





The Summit 2020: Georgia's Child Welfare

This year has brought new challenges that have both highlighted the strengths and accentuated the weaknesses of our child welfare system as well as shaped the policies and practices of how we serve children and families throughout the state. OCA is proud to co-host this year's Summit with the

Supreme Court of Georgia's Committee on Justice for Children, the Georgia Division of Family and Children Services, and the Georgia Court Appointed Special Advocates. Although the Summit looks different this year, this conference might be one of the most important. Now, more than ever, we must ensure that all children and families have access to quality services and supports in their communities that are conscious of values of racial equity and social justice.

As always, the Summit features exciting plenary speakers, enlightening workshops, inspiring videos, and networking opportunities. In addition, in our new virtual platform, attendees will have a tremendous opportunity to connect with and learn from child protection and child welfare professionals and stakeholders, have continued access to recordings of all 36 of the Summit presentations, as well as the chance to participate in online discussions and networking.

Click <u>here</u> to register as a **virtual participant** and learn more about the Summit. We look forward to many of you joining us virtually! And we encourage you to take photos or make posts and share them on social media using **#Summit2020**!



A behind the scenes view of filming for one of several inspiring videos to be shown at The Summit.

YOUTH VOICE IN THE 2020 ELECTIONS: EMPOWERING YOUTH TO VOTE



Recently, Georgia Empowerment hosted a live webinar about how to vote, what youth are voting for, and making sure youth voices are heard in the upcoming elections. The discussion featured Thomaesa Bailey who serves as a governmental relations associate at the Georgia Municipal Association and formerly served as a research and policy coordinator with the Multi-Agency Alliance for Children. The webinar can be accessed here.

As mentioned in the webinar, registered voters can visit the Georgia Secretary of State's My Voter Page <u>here</u> to view their sample ballot, early voting locations and times, and election day polling place. Election day is Tuesday, November 3rd. Be sure to use your vote to express your voice!





Atlanta Area Council of Boy Scouts of America Hosts the 7th Annual Youth Protection Seminar

Highlighted by Renee Moore, OCA Senior Investigator

On October 8, 2020, the Atlanta Area Council hosted the 7th Annual Youth Protection Seminar for Youth Serving Organizations and had approximately 350 guests that participated virtually. OCA and DFCS had the pleasure of presenting as well as many other child serving agencies. It was exciting to be part of the Youth Protection Seminar that grows larger each and every year and reaches those who wish to learn more about child protection and understand it takes all of us working together to protect Georgia's most vulnerable population.

Joshua Kirkham, Safe Scouting and Operations Director Atlanta Area Council BSA, summed it up best: "The Atlanta Area Council BSA could not be more pleased with the support that was given by the outstanding child advocates from across the great state of Georgia. First Lady Marty Kemp and Director Vic Reynolds did a wonderful job of elevating the message of collaboration as dozens of youth serving organizations came together to learn and teach about making kids safer. We cannot wait for October 7, 2021 to share this wonderful event with everyone again." Thank you to all who attended and we look forward to seeing you next year.



From left to right collectively: GBI Director Vic Reynolds, Georgia First Lady Marty Kemp, Scout Executive/CEO Tracy Techau, JQC Director Chuck Boring, National Education Consultant Robert Jackson, and other seminar participants.

Blooming Our Youth with Support in Fayette County

Foster families are heroes. We recently learned about a foster family with children in their care who are thriving and blooming with support from "Bloom Our Youth" based in Fayette County. To protect their identities, we will refer to the foster family as the Bloom Family and the children as the siblings.

Before joining the Bloom Family, the siblings were placed in three different homes over the course of three months. They had a rough start without consistency or stability and they displayed extreme behaviors, ranging from aggressive to non-verbal. These were the first children placed with the Bloom Family, who have been committed to them from the beginning.

The Bloom Family has never given up, even when one of the children ran away from their home in the pouring rain. They made sure the siblings received the love, support, and services they needed to thrive in school and at home. As a result, the siblings utilize healthy coping skills; the aggressive and defiant behaviors initially displayed have decreased; and a previously non-verbal child is now speaking in complete sentences following a proper diagnosis and supports.

