



A Message from the Director



*By Rachel Davidson
OCA Director*

**Having previously
represented children** in de-

pendency proceedings, I saw firsthand the benefits of engaging with youth in and out of court. I remain passionate about the need to engage with youth and believe in Georgia EmpowerMENT's motto of "Nothing about me without me."

I have discussed before the notion of sharing our bullhorns with the children we serve. When we do, it helps us understand what they view as important and how we can better advocate for their needs and desires. In advance of National Foster Care Month in May, I wrote [this piece](#) on authentic youth engagement and sharing our bullhorns that I encourage you to read. Although I am already a strong adult supporter of youth in foster care, I continue to learn from young people. Just recently I had the opportunity to hear a young adult's perspective of what court hearings can be like for children in care. This perspective helped me recognize how we can be more sensitive

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CALL FOR WORKSHOP PROPOSALS

The Georgia Office of the Child Advocate, Supreme Court of Georgia's Committee on Justice for Children, the Georgia Division of Family and Children Services, and Georgia Court Appointed Special Advocates are pleased to announce the call for workshop proposals for **The Summit: Georgia's Child Welfare Conference** to be held on **November 17-19, 2021** at the **Alpharetta Conference Center at The Hotel at Avalon**.

As in previous years, The Summit is designed for all stakeholders that comprise Georgia's child welfare system. Click [here](#) to **submit your proposal by June 11, 2021**. Please contact AK Consulting Group at 850-523-4200 if you have any questions or need assistance.

YOUTH VOICE

Celebrating Resiliency and Accomplishments

*By Jared Oenick,
Member, Georgia
Peers Advocating for
Change (GPAC)*

**My name is Jared
Oenick, and I am 22
years-old.** I aged out of

the foster care system in 2017 and transitioned into Necco's ILP program. It was a long and difficult journey, but if you fast forward 4 years, I am now a junior at the University of North Georgia (UNG), majoring in biology with a minor in neuroscience. I never thought I would be where I am today. I was never exceptionally good in school growing up, and changing schools over and over again due to switching from group home to group home did not help.

In middle and high school, my grades were lousy, and I was never put into any honors or gifted pro-



grams. Although I acted like a know-it-all, I can assure you, I really, re-

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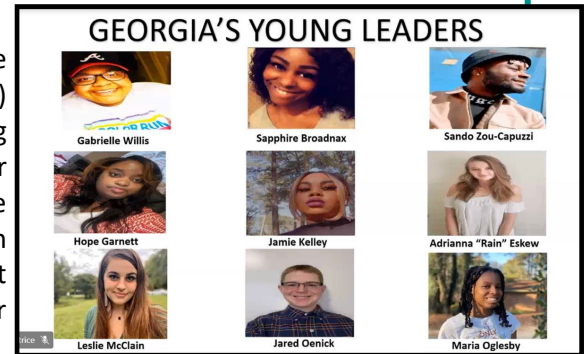


Joint Planning Meeting on Permanency and Well-Being with Young Leaders

DFCS recently held multiple stakeholder meetings as part of their annual review of Georgia's federally-approved child welfare strategic plan. One of these meetings was led by young adults who have experienced Georgia's foster care system and are a part of a youth advisory council. These young leaders shared their insights and engaged and brainstormed with Georgia's child welfare professionals on "Engaging Youth with Opportunities and Career Exploration" as assisting young people navigating and transitioning into independence is an area where these professionals can provide support.

This and similar stakeholder meetings help promote collaborative discourse to further shared goals. Special thanks to Tammy Reed (recently retired (!) DFCS Permanency Section Director), Carmen Callaway (DFCS Well-Being Services Director), and Candis Jones (DFCS Independent Living Director) for creating this opportunity and to the young leaders for making it a valuable and productive event. Of this event, participant and adult supporter Sarah Bess Hudson shared, "This collaboration is so beautiful and powerful! What a great example among all of us! Go GPAC [Georgia Peers Advocating for Change], EmpowerMEnt, and Amerigroup!"

Additional stakeholder meetings ensure a focus on prevention, kinship, and safety. The 5-year strategic plan is known as the Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP); the annual review of this plan is known as the Annual Progress and Services Report (APSR). Click [here](#) to learn more.



What a Difference a Year Makes

On March 13, 2021, as the pandemic led to a shut down, several Georgia child welfare professionals flew back to Atlanta from a Court Improvement Program meeting in Washington, D.C. It was an eerie time and over a year later we continue to live in a space that feels somewhat in-between.

