



Recap of #TheSummit2019: Georgia's Child Welfare Conference

With over 600 attendees, Georgia's Annual Child Welfare Conference was held at The Hotel at Avalon in Alpharetta on November 13-15, 2019. For the third year in a row, the Georgia Office of the Child Advocate was pleased to partner with the Administrative Office of the Courts and the Division of Family and Children Services for this year's statewide conference. #TheSummit2019 brought together stakeholders from diverse fields to discuss challenges in our practice, to highlight breakthroughs, to learn from one another, and to affirm our commitment to this challenging but critically important work.



Judge Scott Bernstein of Florida's Eleventh Judicial Circuit bringing light to implicit bias in practice.

Georgia Supreme Court Presiding Justice David E. Nahmias kicked off The Summit with a focus on the concept of prevention and the significant opportunities that the federal Family First Prevention Services Act could bring to our state in preventing child abuse and neglect. Justice Nahmias also invited attendees to celebrate their work, especially the DFCS employees on the front line and encouraged attendees to submit nominations for the 2020 Chief Justice P. Harris Hines Award.

The keynote speaker during the opening plenary session, Judge Scott Bernstein of the Eleventh Judicial Circuit of Florida, shed light on what implicit bias/explicit justice is, how it impacts our brains and behaviors, and what it may look like in practice. This engaging session fostered a safe place for attendees to engage in conversations at every table on how implicit bias has or may impact our decisions.

On the second day of The Summit, Professor Carol Campbell Edwards of Florida State University's College of Social Work gave an inspiring message of hope and resilience for the attendees with the understanding that the work may often involve high stress situations that could lead to compassion fatigue, burnout, and high turnover. By providing tools and practices to build resilience and optimism, Professor Edwards gave attendees ways to increase



Georgia Supreme Court Presiding Justice David E. Nahmias welcoming over 600 attendees.



FSU Professor Carol Campbell Edwards providing attendees with tools to build resilience and optimism.

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»»»»»»»» YOUTH VOICE

The unedited voices of young people who have been in care

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As part of The Summit: Georgia's Child Welfare Conference, youth in foster care participated in The Summit's Youth Art Contest with the theme "This is ME". Through art, youth expressed what makes them who they are, who they are becoming, or who they want to be. The youth's artwork were displayed at The Summit and inspired the hundreds of child welfare and child protection professionals in attendance. Congratulations to our overall 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place winners! All of the powerful artwork of our youth in foster care are featured throughout the newsletter!



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Trauma: A Public Health Issue



By Jansen Head
OCA Deputy
Director

Troup County Juvenile Court Judge Michael

Key invited Dr. Stan Sonu (pictured right) to speak in his courtroom on the impact of trauma on physical health. The presentation was entitled "Trauma as a Public Health Issue and Systemic Empathy as an Effective Remedy". Dr. Sonu is the associate director of the Emory J. Willis Hurst International Medicine Residency Program at Emory University School of Medicine, with a focus primarily at Grady Hospital. Dr. Sonu spoke about the adverse childhood experiences study (ACES) and how the study suggests that trauma – whether it occurred recently or years ago – creates a long-lasting impact on a person's life. The study asks a person about abuse, neglect, and household stress. Some of the study's findings show that ACE factors are common, affect health and wellbeing negatively, and change our lifespan. The findings also show that the most devastating ACE factor appears to be emotional neglect. Dr. Sonu emphasized the importance of understanding what is going on at home and to approach the healing of people with "what has happened to you" rather than "what is wrong with you". Dr. Sonu also explained that the human stress response system can produce temporary stress and chronic stress, with the latter leaving a life-long impact on a child with regard to brain development, architecture, function, and growth. The key, as emphasized by Dr. Sonu, to revert chronic (toxic) stress to normal stress is resilience which is built through nurturing relationships that are strong and stable with a caregiver adult for the long-term. "Whether I'm caring for adults or children, I see the devastating effects of trauma daily in my practice, and the connections between education, our justice system, and health are undeniable." – Dr. Sonu. Click [here](#) to watch Dr. Sonu speak about the science of adversity on Tedx Talks.



Lead by Example

We're thankful that Associate Commissioner Jerry Milner, David Kelly, and Jeremy Long with the Children's Bureau took time during [#TheSummit2019](#) to sit down and chat with members of Georgia's Parent Advisory Council, in addition to youth with lived experience. Hearing directly from those the system serves - about their experiences, insights, and ideas - helps us better support system improvement. Thank you to all that participated in these conversations!



