



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

AdvOCacy

Your child welfare update

October 2019

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The Summit: Georgia's Child Welfare Conference

Are you one of over 600+ child welfare professionals who are registered for The Summit, Georgia's Child Welfare Conference? The Georgia Office of the Child Advocate, Georgia Division of Family and Children Services, and Georgia Supreme Court's Committee on Justice for Children are excited to host their third annual Summit on November 13-15, 2019 at the Hotel at Avalon in Alpharetta. During the Summit, we hope to see many photos and social media posts and encourage the attendees to use the hashtag **#TheSummit2019**. Click [here](#) to learn more about the exciting workshops, plenary speakers, networking opportunities, and our new "Courageous Conversations"! We look forward to seeing many of you there!



BOOK DRIVE

As part of **#TheSummit2019**, we encourage attendees to bring new or gently used children's books to the Summit which will be distributed throughout the state to share the gift and adventure of reading to our youth in foster care. If you would like to donate your books in advance, please contact OCA Investigator Shantelle Whitehead at swhitehead@oca.ga.gov.

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

Youth Voice

As part of this year's Summit: Georgia's Child Welfare Conference, youth in foster care are encouraged to participate in the Summit Youth Art Contest with the theme **"This is ME"**. This has been an opportunity for youth to express themselves: *What makes you who you are, who you are becoming, or who you want to be?* Click [here](#) to learn how youth can share their voices through the Summit Youth Art Contest.

We are receiving artwork through November 4th. Below is an excellent example of how powerful youth voices are in our state:



"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)



Celebrating Georgia Pre-K Week and Highlighting The Head Start Program



By LaVenus Brown

**East Dublin Head Start/Middle
Georgia Community Action Agency**

The Head Start program began in 1964. Its purpose was designed to help promote access to education among disadvantaged and low income families of preschool age. As a parent, I was able to have the experience of a child taking part in the Head Start program. After relocating to Georgia from New York, I enrolled my son into the Head Start program. This ultimately led to my employment with the program through Middle Georgia Community Action Agency (MGCAA) in 1995 until present. While looking for employment, I was offered the opportunity to become a parent volunteer. I really enjoyed this opportunity, but the reward of positively interacting with children was even greater. I was eventually offered a job as a teacher, and worked my way up to my current position as a Center Manager of East Dublin Head Start.

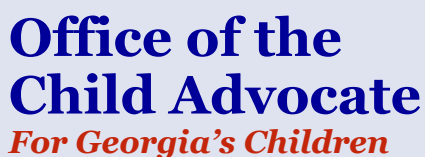
During my time with this program, I have come in contact with so many great families, and watched them become self-sufficient in life. Within the MGCAA-Head Start program, several parents and their children have become outstanding employees of the agency. This is a plus for working with such an agency that looks to not only educate the children, but assure their parents feel they are an important part of the program. My most rewarding moment happened when one of my parents came to me and said she had received her degree in nursing. This is a parent who started out coming to the parent meetings and articulating the hardships she was facing. She came and talked

See [PRE-K](#), Page 7

Llama Llama Red Pajama

For Georgia Pre-K Week, OCA Director Rachel Davidson visited with students at East Dublin Head Start to engage them in reading the children's book [Llama Llama Red Pajama](#) by author Anna Dewdney. This was also a great way to kick-off October as "Book Month" by showing how reading can be fun and educational for children and their families. Thank you to all educators and education professionals for your service for our students in Georgia!