The effects of the pandemic have been well-documented and I am sure we will continue to learn more about long lasting effects as time goes on. [This article](#) discusses the effects of the pandemic on LA County's child welfare system which are similar to those in Georgia and many other child welfare systems. [This article](#) highlights the effects on Polk County's Family Connection Partnership and collaborative efforts to continue to serve the community. [This article](#) and [its follow-up](#) focus on school attendance in Georgia and the effects of absenteeism. In addition to discussing the effects of the pandemic, [this article](#) also discusses ways to prepare for and respond to these effects.

There are certainly a number of things resulting from the pandemic that will positively impact our work and our lives as we continue to try to regain a sense of normalcy. Yet many of us have been faced with unusual challenges this past year, and even as it becomes safer to interact with people as we did before COVID-19, it remains even more important than ever to engage with the people we serve to understand what their unique short and long-term challenges are—either because of the pandemic or regardless of it. We must also continue to extend grace to each other and ourselves.



Honoring Social Workers

March is recognized as National Social Work Month. This year's theme is "Social Workers are Essential." DHS honored the compassionate social workers who assist people in need to overcome barriers to achieve safe, stable, and fulfilling lives by highlighting their experiences and perspectives.

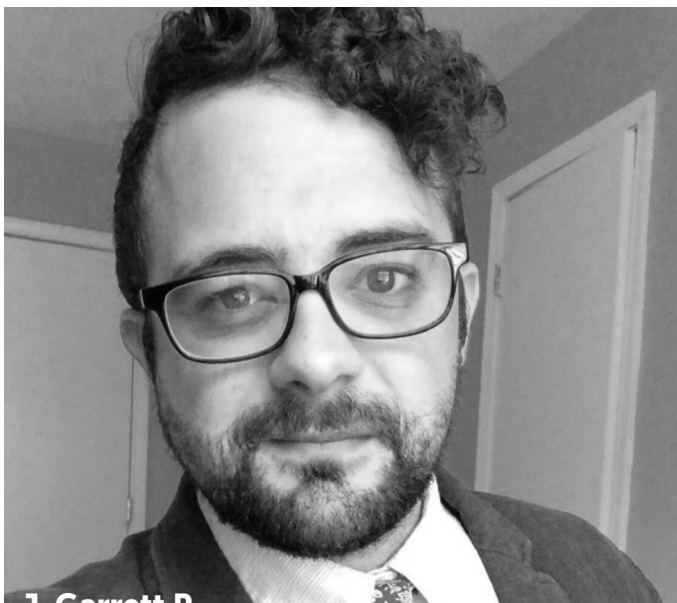
“Social workers are essential because if not us, then who? There are children and families in this world who are hurting and who need us, and if we aren't willing to intervene and help, who else will? In my time with the Department, I have learned that people genuinely want to change, and most are willing to accept our help and allow us to walk alongside them.

This pandemic has spotlighted how vital the social work field is. Children and families need us now more than ever. The pandemic challenged us all as professionals to think outside the box, get creative and bust through barriers to ensure we best serve Georgia's most vulnerable populations.”

— Brittney H., Regional Adoptions Unit Supervisor, Region 2



Brittney H.
Regional Adoptions Unit Supervisor | Region 2



J. Garrett P.
Social Services Administrator | Region 1

“I have the honor of leading a team of 20 social services professionals in the 11 counties making up [DFCS] Region 1.

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, our team was able to open 93 new foster and adoptive resources in 2020. Our team helps recruit, assess and train foster, adoptive and kinship caregivers for children in care.

As case managers, it is essential to create more families in the communities we serve, and I enjoy guiding my team to do the same in their communities and watching them build their own passions for their work.”

— J. Garrett P., Social Services Administrator, Region 1





Haven B.
DeKalb County Case Manager | Region 14

“‘What makes you different from your families?’ That is the question that leads my work.

Through my tenure as a case manager, the only thing that makes me different are resources and opportunities. Each day, I make the conscious decision to be the resource and the opportunity for a family. As a social worker during the pandemic, we have had to soldier on because vulnerable children were at stake. That is what makes us essential. We had to proceed with caution and regroup, our children and families needed our help.

... Seeing a child cry because their case was successfully closed and they were able to be reunited with their family makes being a social worker worth it.”