FROM THE OFFICE OF THE CHILD ADVOCATE:

Happy Thanksgiving!

Our office will be closed November 28-29 to observe state holidays.





Mediate Don't Litigate: Why Dependency Media- tion is the Better Option

**By: Lynn H. Goldman, Attorney
Claiborne Fox Bradley Goldman LLC**

What is Mediation?

Dependency Mediation is an opportunity for the parties involved in a dependency matter, to have a confidential discussion about the issues in the case with a neutral impartial party mediator, to determine if the parties are able to reach an agreement.

What are the advantages of using mediation?

Mediation allows the parties to discuss the issues and concerns that have arisen in the case. Unlike in court where parties are often restricted from having a back and forth exchange of information and discussion, this is regularly done in mediation. This helps all parties to develop a greater understanding of the family's and specifically the child's needs. Sitting down having a discussion to exchange information versus parties being on a witness stand testifying, helps preserve working relationships between the parties so everyone can work as a team toward permanency.

Since mediation allows all parties to learn each party's concerns in the case and help develop a negotiated agreement, the parties are the decision makers versus a judge. Studies around the country have shown that when parties are able to reach an agreement that they participated in crafting they are more likely to comply with the agreement.

Charlotte, Texas, California and Nevada studies showed that cases that were mediated achieved permanency (whether it be reunification or another permanency plan) sooner. This cuts down on foster care costs, court costs and time out of school or work for parents and children attending hearings. A Georgia juvenile courtroom costs approximately between \$5,000-7,000 a day to operate. If a case takes a full day to litigate this is significantly more expensive than mediating the case for **See MEDIATE, Page 8**

Georgia Children's Cabinet

The Georgia Children's Cabinet met this month at the Governor's Mansion to work on the Cabinet's strategic plan. The Cabinet's Honorary Chair is Georgia's First Lady Marty Kemp, and co-Chairs are Joy Hawkins (Director of the Governor's Office of Student Achievement) and Amy Jacobs (Commissioner of the Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning). The Cabinet's mission is to support a sustainable and comprehensive system of education and care to best serve children and families throughout the state.



National Adoption Month 2019

Youth Voices: Why Families Matter
childwelfare.gov/topics/adoption/nam/



Child Welfare
Information Gateway

Governor Kemp Proclaims November as Adoption Awareness Month



In the proclamation, Governor Kemp stated that all children deserve to grow up in a safe and loving home, complete with a nurturing and supportive family, and that the State of Georgia is committed to educating its citizens about the need for adoptive parents. Click [here](#) for details.

Interested in adoption? Click [here](#) to learn more.



The Summit Continued...

Georgia's Child Welfare Conference

their professional and personal quality of life while serving others.

During the closing plenary session, Dr. Jerry Milner (Associate Commissioner of the U.S. Children's Bureau) encouraged attendees with [this video](#) to imagine the child welfare system operating differently so as to focus more on preventing the need to remove a child and treating causes as opposed to effects. Following his remarks, he invited panelists to discuss their experiences, insights, and ideas for improvements for the child welfare system.

This year, "Courageous Conversations" rocked the rooms with discussions led by thoughtful leaders and advocates in the profession to address some of the toughest challenges experienced in our field. Those conversations were led by an assortment of juvenile court judges, state agency directors, members of various councils for youth and parents, and advocates in the courtroom and legislative hearings. The workshop offerings included a wide range of topics, such as the "Art of Engaging Families in Child Welfare Cases", "Human Trafficking for Child Welfare Professionals", "2019 Case Law Review", "Youth Suicide in Georgia", "Understanding Substance Use Disorder", "Father Engagement", "Plans of Safe Care", and much more.



Jerry Milner, Associate Commissioner of the federal Children's Bureau.



Jerry Milner, Associate Commissioner of the federal Children's Bureau, leading discussion on improving the child welfare experience with the panel of advocates and professionals.

In addition to the workshops, "brain breaks"—alternatives to traditional workshops designed to encourage more networking and cultivate habits that contribute to our mental and physical health and resilience—were also offered. Attendees encountered multiple options to promote their own self-care, as well as have a little fun. Another highlight of The Summit were videos showcasing a variety of positive outcomes achieved through collaborative efforts of many working hands. Click [here](#) to view the videos from #TheSummit2019.

