



## Planting Seeds for Learning

*An Interview with Georgia's First Lady Sandra Deal*

By Rachel Davidson, OCA Interim Director

Over the past 8 years, Georgia's First Lady, Mrs. Sandra Deal has spent a lot of time reading to children. In fact, she recently completed her 900<sup>th</sup> school visit! (Read more [here](#).) I recently had the opportunity to chat with her about her passion for and the importance of childhood literacy in Georgia.

**OCA:** Why is reading to children throughout Georgia something you are so passionate about?

**Mrs. Deal:** "As a former educator of 15 years, I understood the importance of literacy in Georgia before becoming First Lady. As I started reading in classrooms and saw how children reacted, it was fulfilling to read to them and get them engaged. I noticed that teachers were often trying to get the children to be quiet as I was trying to get them engaged.

"It's important for children to participate by answering questions and sharing their thoughts because when a child is engaged, he or she is interested. There are so many children throughout the state that have never really had a guest reader visit their class. On some visits, kids would dress up like princesses thinking that I was a princess. They were disappointed to find out that we are just regular people, but it's important for them to know that because I believe that it helps broaden their horizons.

"My purpose in reading to children is to encourage them to read themselves. Nathan's goal has been to have people graduate from high school and go on to college or technical school so that they can join Georgia's workforce and be productive citizens. It's up to children to apply themselves, but by reading to



Mrs. Deal reads to Pre-K students during Georgia's 2018 Pre-K Week

See [Seeds](#), page 6

## "The Apple Doesn't Fall Far From the Tree"— Or Does It?

By Kim Hames, Kin Caregiver

In the beginning, formation of child protective agencies was born for the protection of children. These children were most often victims of generational poverty and dysfunction in the family. Only children that were extremely emotionally, sexually, or physically abused received services. Case workers were trained with the expectation that the child's biological family was the worst place for them. That, along with the lack of telecommunications and technology to find distant relatives, helped to form the foster care system. It was the 1960s and our nation was still very innocent.

Fast forward to the Millenium. Over two thirds of the children placed in foster care are victims of neglect. There is an entire generation affected by the opioid crisis. My daughter is one of them. The crisis is the worst we have ever experienced, I would venture to guess that it is even worse than the "crack" cocaine epidemic. This epidemic is not the only reason for displaced children, but it is the largest cause of it. This new wave of drug abuse has got to foster a new way of thinking to combat what we face.

Poverty and family dysfunction are still alive and well unfortunately, but the battleground has changed. Today the addicts are , more often than not, from what is considered to be the "normal" all American family. In this age the addiction is so widespread and severe it crosses all lines of delineation. It is an all color , all creed, all encompassing human problem. This social monster that we are all fighting will take ALL of us working together to win.

Georgia Division of Family and

See [Apple](#), page 7

*OCA's monthly platform for the unedited voices of young people who have been in care....*

### Youth Voice

At a recent focus group, teenagers in foster care were asked, "What helps get young people to graduation?" Responses included:

- "My MAAC worker"
- "My village"
- "ILP meetings"
- "My mom and behavior aide "
- "Visiting with family every weekend"
- "Seeing my baby sister"
- "Standing up [advocating] for myself"
- "My brother and adoptive mom"
- "My DFCS case manager"
- "Deciding to get back on track"
- "My mom"
- "My MAAC mentor"
- "Thinking about my goals"
- "My family and caseworker"
- "My caseworker and mentor"
- "Talking to my little sister"



## He Gave Me Hope



By Chelsea Brooks  
Foster Care Case Manager  
Barrow County DFCS

**We all have a why.** There is usually an “ah-ha” moment for each of us where we decided that this was the field of work we should be in.

Some moments come from our personal experiences, some from watching the experiences of others.

For me, it was both.

I grew up very loved, raised by my mother and by my step-father who treated me as his own since I was a baby. As I grew older, it was difficult to understand why my biological father was not the one to raise me. I saw him father several children after me who he also did not raise, and I couldn't comprehend. I felt this wish to make my family whole but as a middle schooler, this was not possible. In addition to the feelings I had about my own father and family dynamic, I saw so many situations of my peers that I knew needed intervention. I interacted with children whose parents struggled with alcoholism, I saw children suffering physical and sexual abuse, and they seemed to have no voice. And I felt that at that time—neither did I. But somewhere along the way I knew that I could be a voice for others and have the power to make one child's life different.