— Haven B., DeKalb County Case Manager, Region 14

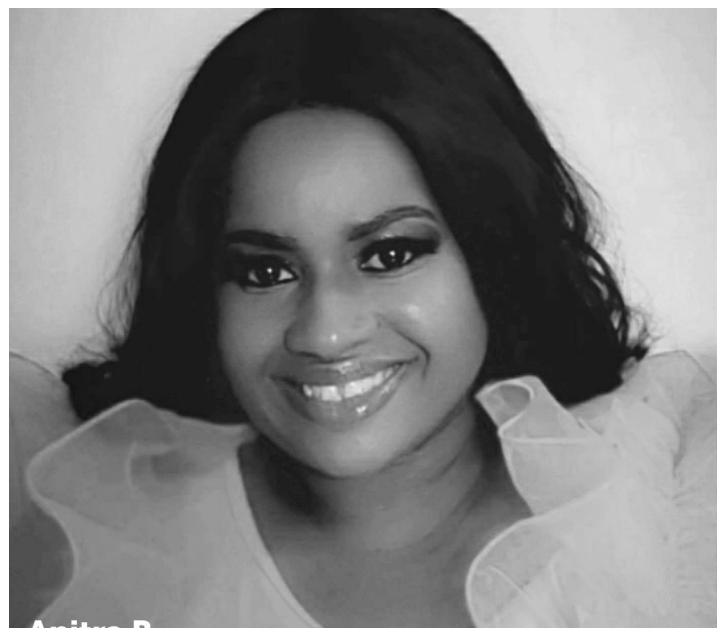


“I have a young man on my caseload who had a pretty tough year. Beyond his typical struggles, he also experienced abuse. During this time, he had lots of services in place, and everyone was incredibly supportive of this young man. He is learning to prevail against all odds.

Like the young man on my caseload, DFCS social workers have also learned to prevail against all odds during this pandemic. We compete against poverty, substance abuse, mental illness, etc., and because of this experience, we have learned to embrace the unimaginable. We have revamped, taken inventory, evaluated and started over.

Social workers are vital, necessary, crucial and needed in a world where families are just trying to survive and live with what little they have.”

— Anitra B., Social Services Case Manager 2, Region 2



Anitra B.
Social Services Case Manager 2 | Region 2





Legislative Updates

Georgia's 2021 Legislative Session ended on March 31, 2021. Several bills of interest that were passed include:

- HB 114: Increases the adoption tax credit. Read more [here](#).
- HB 154: Includes technical revisions to the Adoption Code; reduces the age at which a person is allowed to petition for adoption from 25 to 21 years of age; and allows DFCS to file a petition for the appointment of a guardian for children in their custody 6 months prior to that child turning 18 years old (applicable under Title 29 of O.C.G.A.).
- SB 20: Adds the following new members to OCA's Advisory Committee: a foster parent, a CASA, and a young adult formerly in foster care.
- SB 28: Includes technical revisions and adjustments to the juvenile code regarding temporary alternatives to foster care and the admissibility of hearsay evidence in dependency proceedings, as well as modifications to definitions regarding abandonment and abuse.
- SB 107: Establishes a tuition waiver program for qualifying youth in foster care at Georgia's public technical colleges, including a waiver of the costs to obtain a GED through such institutions. It also urges the Board of Regents to adopt a similar waiver program for Georgia's public universities and classifies students from a homeless situation as in-state for tuition purposes. Read more [here](#).
- HB 548: Facilitates increased data sharing regarding timing and status of dependency proceedings between DFCS and the courts.

Big Questions for Child Welfare Podcast: Racial Bias and Caseworker Training

Hosted by The Imprint's Weekly Podcast

It can be encouraging to hear and participate in necessary conversations about racial bias, especially related to the child welfare system. [This podcast](#), part of The Imprint's Weekly Podcast series, involved a conversation between Daniel Heimpel, Molly Tierney, and Karen Baynes-Dunning. If you listen to it yourself, you may just find it as enlightening as I did. The virtual reality training developed for case workers sounds promising, as does the potential for positive change as part of the conversations that will undoubtedly follow.

GEORGIA CASA CONFERENCE

• SAVE THE DATE •

SATURDAY, AUGUST 7, 2021

**ATLANTA MARRIOTT MARQUIS
ATLANTA, GA**

Make your plans now to join us for a hybrid conference experience that offers options for both in-person and virtual participation.

More information coming soon!

Follow us on Facebook or visit our website for conference details and updates.

