



## Foster Care as a Support to Families



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**May is National Foster Care Month.** Typically, month-long observances are used to raise awareness about an issue or cause, commemorate an event, or celebrate people. National Foster Care Month is different in that the occasion is not one for celebrating foster care in and of itself. Our shared aspiration is that foster care is not needed, that families are strong and supported by communities so that child abuse and neglect does not occur. So, while celebrating the contributions of foster parents and child welfare professionals this month, let's also consider the purpose of foster care and how we can help families avoid it.

Leading into this month, the U.S. Children's Bureau issued guidance to states concerning the subject of Foster Care as a Support to Families (ACYF-CB-IM-20-06). The memo advances a new vision for foster care that is about more than just child safety. That new vision is that foster care can, and should be, used as a more intentional support to families – one that improves parental engagement, promotes timely reunification, builds parental protective capacities, and strengthens overall child and family well-

See [SUPPORT](#), Page 7



## Education LEADS to the Future

**The Multi-Agency Alliance for Children, MAAC** is celebrating their graduates in the LEADS program and found a fun, safe way to do that. LEADS graduates were surprised with a graduation celebration caravan on May 16<sup>th</sup> and celebrated their success. Eight caravans dispersed around the state with gifts and celebratory messages for the graduates. It was a day to remember and as one graduate said, "having the caravan celebrate me made me feel proud



MAAC staff participated in graduation celebrations via caravan!

See [GRADUATION](#), Page 9

## >>> YOUTH VOICE <<<

### OCA Intern Leslie McClain Interview with Youth in College Who Are or Were in Foster Care

**How do you think we can work to encourage and support more foster care youth to go to college or pursue education after grade school?**

**Morgan M.:** "I think a way to encourage and support foster youth to pursue an education after grade school, is to help remind them of the things they are capable of. Many foster youth feel as though they aren't capable of being successful or that they are bound to turn out like their parents. We also need to help them by showing them how to apply for college, scholarships, and FAFSA, because not all youth know how to do these things. They need help, they can't do it all on their own."

See [VOICE](#), Page 13



## Our Recent Foster Care Experience



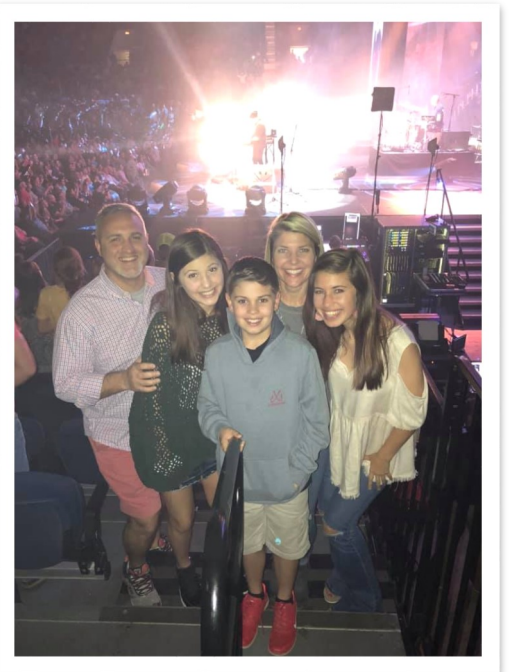
*By George Emami, MBA  
Real Estate Broker & Owner, The Brokery LLC  
Monroe County Commissioner, District 4*

**This whole dream started with my wife.** Her heart for kids needing loving interim or adoptive parents took root when she interned for a non profit called Hope for Children while in graduate school at UGA. She specifically aided adoptive families who were seeking to adopt internationally. Over the years her passion and desire to help be part of the solution to a very challenging need in our world evolved into finally convincing our family to become a foster family. Once all of us were on board, it took us almost a year to get through our in-processing and training with our agency (Trek Foster Care) and to get our first placement. We had gotten a call that there were three siblings (8, 5, and 4) who needed a home. At first we declined, as we'd asked to start with just one child. I guess our agency knew us better than we did because they let us know anyways. Several days later we called back to get more details and to ask if they had found a foster home yet. The rest, as they say, is history!