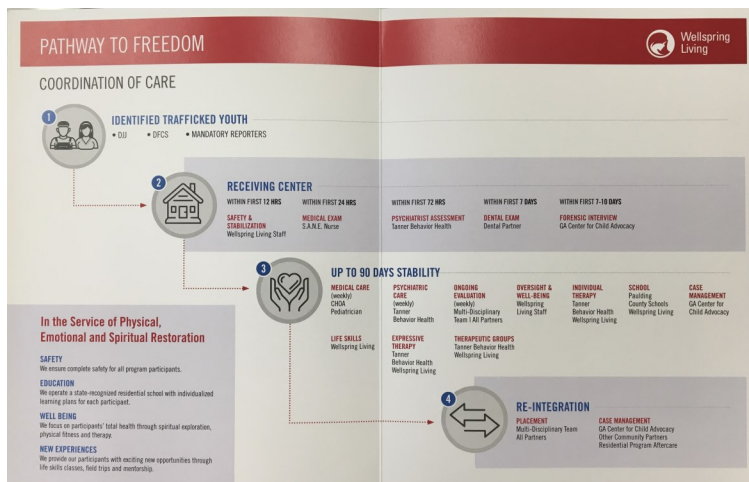


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Receiving HOPE Center

[illegible]

In early 2020, Wellspring Living will open the doors to a center focused on serving trafficked youth through identification, stabilization, and placement. The picture above outlines the various services and care youth will receive at this center. The picture below is a glimpse into a portion of a common living area in the new center. Contact info@wellspringliving.org if you are interested in helping their efforts to fully furnish and outfit the new center.



The Georgia Conference on Children and Families hosts an annual awards luncheon during their annual conference. Pictured here are many of the award winners. Congratulations to all who received an award! Thank you for all that you do for Georgia's children!



Keeping Georgia's Children a Priority



The Georgia Child Fatality Review Panel held its annual strategic planning session at Lake Blackshear Resort and Conference Center and focused on reducing the number of preventable deaths of children in Georgia. An overview of data from 2018 illustrated that most causes of children's deaths were preventable, included those caused by suicide, homicide, and sleep-related situations. A special presentation was also made to Douglas County Juvenile Court Judge Peggy Walker, who has served as the interim chair of CFR during 2019. Judge Walker recently announced her retirement at the end of this year from Juvenile Court. Her contributions to both CFR and the child welfare system are far-reaching!

National SIDS Awareness Month

October marks the observance of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) Awareness month. As of 2018, Georgia averages three infant deaths every week due to SIDS and other sleep-related deaths. Many of these deaths result from accidental suffocation, overlay, and entrapment. Georgia has one of the highest infant mortality rates in the country. Sleep-related infant deaths occur suddenly, but parents and caregivers can reduce the risk of these deaths by following the ABCs of safe sleep. Click [here](#) for more information.

GEORGIA SAFE TO SLEEP
THIS SIDE UP
GEORGIA SAFE TO SLEEP
GEORGIA SAFE TO SLEEP

ABC'S of SAFE to SLEEP

- ALONE -
Babies should sleep **alone** in their own sleep space, close to but separate from their caregiver.
- BACK -
Babies should be placed on their **back** to sleep. Every sleep. Every nap. Every time.
- CRIB -
Babies should sleep in a **crib** or bassinet with a firm, flat surface with no extra items such as blankets and toys.