That is my *why*.

When I got into the field it was nothing like what I expected. It was harder than I fathomed possible. The pain I witnessed in these families, the way the families lashed out at me because of their pain—was a lot to handle. And in the two years that I have been working with the Department, I have had two families be reunited. The “M” family was my second. Mr. M's children came into care due to domestic violence and substance abuse. Though the children's mother did not remain fully cooperative with the Department, Mr. M was determined to get his children back home. I told him what steps he needed to complete and that the timeline was getting shorter, and he buckled down to get things done. Even though it may have taken a while for him to really get going, once he started, nothing got in his way of completing his case plan.

I shared with him how much his dedication meant to me because I had not grown up with a lot of strong father figures, and honestly did not have a lot of faith that fathers could remain diligent about their children. So, he gave me hope.

See [Hope](#), page 7

## WHY?

### Why do we have a Child Abuse Protocol?

#### WHAT is it?

The protocol is a written document outlining in detail the procedures to be used in investigating and prosecuting cases arising from alleged child abuse and the methods to be used in coordinating treatment programs for the perpetrator, the family, and the child. OCGA 19-15-2(e). The Protocol outlines the multi-disciplinary approach used to investigate and prosecute alleged cases of child neglect, physical and sexual abuse and sexual exploitation as well as procedures to be used when child abuse occurs in a household where there is domestic violence. Although not statutorily mandated, the Protocol also addresses cases involving children with special needs.

#### WHY do we have it?

The mandated purpose and ultimate goal of the Protocol is to *ensure coordination and cooperation* between all agencies involved in a child abuse case so as to *increase the efficiency of all agencies* handling such cases and to *minimize the stress created for the allegedly abused child* by the legal and investigatory process. O.C.G.A. §19-15-2.

See [Why](#), page 8

### Upcoming Events:

- ✓ “H.O.M.E., It's About the Children” (Adoption Celebration Event), November 3, 2018, Austell, GA. More info [here](#).
- ✓ Georgia Families 360° Program Foster Care Program Overview, November 7, 2018, Amerigroup Webinar. More info [here](#).
- ✓ Behavioral Health Services and Referral Process: An Overview, November 13, 20, or 27, 2018, Amerigroup Webinar. More info [here](#).
- ✓ The Summit: Georgia's Child Welfare Conference, December 3-5, 2018, Atlanta, GA. More info [here](#).





## Investigator Insight: A Day with Walton County DFCS



**By Beth Smith**  
OCA Investigator

I was impressed with the team approach implemented by Walton DFCS staff. On this particular day the county was working with two PRNS and three case managers. If this seems like impossible odds, then you have not met the Walton County team. Every member of the staff worked energetically and collaboratively to address the agency's prioritized workload for the day. During my field observation, I was able to observe firsthand the strong community partnerships among DFCS, law enforcement, medical providers, and school personnel. Frontline staff and administrative staff remained in near constant contact throughout the day to make sure every child assessed was safe.

As I left for the day, investigator Chandranique Bronson who I shadowed was still gathering information for her assessments - and then a new case was assigned with a high priority status....

Case Manager! Super Hero! All in a day's work!

**OCA staff periodically shadow** DFCS staff in the field to gain insight into the issues impacting DFCS case managers and the families they serve. I was recently able to observe field operations in Walton County.

The Walton County DFCS Director, Tina Grubbs, welcomed me into a morning staff meeting which focused on strategies for thinking "outside the box" in order to deal with a heavy influx of investigations. Staff creatively collaborated in their discussion of methods to 1) ensure a timely response to incoming reports of maltreatment, 2) ensure children are safe and 3) ensure a provision of services tailored to the specific dynamics of each case.



Walton County  
DFCS Investigator  
Chandranique Bronson

## The Importance of Quality Documentation



**By Eboni Woodbury**  
OCA Investigator

### **"If it was not documented, then it did not happen."**

Have you ever had a conversation with a friend that ended abruptly? The conversation failed to give you the "juice." It lacked the "tea!" You left the conversation bewildered; and feeling as though the conversation was pointless. There are too many questions to ask in order to understand what the narrator was attempting to express. Well, good documentation is similar to a great conversation. You want to know the pertinent details including the major players that contributed to the situation; the climax; and the conclusion. In the field of child welfare, good documentation is a component of best practice.