I'll never forget the way these three little fireballs came into our lives. It was homecoming night. Our oldest daughter was being recognized on the Junior Homecoming court and she and I were literally about to walk down to the field to be recognized when I got a text message from DFCS saying that they (and the kids) were at our house! LOL. We knew they were coming soon but figured it would be the next day. Nope! They were here... TONIGHT! The feelings of both mortal fear, excitement, and "OMG this is getting real" had to set in really quick as only a few minutes later we were hearing our names announced in front of the local high school crowd, and i was walking her onto the field. Man, what a night!

Not long after the festivities we were dividing and conquering to go meet our three little sweethearts while making sure our other kids got where they needed to! It wasn't until almost 11 pm before all the paperwork had been signed. We got a very quick rundown on the basics to get through the first 24 hours and got their car seats put in. Just like that, we were headed home with 3 kids who didn't know us and who we didn't know. I remember distinctly an ethereal feeling of confusion when, on the way home, the kids referred to us as Mommy and Daddy. The weight of what had just transpired began to sink in. The range of emotions and fears one feels at that moment is truly hard to describe. Very similar to when the hospital sent us out the doors with our own first born. One keeps wanting to say, "wait... are you sure I'm ready for this?" Well... apparently we were! LOL.

The coming months were filled with so many challenges. It had been a while since we had needed to change wet beds, draw baths, wipe "hineys", and do bed time stories. Along with the daily regimen challenges, we had to find a way to love the kids through what was a very difficult circumstance for them. We were the 5th foster parents they had lived with in



***The Emami Family***



## Helping Foster Parents to Support Children Transitioning to Permanency

### *Highlight from Child Welfare Information Gateway*

Foster parents can play a critical role in helping a child transition from foster care to adoption or other permanency. In some cases, they may become the child's adoptive parents, but they frequently also may be helping the child prepare to join another family. Foster parents can also give children "permission" to join — or explore joining — a new family. Caseworkers can support foster parents in this process by providing them with the following tips and responsibilities:

- ✓ Consider themselves part of the transition team.
- ✓ Read books to the child related to adoption and families. Help the child recognize and manage their feelings.
- ✓ Provide relevant information to the caseworker and therapist, if applicable.
- ✓ Provide material to the caseworker to assist in keeping the child's lifebook current.
- ✓ Remind the child they will always care about the child and reinforce a positive self-image for the child.

Caseworkers should also be aware that foster parents may experience their own grief when a child leaves their home. To help reduce and resolve the grief foster parents may feel, caseworkers and agencies can ensure that foster parent training or other preparation includes information about what it may be like for them when a child leaves their home, allow the foster parents to participate in the child's transition to a permanent home, and provide support to them during and after the transition. This may also assist in retaining foster parents for future placements. Click [here](#) for more information on preparing children and youth for permanency.

*(Source: Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2020). Preparing children and youth for adoption or other family permanency.)*

## Top Federal Child Welfare Officials: Family is a Compelling Reason

### *Highlights from U.S. Children's Bureau*

Children's Bureau Associate Commissioner Jerry Milner and his special assistant David Kelly of the U.S. Children's Bureau wrote an article to remind child welfare professionals of how family connections, empathy, and diligence towards permanency is even more important in light of the impacts from COVID-19. Click [here](#) to read the article, and check out the comments below from GA DFCS staff who were moved by this read!

