



Success Strategies: What Success Can Look Like in Juvenile Court

By Emma Brown-Bernstein
Parent Attorney, Atlanta Judicial Circuit

After reading the Office of the Child Advocate's June 2019 newsletter highlighting "National Reunification Month Celebrations" I was reminded of the ways in which "success" stories do happen in child welfare. As a parent attorney in Fulton County, I have sometimes gotten bogged down in the stories of tragedy and injustice while failing to recall cases that represent good outcomes for children and families. Coincidentally, Fulton County's Court Improvement project for July 2019 asked all of the various stakeholders to share their "wins" over the last year. Listening to stakeholders and colleagues share their success stories got me thinking about what makes a dependency case close "successfully." Although the families may bring a different perspective, those of us assigned to their cases seemed to feel like the best resolutions happened when three conditions are met:

- All stakeholders share the guiding belief that children do best when they are with family;
- The parties are able to work collaboratively, and in ways that further the desires of their clients, towards a common goal; and
- Each party is represented by a zealous advocate who is deeply knowledgeable about the child welfare system and dependency law.

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Conversation About Efforts to Ensure Child Safety and Healthy Development

Voices for Georgia's Children and the Multi-Agency Alliance for Children (MAAC) invited several agency leaders, including OCA Director Rachel Davidson, to participate as a panelist on a discussion focused on primary and pre-primary prevention of child abuse and neglect. The opening presentation included an overview of existing initiatives that promote Georgia's efforts to ensure child safety and healthy development. Among others, the Georgia Fatality Review Program and the Georgia



Panel Members Representing GA DOE, GBI, OCA, DBHDD, DFCS, DCH, DPH, GOSA, DECAL, and DNR.

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

Youth Voice

Written by A. B.

Hello, my name is [A.B.] and I am 17 years old. I have been in care for a total of 3 years now, and I am proud of my decision of staying in. Since I been in care, I have had the opportunity to do so many wonderful things, some that you probably couldn't do while with your parents, like becoming a Certified Nursing Assistant at the age of 17, but not only that, I was given the opportunity to go to Ireland for a study abroad trip with Central Ga Tech, where I currently take dual-enrolled classes at. And yes... I said to Ireland. Dublin, Ireland to be exact. But it wasn't easy trying to go on this trip. To start off, my high school coordinator, Mr. Kenneth Rozier told me about this opportunity at a dual-enrollment orientation, explaining that

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“Safe Sleep” Guidelines Highlighted through Georgia’s Child Fatality Review Panel

The Georgia Child Fatality Review Panel met this month and received an overview of the American Academy of Pediatrics’ “Safe Sleep” guidelines. During the meeting, Dr. Sarah Lazarus explained recent recommendations on safe sleep practices including placing infants on their back for every sleep and caregivers being educated on CPR



Dr. Sarah Lazarus, DO reminding members of the Georgia Child Fatality Review Panel of the ABC's of "Safe Sleep".

for infants. Sleep-related deaths are a major, largely preventable, cause of death for infants in Georgia and the United States. A study of 2018 death certificates filed in Georgia has shown that sleep-related deaths are the leading cause of death for infants and children under the age of eighteen. More than 100 infants died in Georgia last year as a result of co-sleeping with their parents or being placed in other unsafe sleep environments. In March of 2019, investigators around the state responded to thirteen cases of “sleep related” deaths of infants in Georgia.

Although parents may be tempted to place their infants in their beds, the Georgia Child Fatality Review Panel urges caregivers to remember the ABC's of Safe Sleep. Click [here](#) for more info.

Georgia Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention State Plan

Leaders from state departments and nonprofit agencies have joined with the Georgia Division of Family and Children Services and Prevent Child Abuse Georgia to update the state's Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Plan. The current state plan was released twenty-six years ago in 1993. To view the 1993 plan, click [here](#).

DFCS and PCA are hosting two planning conversations in all fourteen regions across the state - one for providers (e.g. human service professionals, agency staff, educators, etc.) and one for caregivers and community representatives (parents, representatives from the faith, civic and business sectors, etc.). Click [here](#) to learn more about the regional meetings and how you can provide input on updating the state plan!

2019 OCA Staff Retreat

During the staff retreat, OCA staff members used art to illustrate why their work is important and what it means to them. Each art piece supports OCA's mission to protect Georgia's children. OCA's work involves assisting and restoring the security of children whose well-being is threatened by providing independent oversight of persons, organizations, and agencies responsible for providing services to or caring for children who are victims of child abuse and neglect or whose domestic situation requires intervention by the state. The artwork, now proudly displayed in our office, is a daily reminder us of our why.





ABC'S of SAFE to SLEEP

- ALONE -

Babies should sleep **alone** in their own sleep space, close to but separate from their caregiver.