The process of assessing our clients in child welfare consist of gathering details that contribute to their presenting situation. Good documentation captures the purpose of the conversation; what was learned; reactions/feelings; and possible solutions/next steps. When reading case documentation, there should little to no questions for the reader to ask. The reader should feel as though they were present during the meeting. Good documentation has appropriate sentence structure that is free of grammatical errors; and detailed. Good documentation reflects the professional. Often times, readers may not know the writer. It is easy to assume the write lacked efficiency in reviewing their documentation to ensure that all details have been included; and that the sentences transition smoothly. Documentation establish accountability and evidence that a service was provided. A golden rule to govern best practice is, "If it was not documented, then it did not happen." Good documentation is vital in effective record keeping and should be monitored to ensure effectiveness.

Good documentation can be time consuming yet, it is worth it. Often times, social service providers are overwhelmed with cases, and diluting their case notes may help to "get it out of the way." There can be several readers of case documentation. Readers can consist of other providers/coworkers; supervisors and higher level management; and court and law enforcement officials. Readers are searching for particular responses to questions they may have regarding the case. See [Documentation](#), page 7





# Office of the Child Advocate

*For Georgia's Children*

# AdvOCacy

*Your child welfare update*

October 2018

Page 4

NATHAN DEAL  
GOVERNOR



TOM C. RAWLINGS  
INTERIM DIRECTOR

October 16, 2018

### ***Open Letter to the Child Welfare Community:***

As you are likely aware, the Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) was signed into law on February 9, 2018 as part of President Trump's Bipartisan Budget Act. This new law gives us a rare opportunity to design a continuum of placement and services from prevention through permanency with additional funding from the federal government. And, if we successfully meet the challenges of implementation, we can serve children, families and communities better.

The FFPSA is the most significant federal child welfare legislation in decades, and it has the potential to have enormous impact on children and families. It aims to prevent children from entering foster care by providing federal funding for evidence-based mental health services, substance use treatment, and in-home parenting skills training. It also seeks to improve the well-being of children by ensuring the quality and appropriateness of foster care placements. To achieve these goals, we must embrace the importance of families, build capacity within communities to support children and families where they live, and emphasize the well-being of children and their parents.

The provisions of this new law are complex, and multiple implementation dates apply. Some changes have already gone into effect, while others are on a longer time horizon. Georgia's Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS), is committed to a phased implementation approach that will include continuous engagement within and outside of the agency, transparency around decisions, and an inclusive and participatory process designed to invite thoughtful dialogue about the impact of these changes and the best way to design a new future. The first critical decision has been made the Administration for Children and Families, the federal agency responsible for monitoring state child welfare programs has been notified that **Georgia intends to implement the FFPSA fully by September 29, 2020**. This timeframe will drive the changes that need to be made to state laws and agency policy, procedure, and training. It also sets the pace for making necessary modifications to information management, financing, monitoring, and data collection systems. And, it motivates capacity-building efforts for more evidence-based prevention service and foster family homes throughout the state.

To facilitate a systematic and comprehensive approach to planning for the implementation of the Act, a Steering Committee within the DFCS State Office has been established, and workgroups and communication protocols are being created to guide and inform the change management process. DFCS cannot do this alone, however. The sweeping changes made by the FFPSA impact the system from end to end and affect all child welfare system stakeholders. Meaningful collaboration and open communication



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

**AdvOCacy**  
*Your child welfare update*

October 2018

Page 5

are more important than ever if we are to realize the full transformative potential of the opportunity we have before us.

This is the first of many communications that will provide our child welfare community updates on progress and announce opportunities for you to shape implementation. Your input is always welcome, so please share your expertise, express your concerns, and voice your opinions. With your help, we can make sure that Georgia's children live safely, in strong families, supported by their communities. Please direct any inquiry and insight to Shelby Zimmer at [Shelby.zimmer@dhs.ga.gov](mailto:Shelby.zimmer@dhs.ga.gov).

