



The Summit 2017.....

Georgia's Child Welfare Conference Hosts 500 Attendees

Juvenile court judges, attorneys, DFCS case managers and leaders, and other professionals gathered in Atlanta November 27-29 to celebrate and encourage the work that our colleagues do every day (and night) to protect and serve abused and neglected children. "The Summit" attracted approximately 500 attendees and included national keynote speakers and words of encouragement from Governor Nathan Deal, DFCS Interim Director Ginger Pryor, and Justices David Nahmias

and Michael Boggs of Georgia's Supreme Court.

The result of strong collaboration among the Office of the Child Advocate, the Supreme Court Committee on Justice for Children, and DFCS, The Summit is intended to be an annual event that will highlight the work done by those lawyers, judges, and case managers on the front lines of the fight for child protection, permanency, and well-being. In addition to general discussions on the parent-



Governor Deal addresses The Summit attendees

child bond, kinship care, and the Indian Child Welfare Act, attendees were offered over 30 different seminars and breakout opportunities on topics including protection of medically fragile

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YOUTH VOICE:

"Promised Land", By Cora Oden

I was given an image of paradise, of a place where I could curl my toes into the sand of finality and justice. I was terrified. I didn't understand why I should get paradise when there were so many whose islands were deserted and barren. The world beyond my immediate present was the blur of cars on a sodden day, unreachable through the unpredictable glass windshield of the system. I was terrified, because of the indefinite existence of this promise. The promise I was made was wonderful, but it was not one that could be kept. I was promised a home; I was promised safety, and overarchingly, I was promised a better future than from where I came. As pretty as this may look on paper, as attractive of a concept that it seems to be, it is an uncertain beast. I was not the only one of my brothers and sisters of the system to be given this idealistic vision. It only took a year of being in the system to abandon this seemingly false hope; it only took a year for those who made this promise to assume that I would forever

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SUMMIT PICS



[Click here for Summit Photos, Videos, and Presentation Materials](#)



OCA Data Points

The chart to the right shows the type of practice and policy complaints that OCA received between January and October 2017. The most common constituent complaints revolved around allegations that DFCS did not adequately investigate a case; did not take steps to ensure child safety; or did not provide sufficient services to a child or family.

While the majority of complaints OCA receives result in no findings of policy or practice violations, there are com-

mon themes that run through our investigations. The top three are:

1. The agency has not provided appropriate services or follow-up to a complaint of child maltreatment;
2. The initial assessment work was not thorough; and/or
3. There was poor communication between the case manager and

Complaint Issues
(Among 172 non-CDSINF cases opened)

Complaint	#	%	Complaint	#	%
Investigation	35	20	Custody/Visitation	16	9
Insufficient CPS investigation	17	10	Custody issues	12	7
Failure to investigate referral	9	5	Visitation	4	2
Improper case determination (investigation)	7	4	Case plan	14	8
Timeliness of investigation	2	1	Unnecessary removal of children	14	8
Placement	33	19%	Reunification	13	7
Placement of child (foster home)	17	10	Reunification	7	4
Placement of child (relative)	14	8	Premature reunification	6	3
Placement of child (facility)	2	1	Permanency	7	4
Child Safety	31	18	Too long in foster care	4	2
Failure to protect youth	29	17	Permanency	3	2
Failure to remove child	1	1	ICPC	3	2
Serious injury	1	1	Confidentiality	1	1
Services	28	16	DJJ	1	1
Services not provided	23	13	Eligibility	1	1
Services not provided in a timely manner	5	3	Foster Care per diem	1	1
DFCS Staff	27	16	Home evaluation (w/in Georgia)	1	1
DFCS-client communication	16	9	Complaint not noted	20	12
DFCS personnel	11	6			

family or other interested party, such as the reporter.

If you have suggestions for improving our state child protection system, please let us know!

Policy and Practice Spotlight on Runaways & Children Missing from Care

According to the Children's Bureau, around two-thirds of US youth who run from foster care placements are 16 or 17 years of age. These runaways are more likely to be girls, to have had multiple prior placements, and to have a case plan of "emancipation" or "long-term foster care". We also know that youth who run away from DFCS custody are too often those most vulnerable to exploitation and trafficking, especially if they have a behavioral health diagnosis or cognitive impairment. Federal law now prioritizes our responsibility to diligently search for and assist our youth who runaway from foster care.