- BACK -

Babies should be placed on their **back** to sleep. Every sleep. Every nap. Every time.

- CRIB -

Babies should sleep in a **crib** or bassinet with a firm, flat surface with no extra items such as blankets and toys.

Each year in the U.S., **more than 4,000** infants, without a prior known illness or injury, die suddenly and unexpectedly from causes attributed to the sleep environment.

Georgia averages **three** infant deaths per week due to sleep-related causes, most of which are preventable.

Georgia leaders have come together to combat this tragedy by introducing the **Georgia Safe to Sleep** campaign, a statewide initiative designed to raise awareness about sleep-related infant deaths and evidence-based sleep practices.

To learn more about the **Georgia Safe to Sleep** campaign or join the Hospital-Based Safe to Sleep program, visit www.georgiasafetosleep.org



FULTON, cont'd...

All of those of us involved in dependency cases (e.g., child attorneys, parent attorneys, SAAGs, guardians ad litem) need to operate with the belief that children do best if they can remain with their families or people with whom they have a preexisting relationship (think “fictive kin”). While this is often reiterated in theory in conferences, trainings and courtroom hallways, sometimes advocacy practice strays unnecessarily from this guiding belief. The more it does, the easier it is for dependency cases to be driven by snap judgments, biases and stereotypes, which, in my experience, can lead to entrenched divisions among the various clients and their representatives. The importance of being guided by this shared belief was exemplified in many of the “success” stories shared at the July Model Court--most of the stories that made all the practitioners feel as if they had served a family well resulted in either permanent placement with a relative or reunification. And while we applaud and are endlessly grateful to the work of foster parents, and identify that there are situations in which the court determines that it is best for the child to remain in that home, this should not be the default view upon which we rely.

So how can this shared belief guide practice? Examples might include: pushing for quick and safe relative placement; advising parents that sometimes they need a “plan B” to reunification; speaking with siblings of a child regarding their desires for their sibling; being creative about the supports and opportunities that families need to be successful; and, at a minimum, always engaging with a family in a way that is respectful. The most “successful” cases seem to include stakeholders working together in a way that is more collaborative than divisive, with advocates able to respect their client’s wishes, and advocate for them, while remaining realistic and honest with clients about outcomes and long-term goals. Collaboration also seems to lend itself to quicker permanency, better de-escalation and communication among the various parties, and better short-term outcomes for children in foster care.

If dependency cases are supposed to help families “function” again, we all need to model behavior through our practice that is respectful, honest, communicative, and, if appropriate, collaborative. This is not to say that sometimes strong divisions occur by virtue of duties and ethical obligations, but that if at all possible stakeholders should strive to avoid unnecessary courtroom cultural dysfunction that can replicate itself in ongoing familial dysfunction. The power of a shared belief system can protect the process against unwarranted conflict.

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Upcoming Events

- ✓ August 20-22: The 28th Annual Summer Conference by Georgia Mental Health Consumer Network at Epworth by the Sea, St. Simons Island, GA. More info [here](#).
- ✓ August 21: Youth Town Hall for DFCS Region 2 at the Boys and Girls Club of Lanier Teen Center in Gainesville, GA. More info [here](#). (Youth who are ILP eligible in Region 2 are invited.)
- ✓ September 10-12: Youth in Crisis Intervention Training by NAMI Georgia in Hampton, GA. More info [here](#).
- ✓ September 23-25: 2019 Georgia Suicide Prevention Conference in Pine Mountain, GA at The Lodge and Spa at Callaway Gardens. More info [here](#).
- ✓ October 3-4: 2019 Embark Georgia Leadership Conference at Columbus State University. More info [here](#).



*Mark your
calendar!*



PANEL cont'd... Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Plan were highlighted in the presentation (and also mentioned with updates in this newsletter).

Members of the MAAC EmpowerMENT Policy Council shared their experience as former youth in the foster care system and how their support and challenges helped them to find and define their voices in speaking up for other youth who are currently in foster care. Their priorities include building and retaining stable connections for youth in care, including those with family members and members of the youth's community. Another priority is also on helping youth who become homeless after transitioning out of foster care.

For the agency panel, each participant explained how their agency is imple-



From left to right: Cheryl Benefield (Georgia Dept. of Education), Trebor Randle (GBI), OCA Director Rachel Davidson, DBHDD Commissioner Judy Fitzgerald, and DFCS Director Tom Rawlings.

menting initiatives and programs that would help change behavior in order to ensure a safer and healthier environment for children in Georgia. Multiple agency leaders highlighted initiatives and programs such as the Georgia Safe to Sleep Campaign, Apex Program, the First Lady of Georgia's GRACE Commission, SPLASH Initiative, town halls for youth, listening tours to all regional education service agencies, and many more. Each participant discussed how its agency is collaborating with other agencies on the panel to provide resources to Georgia's children and to help create a safer and healthier environment for children to learn and grow.