Respectfully,

Tom C. Rawlings  
Interim Division Director

Melissa D. Carter  
Executive Director  
Barton Child Law and Policy Center  
FFPSA Consultant



Georgia's lottery-funded Pre-K Program was launched in 1992 by Governor Zell Miller as a pilot program serving 750 four-year-olds. Since then, the program has laid a foundation for academic excellence and success in the lives of approximately 1.6 million children. Many legislators and leaders, including commissioners, police chiefs and firemen read to children throughout Georgia during Pre-K Week held October 1-5, 2018. Even Santa paid a visit!



**Seeds, cont'd** children, we can encourage them to do just that.”

**OCA:** How did you become passionate about reading?

**Mrs. Deal:** “Both of my parents were teachers, and in fact, both of Nathan’s parents were teachers as well. As a child, I was taught songs and rhymes and my mother read to us often. I learned to read when I was very young and I then read to my brothers and other children my mother looked after.

“I have always loved reading and have been an avid reader. When I was young, I would often get into trouble for reading with a flashlight after bedtime! My mother took us to the library regularly; I did the same with my children and they have since done the same with their children. Our children were avid readers growing up and I’m proud that my grandchildren have also become avid readers, as those habits were established at early ages in our family.

“The library is such a friendly place – you don’t have to buy the books – you can just check them out and return them. Growing up, we didn’t have much money to spend on books, so the library was a haven for us and we loved going there. Because we didn’t spend money on books, we were able to use our limited income for other necessities.”

**OCA:** Why is reading to children so important?

**Mrs. Deal:** “Reading helps children develop listening skills. Read grows a student’s ability to pay attention and develop eye contact. Cuddling up with a parent or guardian and reading also creates a unique and valuable bonding opportunity between the child and family.

“Children learn a lot just from looking at pictures. They begin to say those words and choose their favorite books. Familiarity with a book helps them want to read it over and over and over again! Among these many benefits, reading from an early age ultimately helps children’s brain development as they develop their vocabulary by learning their colors and names of objects. Having a heightened vocabulary when starting school is immeasurably important for Georgia’s children.”

**OCA:** In our experience, a lot of children involved with the child welfare system are behind their expected reading and/or grade level. What recommendations, if any, do you have for helping a child who may have fallen behind?

**Mrs. Deal:** “Well, I don’t have a magic wand. Reading takes practice and the student has to do the practicing, but students need encouragement. They need someone with patience to work with them to develop their skills based on the developmental level of each student.

“It helps to find things they really like to read so they will be more interested. We all like to read what appeals to us and catches our attention. For some, pictures are a motivating factor while others may enjoy a good mystery story. Spending time just sitting and reading with children would help a lot of children who may feel lonely, especially children in foster care who are in seemingly uncertain situations.

“Helping children read on grade-level before the fourth grade is especially important because that’s when they start reading for themselves. Once they have a grasp of the fundamentals, students are reading to learn. Mentors and others who show a child they are interested can be incredibly helpful for all children but especially for children who may need a little extra attention.”

See [Seeds](#), page 9





## Hope, cont'd

Hope that working with these families is not in vain. Hope that there are still so many men out here who *want* to be fathers to their children. Hope that I can actually make an impact on the world.

I recently did an interview during which my dedication to the case was recognized, as well as Mr. M's. However, I still don't feel that I can take any credit for it. I did my best to make him feel like he was capable, but the rest was all him and his family working to be whole again. I made sure he knew what he had to do and assisted him where I could when barriers such as transportation arose. I am very hard on myself as far as being the best I can be to serve my families, but to me I am just the one with the tools—and the parents are doing the real handiwork.

My *why* remains the same. I do this for the little girl in me who always wanted her daddy to be in her life. I do this for the countless children who continue to be in unsafe environments. I do this for the parents who have potential to be great and raise their children in a loving, stable and safe environment. Although it gets rough, it gets extremely exhausting, and overwhelming, my hope keeps me going.



Chelsea Brooks with Mr. M as he is reunified with his children.

## Apple, cont'd

Children's Services is in a very unique position to affect positive change for an entire generation of children. This change will not be easy and you cannot do it alone. I would dare to say you cannot do it without US! The kinship caregivers.