*"WOW!...I think sometimes we forget that these are other people's children. It is our job to protect them and that includes their emotional well-being."*

*"I know that sometimes we become desensitized or complacent in our work. We (as an agency) figure out a way to "handle" a situation (or pandemic) and go about OUR day like 'okay, I did what I was supposed to do today' not thinking about how the long-term effects of something like this."*

*"I hope that everyone reads this and takes it as an opportunity to step up. We need to push harder on our families to partner, but we also need to work harder to partner with our coworkers in sending the message to all that there is no station in [the region] for that train!"*

*"Many times it becomes second nature to complain and focus on what's not right in the world or in our lives specifically. But on a daily basis there are children and parents yearning for reunification. So as mentioned in the article we must not allow day-to-day uncertainties to determine our quality of work and when it's appropriate, we must do all we can do to aid the reunification of families."*

*"This article is a huge reminder that although the majority of the state might have been on hold, our work never stops because there are families depending on us to become whole again, just like there are children still depending on us to save them. We have to remember our role and why we chose to do the work we do."*





## Honoring Foster Caregivers

May is National Foster Care Month and this month's theme is "Foster Care as a Support to Families, not a Substitute for Parents. Since Georgia DFCS was not able to host an in person celebration to honor foster families throughout Georgia as they normally would during this month, they took to social media to honor foster families [virtually](#).

The finalists from each region include: **Stephen and Karen Holloway**, Region 1: Gordon County; **John and Cassie Adams**, Region 2: Hall County; **Kevin and Rachel Puryear**, Region 3: Floyd County; **Steven and Melissa Beam**, Region 4: Carroll County; **Michael and Chris Bulls**, Region 5: Jackson County; **Brian and Amanda Collins**, Region 6: Jones County; **Willie Mae Walker**, Region 7: Burke County; **James and Linda Mathis**, Region 8: Marion County; **Sheila Knox**, Region 9: Jeff Davis County; **James and Kathy Chatmon**, Region 10, Thomas County; **Suzanne Griffin**, Region 11, Turner County; **Ronald and Carol Gay**, Region 12: Glynn County; **Jacqueline Cooper**, Region 13: Clayton County; **Paula Holloway**, Region 14: Fulton County.

HOPE Builder Award Nominees include: Preserving Sibling Connections: **James and Larita Burke**, Region 1: Chattooga County; Service to Older Youth: **James and Lashawn Nave**, Region 13: Gwinnett County; Partnership MVP: **Jack and Phyllis Endres**, Region 7: Columbia County; Faith and Community Partnership: **Derrick and April Hobbs**, Region 1: Murray County; Faithful Service: **Pat Waller**, Region 3: Polk County.

Child Placement Agency Families being recognized include: **Marlene Oliver** with Elks Aidmore; **Aaron and Shakeema Brown** with Community Connections; and **Scott and Sandi Gaither** with Goshen Homes.

Miss Georgia Victoria Hill has been a strong advocate for the needs of the foster care system and planned to express her appreciation in person during DFCS' annual celebration. Her three main goals during her tenure include: 1. Educate the public as to the needs of the foster care system; 2. Engage businesses and organizations to serve children in foster care; and 3. Encourage people to mentor youth aging out of the foster care system. We appreciate her efforts and ongoing support, as well as her sharing her appreciation of foster parents in this [video](#).

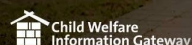
Bartow County DFCS created [this](#) "Short Film of Gratitude". While directed towards foster parents supporting children in the custody of Bartow County DFCS, it's safe to say the sentiments expressed are held by those working throughout the state—this month and the entire year through!

OCA appreciates all those who strive hard to help others in need. Thank you for your selflessness and all that you do every day!

*Are you interested in becoming a foster parent to support children and families? Click [here](#) for more information.*

**Support the Child  
—and the Family.**

National Foster Care Month  
[www.childwelfare.gov/fostercaremonth](http://www.childwelfare.gov/fostercaremonth)



**Foster Care as a  
Support to Families,  
Not a Substitute  
for Parents**

National Foster Care Month  
[www.childwelfare.gov/fostercaremonth](http://www.childwelfare.gov/fostercaremonth)





## Mental Health Awareness Month

May is recognized as **Mental Health Awareness Month**. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the need for positive mental health has been realized and mental health services and resources have been highlighted in many ways. Here are a few examples:



During May, Georgia DBHDD has highlighted the importance of mental health and coping techniques through a series of videos on their social media account. Check them out [here](#).