The Bloom Family's experience is a reminder of the vital role foster families can play in changing the lives of children who have endured trauma and how the right supports and services can offer children stability and a healing environment. We are extremely appreciative to this family and Bloom Our Youth for their commitment and support to these children and others in their care. A special thank you to DFCS Case Manager Jade Wilson for highlighting the great work being done by this foster family and Child Placing Agency.







Birth Parents Share Experience in the Path to Permanency

Highlighting the Voices of Birth Parents Involved in the Child Welfare System

During the DFCS Region 14 Virtual Roadshow, birth parents shared their experience working with DFCS along the path to permanency for their children. During this virtual meeting, local and state DFCS leaders asked questions and learned about ways the child welfare system could continue to improve:

"What helped you the most in this process?"

"My case manager was really helpful. She answered all of my questions in a timely manner. She took the time to explain things to me. It is helpful to have someone who has worked with people who aren't familiar with the process and can communicate the basic information as to what to expect, who to contact, and how they can help you. I did some research on my own like on Google but once my case manager came in and took over, everything was good from there." - Parent

"One of the lawyers that was there to provide legal support. She played a big part in everything. She was outstanding in the visits with communications and I think the kids took to her. It felt like she really cared, that they are doing something they are really sincere about and that it's not just a job to them." - Parent

"My family really appreciates everything our case manager did. She is a wonderful case worker. I wish my son had hundreds, thousands more like you, so thank you!" - Parent

"How can DFCS do better?"

"Maybe having a packet or something sent to the parents explaining how the process works and what's your role in everything and what they can do on their own." - Parent

"I think if my son had a counselor that was more relatable, that could have benefitted him a whole lot. I didn't think she could relate to him. I don't know if it was something with the cultural differences but I didn't think she understood him as much as someone like him would have." - Parent

"Be transparent as possible. A lot of people may not be aware of certain processes and things like that, so just really having some background information, maybe some different examples of different cases, offering that variety as far as how they could potentially play out." - Parent

"Just have someone that's really invested in what's going on to ensure the parents' questions are being answered." - Parent







Cash Grants & Virtual Support Application

"Think of Us" is a youth-led nonprofit dedicated to transforming the foster care system. Think of Us is accepting cash grant applications to allow youth ages 14 through 29 (who have spent time in foster care) to apply for a one-time micro cash grant up to \$1,000 and an email with resources related to the youth's need. The application deadline is November 18, 2020. Access the application here and apply by November 18th!

CDC Tips to Make Halloween Festivities Safer



Choosing costumes, decorating pumpkins, and getting special treats brings joy to many children and families at Halloween. Some Halloween traditions may look different this year to keep everyone safe during the COVID-19 pandemic. Along with social distancing, below are ways we can stay safe while enjoying Halloween festivities! Click here for more info from the CDC.

Make trick-or-treating safer:

- Avoid direct contact with trick-or-treaters
- Give out treats outdoors
- Wear a mask
- Wash hands if handling treats
- Set up a station with individually bagged treats for kids to take

Wash your hands:

- Bring hand sanitizer with you
- Parents: Supervise young children using hand sanitizer
- Wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds when you get home and before eating treats

Wear a mask:

- Make your cloth mask part of your costume
- Do not wear a costume mask over a cloth mask. It can make breathing more difficult.







DFCS' Training and Professional Development Unit has launched a new podcast series called 'Tell Me Something Good', which partners with internal and external experts to discuss best practices in child welfare, supervision and leadership. Access the inaugural episode, featuring Candis Jones, Director of GA RYSE-ILP Program and Carmen Calloway, Well-Being Services Director, as they discuss legislative changes related to the Extended Youth Foster Care Services for Young Adults ages 18-21 here.

Decatur Makers has shared an amazing opportunity for youth to receive a free desk! Upon learning of the high demand in response to this offer, they have set a goal of building 500 desks. As of October 28, they had already built 72 desks with 428 more to go.