The foster care system is overwhelmed and kinship caregivers have stepped up to the plate. On our own we are taking on the "no guts no glory" fight of our lives. The fight to keep a sense of security and normalcy for children. We struggle every day to raise healthy, happy, well-adjusted human beings.

Most would assume that extended family would be prepared for such a task since we have already raised kids of our own. Well, let me enlighten you. We suffer from our own demons. The *social stigma* of having raised a drug addict is nearly unbearable. No one talks about it in social circles or even acknowledges it. One day you are planning your retirement and lunching with your friends, and the next you are thrust into the world of deceit, drug abuse, homelessness and mental health perpetrated by the very person whom you love the most.

It starts very innocently, spoiling your grandchildren and helping out your kids. Trying to be understanding and respectful of different parenting styles. Until one day, you look in the mirror to see a full blown enabler. I raised three children and each of them has raised children. I don't know where I went wrong with my middle child and that is the first misnomer that needs to be addressed. We have guilt that we didn't see the signs, we have fear that we will raise another

See [Apple](#), page 11

## Documentation, cont'd

Readers are wanting to gain knowledge on the "Who/What/When/Where/and How." The information in documentation can be used to create case plans for clients. It can even aid in a prosecution of a crime. Documentation captures the clients perspective of the presenting situation; family dynamics; and prior issues/concerns. The clients' perspective is viable as they are key players in the case. Documentation must be thorough. You will never know who will review your work.

Overall, good documentation is vital for best practice in the field of social services. Writers should proof read their work; and ensure all details have been included. Good documentation protects professions if it is ever reviewed. It also reflects the capacity of the writer to properly construct sentences and report pertinent information regarding their clients. Good documentation is not hard. It requires patience and will be beneficial when achieving the ultimate goal in servicing clients and their families.



## Why, cont'd...

OCA views the Protocol as the foundation for effective multi-disciplinary investigation and prosecution of child abuse, neglect and sexual exploitation at the local level. This comprehensive document outlines the process for first responders to ensure that other agencies are notified up front and appropriately to ensure protection of the child(ren) (the dependency side) and the investigation and prosecution of responsible individuals (the criminal side). It is imperative that everyone is on the same page, and that the right and left hands know what the other is doing.

### How is OCA involved with CAP?

OCA maintains a Model Protocol to assist local Protocol Committees in the development and update of their own local protocols. The Protocol is a living document that is revised and improved on a regular basis, such as when new laws are passed, new policies are implemented by state and local agencies, and best practices have changed.

OCA also offers training of multidisciplinary front line responders, helps implement the local Protocol to improve the process and enhance the quality, consistency and coordination of the multi-disciplinary response for handling child abuse, neglect and sexual exploitation cases as well as children with special needs. Special needs of children with disabilities, developmental disabilities, fetal alcohol spectrum disorder and sexual exploitation are highlighted throughout the Protocol and during Protocol training.

If you are interested in developing, updating or training regarding your local Protocol, please contact Diana Summers: [dsummers@oca.ga.gov](mailto:dsummers@oca.ga.gov).



Clayton County Child Abuse Protocol Training



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

November is coming, which means National Adoption Month is almost here!

Learn about almost 200 children currently available for adoption in Georgia [here](#).

## National Adoption Month



[childwelfare.gov/topics/adoption/nam](http://childwelfare.gov/topics/adoption/nam)





## Seeds, cont'd **OCA:** What is your favorite children's book?

**Mrs. Deal:** "As a child and young teenager, I loved the Grimm Brothers' *"The Twelve Dancing Princesses"* because I loved the fairy tales. When I read to children throughout the state these days, I really enjoy reading *"Will Powers: Where There's a Will, There's a Way"* by Coy Bowles. The book has cute illustrations and shares a great lesson about putting work into something that you want.

"Practice helps you reach your goals and you feel good about yourself if you even get close. I read this to a lot of first, second and third-grade students because I think it's such a terrific lesson. A teacher can teach, but if a child doesn't listen and apply the lesson, knowledge isn't gained very well. So I try to encourage students to learn to love reading and play close attention to their teachers. The futures of these students are in their own hands and they have to be the ones to put the work into seeing dreams become reality."