Georgia's DBHDD has also offered the "2x2 Series: Daily Self-Care Tips and Support for Health Care and Emergency Response Workers". Check them out [here](#).



The National Institute of Mental Health highlights depression in women. Read more [here](#).



Public Service  
Announcement



## Be Kind to Your Mind

### Tips to cope with stress during COVID-19

- 1 **PAUSE.** Breathe. Notice how you feel
- 2 **TAKE BREAKS** from COVID-19 content
- 3 **MAKE TIME** to sleep and exercise
- 4 **REACH OUT** and stay connected
- 5 **SEEK HELP** if overwhelmed or unsafe



**Everyone's  
story is unique.**

Know the youth you work with.  
Listen. Advocate.

National Foster Care Month  
[www.childwelfare.gov/fostercaremonth](http://www.childwelfare.gov/fostercaremonth)



## Family First as an Opportunity to Transform Child Welfare

Have you heard about the Family First Act? Georgia is taking the opportunities offered through this act to transform the state's child welfare system. Hear from Amanda about her experience with the foster care system and from Georgia DFCS staff about Georgia's opportunity to offer hope to families in [this short video](#).



The Family First Act recognizes it is traumatic for kids to be separated from their parents and placed in foster care. The new federal law provides funding for prevention services to help parents and children to stay together.

*A screenshot from the video including Amanda and her son*



A recipe for success includes caseworkers, caregivers, and families who prioritize partnership.

National Foster Care Month  
[www.childwelfare.gov/fostercaremonth](http://www.childwelfare.gov/fostercaremonth)







## CAPITOL UPDATE



With the 2020 Legislative Session expected to resume June 11th, Speaker David Ralston released a [memo](#) updating House membership on what to expect at the Capitol. He also released [policies and procedures](#) from the GA House of Representatives Committee on Re-opening.

### Senate Appropriations Subcommittees Review FY2021 General Budget

#### CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND PUBLIC SAFETY

ICYMI: Video available [here](#).

Department of Community Supervision  
Department of Corrections  
Department of Defense  
Georgia Emergency Management and Homeland Security Agency  
Georgia Bureau of Investigation  
Criminal Justice Coordinating Council  
Department of Juvenile Justice  
State Board of Pardons and Paroles  
Department of Public Safety  
Peace Officer Standards and Training Council  
Georgia Firefighter Standards and Training Council  
Georgia Public Safety Training Center

#### EDUCATION

ICYMI: Video available [here](#).

Professional Standards Commission  
Department of Early Care and Learning  
Employees' Retirement System  
Teachers Retirement System  
Department of Education  
Governor's Office of Student Achievement

#### JUDICIAL

June 1 at 10:00AM: View [here](#).

Court of Appeals  
Georgia State-wide Business Court  
Council of Juvenile Court Judges  
Prosecuting Attorneys' Council  
Council of Superior Court Judges  
Supreme Court  
Public Defender Council  
Department of Law

#### FISCAL MANAGEMENT AND GENERAL GOVERNMENT

June 2 at 9:00 AM: View [here](#).

Department of Administrative Services  
Department of Revenue  
Office of the Secretary of State  
Department of Banking and Finance  
Department of Audits and Accounts  
Georgia Access to Medical Cannabis Commission

#### FY2021 GENERAL BUDGET SUBMISSIONS

Click [here](#) to review the state agencies' proposals to meet 14% budget reduction (as posted on May 26, 2020).