If you would like to contribute ute financially, contribute your time and woodworking skills, or request a desk, click here to learn more.



November is National Adoption Month — a special time to celebrate families that have grown through adoption and raise awareness of the more than 350 children and youth available for adoption in Georgia. This year's theme is "Engage Youth: Listen and Learn." Please join the State Adoption Team for Georgia's first virtual National Adoption Month kick-off on Monday, November 2, 2020 at 10 am by clicking here. Wear your purple and join Director Rawlings, Deputy Director Mary Havick and State Adoption Director Deborah Burrus, as we celebrate Georgia's successes. The celebration will include regional adoption stories and a personal story from one of Georgia's own celebrated adoptive families!

While in your PURPLE:

- ✓ Take a picture of yourself and your colleagues dressed in purple and share it on your favorite social media platform using #NAM2020 or #NationalAdoptionMonth2020. You can also email your photo with a brief caption to: dhswebrequests@dhs.ga.gov.
- Share a story of how you've helped find forever families for children, integrated youth voice when advocating for policies that keep children safe, or donated time or money to a local childserving organization. Inspire others to get involved during National Adoption Month! Email your story to: dfcs office of communications@dhs.ga.gov.

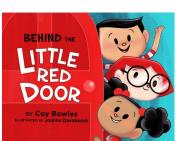






Georgia Pre-K Week celebrated its 10th year of emphasizing the importance of quality early childhood education by providing opportunities for leaders to engage with Pre-K classrooms in the local communities. In a

virtual setting, leaders and other special guests joined Pre-K students in reading Behind the Little Red Door by Coy Bowles. Read along with one of many guest readers by clicking here!



Breast Cancer Awareness Month

The month of October is nationally known as Breast Cancer Awareness Month. The year of 2020 has



been a powerful reminder that we are all in this together, and our choices and actions have the power to protect the most vulnerable among us in a big way. The same holds true when it comes to breast cancer.

We join our colleagues, families, friends, and communities across the state in supporting the *fighters*, admiring the *survivors*, honoring the *taken*, and never, ever giving up *hope*.

Recognizing Juvenile Court Judge Maureen Wood in Rockdale Co.

The Rockdale County Success Minute highlighted some of the great work accomplished at the Rockdale County Juvenile Court with Judge Maureen Wood leading the way as she was recently appointed for a second term on the juvenile court. We applaud Judge Wood on her accomplishments, appreciate those who support her efforts, and look forward to another successful term! Click here for the video.









New Trafficking Hotline: 1-866-END-HTGA

Effective October 1, 2020, the Children's Advocacy Centers of Georgia (CACGA) CSEC Response Team Georgia began operating a new trafficking hotline number: **1-866-END-HTGA**. This 24 hour hotline receives reports of suspected trafficking, provides assistance to victims of human trafficking, and connects callers to additional resources.



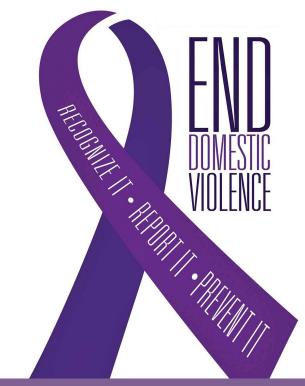
CACGA's response to reports may include the provision of collaborative multidisciplinary team assessments and services for suspected trafficking victims; community based follow-up care and after care services through multidisciplinary coordination and intensive case management/enhanced family advocacy; and coordination with existing antitrafficking organizations and law enforcement agencies to develop and conduct trainings for professionals serving trafficking victims and community members working to identify trafficking victims.

In addition to this new CSEC Response Team, CACGA and local Child Advocacy Centers (CACs) will continue providing the services they currently provide. For further information, visit here. For additional information on recognizing the signs of human trafficking, visit here.