**OCA:** What is Governor Deal's favorite children's book?

**Mrs. Deal:** "He read lots of cowboy books when he was young, but as a parent, he read *"The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe"* by C.S. Lewis to our daughters. It's such an imaginative book. Our daughters recall this time spent reading with their dad as a really special time for them. I think it's as important for fathers to read with their children as it is for mothers. It's also important to talk about the meanings, lessons, and consequences found in books."

**OCA:** What would you recommend for someone interested in volunteering their time to help children cultivate a love of reading and learning?

**Mrs. Deal:** "People should feel comfortable volunteering by going to schools as a mystery or guest reader. Although someone may not have a child in school or that particular school, those interested can reach out to schools or educators and provide contact information. (A teacher that ran into someone in the grocery store who expressed interest in reading or volunteering may not remember whose mother said what!) Local chambers of commerce might also help by developing a list of people interested in reading to children and sharing that with schools, especially schools that don't have as many volunteers or guest readers."

"Children need to see role models and know what jobs are available, from firefighters, police officers, or teachers. Guest readers introduce students to other role models they may not have had contact with previously like engineers, radio hosts, or members of the military. Their presence or a visit may help a young child understand what opportunities are available if students pursue their interests. For example, if a student wants to be an engineer, she will need to study a lot of math; if another student wants to be a biologist, he will need to study science. Reading different kinds of books certainly helps but having adults with diverse sets of experiences and careers reading to children in schools also helps inspire children and help them develop a path."

**OCA:** Mrs. Deal, thank you for the time you have taken to share about the importance of reading. And thank you for spending your time cultivating a love of reading for so many children throughout Georgia. I anticipate the benefits of your efforts will continue for a very long time.

**Mrs. Deal:** "I hope so! The love of learning is important. We have to be excited about learning. I hope I have planted the seeds about reading and learning and I appreciate everyone who helps and encourages children!"



## The Gift of Reading

As a way to honor Mrs. Deal's efforts to encourage reading, members of the First Lady's Children's Cabinet surprised her with a children's book that held a special meaning for them during the September 2018 Cabinet Meeting. Mrs. Deal will use these books as she continues reading to children throughout Georgia.

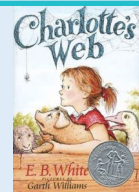
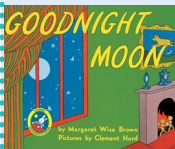
As part of The Summit being held December 3-5, we are asking attendees to help share the gift of reading by bringing a favorite children's book for a child in foster care. (More info [here](#).) Unable to attend? Consider organizing a book drive before then and contact us so we can ensure these books make it to children in foster care.





## Staff Picks: OCA Staff Highlight Favorite Children's Books

**Goodnight Moon by Margaret Wise Brown.** This book became the most important part of our day because after reading it every night and could recite from memory I got to hear "goodnight mommy goodnight daddy" and for a moment time stood still as we spent time reading together. (Still have the book, the corners are frayed and pages are loose but would not take anything for it). Bonus: **Charlotte's Web by E.B. White.** This book reminded me and taught my children about unconditional love. I would like to believe that my children's love of reading came from our many visits to the library and the excitement of getting to pick out a new book and even though they have grown up, they are both avid readers (consistently telling me about new books they are reading) which I hope will continue for many years. *Renee Moore, Senior Investigator*



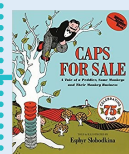
**The Runaway Bunny by Margaret Wise Brown.** I like the underlying theme that no matter what happens the bunny's mother would love and protect the young bunny. *Ryan Sanford, Investigator*



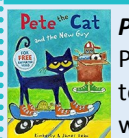
**The Little Mouse, the Red Ripe Strawberry, and the Big Hungry Bear by Audrey & Don Wood.** This is one of my most beloved favorites that everyone should read. As a former educator, I found this to be a fun book to read with children. It helps them learn about predicting and lends itself to creative activities to reinforce its teachings. *Lakisha Pitts, Intern*