DFCS policy requires that whenever a child runs from foster care, the following steps be taken:

1. Immediately search for the child;
2. Immediately report the missing child to both law enforcement and to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. Request that law enforcement enter the child as missing on the NCIC database;

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WHY?

Why is it important to analyze and consider DFCS history?

Reviewing and analyzing history can provide useful information about a family and the level of intervention needed to assist them and ensure a child's safety. For instance, observing a pattern and recognizing potential red flags can help a case manager ensure they are asking the right questions. Identifying relatives and other family supports that were previously engaged can reduce the trauma a child experiences if removal from their parents is necessary. Being aware of a family's support systems and coping

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children, steps to improve representation of abused children, and the importance of a trauma-informed approach to child welfare.

Intentionally built into the Summit agenda was a focus on DFCS' front-line case managers, with DFCS inviting over 125 front-line staff from all regions of the State. Governor Deal, who during the past few years has successfully advocated for an expanded child protection workforce and significant pay raises for new workers, personally thanked these case managers for the

work they do at all hours of the night and day in often dangerous situations. Video production teams went around the state documenting amazing stories of the work DFCS and juvenile courts do to protect children and heal families, and these videos were a highlight of the summit's plenary sessions.

These inspirational videos, as well as most of the materials from the Sum-



Amelia Franck Meyer gave an inspiring opening message!

mit training sessions are posted on OCA's website at: <https://oca.georgia.gov/georgia-child-welfare-summit-2017>. If you have any feedback for the Summit organizers, please contact us at trawlings@oca.ga.gov.



Why, continued.

skills can help reduce or mitigate safety concerns.

Child Protective Services history tends to be a fair predictor of future behavior and therefore plays a significant role in safety, permanency, and well-being decisions.

At OCA, we regularly review case files to ensure that case managers carefully consider a family's history to determine whether a child can be kept safe in the home. If you have questions about DFCS policy and practice, we are always here to help!

Voice, continued...

sit on the shore, gazing out at the ocean. I don't cast stones towards them, though - I shared that opinion. This feeling of hopelessness should never have to brush against the cheeks of children who only want a home but instead are given uncertainty. We have learned to not trust alone in promises spoken aloud or implied; by taking us into their arms just to thrust us away when convenient, the people in our lives who are supposed to love us have already made it and broken it. I was lucky enough to find my own promised land in the sweet ring of the words Mom and Dad. I was lucky enough that I found a home that will never ever fade away unlike the uncertain tendrils of clouds once remembered. I am lucky. Understand that not everyone is blessed with this same luck. It is our duty to fulfill this promise given to my brothers and sisters; it is our duty to be proactive in our search for justice for those who can't voice it themselves. It took me thirteen years from the time I first entered care to find my family. This cannot be the precedent and it cannot be the finale, the last touch of people who are supposed to uplift them in their lives. Do justice by the unlucky ones who fate neglected and help them find their promised land.



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Runaways, continued

3. File a runaway report in juvenile court within two business days of determining that a child in foster care is missing. The motion shall include efforts made to locate the child; and
4. Maintain an open case on any missing child in DFCS custody and continue efforts to locate the child.

Following a sincere conversation with youth, especially those considered to be a high risk of running away, Clarke County DFCS now offers “on-the-go bags” to these youth.

The bag serves as a temporary survival kit and life line until the youth can reach safety and make contact with DFCS. Clarke County believes this practice has prevented several youth from running away.

OCA has put together recommendations for DFCS and courts to follow whenever a child runs from care. Those can be found at [We are also available to assist in locating a missing child or providing recommendations for a runaway child who is reluctant to return to foster care.](#)

For those interested, Michael Pergamit of the Urban Institute and Michelle Ernst from Chapin Hall authored an interesting study a few years ago in which they interviewed children who had run from foster care. You can find the article [here](#).

[Source: Children’s Bureau, At Risk For Sex Trafficking: Youths Who Run Away from Foster Care.](#)

Transitions

OCA is sad to announce the departure of **Vickie White**, Child Welfare and Policy Analyst, who is leaving us after over 14 years with the agency. But we’re happy for her, as Vickie will be joining the Bibb Circuit District Attorney’s Office as a victim-witness advocate for juvenile cases. Congratulations, Vickie — we’ll miss you!



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