Attendees were also invited to review the distributed copies of the state's new Family Time Practice Guide to start the conversation about best practices in family time for children and parents in dependency cases. This guide is the result of a significant amount of work in the last year. For more information on this practice guide, please contact Peter Faile at peter.faile@georgiacourts.gov.

Many thanks to the staff, exhibitors, presenters, attendees, and others who made #TheSummit2019 a success! Your feedback is extremely helpful and appreciated as we look forward to **#TheSummit2020** next year where we hope to join with each of you again to elevate our collective work in the child welfare system. Until then, thank you for participating and thank you for all the work you do every day to help achieve and improve outcomes for our children and families in Georgia!



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»»»» #TheSummit2019

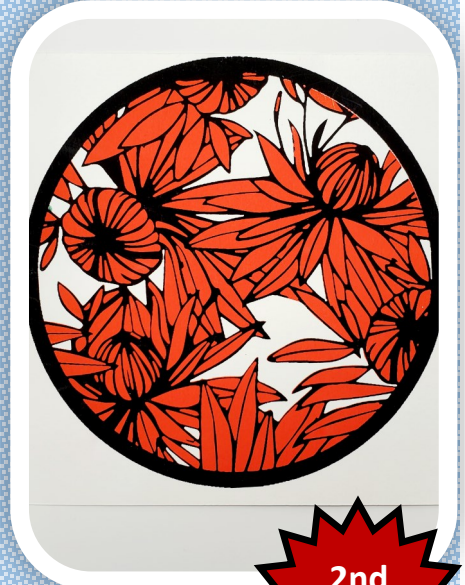
Congratulations to our 1st, 2nd, and 3rd
place winners of the youth art contest!

««««



"My work shows me being trapped by 4 things: rules, expectations, love, and family. The family web is slightly torn to represent my distance from family and to show one can never truly be free."
- J.G. (Age: 17)

"Red Flower Design"
- N.T. (Age: 15)



2nd
Place

Congratulations!

3rd
Place



"Sunset with crosses."
- K.H. (Age: 14)

*"Jeremiah is watching
Paw Patrol."* - J.W. (Age: 7)



3rd
Place



Reflecting on Down Syndrome Awareness Month



**By Megan Kade,
OCA Administrator**

In the United States, October is recognized as "National Down Syndrome Awareness Month." It's important to take this opportunity to promote acceptance of people living with Down Syndrome or other developmental disabilities. My youngest brother has Down Syndrome. Now 21 years old, he takes part in a day program for young adults with developmental disabilities, has a part-time job, and several close friends. The opportunities available to young adults with Down Syndrome and other developmental disabilities are much more expansive than they once were, but the role of family and community support cannot be understated in determining the outcomes for disabled youth. Here are a few of the ways we can all practice acceptance of people with Down Syndrome and other disabilities every day:

1. Reject the R-word

Although once a common cultural and clinical phrase for intellectually disabled folks, the term "mental retardation" is long outdated, and using the r-word to refer to any person is now considered unacceptable hate speech. If describing a youth's support needs, it's appropriate to simply state that they have Down Syndrome.

Megan's youngest brother, Corbett, and his friend Abbey.



See [ACCEPTANCE](#), Page 11

#TheSummit2019

Featuring Youth Artwork: "This is ME"



"Winnie the Pooh and Piglet" - C.S. (Age: 16)

November is National Caregivers Month



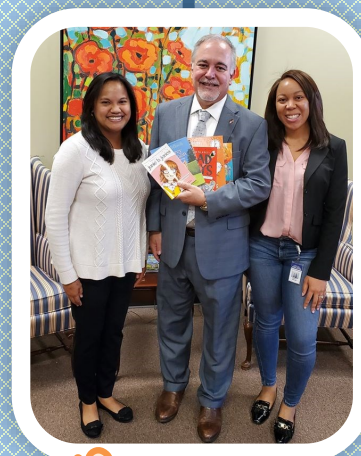
**Caregivers make life possible.
THANK YOU!**



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BOOK DRIVE



THANK YOU!