**OCA WELCOMES  
ZONIA RUSSELL  
TO THE TEAM!**

*Zonia recently joined OCA as an investigator. Welcome to the team, Zonia! We are happy to have you!*

**A Spotlight on OCA's Own:  
Senior Investigator Renee Moore**



**In partnership with the Georgia** Division of Family and Children Services, OCA conducts debriefings related to cases involving the death of a child. As part of this process, surveys are given to the participants. One anonymous response shared the following:

*"Renee was very nice and open. She listened to me and appreciated my honesty. I felt like she cared about what I was saying. I definitely feel that it was helpful seeing her through a video call and face to face is the best way to conduct these interviews."*

The debriefings are designed to garner honest responses such that the feedback will ultimately inform larger system improvements. We are grateful for Renee's natural ability to help people feel comfortable and heard when discussing an otherwise emotionally difficult topic. We also appreciate participants' willingness to provide feedback on these system and process improvements.

**SUPPORT CONT'D...**

being. The key to realizing these outcomes is the quality of relationship that is built between the child's parents and foster parents. A supportive and mutually-respectful relationship between the child's parents and temporary caregivers is one that should be nurtured and supported by all stakeholders within the child welfare system in the overall interest of the child's welfare.

Reframing how the intervention of foster care is used will require challenging longstanding and deeply-held assumptions about how families should be served. Those assumptions are built on a values framework, historical practices, and entrenched norms that too often suggest that protecting children means separating families. Foster care, unfortunately, remains necessary at times for the safety of children who experience abuse and neglect. But removing children from their family, community, and context is an intervention that inherently causes trauma and disruption. And, the fact that removal decisions are historically disproportionately related to race, poverty, and other systemic inequities cannot be ignored. Embracing the new approach to foster care as a support to families necessitates that state child welfare agencies and their partners value all families and commit to prioritizing the well-being of children AND their parents.

The Division and its child placing agency partners have made many strides in this direction of a partnership parenting model. Throughout this month in the state, we have heard countless stories of foster parents who have supported parents in extraordinary ways on the path to reunification. What must not be lost in the recognition of foster care providers or the reevaluation of how services are delivered to families, however, is the broader opportunity to prevent maltreatment and the entire need for foster care. The values that support partnering with families to ensure child safety and family well-being can and should apply prior to a removal to foster care as well. The Family First Prevention Services Act advances the goal of preventing maltreatment and the unnecessary placement of children by allowing states, for the first time, to seek federal reimbursement for services offered to prevent removal to foster care. As we move toward implementing the prevention services provisions of the act over the next 18 months, we see the need for those of us who work in the system to confront our values and our beliefs about families and child protection to ensure we are serving families in the most appropriate, least disruptive ways. We have long embraced the value that foster care should be temporary and that children should be raised in families. Now we are reconsidering how families can be better supported by being more purposeful about foster care.



# Office of the Child Advocate

For Georgia's Children

# AdvOCacy

Your child welfare update

May 2020

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**Georgia COVID-19 Emotional Support Line**  
**866-399-8938**

Georgia Department of Behavioral Health & Developmental Disabilities | BHL | beacon Health Options

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.

A partnership between The Georgia Department of Behavioral Health & Developmental Disabilities, Beacon Health Options and Behavioral Health Link

**Georgia Crisis & Access Line**  
**1-800-715-4225**  
 mygal.com

Sponsored by the Georgia Department of Behavioral Health & Developmental Disabilities

**Georgia Crisis and Access Line (GCAL)**  
**1-800-715-4225**

The Georgia Crisis and Access Line (GCAL) provides 24/7 free and confidential crisis intervention and access to mental health, substance misuse, and intellectual and developmental disability services.



**CARES Warm Line**  
**1-844-326-5400**  
 Substance Abuse Challenges  
 Call or Text Every Day of The Year  
 8:30AM - 11:00PM



**COVID-19 Hotline**  
**(844) 442-2681**  
 The State of Georgia has a new COVID-19 hotline. If you believe that you are experiencing symptoms of COVID-19 or have been exposed to the novel coronavirus, please contact your primary care doctor or an urgent care clinic. Please do not show up unannounced at an emergency room or health care facility.