<https://www.gacasa.org/get-involved/#events>

**CHANGE A
CHILD'S STORY.™**



Governor Kemp signs HB 114 into law on March 22, 2021



The Long-Lasting Impact of Professionalism and Kindness

(As shared by Mary Havick, DFCS Deputy Division Director of Child Welfare, via "The Connection" DFCS staff newsletter)



Professional kindness. I've been thinking and reading about kindness in the workplace this week. Kindness is defined as "the quality of being friendly, generous, and considerate." Professional kindness in action could be a quick email thank you note, giving a colleague encouragement or how you share news. Research says kindness in the workplace is contagious, increases employee well-being and can lead to an more inclusive culture.

When I reflect upon times I've been treated kindly at work, one of the first examples that comes to mind happened early in my career and revolved around how I received some bad news. I was working as a case manager and applied for a job as a case manager in a neighboring county. The job opening was in the CPS Investigations unit. I was qualified with a BSW degree and two years of experience as a case manager in CPS Investigations and Family Preservation. I didn't get the job. However, I'll never forget the way I got the news and how it made me feel. The hiring manager, a Social Services Administrator, called me and told me I didn't get the job. It was a brief phone call, like maybe 20 seconds long, that went something like "Hi Mary. I'm calling to tell you that you were not selected for the position. I hope you'll consider applying again when we have another opening. Thank you. Goodbye."

I didn't get a form letter several weeks later. I got a phone call right after the decision was made. It wasn't the news I wanted to hear, but it was delivered timely and in a considerate manner. I felt respected. A few weeks later, I got a phone call from the same person. She said they had an open position in the Foster Care and Adoptions unit and wondered if I was interested. Without hesitation, I said "yes" even though it was a different program area and was off to my next adventure with the agency. Kindness matters.

Check out these articles about kindness in the workplace:

[6 Surprising Ways Kindness Can Boost Your Career](#)

[Making Kindness a Priority in the Workplace](#)

[Kindness in the Workplace: 5 Ways to Spread Some Positivity](#)





MESSAGE CONT'D... to the complexities that the youth may be experiencing in these situations. I am grateful for my continued education and ongoing understanding of the experiences of children, young adults, and parents in the system within which we work through hearing their insights and perspectives. Without taking the time to authentically engage, I never would have otherwise understood how to adjust my own approaches and perspectives.

Authentic engagement takes time and can be difficult because relationships are hard and our work can be taxing especially because children and families have endured trauma. When we authentically engage and work in a trauma-informed and responsive way while building and supporting strong and positive relationships, amazing things can happen – not only in the lives of those we serve, but also for our system's culture and climate.

Being trauma-informed means you understand and have an appreciation for the fact that a child's difficult behaviors may be that child's expression of or coping mechanism for the trauma. Being trauma-responsive means you don't hold that child's expression of his trauma against him and that you meet him where he is, seek ways to build resilience, and approach him in a solution-oriented manner as opposed to a punitive one.

Whitney Gilliard, CEO of Gilliard and Company, reflected on the possibilities when approaching the work in a trauma-responsive way. During a treatment team meeting with social workers, therapists, the child, additional supporting members, and herself serving in the role of trauma intervention, behavior aide, and family support partner, the team was discussing a youth who had been running away, fighting, and destroying property. She shared the following exchange:

Others: He needs to learn consequences, the police needs to be called.

Others: He is acting out on purpose and it's dangerous. He will never be reunified home. We can't just give him to his mother like this. We won't give into his "tantrums".

*Me: *watching and hearing everyone. Doing internal deep breathing*, my heart is about to beat out of my chest from anger.*

Others: He needs to go into another maximum facility. He needs to learn there are consequences to his actions.

Others: Let's put him on a contract, we have to make him understand his actions are not tolerated.

Others: There's no other option, we need to consider Juven-

Me: (you can see my heart pulse in the vein of my neck) "Send him home. He needs to be at home with his mother."

*Others: *Silence**

The split between myself and everyone else suddenly becomes as clear as the part of the sea

Me: "When my son was at the dentist, and he screamed, kicked and cried, the dentist refused services and offered another day. When I was upset and assumed it was because of his behavior- they said to me, 'ma'am, if we force him, we are traumatizing him.' If we force this child to stay in foster care even when he is kicking and screaming... we are traumatizing this child. And I will not be a part of that. Send him home. If he is no better in behavior adjustment then let's offer a therapeutic treatment facility. But until then, send him home.

Others: After an hour deliberation. "We will send him home. But we all need to be prepared that this may be catastrophic and dangerous"

The result: The child is back with mom who worked through her drug addiction. Through their time together, they have been reminded why they need each other. They are reunified.

