



Child-Friendly Court Practice in Action: Chatham County



This friendly guy sits in Judge Lisa Colbert's office waiting to share hugs with children at court.

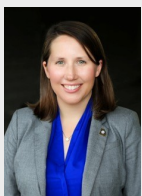
While visiting Chatham County Juvenile Court this month, we learned of a way the court helps makes things a little bit friendlier for children.

Children attending court for dependency proceedings are afforded an opportunity to help themselves to a treat—a toy, book, toiletries, or snacks—from the court. Children are escorted back to the judge's chambers to choose something of their liking. All the items are donated to the court for this purpose.

OCA and DFCS staff discussed this practice with Chatham County Juvenile Court

See [Child-Friendly](#), page 6

End Human Trafficking Summit

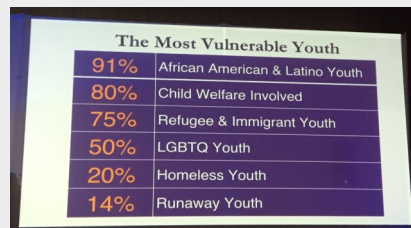


By Rachel Davidson
OCA Director

The City of Atlanta hosted the "End Human Trafficking ATL Summit 2019" this month. It was an educational and inspiring day that included performing arts, stories from survivors, and discussion around efforts underway to detect, rescue, and prevent trafficking of persons.

Given that youth involved in the child welfare system tend to be at higher risk of becoming victims of human trafficking, we have a responsibility to be educated and aware of resources available to prevent, intervene, and treat victims of trafficking.

YouthSpark is one such resource. They spoke of the need to disrupt the social connections that have been shown, through research, to increase a youth's vulnerability regarding both sexual and labor trafficking. Those connections include the juvenile justice and child welfare systems, in addition to drug abuse and truancy and



See [Trafficking](#), page 7

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

Youth Voice

As part of an effort to connect with youth directly to learn about their experiences and ideas for improving the foster care system, OCA and DFCS leaders have partnered to hold focus groups with youth in care. Our first visit was at a maximum watchful oversight (MWO) group home facility in Macon on March 4th.

While there, we met with three separate groups of youth ranging in age from 11-18, distinguished by their ages and cottages. We had several takeaways that were quite impactful:

- We asked a group of 10 youth (ranging in age from 15-18) to let us know about how long they had been in the facility. Every single youth knew the EXACT day they entered the facility. This underscored for us the life-changing significance a move into or within foster care can be to a child.
- The youth we spoke with were extremely engaged in the youth rights process. They were familiar with the placement's grievance process (and had utilized it!), but it was more than that; they were deeply invested in exercising their voice about their needs and their living space. Youth spoke highly of several staff members, with one group inviting their cottage leader in to See [Voice](#), page 6



Celebrating Social Work Month

“A Day in the Life”



By Marci Lane
Social Services Supervisor
Muscogee County DFCS

I want to introduce you to one of my case managers, Ms.

Brittany George. I am not

going to tell you how her pacing numbers are outstanding and all of her health checks and case plans are up to date. What I am going to share is a brief look at some barriers to our numbers but what real case management looks like.

Over a weekend, a three-day period, CM George had the following issues: A 15-year old child on her caseload ran away. It was reported that she was with her boyfriend, who is known to carry a gun and has a history of violence, as reported by his mother. CM George spent all day with the police getting a report, updating from “runaway” to “missing”, coordinating with the boyfriend’s mother to locate possible relatives, friends, etc., who could have picked them up. While this was occurring, her 16-year old foster child was 1013’d for the second time that week due to ongoing psychotic behaviors. CM George has fought relentlessly to get this child the medical attention she needs to stabilize, including arguing with a doctor who took her off all of her meds and gave her only one and stated she was ready to discharge. The child went to school the next day and stabbed herself with a pencil. Next, she had a child who was to have weekend visitation with his father and lives for these visits. CM George called me saying that the transporter cancelled and she wanted to pick him up and get him to his dad’s so he wouldn’t have to miss his visit. Also during

See [Day](#), page 5



Governor Kemp proclaimed March as Social Work Month in Georgia. Pictured are DHS, DFCS, and OCA leadership who are all pleased to celebrate the hard work that social workers and others in this field do every day!

You are heroes!