Thank you to Voices and MAAC for hosting this important conversation, as well as to the legislators and many others who joined us!

VOICE cont'd... you could earn music appreciation credits for the class, so I really jumped for this, as I want to be ahead of my classmates, and I don't want that to come off in a bad way. But it's true. So, as I expressed that I wanted to go, Mr. Rozier told me the right paths to go, but I didn't have a way to pay for this trip. So, I asked the Methodist Home for Children and Youth (Cathy Houle- HSP of Smith Cottage and Alison Evan- CEO of the Methodist Home) was there anyway I could earned this money. That's when we came together for a meeting and we came up with an agreement: The Methodist Home would pay for my ticket, and I put in my short term money and all of my allowance to the pot of funds, and we would check every money to see how much money I have earned. My initial goal was \$1000. So, I got a job and raised \$400, but I was still missing \$600 and that when my Case Manager, Tiffeny Davis and the Houston Co. DFACS office may a big part in the money situation, along with donors of the Methodist Home and some of the community. All was done was, my name put out there and the reason for me raising all this money, and so many people contributed to this. I am very grateful for this. And when Ms. Alison told me that I raised over than the amount needed, I still worked to show, that I wasn't a slacker and I could do it. I truly thank everybody that helped for me to get on this trip. This was a once- in- the- lifetime trip and I am glad I *See [VOICE](#), Page 7*



DID YOU KNOW?

The Georgia General Assembly passed several new laws that would impact the child welfare community effective July 1, 2019. Some of the new laws include the following listed below. To read more about each legislative bill signed by the Governor, click on the respective bill numbers below.

Bill No.	Brief Description
HB 12, Act 129	Requires every public school to post a sign containing the toll-free telephone number operated by the Division of Family and Children Services to receive reports of child abuse or neglect 24 hours per day and seven days per week.
HB 64, Act 268	Requires child welfare agencies to make efforts to determine whether a parent or guardian of a child who is the subject of abuse allegations is on active duty in the military. Also requires certain notifications to military installation family advocacy programs and the reporting of child abuse to military law enforcement in certain situations.
HB 228, Act 187	Changes the minimum age of marriage of a child from 16 to 17 years of age and requires any person who is 17 years of age to have been emancipated. Also establishes requirements for filing a petition for emancipation for petitioners who desire to enter into a marriage.
HB 514, Act 216	Establishes the Georgia Behavioral Health Reform and Innovation Commission responsible for conducting a comprehensive review of the mental health system in Georgia. The commission will include five subcommittees, including one on Children and Adolescent Behavioral Health.
HB 530, Act 224	Prohibits parents or guardians from withdrawing or removing a child from a public school for the purpose of avoiding compliance with laws relating to mandatory attendance, school discipline, parental involvement, or parental responsibilities.
HB 543, Act 218	Allows a person to establish standing as an equitable caregiver if he or she can prove by clear and convincing evidence that he or she has undertaken a parental role in a child's life and that the child will suffer physical or long-term emotional harm. Also allows courts to establish parental rights and responsibilities for a person adjudicated to be an equitable caregiver. Prohibits courts from authorizing an equitable caregiver action when the parents of the child are not separated or when DFCS has an open child welfare case involving the child.
SB 158, Act 30	Referred to as the "Anti-Human Trafficking Protective Response Act". Authorizes DFCS to provide care and supervision to children who are victims of human trafficking. Amends the offense of trafficking for sexual servitude, redefines prostitution to include only acts committed by persons 18 years of age or older, and eliminates the offense of pandering by compulsion.
SB 167, Act 143	Allows a foster placement for a child adjudicated as a dependent child to be deemed as the child's fictive kin in determining such child's permanency plan.



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FULTON, cont'd...

Lastly, success stories occur when all stakeholders are represented by lawyers who are competent, qualified and zealous. Child welfare and dependency is an ever-evolving, challenging and nuanced area of law that requires lawyers to maintain effective relationships with a variety of players, including clients. To be successful in their respective roles, lawyers need significant knowledge of dependency law and its practice, and ample and diverse training. Courts also need to raise concern over lawyers who seem to fall short of this standard. I have the unique privilege of working in a public defender office that has a parent attorney division in which I am supported in my legal practice. I am surrounded by lawyers who do this work all the time who can offer me suggestions, guidance or a compassionate ear. But I know that this is not the experience for all parent attorneys in Georgia. I also know that not all parents receive high quality legal representation. I have seen and spoken with parent attorneys who have struggled with feeling marginalized in court by other stakeholders. I have spoken to parents who didn't even know they had a parent attorney, if they had one at all. I have taken phone calls from parent attorneys asking for a last-ditch legal argument before advocating against a termination of parental rights.

