the State Capitol. More info [here](#).
- ✓ **Feb. 20:** Trauma Awareness Day at the State Capitol. More info [here](#).
- ✓ **Feb. 20:** Substance Abuse Prevention Advocacy Day at the State Capitol. More info [here](#).
- ✓ **Feb. 21:** 2020 Coastal Plain CASA Annual Appreciation and Recruitment Dinner with Miss Georgia, Victoria Hill, as keynote speaker. More info [here](#).
- ✓ **Feb. 25:** Afterschool Day at the State Capitol. More info [here](#) and [here](#).
- ✓ **Feb. 27:** ABA Webinar: How Adolescent Brain Science Supports Youth Engagement in Court Hearings and Case Planning. More info [here](#).
- ✓ **Feb. 27:** Justice Day at the State Capitol. More info [here](#).
- ✓ **Mar. 20:** Deadline to submit an entry to the PBS Kids Writers Contest. More info [here](#).



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2nd Annual Human Trafficking Summit: A Collaborative Effort to End Sexual Exploitation

Highlighted by Jansen Head,
OCA Deputy Director

The DFCS Care Coordination Treatment Unit held its second annual human trafficking summit on January 30th at the Georgia Public Safety Training Center. The purpose of the summit is to develop a shared vision among collaborative partners and create solutions to this issue. Attendees included DFCS employees, state agency partners, CCI/CPA providers, law enforcement, and medical and mental health providers from several areas around the state.

Dr. Margie Gill (executive director of Tabitha's House) and Marq D. Taylor (survivor and founder/president of The B.U.D.D.Y. House) presented on the sexual exploitation of boys. Although there are some similarities between the experience of male and female victims, males in particular experience increased physical violence

with perpetrators, higher rates of illicit drug use, increased physical brutality, and living with smaller groups or alone. Also particular to male victims, they are usually provided with post bail or bond for criminal activity and are offered protection while working.

Maja Hasic, the Anti-Human Trafficking Program Director at Tapestry, presented on labor trafficking in Georgia. She reviewed a closed case where a Nigerian citizen, known as "Bidemi Bello", became a naturalized U.S. citizen and became a well-respected business person in both countries. Bidemi took advantage of families with financial struggles in Nigeria and promised a better life for daughters in families if they move to the U.S. and live with her. Ultimately, Bidemi was trafficking women for their labor in her home in the U.S. Once the FBI got involved, they were able to catch her at the airport, arrest her, and convict her of the crimes committed.

The summit ended with a powerful panel of survivors who have joined the fight against trafficking and are serving as advocates. Marquis Moody advised attendees to welcome youth victims with support and open arms and further advised that if

you are not familiar with the LGBTQ community, to ask someone and learn about that community. Another survivor, Nathifa Joseph, advised that having good staff is key to a successful program. She advised, "Be there for them. Don't send them somewhere where they will never see or hear from you again . . . They want to know you are calling for them and are asking for them. It means that even in the midst of all this, someone still cares." Ryn Hammontree, a survivor as well, said we could do more for girls ages 18-19 and for those who are in strip clubs because that is where traffickers are known to recruit vulnerable girls. Another survivor, Amirah Sharif, said that before she got involved in trafficking, all she needed was someone who would listen to her, be patient, and just understand what she was going through.



Survivor Leadership Panel

2-1-1
[Call. Click. Connect.]
**UNITED WAY
GREATER ATLANTA**

United Way of Greater Atlanta's 2-1-1 Contact Center connects families with community resources like food pantries, job search and placement agencies, and financial emergency assistance agencies. Those who reach out to 2-1-1 are connected to trained, bilingual contact center agents. This help is provided so that families can recover and become sustainable when assistance is needed. There are more than 5,000 agencies listed in the 2-1-1 database. 2-1-1 is free, confidential, and available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, in over 140 different languages. It can be reached from your phone or mobile device 24/7/365. You can dial 2-1-1, text your zip code and needed assistance to 898-211, download the free 2-1-1 app from your device's app store (search for 211), and search the database online. Click [here](#) for more information.