As part of The Summit: Georgia's Child Welfare Conference, OCA invited state agencies and attendees of #TheSummit2019 to donate new or gently used children's books to help share the gift of reading with our youth in foster care. We are very thankful for the 250+ children's books that we received and have already distributed to the DFCS Regional Directors to share within their regions across the state! Special thanks to our fellow state agencies for their partnership in supporting Georgia's children: Governor's Office of Student Achievement, Georgia Department of Education, and Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning. Thank you!



MEDIATE, CONT'D...

approximately \$300. Further, for those counties with an approved court program, ADR funds may be available to cover or offset the cost of mediation, decreasing or eliminating the burden on a juvenile court budget. Agreements reached in mediation are more detailed and specific than most court orders. For example mediated agreements can include: detailed graduated visitation plans, specific steps and goals individually tailored to the family and a plan of how relative options will be explored.

Also when parties are part of the discussion and decision making they have a better understanding of the court process, the case manager, CASA and child attorney's roles, and most importantly what is expected of them moving forward in the case.

How is mediation different from a Family Team Meeting or a Citizen Panel Review?

Mediation is different from a Family Team Meeting in three ways. First, mediation is facilitated by a neutral mediator that is not a party. Family Team Meetings are conducted by the Department of Family and Children Services (DFCS). DFCS is not neutral and has a specific motivation in a case. Second, Family Team Meetings usually are held to develop a case plan, whereas any issue can be addressed in a mediation (adjudication, non-reunification, TPR, review hearings). Third, attorneys are not usually involved in a Family Team Meeting. However, in mediation all parties have the right to have their attorney present.

A Citizen Panel Review (Panel) is very different from mediation as well. A Panel Review is where a group of community volunteers hears the facts and updates on a case and makes a recommendation to the Court. Whereas, in mediation the mediator helps to facilitate the discussion and works with the Parties to come up with an agreement on the issues.

Who are the mediators and what are their roles?

Mediators who handle dependency mediations must be registered with the Georgia Office of **See [MEDIATE](#), Page 10**

Updating Georgia's 1993 CANPP

The Prevention and Community Support Section of DFCS, in partnership with Prevent Child Abuse Georgia, is leading the update of our state's Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Plan (CANPP) which was initially drafted and approved in 1993! This month, a group of state partners in prevention attended the CANPP Champions' Retreat at



Georgia Tech's Conference Center to review the output of the 14 DFCS regional meetings, develop state-level objectives and

strategies, and compile this information into a comprehensive state plan draft. Click [here](#) to see the original (and current) 1993 CANPP. Stay tuned for the draft plan!

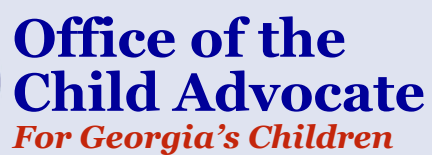
#TheSummit2019

Featuring Youth Artwork: "This is ME"