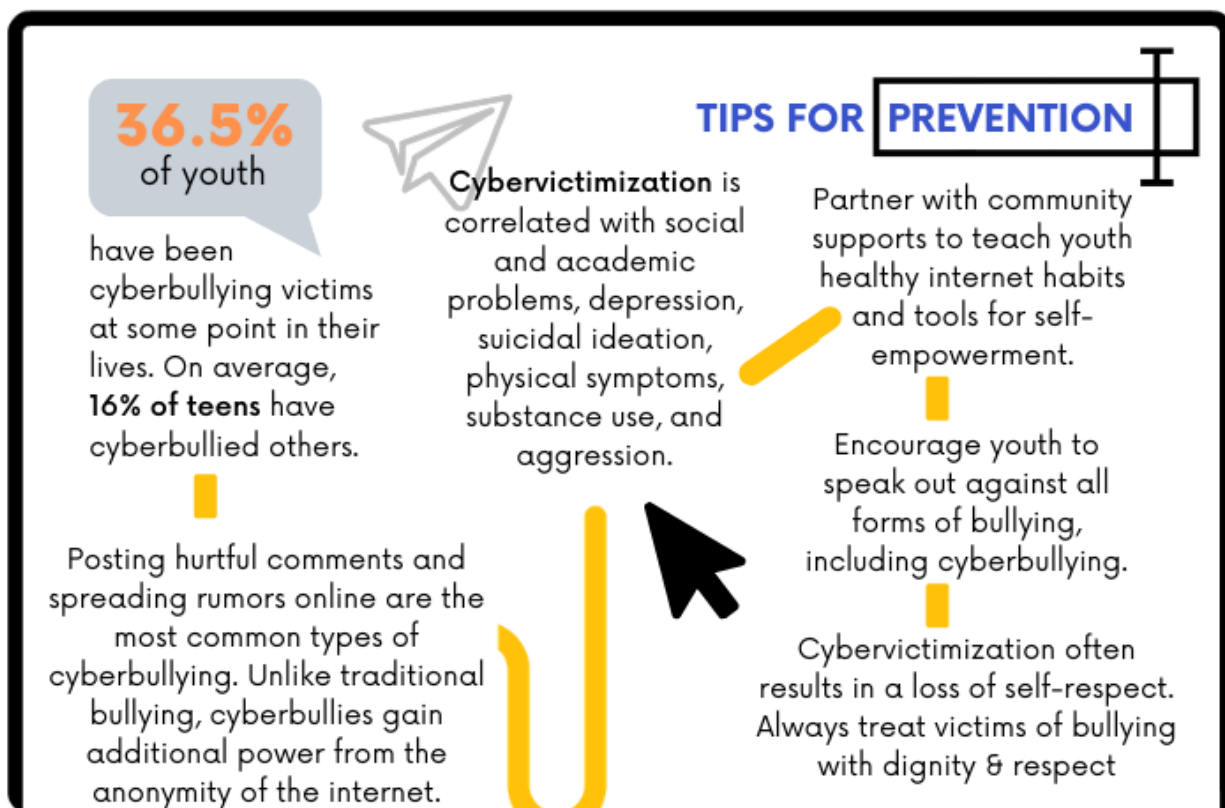


Supporting the *fighters*
Admiring the *Survivors*
Honoring the *taken*
and never, ever giving up
hope



OCTOBER IS NATIONAL BULLYING PREVENTION MONTH

but bullying isn't restricted to playground harassment or physical fights. Bullying can occur any place where youth spend time, including online. Know the statistics & practice these tips to keep youth safe from **CYBERBULLYING**.



Sources:

- Cappadocia, M.C., Craig, W. M., & Pepler, D. (2013)
- The Cyberbullying Research Center (2007-2019)
- Hinduja, S. & Patchin, J. W. (2018)



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We are sad to say "Goodbye" to one of Georgia's long-serving juvenile court judges. Judge Ben Brinson served as a juvenile court judge in the Atlantic Judicial Circuit for almost 20 years. He passed away on October 23, 2019. In addition to serving as a juvenile court judge, he also served as President of the Council of Juvenile Court Judges after having served on the Executive Committee for several years. He was an active member of the Council, participating in multiple committees and regularly advocating for his peers and children in need. Judge Brinson, thank you for your service!



Above: Judge Ben Brinson, along with other judges who have served as Presidents of the Council of Juvenile Court Judges.

Left: Judge Ben Brinson on a panel of past presidents of the Council of Juvenile Court Judges (CJCJ) during the Fall CJCJ Seminar.



Walton DFCS staff helped children in care celebrate Halloween by decorating their offices, dressing up, and inviting children to trick-or-treat through the hallways! Happy Halloween!

Are you interested in helping a child in foster care for the holidays? Participate in the annual Secret Santa program! Learn more [here](#).





First Lady Kemp Visits Berrien and Lowndes Counties

Georgia's First Lady Marty Kemp visited Berrien County earlier in October at the ribbon cutting for the county's new Family and Children Services building. She also visited the Greater Valdosta United Way office to visit with representatives of the Lowndes County Child Advocacy Center and The Haven. During her visits, First Lady Kemp discussed ways that they could work together to serve children in the local communities.