Journey to Reunification

Did you make it to the closing plenary of The Summit? During that time, you were introduced to Amanda Mansfield, a parent with lived experience. She recently shared her story and appreciation for DFCS to help her on her journey to become healthy and safely reunify with her son. Watch her "Reunification Story" [here](#).



Amanda Mansfield with her son Matiyx and their supporters

Public Comment Period for the Georgia Child Abuse & Neglect Prevention Plan Currently Open!

Georgia DFCS and PCA Georgia have led the charge on updating Georgia's Child Abuse & Neglect Prevention Plan. Stakeholder meetings were held throughout the state and a draft of the updated plan is now available [here](#).

Please review this plan, with a particular eye to the overall direction and strategies and provide feedback by **Friday, February 14 at 5pm** to Mathew George of Advantage Consulting, LLC at mathew@advantageconsultingllc.com.

Thank you for your commitment to ensuring all Georgia's children thrive in safe, stable nurturing relationships and environments.

"My Pleasure!"

During the DFCS leadership meeting with both OFI and Child Welfare staff this month, Chick-fil-A representative Jonathan Howard presented to the group on hospitality principles. Along with DFCS and the Administrative Office of the



Chick-fil-A's Hospitality Principles Training

Courts, OCA is focused on improving the culture of the child welfare system. We were pleased to partner with Chick-fil-A to join this effort by reinforcing a hospitality mindset and culture for leaders and staff within Georgia DFCS.

National Parent Leadership Month

February is National Parent Leadership Month

which highlights the many opportunities available for parents, staff, policymakers and other community members to engage in partnerships with the goal of building and supporting strong, safe families.

To build successful partnerships with parent leaders, the Prevention and Community Support Section (PCS) of the Georgia Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) formed the Georgia Parent Advisory Council (GAPAC). The new GAPAC launched in June 2019 with nine parents each representing one of the 14 DFCS regions. The role of the GAPAC is to advise DFCS about making changes to child welfare services and systems, particularly prevention programming. The GAPAC is a sounding board for decisions, ideas, and questions that help shape the future of PCS and DFCS. PCS selected a group of parents from across the state who have a range of expertise and personal experiences using community-based prevention services or experience within the child welfare system.

Parent leadership is successfully achieved when parents and practitioners build effective partnerships based upon mutual respect and shared responsibility, expertise and leadership in the decisions being made that affect their own families, other families and their communities.

GAPAC Vision: Resilient communities where families are strengthened through authentic parent voices.

GAPAC Mission: Parents and caregivers working with GA DFCS and our partners to build relationships with families, to develop parent leadership, and to advocate for parent informed policy and practice.

We are still accepting applications! If you are interested in applying to join the Georgia Parent Advisory Council, please fill out an application by clicking on this link: <http://survey.constantcontact.com/survey/a07eg3rlewrijs3bi6z5/a005js40dhpu/greeting>

For questions or more information, please contact, PCS Program Specialist, Lindsey Dale, at Lindsey.Dale@dhs.ga.gov.



Statewide Human Trafficking Task Force



By Shantelle Whitehead
OCA Investigator

The Statewide Human Trafficking Task Force includes professionals from state, local, federal government, law enforcement, victim service providers, and non-governmental organizations who work together to address the needs of human trafficking victims. The Task Force is divided into 9 workgroups, within these workgroups individuals work together on implementing projects and programs to carry out the goal and mission of the Task Force. One of the primary focuses of the Task Force is to spread awareness of trafficking throughout the state, in addition to aiding schools, businesses, establishments, etc. with compliance regarding newly implemented laws.

Successively, the Task Force has developed a number of trainings to address the many issues of trafficking. One in particular, "Understanding and Recognizing Child Sex Trafficking: Training for Hotel Staff" was specifically designed to help hotel employees recognize potential signs of child sex trafficking that may be occurring in their hotel. Within this training a brief introduction to trafficking is covered, along with risk factors, signs to look for and how to respond to suspicious activity. Through partnership with law enforcement and task force members, this training supports hotels with maintaining compliance of House Bill 141. The bill requires certain establishments and businesses to post a notice to enable persons who are the subject of human trafficking to obtain help and services. This bill was passed during the 2013 session of the General Assembly and signed into law by Governor Nathan Deal on May 6, 2013. This training is very vital to hotel employees as hotels are often a place where trafficking occurs. Hotel employees are in a unique and vital position to observe and report behavior that looks suspicious, as well as recognizing and helping potential victims. For more information about the Task Force, visit their website [here](#).