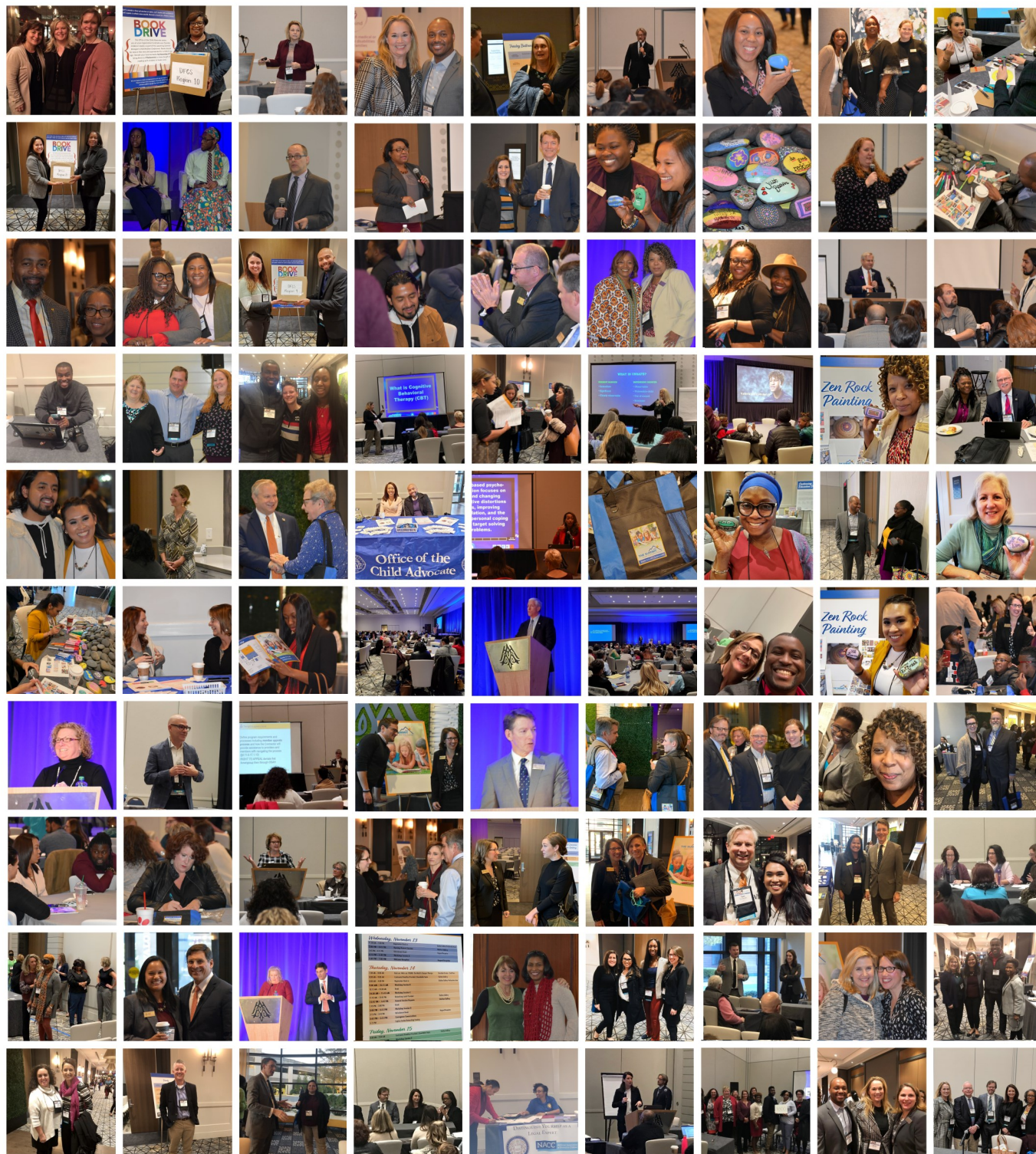
"Things that I enjoy and are a part of my personality."

- D.K. (Age: 16)



Where's Waldo?

See if you can spot any familiar faces in these scenes from #TheSummit2019!





MEDIATE, CONT'D...

Dispute Resolution. A registered dependency mediation must have specific training in general mediation, delinquency mediation, and dependency mediation. Georgia's list of registered mediators is professionally diverse and includes individuals in the fields of law, mental health, child welfare, education, business, etc.... The complete requirements for mediator registration can be found in the Supreme Court ADR Rules, Appendix B.

When is mediation used in a case?

Mediation can be used at any time during the case, including at TPR.

What are typical topics discussed in a mediation?

Typical topics that are discussed in mediation include: visitation plans, placement options, case plan goals or issues, guardianship termination, TPR.

Who should attend mediation?

All parties should attend mediation. Sometimes it is helpful for others to attend mediation that are not a party. However, if a non-legal party attends mediation, the legal parties must all be in agreement on whether the non-legal party may participate or attend the mediation.

Can the child participate in mediation?

Absolutely! A child is a party and has the right to attend and participate in the mediation. A child may participate in a manner that is age appropriate and helpful for them. Sometimes a child will draw a picture or write a letter to give to the parties in a mediation. If a child attends a mediation in person, it is recommended that their attorney be present for the mediation.

How long does mediation take?

The average length of time for a dependency mediation is 3 hours.

What does mediation cost?

Mediation is free for the parties.

What types of agreements are there?