Tom Rawlings, DFCS Director, and Robyn Crittenden, DHS Commissioner, pictured with the official Proclamation

Upcoming Events:

- ✓ 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. (No SAT/ACT requirement.) More info [here](#).
- ✓ (Free!) Youth Empowerment Conference, April 13, 2019, Atlanta, GA. More info [here](#).
- ✓ Foster Walk 2019, May 18, 2019, Lithonia, GA. More info [here](#).
- ✓ Free courses on child trauma and brain development through the Child Welfare Training Collaborative, multiple and ongoing opportunities statewide. More info [here](#).

Mark your
calendar!



As Seen on Social Media

The Rotary Club of Carrollton posted this message and these pictures recently on social media as they built a playground on the grounds of Carroll County DFCS so children and families can use it for visitations and while otherwise at the office. DFCS County Director Libby Smith also suspects staff may enjoy swinging a bit to destress! She expressed appreciation for all that the entire Carroll County community has done and continues to do to support DFCS and children in care.

Day 2 was beautiful and productive! The playground is taking shape and will be ready soon. Thanks to all Rotarians and friends for their help yesterday!



Parent Advisory Council

The Prevention and Community Support Section of Georgia DFCS is currently accepting applications for parents interested in joining Georgia's Parent Advisory Council. Parents must have prior involvement with the child welfare system or experiences using community-based prevention services.

The Council will help expand meaningful partnerships between parents and staff throughout the system by promoting the voices of parents as advisors to the system.

For more information and to apply, click [here](#). Applications are due by March 29, 2019.

Spotlight on a State of Hope 'Big Idea'

Coastal Georgia Area Community Action Authority

The Coastal Georgia Community Action Authority was one of the more than 60 proposals selected to become designated State of Hope sites and one of only five to receive both technical and financial support. Their 'big idea' focuses on improving outcomes for vulnerable children and families in Brunswick by creating a community resource and access center at the Risley School location. The center will serve as the point of contact for families in need to connect them to the available resources in the community. The center will also assist families with referral processes; host continuing education and training; and advocate for the needs of citizens in the Brunswick community. For more information visit <http://www.coastalgacaa.org>.

WHAT IS STATE OF HOPE ALL ABOUT?

Offer models for youth and families to shape the work that is meant to serve them



Create convening opportunities where stakeholders can learn from each other and build relationships



Lift up and scale promising practices



Inspire collective impact and innovation



Partner with communities and support efforts that ensure that individuals and families thrive



Connect and support local leaders in prioritizing the needs of families and developing strategies to address these needs



Encourage communities to leverage their strengths



Celebrate community successes and shine a light on HOPE in action across the state





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

AdvOCacy

Your child welfare update

March 2019

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The Cold Case Project is in its 10th year!

The Cold Case Project (CCP) began in 2009 with the focus on removing barriers to achieving legal permanency for children in foster care. CCP reviews cases of children who are predicted, by a computer model, to be most at risk of aging out of foster care without attaining legal permanency. Additional other wellbeing measures are tackled and accomplished for these children.

The Supreme Court of Georgia's Committee on Justice for Children (J4C) administers CCP in partnership with the Georgia Division of Family and Children Services and the Office of the Child Advocate. Cold Case Fellows are attorneys representing a mix of agency (Special Assistant Attorneys General), parent and child attorneys, and Guardians ad Litem. A wide network of experts is available to assist the Fellows.

Please see [here](#) for the most recent annual report.

Cold Case Project
Annual Report for the Work of 2017
Georgia's Child Welfare System
March 2019



Prepared by the Judicial Council/Administrative Office of the Courts
Communications, Children, Families and the Courts Division

Georgia Bureau of Investigation

Banks County Youth Suicide Prevention Summit

April 23, 2019 | 6 - 8 PM



In the past five years, 268 youth have taken their own lives in Georgia. For every young person who dies by suicide, national statistics indicate 25 others will have attempted to take their own lives. That means approximately 6,700 other children have attempted suicide during the same time. In response, Georgia Bureau of Investigation and Child Fatality Review want to start the conversation around what we can do to prevent suicides in the state of Georgia.

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Banks County High School Auditorium
1486 Historic Homer Hwy.
Homer GA 30547

www.gbi.ga.gov/cfr

For more information call 404-270-8715



GBI's Child Fatality Review (CFR) is proud to partner with the Banks County Coroner's Office, Banks County Sheriff's Department and the local school system in a Youth Suicide Prevention Summit. Please join us from 6:00 pm - 8:00 pm, as we discuss the youth suicide crisis in Georgia, and what we can do as a community to help our youth and raise awareness.