Whitney's takeaway from this experience was that it was necessary to speak up, even when your words may not be favored by everyone and you may feel like an odd man out. I have been involved in similar conversations where a youth is being punished for the behaviors that may merely be an ex-



Child Abuse Prevention Month

Have your social media feeds been flooded with Pinwheels for Prevention? April is Child Abuse Prevention Month and victims of child abuse are often recognized by blue pinwheels and pinwheel gardens to promote awareness and prevention efforts. Everyone plays a role in prevention; check out [this new PSA video](#) to see how. Check out [this site](#) for more information on preventing child abuse and [participate in a regional prevention-focused planning session](#). And allow these pinwheel gardens that have appeared on OCA's social media feeds to remind you why you do this valuable work and motivate your continued efforts on behalf of children and families:



Fulton County Juvenile Court Judge Philip Jackson (above) and Georgia CASA's Lori Pupp (below) planted pinwheels with Atlanta CASA at the Fulton County Juvenile Court.



The Child Advocacy Center— Lookout Mountain Judicial Circuit teamed up with their partners in Dade County to plant 260 pinwheels representing the number of reports of abuse they received in 2020.



The pinwheel garden in Sylvester, GA (Worth County) has been going strong for about 20 years.



The Lighthouse Children's Advocacy Center helps support and protect ALL children in the Southwestern Judicial Circuit.



295 pinwheels at the Lumpkin County Courthouse represent each child served by Enotah CASA.





ICYMI: Domestic Violence Trainings

The DFCS Safety Services Section recently hosted two trainings focused on Domestic Violence/Intimate Partner Violence. One training involved a partnership with the Department of Public Health (DPH) and Northside Hospital and focused on **Linking Concussions and Domestic Violence/Intimate Partner Violence** and can be viewed [here](#). The other training involved a partnership with the Georgia Commission on Family Violence and focused on **Collaborating with partners to promote safe homes for all Georgians** and can be viewed [here](#).

These trainings can be helpful to all child welfare professionals interested in expanding their knowledge and problem solving skills around domestic/intimate partner violence as they address:

- Increased awareness of the medical needs of domestic violence victims
- How to identify common signs and symptoms of a concussion
- Do's and Don'ts of safety planning with domestic violence victims/survivors diagnosed with a concussion
- Research and resources to support victims/survivors through concussion recovery
- Additional information and resources available through the Georgia Commission on Family Violence



Hot Chocolate Talk How-to Guide

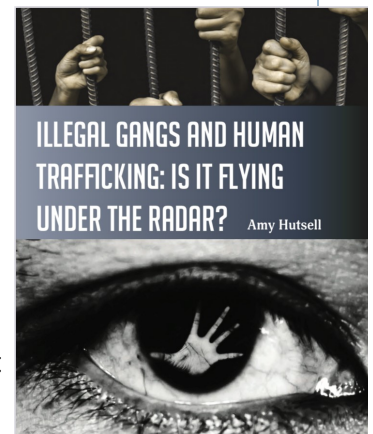


Talking with children about safety and sexual abuse can seem daunting. The Committee for Children has developed a How-to Guide to make it easier, with specific tips by age to help ensure a developmentally appropriate conversation. Access the guide and additional information [here](#).