It is in this vein that parent attorneys and judges across the state have looked to reigniting PAAC, the Parent Attorney Advocacy Committee, in order to help train and support newer parent attorneys and those who remain isolated and disenfranchised. I have often heard it said that things go awry with more lawyers involved but lawyers armed with the requisite knowledge to do their job, and to do their job well, should be considered by all stakeholders as a condition precedent to serving children and families. Here's to a successful PAAC! (*More to come—stay tuned!*)

Back to School Bash

Richmond County DFCS was one of many that have recently hosted a back-to-school event. During this "Back to School Bash", they gave away book bags loaded with school



Members of the "Back to School Bash" Team

supplies and had many fun activities, including games, face painting, bounce houses, free hair-cuts, and free food!

Youth That Inspire!

Dennis Jacobs was recently recognized at a graduation celebration in Cobb County. This month, he was featured by CNN as a positive athlete in his community! Dennis is a track athlete, musician and entrepreneur. He overcame many obstacles to exceed his goals and go to college. "If you want to do better, be better for yourself, take advantage of what appears to be a bad situation," Jacobs said. Check out the feature on CNN [here](#).

VOICE cont'd...

went on it. But the reason I was went on this trip, was to show people that you can do anything that you put your mind to, and that I don't want to be labeled a stereotype, "that kids in care can't do things other kids can do." or "we're handicap and can't do anything for ourselves". I broke those stereotypes and I hope other kids can too.



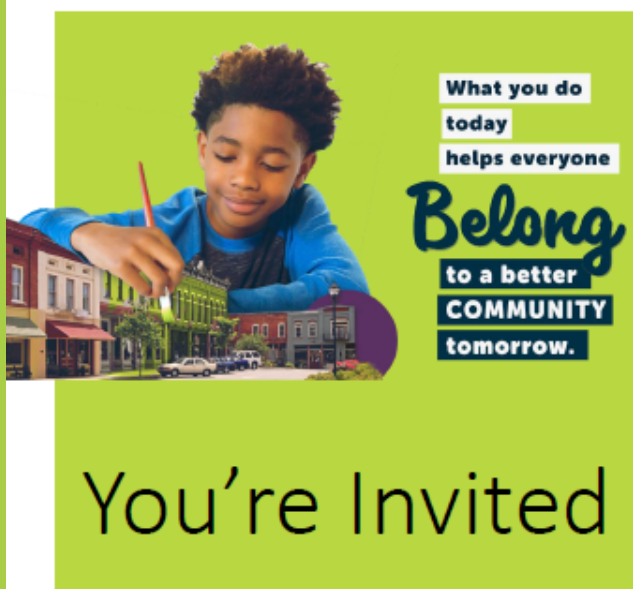


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What

Child Abuse & Neglect
Prevention Planning for the
state of Georgia

When

August- September 2019

Where

In all the 14 DFCS regions

Hosted by: Prevention and Community
Support Section of the Georgia Division
of Family and Children Services and
Prevent Child Abuse Georgia

Leaders from across Georgia's state departments and nonprofit agencies are working together to update the state's Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Plan. **We invite you to attend a planning conversation session in your area-**

**Professional and Service
Providers' Meeting**
(e.g. human service professionals,
agency staff, educators, etc.)

-OR-

**Caregivers and Community
Members' Meeting**
(parents, representatives from the faith,
civic and business sectors, etc.)

Find and Register for a Meeting Near You!

Abuse.PublicHealth.GSU.EDU/CANPP

Please help us by also sharing this invitation widely with anyone you think may be interested in attending.

Please direct questions to Deborah Chosewood
Deborah.Chosewood@dhs.ga.gov



DID YOU KNOW?!?!

The last Child Abuse & Neglect
Prevention Plan for the state of
Georgia was release in 1993, 26
YEARS AGO! Do you remember what
you were doing in 1993, were some of
you even born yet? [View 1993 Plan.](#)



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Save the Date!



November 13-15, 2019 • The Hotel at Avalon

The Georgia Office of the Child Advocate, Supreme Court of Georgia's Committee on Justice for Children, and the Georgia Division of Family and Children Services are pleased to announce the Call for Workshop Proposals for ***The Summit: Georgia's Child Welfare Conference*** to be held on **November 13-15, 2019** at the **Alpharetta Conference Center at The Hotel at Avalon**.

You are invited to join other child welfare professionals at the third annual Summit, a statewide, multi-disciplinary conference for sharing best practices, and collaborating across professions. The agenda is taking shape for an extraordinary program for all child welfare professionals – case managers, lawyers, judges, policy makers, Court Appointed Special Advocates, stakeholders and anyone interested in improving our system of serving Georgia's abused and neglected children.

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

Rachel Davidson, Director

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a complaint:*

- Phone: (404) 656-4200
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