The parties may reach any of the See [MEDIATE](#), Page 12

November is Military Family Appreciation Month

5 ways to recognize military families

1. SAY THANK YOU!

2. SEND A THANK YOU NOTE

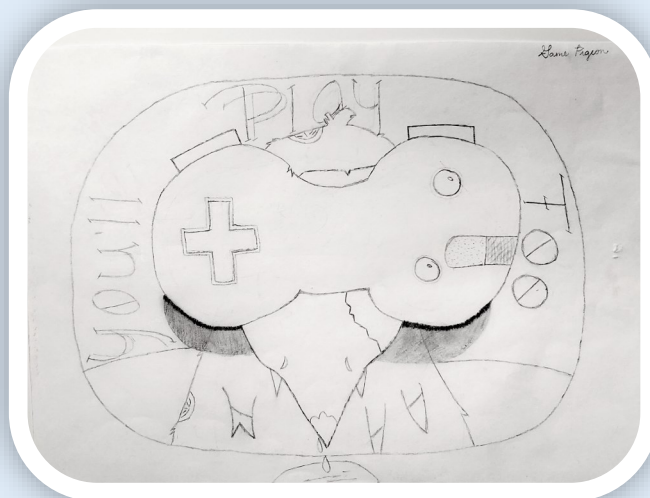
3. OFFER TO BABYSIT

4. DONATE ON THEIR BEHALF

5. ASK "HOW CAN I HELP?"

#TheSummit2019

Featuring Youth Artwork: "This is ME"

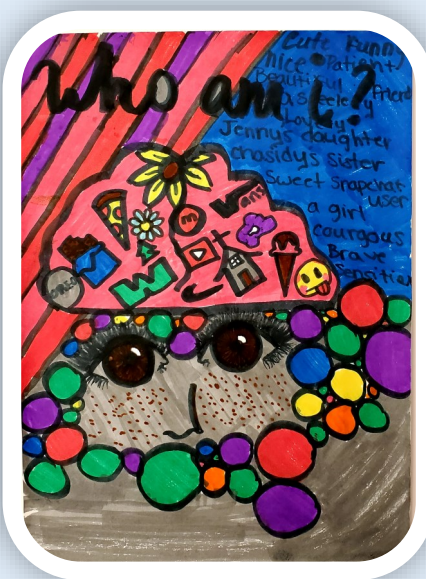
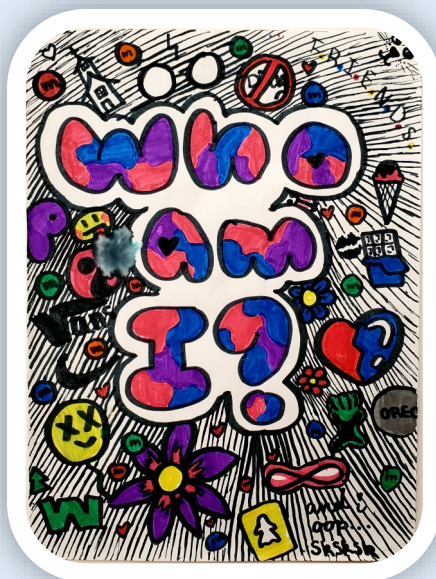


"Game System Pigeon." - A.B. (Age: 18)



#TheSummit2019

Featuring Youth Artwork: "This is ME"



"The art represents what I like and what I like to do." - P.S. (Age: 13)

**NATIONAL
FAMILY
CAREGIVERS
MONTH**

Thank you for all you do

Georgia Office of the Child Advocate

THANK YOU
to our military families

Military Family Appreciation Month

ACCEPTANCE, CONT'D...

2. Take Action Against Ableism

Ableism is discrimination against disabled people and can take many forms. Practice Down Syndrome and disability acceptance by taking a stand against ableism when you hear or see others engaging in all forms of discrimination against disabled people. Support people with Down Syndrome in having a voice in their lives and decisions that affect them, and protect their rights, access to opportunities, and self-determination.

3. Support Youth with Disabilities in Foster Care

Children with disabilities are at least three times as likely to experience abuse or neglect than their non-disabled peers (Jones et al., as cited in Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2018). These youth are also 1.9 times more likely to experience foster care. When youth with disabilities in foster care age out, they often face increased risk of financial instability, homelessness, institutionalization, and unemployment (Children's Rights, 2006).

The support of family and community can serve as significant protective factors against these risks. Ensure that youth with disabilities in foster care are placed with encouraging, supportive families and are connected to developmentally appropriate services and community resources.

By supporting the developmentally disabled community, we can create a more equitable world for everyone!

Resources: Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2018). The risk and prevention of maltreatment of children with disabilities. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Children's Bureau; Children's Rights. (2006). Forgotten children: A case for youth and children with disabilities in foster care. Retrieved from online [here](#).