Illegal Gangs and Human Trafficking

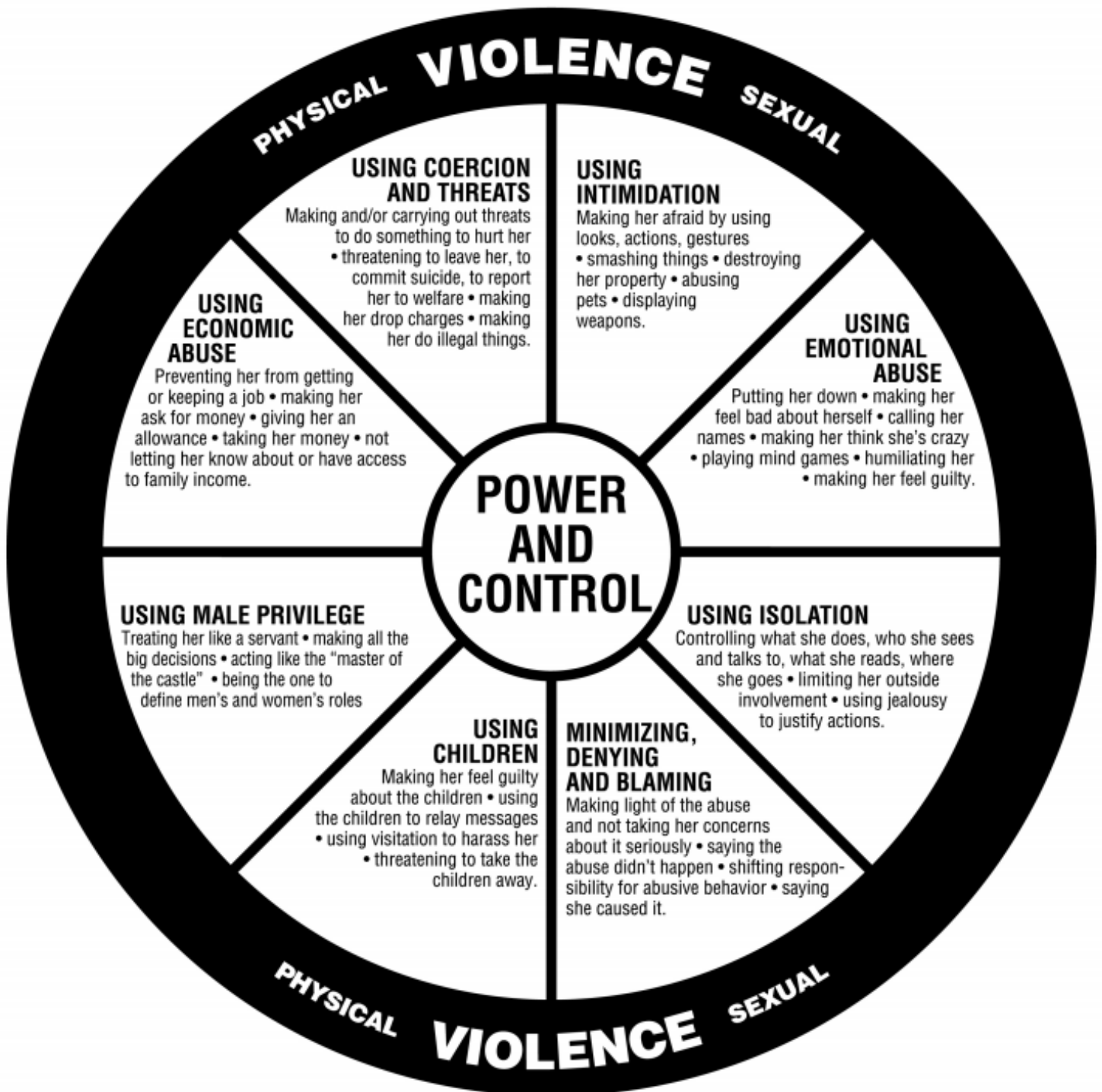
The Spring 2021 Edition of the Georgia Police Chief Magazine has an informative article titled "Illegal Gangs and Human Trafficking: Is it Flying Under the Radar?" written by Amy Hutsell with Georgia's Criminal Justice Coordinating Council (CJCC). It begins on page 52 and can be accessed [here](#).

Let's stay aware of the connection between gangs and human trafficking and support our partners in law enforcement to do the same.



Financial Support for Post-Secondary Education

Know a youth who is looking for support reaching their post-secondary education goals? Have them check out [this conversation](#) between EmpowerMENT and the nsoro Foundation to learn more about [nsoro's scholarship](#) opportunities and supports. **Scholarship application deadline is May 15, 2021.**



This Domestic Violence power and control wheel is discussed in the domestic violence training highlighted on page 9. As mentioned in the training, this is relevant when focusing on heterosexual relationships.



Connections Matter

The [Connections Matter Georgia](#)® statewide initiative, launched by the Georgia Center for Child Advocacy and Prevent Child Abuse Georgia, is focused on raising awareness and providing a community-based prevention response to Adverse Childhood Experiences.

Connections Matter® addresses the intersecting topics of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), trauma, brain development, and resilience. It explores how the connections we make in life profoundly impact our brain's ability to grow and our own individual abilities to cope and thrive. During this four-hour training participants learn about a community-based approach, appropriate for both urban and rural settings, that can build resilience in children and their communities. Workshops and Train the Trainer opportunities are available. Learn more [here](#) and [here](#).