In Georgia, suicide is the second leading cause of death for children ages 15-17. Education regarding risk factors and prevention tools are key to putting an end to this crisis! Parents, educators, youth, and the community as a whole are encouraged to attend. You will hear from subject matter experts, legislators, and local officials regarding resources and plans to address this issue. For more questions, please contact Banks County Coroner Mark Savage at 706-983-1799 or CFR at 404-270-8715.

More info regarding CFR can be found [here](#).



March 2019

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Elevating Social Work

During this month, DFCS has been "Elevating" their social workers by highlighting them on social media. Here is a sampling:



Everyday social service workers help guide and elevate those from disparity to hopeful realities. There is no dollar value that can be measured against one life saved or transformed due to the outreach of social service workers. — DFCS Region 4 Accounting Team

The term "social work" has a lot of different meanings, however, to me it simply means helping others in times of need. Not only in the community but also in the workplace. I think that our families, children and community deserve to have stellar social work services, and my goal and objective is to make the Division of Family & Children Services GREAT! We can provide great customer service, great and timely services, great permanency outcomes — by being GREAT in every measure and aspect of our work. — Channelle, social service administrator



Our new class of child welfare social workers from February's child welfare academy plan to [#ElevateSocial-Work](#) in their community by protecting "one child at a time."

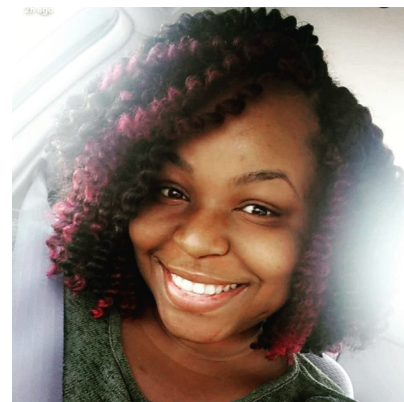
Want to work with
DFCS? They're Hiring!
Click [here](#) to apply.

Day, cont'd...

this time, CM George has a 17-year old who was brought into care because her mother was found dead and she and her siblings had no guardian or family. This child has endured grief and trauma of foster care and was now going to her Senior Prom. CM George arranged to pick the child up and take her to have her make-up and hair done. CM George sent pictures of the most beautiful and stunning 17-year old who could now hold her head up and enjoy what other children take for granted. Again, all of this is occurring within 3 days. Good news, the missing child was returned to the foster parent unharmed, thank the Lord. Now, the foster parent would not allow her to stay so CM George had to call and secure placement for this child. Basically CM George has not sat at home, let alone her desk, to document, in almost a week. Her heart shines through everything she does. As stressful as the disruptions have been, CM George sends me a picture of the beautiful child going to prom and states how this is what makes it all worth while. Following this weekend, CM George went to see her 16-year old foster child, who was once again hospitalized and unstable. She has seen her at least 4 times that month. She texted me to tell me how the child is still hearing voices and is so distraught that she tells CM George that she just wants to kill herself. CM George told me that she just prayed with the child.

This is what Case Management looks like. I am inspired to be better at what I do because of this. I wanted to shout this as loudly as I could to share that greatness is still occurring, regardless of the numbers. I want to recognize this Case Manager for the outstanding performance and dedication. A paper certificate on the bulletin board does not seem sufficient to me.

I just wanted to share this with as many as I possibly could and express gratitude for this Case Manager and also share some positive light to others that it may also inspire. I appreciate your time in reading this and sharing my joy. I cannot take credit for this Case Manager, as she was already this type of worker when I came to the county and met her, but regardless of where the road takes her in the future, I will never forget the impression that has been forever made on me.



Case Manager Brittany George



Child-Friendly cont'd...

Judge Colbert and Judge Cole. They both indicated the benefits of this practice help alter children's views and opinions of the court and improve the relationship between them and the judge. This was exemplified by one teenager we encountered. She was asked if she'd like to go pick something out.

She hesitated because she would have to walk through the same doors she did when she was taken into custody for a delinquency offense. After she was assured she would walk back through the doors to her regular life, she happily went to select an item for herself (and did return!).

The court has seen many children leave with a smile on their face as a result of this child-friendly practice. What can your court do to make things a little bit friendlier for children?



A wall full of goodies for children—there's plenty more that didn't make it into the photo!



Toiletries galore!



Treasure chest filled with donated toys

Does your court have child-friendly practices in place? We'd love to hear about them! Please share via email: rdavidson@oca.ga.gov.