**PEER2PEER Warm Line**  
**888-945-1414**  
 24/7/365  
 www.peer2peer.center

Peer Support for Georgia

**Peer2Peer Warm Line**  
 Operating since the opening of the Peer Support and Wellness Center of Decatur in 2008, the warm line provides Georgians the opportunity to receive peer support over the phone 24 hours a day.

How to contact the Peer2Peer Warm Line  
 Call 888-945-1414 (toll-free) statewide, or locally:  
 Decatur: 404-371-1414  
 Bartow County: 770-276-2019  
 Colquitt County: 229-873-9737  
 Henry County: 678-782-7666  
 White County: 706-865-3601

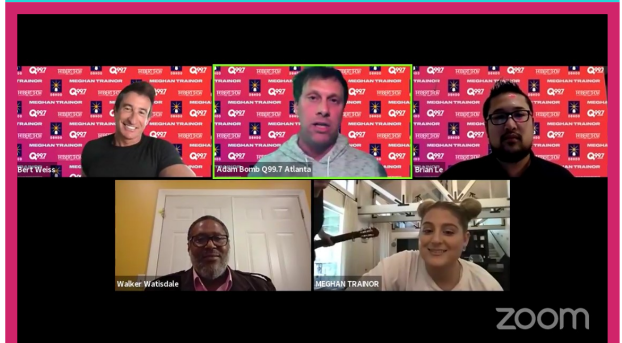


Georgia's Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (DBHDD) has teamed up with Q99.7 Atlanta on "MyVoice: Coping and Wellness during COVID-19". As part of this effort, Q99.7 Atlanta DJs Bert and Adam Bomb, have interviewed DBHDD staff as well as artists Meghan Trainor and Kelly Clarkson.



To view the most recent interviews, featuring a conversation with Kelly Clarkson, click [here](#).

To view the initial interviews, featuring a performance by Meghan Trainor, click [here](#).







**Graduation, Cont'd...**

of my hard work.”

As of May 27<sup>th</sup>, LEADS had a 73% graduation rate, higher than the national graduation estimate for youth in foster care of 65% and significantly higher than what often gets reported to the state.



58% have already been accepted and plan to attend a post-secondary program that includes Georgia State, Kennesaw State, Georgia Southern and Fort Valley State among others and an athletic scholarship. This post-

secondary acceptance and enrollment is also higher than the national average for students in foster care. While the students' success is 100% a testament to their hard work, it also illustrates the impact dedicated, individualized support can have for young people. The LEADS program, finishing its 3<sup>rd</sup> year, has been providing this support for students in care in Fulton and DeKalb and the success has been overwhelming. Furthermore, through this dedicated support, LEADS focuses on connection to school, community and placement stability with an understanding of the impact these have on educational success. The results are students



that are connected and looking towards the future and that shows in the graduation rates and post-secondary planning.

For more information on LEADS and how you can support these young people, please reach out to MAAC at 404-880-9323, visit us at [www.maac4kids.org](http://www.maac4kids.org) or via email at [in-fo@maac4kids.org](mailto:info@maac4kids.org).





# *Congratulations* CLASS OF 2020

*Imagine with all your mind.  
Believe with all your heart.  
Achieve with all your might.*





## 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.





## **It's Not Too Late To Complete the 2020 Census: Remember to Count Infants and Young Children Too!**

**The 2020 Census will help** our government figure out how much money each state should receive for important programs for the next decade. In the 2010 Census, the nation missed more than 2 million children under age five: as a result, states lose over a half-a-billion dollars every year for health care, foster care, and child care. An undercount in 2020 could affect how much support programs that serve families and their young children receive, such as schools, child care and early learning, health insurance, hospitals, and food assistance. If you are filling out the census for your home, you should count everyone who is living there as of April 1, 2020 (Census Day). This includes anyone who is living and sleeping there most of the time, including children.



Count children in the home where they live and sleep most of the time, even if their parents don't live there.



If a child's time is divided between more than one home, count them where they stay most often. If their time is evenly divided, or you don't know where they stay most often, count them where they were staying on April 1, 2020.