KEEPING ALL GEORGIANS SAFE & CONNECTED

- 🌀 Ways to help you stay healthy and safe, including the latest vaccine information, tips for families, and mental health resources
- 🌀 School information, including the latest on virtual instruction and helpful tools for educators, child care programs, and families
- 🌀 Meal and financial assistance, including community resources, food assistance programs, and access to unemployment services
- 🌀 Dozens of free digital learning resources to help you stay connected, support younger learners, and boost literacy

GETGEORGIAREADING.ORG/CORONAVIRUS



WEBINAR

Dr. Sege will be presenting a webinar April 20th 2021 from 1-2 PM. Registration is required, link is in the description

Dr. Robert Sege will present background information on the adverse health effects of ACEs and the research showing how key positive childhood experiences prevent and mitigate the effects of ACEs and toxic stress. Participants will learn about the 4 building blocks of HOPE and participate in skill building exercises that will enable them to begin to incorporate the HOPE framework into the work with families.



This project was supported in part by the Georgia Department of Human Services, Division of Family and Children Services and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Community Based Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CFDA 93.590). Points of view or opinions stated in this document are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the Georgia Department of Human Services, Division of Family and Children Services or the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Community Based Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CFDA 93.590).

Upcoming Events

- ✓ April 13: Webinar on the All-New Prevention Resource Guide. More info [here](#).
- ✓ April 15: National Town Hall Introducing New Children's Bureau Associate Commissioner. More info [here](#).
- ✓ April 15: Community Learning Series for Child Abuse Prevention Month: "Racism, It's Baked In". More info [here](#).
- ✓ April 16: 2021 CEASE Conference. More info [here](#).
- ✓ April 20: Better Brains for Babies Webinar: "Balancing ACEs with HOPE (Healthy Outcomes from Positive Experiences)". Register [here](#).
- ✓ April 21: EmpowerMENT's Through Our Eyes Podcast with James Hill. More info [here](#).
- ✓ April 29: Building a Resilient Workforce to Address Trauma and Enhance Well-Being. More info [here](#).
- ✓ April 29: Transformation Points: Redesigning Child Welfare to Help Youth and Families Thrive. More info [here](#).
- ✓ April 30: Deadline for PBS Kids 2021 Writers Contest. More info [here](#).
- ✓ May 4-6: CWLA 2021 Virtual Conference, *Lessons Learned from 2020: Reaching New Heights for Children and Families*. More details coming soon [here](#).
- ✓ May 6: A Starry Night 2021. More info [here](#).
- ✓ May 14: Advocating for Individuals and Families Living with FASD. More info [here](#).
- ✓ May 24-26: 2021 Embark Georgia Leadership Conference. More info [here](#).
- ✓ June 23-24: Virtual Georgia System of Care Academy. More info soon.
- ✓ August 7: Georgia CASA Conference. More info coming soon [here](#).
- ✓ August 14-18: NACC National Child Welfare Law Conference. More info [here](#).
- ✓ SAVE THE DATE! November 8-10: 27th Annual Family Violence Conference. More info [here](#). Submit a workshop proposal by April 30, 2021.
- ✓ SAVE THE DATE! November 17-19: The Summit: Georgia's Child Welfare Conference.



Department of Driver Services
375-3-1-.34: Applications of Minors



Access to State IDs, Instruction Permit & Driver's License for Youth

DDS' "Signature on Application for Minor" rule will assist with the access to a state ID or driver's license for young people in foster care by creating new provisions to allow adults who work with young people to assist them in obtaining their state ID and work towards their driver's permit and license.

Who is a Responsible Adult?



A "responsible adult" is an individual that is eighteen (18) years of age or older, competent to verify the application, and has personal knowledge of the applicant. Such as:

1. DFCS or DJJ Employee
2. Private foster care agency or group home employee
3. A foster parent with private agency or group home
4. Designated official for private agency or group home

O.C.G.A. 49-5-3

DDS Customer Service Center: What to Do?

At the Customer Service Center (CSC), the responsible adult will (1) sign a Responsible Adult affidavit and include the relationship to the young person, (2) provide a state ID or letter from state agency to verify your identity AND (3) submit paperwork such as school documents, driver's license or identification card.





MESSAGE CONT'D... pression of their trauma instead of being supported to address their trauma in a healthy way. It can be disheartening and it is easy to feel like an odd man out. But when we shift our thinking and our approaches, our system can have a healthier culture and climate which better supports positive outcomes for children and families. (If you need help with this, consider becoming familiar with Trust-Based Relational Intervention (TBRI), a therapeutic model that trains caregivers to provide effective support and treatment for at-risk children. Also consider how the concepts of Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) implemented by many schools in Georgia can be replicated in our child welfare system.)