Signs of Labor Trafficking:

Common Work and Living Conditions

- ⇒ Not free to leave or come and go at will
- ⇒ Unpaid, paid very little, or paid only through tips
- ⇒ Works excessively long and/or unusual hours
- ⇒ Not allowed breaks or suffers unusual restrictions at work
- ⇒ Owes a large debt and is unable to pay it off
- ⇒ Recruited through false promises concerning the nature and conditions of the work
- ⇒ Living and working on site
- ⇒ Experiences verbal or physical abuse by supervisor
- ⇒ Not paid directly
- ⇒ High security measures exist in the work and/or living locations (i.e. bars on window, opaque windows, etc.)

Signs of Sex Trafficking:

Common Appearances and Behaviors

- ⇒ Runaway history or is homeless
- ⇒ Special marked tattoos or branding on the body
- ⇒ No identification or is not in control of the identification documents
- ⇒ Dressed inappropriately for the occasion or season
- ⇒ With a significantly older boyfriend/companion or other non-family member
- ⇒ History of sexual abuse or domestic violence
- ⇒ Change in school attendance habits
- ⇒ Conflicting statements to authority figures
- ⇒ Possession of hotel keys for no apparent reason
- ⇒ Has many prepaid cards or gift cards
- ⇒ Unexplained bruising



Census 2020: Every. One. Counts.

By Dr. Erica Fener Sitkoff
Executive Director,
Voices for Georgia's Children



What is the Census?

The U.S. Constitution mandates that the government complete a head count of **all** people living in the United States, every ten years. It is called the census, and Census 2020 is right around the corner. The results will have a huge impact on our state and all Georgian's lives for the next decade.

Census counts are used to determine both representation and appropriations at the federal level for every state. Over the past few censuses, Georgia has gained congressional representation thanks to the count showing our state's continued population growth. The count is also used to determine how billions of dollars are allocated for vital programs impacting schools, hospitals, roads, and public safety.

Every year, Georgia receives federal funding totaling about \$20 billion from the census results. That amount is distributed across the state to 316 programs that serve our communities, including Title IV-E Foster Care Services. **Georgia receives about \$88 million for Title IV-E Foster Care Services every year.** Other examples of programs include the National School Lunch Program, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and Medicaid. It is essential that we get an accurate count since we only have one chance every ten years to get it right.

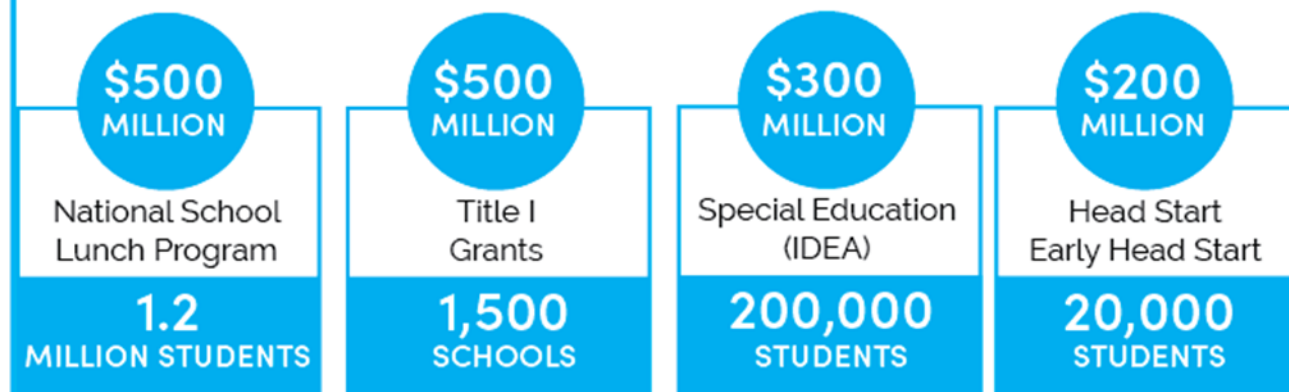
Ensuring an accurate count of every person has far reaching implications for our state and our kids. Ten years is most of a child's childhood. If we want them to receive any of the benefits from an accurate census count, then we all must be counted now.