Updated Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Plan

The Prevention and Community Support Section of the Division of Family and Children Services and Prevent Child Abuse Georgia has taken action to develop a statewide Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Plan (CANPP). Since its last version 20 years ago, state agencies and organizations and various stakeholders, including state and local government leaders, community-based and human services providers, early childhood educators, parents, caregivers, and faith-based organizations, have developed a new vision for child and family well-being in Georgia.

Virtually, on September 16, 2020, the 10-year plan was launched at the Georgia Conference on Child Abuse and Neglect. Click here to download the updated CANPP and to learn more about its implementation.



Georgia's 24-Hour Statewide

Domestic Violence Hotline:
1-800-22-HAVEN (1-800-334-2836)





October is National Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) Awareness Month



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.

Each year in the U.S., more than 4,000 infants, without a prior known illness or injury, die suddenly and unexpectedly from causes attributed to the sleep environment.

Georgia averages **three** infant deaths per week due to sleep-related causes, most of which are preventable.

Georgia leaders have come together
to combat this tragedy by introducing
the Georgia Safe to Sleep campaign,
a statewide initiative designed to raise
awareness about sleep-related infant deaths
and evidence-based sleep practices.

To learn more about the **Georgia Safe to Sleep** campaign or join the HospitalBased Safe to Sleep program, visit **www.georgiasafetosleep.org**





National Bullying Prevention Month

October is National Bullying Prevention Month, a time to focus and raise awareness on bullying. Bullying affects all youth, including those who are bullied, those who bully others, and those who witness bullying. There is not a single profile of a young person involved in bullying. Youth who bully can be either well connected socially or marginalized, and may be bullied by others as well. Similarly, those who are bullied sometimes bully others. With youth engaging in more activities online – whether for school or entertainment – youth are at a higher risk of experiencing, witnessing, or engaging in bullying. One of the most common places where cyberbullying occurs are social media, such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Tik Tok, and Twitter. Common cyberbullying tactics include:

- Posting comments or rumors about someone that are mean, hurtful, or embarrassing.
- Posting a mean/hurtful picture or video.
- Pretending to be someone else to solicit or post personal or false information about someone else.
- Posting mean/hateful comments or content about race, religion, ethnicity, or other personal characteristics.

Many of the warning signs that cyberbullying is occurring happen around a child's use of their device. Some of the warning signs that a child may be involved in cyberbullying are:

- Noticeable increases or decreases in device use, including texting.
- A child exhibits emotional responses (laughter, anger, upset) to what is happening on their device.
- A child hides their screen/device when others are near and avoids sharing what they are doing on their device.
- A child starts to avoid social situations, even those that were enjoyed in the past.
- A child becomes withdrawn or depressed, or loses interest in people and activities.

Because cyberbullying happens online, responding to it requires different approaches. If you think that a child is involved in cyberbullying, there are several things you can do:

- Notice Recognize if there has been a change in mood or behavior and explore what the cause might be.
- Talk Ask questions to learn what is happening, how it started, and who is involved.
- **Document** Keep a record of what is happening and where. Take screenshots of harmful posts or content.
- **Report** Most social media platforms and schools have clear policies and reporting processes. If a classmate is cyberbullying, report it to the school. You can also contact app or social media platforms to report offensive content and have it removed. If a child has received physical threats, or if a potential crime or illegal behavior is occurring, report it to the police.
- **Support** Peers, mentors, and trusted adults can sometimes intervene publicly to positively influence a situation where negative or hurtful content posts are about a child. Public intervention can include posting positive comments about the person targeted with bullying to try to shift the conversation in a positive direction. It can also help to reach out to the child who is bullying and the target of the bullying to express your concern. If possible, try to determine if more professional support is needed for those involved, such as speaking with a guidance counselor or mental health professional.

Editor's Note: Information above originated from StopBullying.gov. Click here to learn more about bullying.





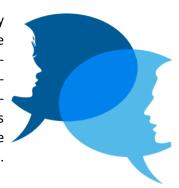
COVID-19 Economic Impact Payments: FAQS for Child Welfare Attorneys



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 (NAAC) 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 Health 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.