MEDIATE, CONT'D...

following:

- ▶ a **full agreement** on all the issues,
- ▶ a **partial agreement** – where they agreed on some issues and the remaining issues will be sent back to Court
- ▶ **impasse**- where the parties could not reach an agreement on any of the issues

What if we don't reach an agreement in mediation?

Sometimes the parties are unable to reach an agreement in mediation. If this occurs, the case will be sent back to Court for the Judge to hold a hearing.

The majority of mediations reach either a full agreement or a partial agreement.

How do I get my case scheduled for a mediation?

Any party, at any time can ask the Court to schedule a case for mediation. The parties will need to agree to mediate the case and then ask the Judge to schedule a mediation.

For any questions regarding mediation, feel free to reach out to mediator and attorney Lynn Goldman 404-442-6969 ext. 3. You can also find information on mediation in Georgia by visiting the Georgia Office of Dispute Resolution at www.godr.org.

**Share your photos on social media
and use #TheSummit2019 to tag us!**



Nominations are Open for the 2020 Chief Justice P. Harris Hines Award

Nominations are open for the 2020 Chief Justice P. Harris Hines Award for Outstanding Advocacy for Children in Dependency Proceedings! These awards are for individual performance and achievement, not for groups or organizations. Two of these awards will be given, one to a Georgia lawyer and one to a Division of Family and Children Services case manager, for outstanding work on behalf of children in dependency proceedings. The award is named in honor of the late Georgia Supreme Court Chief Justice P. Harris Hines and is sponsored by the Supreme Court's Committee on Justice for Children and the Georgia Office of the Child Advocate. The award recipients will be recognized at the State Bar of Georgia's Annual Meeting in June 2020. A nomination packet must be submitted by February 28, 2020. Click [here](#) to nominate an attorney and [here](#) to nominate a case manager. Please contact Peter Faile at peter.faile@georgiacourts.gov for any questions.



Interested in joining the NACC? NACC is looking for an attorney to join their legal team as the Senior Training Attorney who will work to ensure legal professionals have the resources they need to provide excellent representation. This includes providing training, technical assistance, resource materials, consulting, and other outreach engagement strategies. NACC is based in Denver, Colorado with legal staff in Washington, DC. Remote applicants in all locations will be considered, with a preference for Denver-based or Washington, DC-based candidates. Click [here](#) for position description and application instructions. Applicants are encouraged to apply by December 2, 2019.



#TheSummit2019 Rocks!

Check out the creative and inspiring rocks designed by attendees at The Summit:



Upcoming Events:

- ✓ **Dec. 4:** Connections Matter training in Athens. More info [here](#).
- ✓ **Dec. 5-7:** Teens R 4 Me Conference in Atlanta. More info [here](#).
- ✓ **Feb. 7:** Mental Health Day at the State Capitol. More info [here](#).
- ✓ **Feb. 28:** Deadline to submit a nomination for the Chief Justice Hines 2020 Awards for an attorney and a case manager of the year. More info [here](#) and [here](#).





DFCS Secret Santa Program Helps Fulfill Holiday Wishes for Children in Foster Care



Each year, DFCS partners with Clark Howard to operate a program called "Secret Santa". The seasonal program helps to make the winter holidays a little better for children and youth in Georgia's foster care system. This year, requests have been received from more than 9,000 children in 126 counties in Georgia. Children participating in the program request three items with a cumulative value of no more than \$150. Donations will allow DFCS to obtain gifts, get them to the distribution facility, and into the hands of the children on Christmas morning.

Any contribution made can get the program that much closer to meeting the goal of 3 gifts for 9,000+ children in Georgia's foster care system. Click [here](#) for more information on how you can help. Thank you to DFCS and supporters of the Secret Santa Program!



Georgia Correctional Industries



GA Dept. of Early Care and Learning



GA DECAL Audits and Compliance Division

Georgia Office of the Child Advocate
for the Protection of Children
Rachel Davidson, Director
<https://oca.georgia.gov>
7 MLK Jr. Blvd, Ste. 347
Atlanta, GA 30334

For general inquiries, assistance, or to file a complaint:

- Phone: (404) 656-4200
- Internet: <https://oca.georgia.gov/webform/request-oca-assistance-or-investigation>

To submit a photo/article for the newsletter, contact Deputy Director Jansen Head at jhead@oca.ga.gov.

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LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/gaoca/>



YouTube: "Georgia OCA"