I recently read the following from the book "Suffering and the Heart of God":

Every act of kindness, every act of helpfulness, every act of forgiveness, and every act of love defies the trauma...So the concept is this...what can we ease or take from the bucket of fear, the bucket of grief, the bucket of overwhelmed, the bucket of hopeless helplessness? And what can we put in the bucket of voice, the bucket of relationship, the bucket of power? What can we add to the bucket of work or purpose and the bucket of faith?

Approaching the work in a trauma-responsive way helps us show kindness, helpfulness, forgiveness, and love. It helps us help others feel empowered to share their voice, build positive relationships, and live with purpose. We are, after all, here for children and families...so why wouldn't we listen to them, engage with them in a trauma-responsive way, and show them the kindness, love, and support they need to be safe, healthy, and happy? Let's take away from their trauma instead of add to it.

The child welfare system is a large and complex one, and by no means without its faults. In addition to youth and family engagement and culture and climate, we recognize that there are other areas in need of systemic support to ensure more positive outcomes, such as the quality of legal representation, mental and behavioral health, and prevention at all levels. Improvement efforts are being made in these and other areas and it can be a slow and arduous task. It doesn't mean we don't keep trying. I encourage you to stay the course and also remain cognizant of the following:

- System barriers can lead to frustrations. Identifying and addressing them cannot be done in a vacuum and requires collaboration. With the many things on your plate, it can sometimes feel like you don't have time to collaborate, but the benefits of collaboration are reflected in the outcomes.
- The value of communication should not be underestimated. Truly listening to others helps us understand others' perceptions of events and values as well as our own. Establishing a positive rapport with others and maintaining that open line of communication can lead to more timely positive outcomes while also bolstering collaborative efforts.
- We all have our own biases and our responses to situations can be subjective. Be aware of your biases, check yourself regularly, and try to ensure you're not imposing your own values on others. Young people are the experts in their lives and should be consulted as such. That consultation can be done collaboratively in a respectful and age and developmentally appropriate way while still offering guidance and direction without being paternalistic. Communicating and consulting with youth through a trauma-informed lens can help build buy-in and develop agency for the youth to pursue a positive outcome no matter the circumstances.

I am grateful to you for trusting me and allowing me to serve alongside you. I have thoroughly enjoyed serving as OCA's Director these past few years and so it is bittersweet that I share the news that I have accepted an offer for a new job. On April 26, I will begin work with an international nonprofit organization focused on keeping children safe and healthy as well as supporting families to do the same. In many ways, I will continue doing the work I love although it will be with a different population and in a different setting. While I am excited for this new opportunity, I will miss working with all of you. However, I know you will continue to work hard on behalf of children and families who will benefit from your assistance. You have my continued support and I hope that our paths continue to cross. In the meantime, I ask that you are patient with OCA during this impending transitional period while a new director is appointed.



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



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

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

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



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



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



24-Hour Trafficking Hotline: 1-866-END-HTGA (842-4842)

Effective October 1, 2020, the Children's Advocacy Centers of Georgia (CACGA) CSEC Response Team began operating a new 24/7 trafficking hotline number: **1-866-END-HTGA**. The hotline provides information to those who might be victims, assistance to law enforcement on the rescue of a victim, and referrals for victim assistance. The hotline operators will assist the caller in coordinating emergency services at all hours of the day and night for youth who may be a victim of exploitation or trafficking. The CACGA CSEC Response Team presented additional information about the new hotline and their process in a webinar facilitated by PCA Georgia—click [here](#) to access the webinar recording and the presentation slides. Referrals can be made through the hotline, fax (678-401-5955), online (click [here](#) for online form), or email (referrals@cacga.org). For further information, visit [here](#).



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VOICE CONT'D...

ally didn't. After starting Necco's ILP program, I decided to pursue my dream of becoming a physician. Since attending UNG, I have been accepted into the honors program, made lots of new friends (some of whom I will be getting an apartment with next semester), awarded funding for my research with bacteria, and my proudest accomplishment - I have an A+ in Organic Chemistry and my GPA continues to climb. I am also a member of the newly formed Georgia Peers Advocating for Change (GPAC), and I am working with some great people to help improve the system for youth aging out of care. Thank you to everyone at Necco Jonesboro, Coweta County DFCS, Georgia RYSE/Chafee, GPAC, and the Nsoro Foundation for believing in me and empowering me to be resilient.



Hotline Help: Connecting Your Needs to Resources

A Highlight of Many Free Resources Available to Assist You

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

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

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

Report concerns or suspected child abuse.

CRISIS TEXT LINE

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

GA COVID-19

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Connect with OCA!