In federal dollars,
Georgia received
**\$23.8
BILLION**
in 2015 from 2010
census counts

More than
50%
went to public
health programs like

MEDICAID
MEDICARE
PEACHCARE/CHIP
SNAP & WIC
HEALTH CENTERS

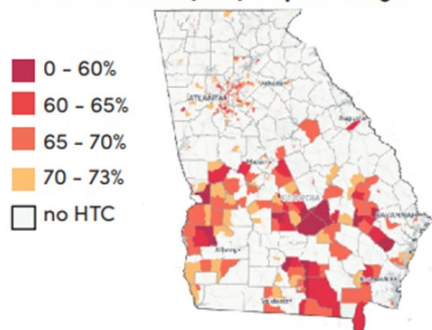
In 2015, Georgia received \$1.6 billion federal dollars for education-related programs.





Census 2020: Every. One. Counts. (continued)

Hard-to-Count (HTC) Map of Georgia



Why wouldn't all people be counted?

Unfortunately, 22% of Georgia lives in a hard-to-count area.

The U.S. Census Bureau defines a hard-to-count area as a census tract that had a self-response rate of below 73% in Census 2010. In Georgia, 2.2 million people live in these areas.

Map from <https://www.censushardtcountmaps2020.us/>

We also know that based on certain characteristics, some groups of people are harder to count and have been historically undercounted, including:

- Young children (0-5 years old)
- Individuals of color
- Those living in poverty
- Those with limited English
- Immigrants
- Those living in rural areas
- Those living in areas with high rental rates
- College students

An undercount of the population in Georgia means we will not be properly represented in the federal government and we will not receive an appropriate allocation of federal dollars. In 2016, every 1% undercount in Georgia cost the state \$68.6 million.

How Can You Help?

Census 2020 is the easiest census to date. You can complete it online, by phone or by mail. Beginning in mid-March, all homes will receive information on how to complete their form. The census only asks nine questions and takes about ten minutes to complete. It is also important to know that all information provided is private and secure since it is protected by Title 13 in the U.S. Constitution. Spread the word that the census is quick, convenient, and safe, not to mention vital for our communities!

Census 2020 will have a major impact on how all Georgians get access to quality education, food, housing, healthcare, and other services they depend on every day. The bottom line is that Census 2020 will impact the way we all live our lives for the next 10 years.

Note: Voices for Georgia's Children and the Georgia Family Connection Partnership have developed a website with a great deal of information and resources. Visit everyonecountsgeorgia.org and look under Resources for factsheets, printed material, social media toolkits, videos, and other information to share.



Capitol Hill Updates

State's Human Trafficking Awareness Training

First Lady Marty Kemp and the Georgians for Refuge, Action, Compassion, and Education (GRACE) Commission, in collaboration with the Department of Administrative Services (DOAS), implemented the state's first human trafficking awareness training for state employees. This online training course provides an understanding of how human trafficking affects our State and how each of us can be part of the solution to help eliminate this problem in our communities. By learning how to identify red flags and outlining steps for reporting human trafficking, each of us can become a trained eye working to stop this crime. Georgia believes in the power of knowledge and is committed to the ideal that an informed public is its best asset and awareness is Georgia's strongest tool. Additional information, resources, and the training itself for both the general public and state employees can be found [here](#).



Governor Brian Kemp, First Lady Marty Kemp, and the GRACE Commission. Photo Credit: Office of the Governor.

"The State of the State is Strong"

Governor Brian Kemp delivered his second State of the State Address to a joint session of the General Assembly on Thursday, January 16th, in which he described his policy and budget priorities for the upcoming legislative session. Governor Kemp announced his plans to pursue foster care and adoption reform through the creation of a "Family First" commission. He also encouraged state legislators to advance legislation that closes loopholes that leave children vulnerable to exploitation, helps victims tell their story in the courtroom without retaliation, and to support survivors who want to enter or re-enter the workforce. To learn more, click [here](#) to listen to the State of the State Address or click [here](#) to read it.