Voice cont'd...

to join us in the midst of our conversation. This staff person and others that the youth respected appeared to be people who expressed empathy, a willingness to listen, and an ability to calmly help the youth understand the need for certain rules while also understanding that there may be room for adjusting other practices to provide youth with a more positive experience in the placement.

- Normalcy—This is something we hear from older youth quite frequently. One young man described his experience with wanting to go to prom. He had not disclosed his foster care placement situation to the girl he wanted to go with and was nervous to do so, but ultimately he would have to because the group home was going to need contact information for her and her parents. If he was in family based care, he likely would not have that struggle.
- While the majority of these youth were happy with their experience at this placement, most would have preferred to be in a more family-like setting. With the requirements of the Family First Prevention Services Act pending, this goes far beyond the general recruitment of foster homes; we need to ensure the foster homes that exist meet the needs of the children in care. Foster homes for teens, children with developmental disabilities and youth struggling with behavioral challenges are in especially short supply within our current continuum.

OCA and DFCS are extremely grateful to the youth that spoke with us during this visit, as well as to the placement for accommodating us and being so welcoming! We intend to continue visits like these throughout the state. Please let us know if there is a particular placement or child you think would benefit from such a visit. We compiled an introduction video for youth to have a better understanding of what to expect when we visit; this video can be viewed [here](#).



Trafficking cont'd...

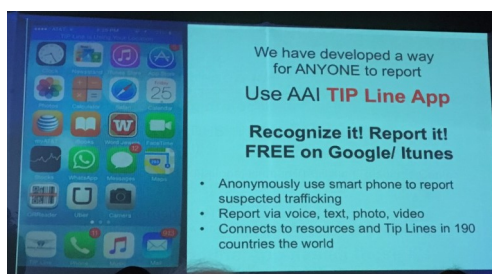
these organizations on how to “look”, and to make buying risky.

Several agencies in Georgia, including the Attorney General’s Office, the Georgia Bureau of Investigation, and the Statewide Human Trafficking Taskforce supported by the Criminal Justice Coordinating Council have all taken significant efforts on these issues. The Georgia General Assembly has also worked diligently to establish laws to protect and support victims of trafficking.

With representatives from Peru, Belgium, Canada and the Bahamas attending this Summit, there is not only collaboration here in Georgia but there is also a global effort to end human trafficking. Each of these countries spoke about their efforts and shared their appreciation of the opportunity to learn from the efforts within Georgia and the U.S.



Georgia Attorney General Chris Carr discusses the ways the state is partnering to combat this issue



perspective, lamenting that it seemed as though no one wanted to prevent a person from becoming a pimp or otherwise help that person out of that lifestyle. The performance underscored an aspect of human trafficking not commonly discussed among advocates: the need to build among men and within the culture in general a respect for women and a rejection of the idea that a person should ever be for sale.

For the children in Georgia, and beyond, it is imperative that we acknowledge the intersectionality that exist and continue to improve our current systems while also implementing new opportunities for prevention and intervention for youth, their families, and their communities.

running away. Several suggestions on solving the problems include building partnerships with high-risk youth organizations, educating

One great resource shared during this conference was established by the airline industry. Airline Ambassadors International has a Tip Line App available for travelers to report suspected victims on an anonymous basis.

One very poignant and enlightening moment of the day came from a performance by the Positive Arts Movement labeled “The Pimp”. An actor described trafficking from a pimp’s

END HUMAN TRAFFICKING ATL SUMMIT 2019 EXHIBITORS

4Sarah
www.4sarah.net
404.312.6793

Airline Ambassadors
www.airlineamb.org
866.ANGEL.86 (866.264.3586)

Atlanta Redemption Ink, Inc.
www.atlantaredemptionink.com
678.926.9946

Gigi's House
www.gigishouseatl.org
470.372.8050

House of Dawn
www.houseofdawn.org
770.477.2385

Out of Darkness Rescuing Hope
www.rescuinghope.com
404.817.3502

Rescuing Hope
www.rescuinghope.com
404.388.0483

S.O.A.P. (Save Our Adolescents from Prostitution)
www.soaproject.org
614.216.1619

Street Grace
www.streetgrace.org
678.809.2111

United Way of Greater Atlanta
www.unitedwayatlanta.org
404.527.7200

Wellspring Living
www.wellspringliving.org
404.948.4673

Youth Spark
www.youth-spark.org
404.612.4628

Numerous helpful resources exist

*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 an article for the newsletter: rdavidson@oca.ga.gov

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<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCqvCem2OBwAXWkmHp6kyYAg>