If a child's family (or guardian) moved during March or April 2020, count them at the address where they lived on April 1, 2020.



Count children in your home if they don't have a permanent place to live and were staying in your home on April 1, 2020, even if they are only staying with you temporarily.



Count newborn babies at the home where they will live and sleep most of the time, even if they were still in the hospital on April 1, 2020.

**Filling out the Census is  
safe, convenient, and quick!**

Whether or not you received a form in the mail, you can complete the 2020 Census online at [2020Census.gov](https://2020Census.gov) or call by PHONE at 844-330-2020. Visit [census.georgia.gov](https://census.georgia.gov) for more information.

**Every.  
One.  
Counts.**





**VOICE, CONT'D...**

**Eshontee' R.:** "I believe that we need to have more ambition focused conversations. Conversations that are about the things that youth want in life and what an ideal job looks like to them. Because post-secondary education is the traditional route it's not always the direct route to get to their dream job. Also letting them know that they don't have to go into social work because of their past and that they're free to be whatever they want to be."

**Monique G.:** "There are a number of strategies we could start implementing in the programs we already have. For example, when I was a senior in high school, I knew that I wanted to go to college, but I didn't have peers or mentors who truly knew what the college application process was like. Luckily, I got connected with a college application advisor through this organization called College Point, and she helped me with the entire process - from my initial college applications to my financial aid, to my eventual college decision. Because of this, I got to go to one of the best liberal arts universities in the nation. This program could be emulated specifically for foster youth, providing the educational support necessary for the college application process."

Of course, not everyone has the means & motivation necessary to create a robust program like this. Sometimes, the best way to encourage those with lived experience to pursue higher education is to just be there, be supportive, and be informative. There are *so* many options for those wishing to pursue higher education. As people who interact with foster youth, we can do our part in making sure our friends in care know *all* of these options."

**What is something you wish you had known before entering college as a foster care student?**

**Morgan M.:** "There really wasn't anything I didn't know before entering college."

**Eshontee' R.:** "I wish I would have known that certain trauma from your childhood will resurface. Luckily, I had the proper tools and support to work through those traumas and that college is hard. I thought it's going to be like high school."

**Monique G.:** "I wish I had been a little more prepared to handle my housing and financial situation all by myself. I had to be creative with my resources, as I didn't have the familial support system that so many around me did have. However, I did have the support of my campus, through those like my incredible financial aid advisor, the career center, and my friends. Asking for help is what empowered me to overcome those challenges."

**How do you think you will differ in your career/life as a foster care youth than those of your fellow counterparts (those who haven't experienced foster care)?**

**Morgan M.:** "I think I will differ because I have been through a lot of hardships, and a lot of change. Many people have someone to fall back on or someone who will help them succeed. While for me, I'm on my own and it's up to me to make my own future which makes me strive even more for success."

**Eshontee' R.:** "One thing that I discovered from being in college on very different for my colleagues. I'm extremely hard-working but I have a hard time living in the moment. I'm always looking towards the next step. In a sense, I feel like I'm in a rush to get so many things accomplished in life to prove that I'm not a statistic."

**Monique G.:** "I know I will face a lot of hurdles - those that come with being a young theater professional, and those that come with aging out of foster care. However, I also know that I am resilient and that my experience in care will continue to influence my work and prepare me for challenges."



**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.

**Events: Available Now and Upcoming!**



- ✓ J4C Webinar on GAL Advocacy in Dependency Cases. Access webinar [here](#). Use access passcode: **2Z@8+\$51**.
- ✓ J4C and Barton Center Webinar on Restraining Juveniles in the Courtroom—Developing Protocols Pursuant to UJCR 20. Access webinar [here](#). Use access passcode: **2o@7#6g6**. Materials available [here](#).
- ✓ J4C Webinar on Advocacy in a Judicial Emergency. Access webinar [here](#). Click [here](#) for presentation slides. Use access passcode: **5s\*x+VJ2**.
- ✓ Darkness to Light's Stewards of Children Training. Use code **FLIPTHESWITCH** to access training at no cost. More info [here](#).
- ✓ Georgia Afterschool & Youth Development's June 2020 webinars focused on mental health. More info [here](#).
- ✓ June 4: United Way Atlanta's Virtual Town Hall on the shift to virtual learning and the effect of school closures on summer vacations. More info [here](#).
- ✓ June 6: Methodist Children's Home South GA 8th Annual Home Run 5k. More info [here](#).