Governor Brian Kemp delivering his second State of the State Address. Photo Credit: Office of the Governor.



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American Bar Association is Hiring!



The American Bar Association Center on Children and the Law is seeking two full-time senior attorneys to work with their court projects team. The senior attorneys will engage in legal system reform efforts with child welfare stakeholders throughout the country, including agencies, judges, attorneys, court improvement programs, and tribes. The senior attorneys will provide training and technical assistance on substantive child welfare topics, including safety, permanency, legal representation, education, adoption, health, and kin caregiving. Click [here](#) for more information.

**Children don't
want better
families. They
just want their
families to be
better.**

THE HONORABLE J. RUSSELL JACKSON
FORSYTH COUNTY JUVENILE COURT

INSIGHT, CONT'D

journey as well. As a parent my heart broke for what this young girl endured and as a child welfare professional I wanted to move this mountain. One of the lessons learned is that we must not forget about our youth who runaway and view them as a lost cause. I was not alone in this journey as there are many people who contributed to the success of saving this young girl. This was an effort that included multiple states and many agencies and with the commitment of all who do this daily we save one child at a time from a life of trafficking. We do not stand alone in this journey to end trafficking; we all stand together.

Trafficking is occurring across our state in every community whether urban or rural. Traffickers target our youth through social media, tell our youth who have runaway "I will take care of you" and any other way they can coax a youth into believing they are there to "help" them. Our youth in Georgia are vulnerable and we must work each and every day to educate and train our communities on human sex trafficking.

It is truly a privilege and an honor to be part of a state and community that cares for Georgia's most vulnerable youth and I would also like to thank First Lady Marty Kemp for leading this charge through the GRACE commission.



VOICE CONT'D...

The central focus of EmpowerMENT is that young people teach their peers how to become a positive part of their community, partner with other adult supporters and leaders in their community, and help them develop and facilitate groups within their community that identify and impact key issues or priorities that are relevant to them.

EmpowerMENT began as a metro-Atlanta organization for young people by young people who had experienced care. Within a few years it had grown state-wide and now operates state-wide. Young people can be involved at their local level, with the Policy Council or other state level opportunities. Groups meet once a quarter and focus on leadership and advocacy development. This is an important avenue within EmpowerMENT for young people to get involved in the communities where they are living, working and going to school. It also celebrates the capacity of youth leadership in a locally driven context. Young leaders mix learning with fun and meetings are facilitated by a peer leader from that area. Topics and skill development include leadership, teamwork, advocacy, public speaking, community engagement, community organizing, facilitation skills, resources, rights and responsibilities.

Young people can become involved with the Policy Council which focuses on identifying and advocating for needed change in policy and practice that impacts outcomes such as permanency, education and economic self-sufficiency. Other teams center the needs of young parents in care, and education.

At a state level EmpowerMENT advocates, plans and facilitates Youth Town Halls, leading state-wide sessions- an opportunity for young people to gain deeper knowledge on issues facing them, representing Georgia on a national level and facilitating key events. In metro-Atlanta, MARTA day teaches participants how to use MARTA and get to key resources through a city-wide scavenger hunt. Last summer, in partnership with nsoro, EmpowerMENT hosted Summer Soiree which provided an intimate opportunity for current high school students to connect with older youth who had graduated from high school, many of which were in college or had recently completed college, and hear their advice on navigating the future.

Through these different avenues, EmpowerMENT members experience leadership growth, opportunities and natural peer mentoring. For more information on EmpowerMENT, follow them on Facebook at GAEmpowerMENT and sign up for their newsletters at EmpowerMENT@maac4kids.org.

*Georgia Office of the Child Advocate
for the Protection of Children*
Rachel Davidson, Director
<https://oca.georgia.gov>
7 MLK Jr. Blvd, Ste. 347
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 a photo/article for the newsletter, contact Deputy Director Jansen Head at jhead@oca.ga.gov.

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