First Lady Kemp with the Greater Valdosta United Way team



First Lady Kemp with the Berrien County DFCS and CAC

PRE-K cont'd...

with me, and stated that she couldn't take her children out for family night. I shared with her how I would buy things like: popcorn, drinks, and a bag of candy from the dollar store (while using my saved coupons). I would also purchase the store brand pizza. My son and I would mix the popcorn and candy together to make our own party mix, while watching a movie or show on television. And this became our family night twice a month, so that me and my son can bond. Once she was able to complete this task, I told her now let's work on yourself? She responded, she wanted to be an influence to her children, and go back to school. Together we all the financial aid available to benefit her education journey. From there she took off, completing her degree and pital. I still see her and her children and they are holding good jobs.

Head Start provides a range of services in the areas of education and early childhood development, including:

- Medical, dental, and mental health
- Nutrition
- Parent involvement and family support
- Literacy

As a Head Start and child advocate, I reach out to anyone I see who has a small child that could benefit from the services that the Head Start has to offer. Head Start promotes the school readiness of children ages 3 to 5 by encouraging their cognitive, social, and emotional development. Head Start recognizes that parents are a child's first teacher and also aims to empower them for a lifelong role in the child's maturation and learning.

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TUESDAY, OCTOBER 11TH WAS NATIONAL COMING OUT DAY!

Established on the anniversary of the National March on Washington for Gay and Lesbian Rights in 1978, **National Coming Out Day** is a day to celebrate those who have "come out" as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, intersex, or asexual (LGBTQIA+) and to offer support to all who may be struggling to share their sexual orientation with others.

Law, society, and culture have progressed quite a bit since 1978, but **coming out still matters**, especially in terms of adolescent development and identity formation. It's important that LGBTQIA+ youth feel supported and affirmed when they share their identity with others.

30.4% OF YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE

identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or another non-heterosexual orientation, while at least **5% identify as transgender** or gender expansive. That's compared to just 11.2 and 1.2 percent of youth not in foster care.¹

LGBTQIA+ youth experiencing foster care are at a greater risk for violence and victimization, poor mental health, placement instability, homelessness, and juvenile justice system involvement.

A 2018 review found that at least 30 percent of LGBTQIA+ youth in the child welfare system experience physical violence by family members after coming out, and 65 percent of LGBTQIA+ youth had lived in foster care or been forced out of their homes because of their sexual or gender identities.²

CULTURALLY-SENSITIVE TERMINOLOGY

Cisgender: the gender identity that corresponds with a person's birth sex; e.g., a person born as female who identifies as a woman
Transgender: applies to a person whose gender identity is different from their sex assigned at birth
Pronouns: the words used to refer to other people (he/him, she/her, they/them)
Nonbinary / Genderqueer: applies to a person who identifies as neither man nor woman (binary genders)

LGBTQIA+ YOUTH IN CARE: THE IMPORTANCE OF SUPPORT

LGBTQIA+ youth are over-represented in the child welfare system and often lack healthy connections to adults who affirm their identities.¹

There are many ways to support LGBTQIA+ youth as an advocate and ally. Here are a few ways YOU can make a difference!

BREAKING HETERONORMATIVE HABITS

Don't assume that "straight" and "cisgender" are the default. Assuming that a youth identifies a particular way based on the way you perceive them can create a barrier that prevents resources from being effective because services may not be relevant or culturally appropriate.

Hi! What
are your
pronouns?

BEING INTENTIONAL

Engage with youth directly and respectfully ask how they identify. Work together to select relevant resources. This validates the youth's identity and prioritizes their voice in their care!

RESPECTING PRIVACY

To be able to address the needs of youth involved in the child welfare system, it's important to have the best available information and complete data. However, **youth safety is paramount**. Always protect a young person's privacy and confidentiality.

Never "out" a youth to another person. Sexual orientation and gender identity is for each person to share if and when they choose to do so. This includes using a person's preferred pronouns. Ask the youth with whom they feel comfortable being called (he/she/they). Be sure to use the youth's preferred pronouns in safe and affirming environments, but **honor their trust** by protecting their privacy and confidentiality in settings where it may not be safe to use those pronouns.