**LOVE, CONT'D...**

a period of about 15 months. Normally the system wouldn't have prolonged their need for care for that long but the parents had been working hard to work the plan the courts had asked of them. In some ways, I think it was harder on all involved to have to find time and emotional resources to connect the bio parents with their kids. There was always a time of difficulty after a phone call or visit, as one might expect. We had to work hard to help get their spirits back up and to help them be reminded that things will get better. We prayed often and the kids really enjoyed the comfort of going to church, which we did every Sunday.

Over the months we had them, we were amazed by how our community helped us to "lighten the load" and to show the kids special love. Our church, the daycare, Monroe County Schools, and so many of our friends and relatives all helped to make it possible for the kids to live with us as long as they did. We literally could not have done it without them. That said... I was most proud of my bio kids. We've told them that, though they have done many things to impress us and make us proud, their willingness to make room for those three little munchkins and to selflessly give of their time and willingness to share their parents, was by far the thing we are most proud of them for.

Fast forward to nearly 5 months after they came to live with us... We are all sitting in a courtroom as the judge hears the DFCS attorney give his account of the parents' efforts to win back custody of their children. At the end of his remarks, he tells the judge that all parties were in agreement that it's time for the kids to go back home. When the judge proclaimed his ruling that he was allowing them to go home, there was not a dry eye in the room. DFCS workers, parents, CASA workers, our family, the bailiff and even the judge were all overjoyed and shedding tears at the outcome. We would later hear that, sadly, this joyous and positive outcome is most often not the case. While that fact is difficult to bear, it made us really happy to have been a part of such a special success story. We still talk to the kids and the parents. We've offered to keep them over a weekend or whenever. We have told them we'd love to go to their graduations and weddings one day, and have full plans of doing so.

I had a friend whose family also fosters tell me that fostering has a way of wrecking life as you know it. Our first experience with being a foster family was indeed one of the hardest things we have collectively and individually ever done. I'd be lying if I said there weren't times where we felt we couldn't go on another day or week, and that the burden was nearly unbearable. But our lives were forever touched and blessed by those three kids. While they were with us, we loved them as they were our own and they loved us the same. There is something divine about how that works and I'm certain only those who experience it for themselves will ever know exactly what I mean.



It's that time of the year when children are out and about, running, playing, and enjoying the outdoors. With the mix of summer break and facility closures due to COVID-19, you will likely see even more children playing outside. Please remember to slow down and watch for children.



## 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 **November 18-20, 2020** at the **Alpharetta Conference Center at The Hotel at Avalon**. You are invited to join other child welfare professionals at the fourth annual Summit, a statewide, multi-disciplinary conference for sharing best practices, and collaborating across professions. You are invited to join other child welfare professionals at the fourth 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. While we will select topics for all levels, we prefer presentations targeting an audience with intermediate to advanced knowledge.

If you are interested in being considered as a potential presenter during The Summit, please complete the Call for Workshop Proposals form and click "Submit." **The deadline is Friday, June 12, 2020.** If you have questions, please contact AK Consulting Group at 850-523-4200. Click [here](#) to submit a proposal online.

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For general inquiries, assistance, or to file a complaint, please contact us by phone at (404) 656-4200 or on our website at <https://oca.georgia.gov/webform/request-oca-assistance-or-investigation>

To submit an article, photo, or event for the newsletter, please contact Deputy Director Jansen Head at [jhead@oca.ga.gov](mailto:jhead@oca.ga.gov).

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