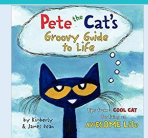
**The Best-Loved Doll by Rebecca Caudill.** I am not sure how I acquired the book but I am sure about the positive message it gave me as a young child able to read my first book. The sweet story is about a girl named Betsy that is invited to a friend's party where there will be a doll contest with prizes for the best dressed, the oldest, etc. Betsy has to make a decision of which doll to take to the party. Instead of taking her most expensive or elaborate doll she decides to take Jennifer. Jennifer has a worn look with tattered clothing from being lugged around daily. I remember reading this part as a child and wondering why she would choose what seemed to me to be an unlikely winner. Even today, thinking about the ending makes me feel happy because against the odds Betsy wins the best award. She wins "The Best Loved Doll" award. I loved this book so much because when I was growing up I lived with relatives that had a daughter around the same age. Often we would get similar items (specifically dolls) for Christmas and birthdays but my version would be the less expensive one. Initially I remember this as being hurtful and making me feel less important but after reading this book I knew that I had "The Best Loved Doll". *Beth Smith, Investigator*



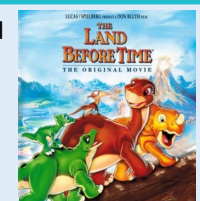
**Caps for Sale by Esphyr Slobodkina.** I love this simple and silly book's great message about thoughtful problem solving, listening, and working collaboratively with others through our differences. *Rachel Davidson, Interim Director*



**Pete the Cat and the New Guy! and Pete the Cat's Groovy Guide to Life by Kimberly and James Dean.** I like Pete the Cat's sense of optimism. I enjoy reading *Pete the Cat and the New Guy!* with my daughter as a way to help teach her about differences, friendship, and acceptance. *Pete the Cat's Groovy Guide to Life* is a fun way to share some inspirational messages with her. *Shantelle Whitehead, Investigator*



**The Land Before Time by Jim Razzi.** As a child, I would watch "The Land Before Time" on VHS. The movies would tell the story of baby dinosaurs and their families' adventures in the wild. I enjoyed the friendships and bonds the baby dinosaurs shared. My favorite character was "Little Foot", a Brontosaurus. "Little Foot" was courageous and was always the voice of reason for his friends. I was fascinated with how the baby dinosaurs would maneuver in the wild with little to no care in the world, despite the challenges around them. I still have the VHS of the book and hopefully get to share the memories with my future children. *Eboni Woodbury, Investigator*



**The Giving Tree by Shel Silverstein.** It has so many levels of meaning! My son liked it – the words & pictures, but not as much I liked reading it to him. The message of unconditional love speaks to me as a parent. I hope he'll read it to his children one day, and finally understand the story. *Diana Summers, Administrator*

**Happy Reading!**



# Have a safe and Happy Halloween!



## Apple, continued...

addict, and we have the insecurity of wondering if we will live long enough to see. We are the only people that I know of that both love and hate our children simultaneously. This comes with a whole other set of challenges.

Most Kinship care givers I know take it upon ourselves to do something and are met with *resistance and legal restrictions* at every turn. DFCS has more legal rights to the children than their own family. That being said, the children are usually used as pawns and we live in fear of losing them constantly. It is with the greatest conviction that I submit to you that we need to work in tandem for the welfare of the children.

Foster care is a valid option in many cases but we all know it comes with many caveats. You know, as the professionals, the higher risks these children face when ripped from all that is familiar. The emotional, and physical (not to mention academic) toll it takes is nearly immeasurable and costly to all involved. I would submit that there is a better way.

We are willing and mostly able to take on this task. We are doing it right now, with you or without you. Surely with you would be more beneficial to both. We are proud and we are strong. Most of us are not asking for handouts, although at least 40% are at or below poverty level. Most caregivers are retirement age and face the hard task of prioritizing our needs in our Golden years with the needs of these children. A lot of us are also caregiving for aging parents. We need resources. We need understanding and we need compassion. Imagine having to choose between medications for yourself and food for the kids.

Just like foster parents we are receiving children with little or nothing accompanying them. No clothes, no food, no furniture, not to mention toys! Many of us are already on a fixed income, and the rest are spending our retirement. We are people that have worked and paid taxes for our entire lives. Taxes that pay for programs we don't qualify for. We have put our lives on hold to help rebuild the lives of these children.

The only thing we ask in return is that you give up the preconceived notions and focus on the same. The "apple doesn't fall far from the tree" mentality is no longer valid and when you enter a case with this you do us all a great disservice.



Kim Hames with her grandchildren

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