The support and identity affirmation LGBTQIA+ youth receive from service providers, child welfare workers, juvenile justice professionals, and those who work and serve through foster care is invaluable.

created by m.kade of OCA

Atlanta Pride Parade

Chris 180, a nonprofit organization serving LGBTQIA+ youth and youth in foster care, shared information about their



services and celebrated with many others as part of the Atlanta Pride parade this month. To learn more about Chris 180, click [here](#).





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GOODBYE, OCTOBER
HELLO, NOVEMBER

*Happy
Thanksgiving!*

*OCA will be closed on November 28th and
November 29th to observe state holidays.*

The world is
full of kind
people...
If you can't
find one, be
one.



Nov. 13 is World Kindness Day!

**National Adoption
Month 2019**

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



**Child Welfare
Information Gateway**

Upcoming Events:

Nov. 4: DFCS Region 9 Youth Town Hall in Dublin. More info [here](#).

Nov. 6: Human Trafficking Training for Law Enforcement, First Responders, EMS, Prosecutors, and Judges in Forsyth. More info [here](#).

Nov. 13-15: The Summit: Georgia's Child Welfare Conference at the Hotel at Avalon in Alpharetta. More info [here](#).

Nov. 18: Connected Caregiver Training in Savannah. More info [here](#).

Nov. 20: Webinar on Georgia legislative updates. More info [here](#).

Dec. 4: Connections Matter training in Athens. More info [here](#).

Dec. 5-7: Teens R 4 Me Conference in Atlanta. More info [here](#).

*Mark your
calendar!*



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"THIS IS ME"
THE SUMMIT ART CONTEST
FOR YOUTH IN CARE
SUBMISSIONS DUE NOVEMBER 4TH
FIVE AGE GROUPS / 1ST, 2ND, 3RD
PLACE AWARDS / WINNING ARTWORK
WILL BE FEATURED AT THE SUMMIT
SUBMIT ARTWORK TO GEORGIA OCA
OCA CONTACT: BETH SMITH (404-656-4200)
MORE DETAILS ON SUBMISSION FORM

CLICK [HERE](#) FOR MORE INFORMATION AND TO DOWNLOAD THE SUBMISSION FORM.



Annual Youth Protection Seminar

Highlighted by
Renee Moore, Senior OCA Investigator

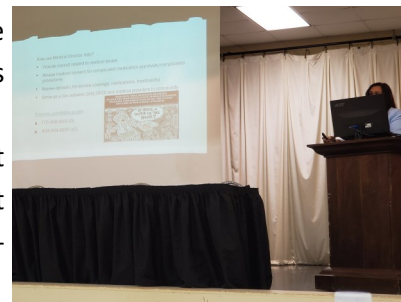
On October 10, 2019 the annual Youth Protection Seminar was hosted by the Atlanta Area Council of the Boy Scouts of America in Cobb County. Chief Erika Shields with the Atlanta Police Department and Dave Moody with C.D. Moody Construction Company, Inc. were the keynote speakers. Child welfare workers, law



enforcement, community stakeholders and partners attended the one day seminar to learn about Sextortion, Social Emotional Development, Responding to Reports of Abuse, Suicide/Mental Health First Aid, and Building Resilience in our Youth among other topics. The seminar was a huge success and we are looking forward to next year. Thank you to all who attended!

2019 Child Welfare Health Summit

The Georgia Division of Family and Children Services held its first Child Welfare Health Summit on October 10th at the Methodist Home for Children in Macon. The Health Summit brought together key leaders and direct youth service support providers within Georgia's child welfare system to ensure that Georgia has a vision and common language moving forward in serving the behavioral health and medical needs of the state's most vulnerable population. As pictured below, Dr. Priyanka Patel (Medical Director with the Georgia Department of Human Services) explained the types of psychotropic medications, best practices for keeping records, methods to ensure that youth are not receiving less or more medications than needed, and the importance of the youth's parent/guardian understanding what informed consent for such medications require.



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

Rachel Davidson, Director

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

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

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Jansen Head: jhead@oca.ga.gov*

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