TOP TEN THINGS YOU NEED

*Before You Leave Foster Care



HEALTH INSURANCE

If you were in care on your 18th birthday, you are automatically enrolled in Amerigroup Georgia Families 360.

You can call their member line 24/7 at 1-855-661-2021



PERSONAL DOCUMENTS

Per OCGA 49-5-3, you should have access to and copies of: Your birth certificate, your Social Security card, and any medical documents or your green card, if applicable.



WRITTEN TRANSITIONAL LIVING PLAN

You are entitled to a Written Transitional Living Plan (Form 391). If you're not sure what is in your plan, you can ask to review it. You have a right to help make decisions about your future after foster care.



DRIVER'S LICENSE

The following people can take you to get your license:

A DFCS or DJJ employee, your foster parent, a foster care agency or group home employee, or a designated official for a private agency or group home.



OPPORTUNITY PASSPORT

This program can match your savings with additional money towards adult purchases like a car, house, apartment, and more. For more info, **email IDAemaac4kids.org.**



HOUSING

It's important to know where you plan to live after transitioning from care! **Make sure you know your options,** including support from ETV and Opportunity Passport!



Do you have somewhere to go during school breaks? Who would you call if you were sick or in a car accident? Do you have someone to talk to if you get into an abusive relationship? If you're not sure, talk with your case manager and attorney about making sure that you have permanency.



ILP GRIEVANCE PROCESS

If you have an issue, you have a right to use the grievance form! Download one at www.garyse-ilp.org



ETV/EMBARK

If you're planning to attend college or trade school in GA, make sure you take advantage of your Educational Training Voucher to pay for it! Contact your Independent Living Specialist for more information.

CONNECTED BY 21

You can stay in care until age 21, so you now have to elect to sign yourself out at 18.





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.

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.

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.

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.

Virtual Events: Available Now and Upcoming!

- Webinar on Protecting Children in a New Normal—Resources for School Personnel provided by PCA Georgia, GaDOE, DFCS, CHOA, GCCA, and ProSolutions. Access webinar here.
 - Webinar on Deepening Engagement—Keeping Kids in School during a Pandemic by Georgia Appleseed and Truancy Intervention Project. Access webinar here.
 - Nov. 2: NCJFCJ's Court Improvement Program Talk on "Uprooted and Traumatized: Avoiding Unnecessary Removals. More info here">here.
- Nov. 4: QIC-CCCT Virtual Summit on Autism, Plans of Safe Care, and the GA Continuum of Early Childhood Services. More info here.
- Nov. 5: Webinar on Adult Transition Planning for Teens with Special Needs. More info here.
- ✓ Nov. 9: Webinar on Legal Processes 101 related to dependency actions. More info here.
- ✓ Nov. 18-20: The Summit 2020 Georgia's Child Welfare Conference. More info here.
- ✓ Dec. 2: CHOA Webinar on Mandated Reporting of Child Abuse in Georgia. More info here.







BE A SUMMIT SPONSOR/EXHIBITOR!

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 host the 4th Annual Summit: Georgia's Child Welfare Conference on November 18-20, 2020 at The Hotel at Avalon. The Summit is an exciting opportunity for child welfare professionals throughout the state to share best practices and continue the advancement of child welfare practice in Georgia. Attendees have included policy advocates, judges, attorneys, guardians ad litem, court appointed special advocates, judicial staff, providers, and several other professionals who serve an important role in caring and supporting the children and families throughout the state.

As you begin allocating your annual sponsorship budgets, please be aware of the many opportunities available at the 2020 Summit. Each sponsorship offers a variety of benefits, visibility, and a return on your investment. Only child welfare service providers and partners may purchase a conference exhibit table. Exhibitors/Sponsors are prohibited from selling products or taking orders for future sales.

With a significant increase in participation, there is a limited number of exhibit tables available for the 2020 Summit. We hope you will join us to greet over 600 attendees at #TheSummit for another successful conference. Please contact AK Consulting Group to register as a sponsor and/or exhibitor by calling 850-523-4200 or emailing judy@akconsultinggroup.org.

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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.

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