



July 16, 2018

Page 1

## Focus on: Prenatal Exposure to Drugs and Alcohol ....

**Court and child welfare** professionals from all parts of the country — many of them cringing in sympathetic pain — watch a video in which an inconsolable newborn shakes and shivers before collapsing in exhaustion. “This child was exposed to PCP,” explains Dr. Ira Chasnoff, a pediatrician specialized in working with substance-affected children and now principal of NTI Upstream. Treating this child with medication designed to help children going through withdrawal from prenatal opioid exposure would be a mistake, he cautions the group.

Dr. Chasnoff was speaking as part of a federal gathering of collaborative court teams working to develop better policies and practices for addressing the

needs of substance-exposed children and their families. Among the teams was one led by Douglas County Juvenile Court Judge Peggy Walker, who is implementing a grant designed to identify pregnant women in need of treatment and improve both pre- and post-natal treatment services for them and their infants.

Although the increase in prenatal opioid exposure is a disturbing trend, speakers reminded the group that prenatal alcohol exposure remains the most significant threat to the health and well-being of the unborn baby, with long-term consequences for the child’s growth and development. Prenatal alcohol exposure affects not only the child’s neurological development but also his or her ability to self-regulate and adapt. As Dr. Chasnoff

and his colleagues demonstrated in a 2015 article, many children who were diagnosed with such issues as ADHD, a learning disability, sensory integration

---

### Judge Walker introduces her team



See [PRENATAL](#), page 4

## Changing the Conversation:



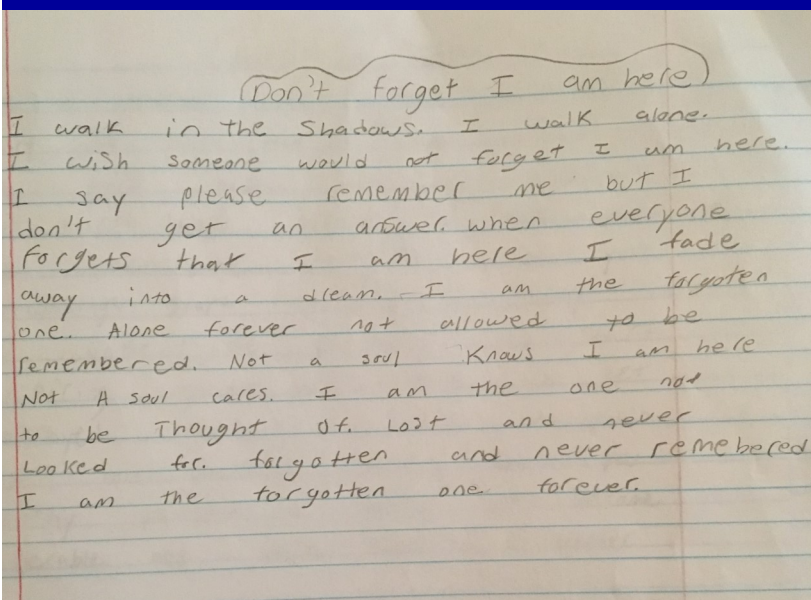
**By Judge Peggy Walker**  
**Douglas Juvenile Court**

The headlines read, **“Opioid Crisis in America.”** But the reality is we have an **“Addiction Crisis”** that affects the child welfare world every day.

Pregnant women are going to the emergency room in our communities giving birth to children affected by drug exposure prior to birth. The mothers have had no prenatal care. The infants require a higher level of care than our local hospital can provide. The infants are moved to another hospital and miss the opportunity for bonding and attachment and other recommended best practices to avoid admin-

See [WALKER](#), page 4

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



(Don't forget I am here)  
I walk in the shadows. I walk alone.  
I wish someone would not forget I am here.  
I say please remember me but I  
don't get an answer when everyone  
forgets that I am here I fade  
away into a dream. I am the forgotten  
one. Alone forever not allowed to be  
remembered. Not a soul knows I am here  
Not a soul cares. I am the one not  
to be thought of. Lost and never  
looked for. forgotten and never remembered  
I am the forgotten one forever.

Submitted by M.B., age 13, a youth in foster care



July 16, 2018

Page 2

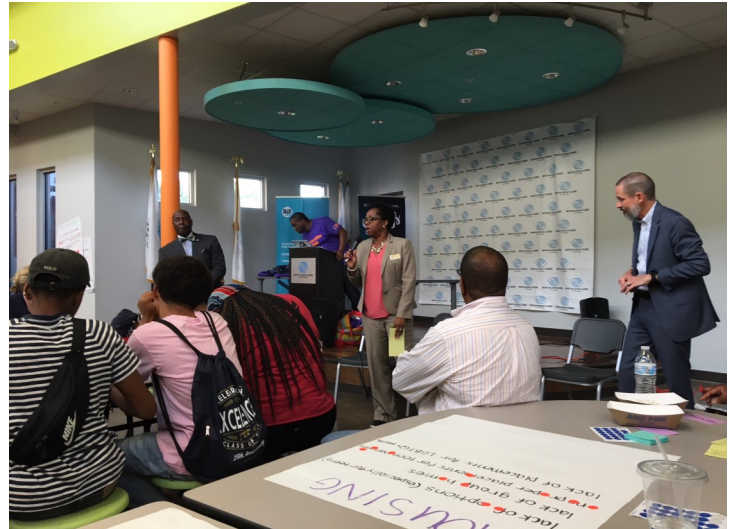
## ***Investigator Insight:*** **Finding common ground**

By Renee Moore,  
OCA Senior Investigator

**I recently had the pleasure of  
attending the DFCS Town Hall**

**Meeting for Youth Empowerment in Augusta.** I was able to participate in discussions with the youth around education, housing and employment. During the town hall meeting I met a teenager who has been in foster care since he was three years old. He did not willingly participate in the discussions and indicated he did not want to be there. I saw this as an opportunity to try to engage this young man, and after several minutes of hearing myself talk he began to open up (probably so I would quit talking). He began to talk about his experiences in foster care, the importance of finishing school and his long term goals. As I thought about our conversation I realized every single youth has a voice but sometimes we in child welfare have to find common ground and meet these youth exactly where they are in that moment. As the

meeting was wrapping up I encouraged this young man to use his voice to make the change he would like to see and he responded....we will see!!!!



DFCS leaders Jeff Lukich, Sekema Harmon, and Keith Bostick collaborate with youth at June's town hall in Augusta



David Sullivan and Andrew Lorenzen-Strait of ICE's custody programs with OCA's folks.

## **ICE Works to Provide Assistance to Georgia's Child Welfare Community**

ciates the struggles that attorneys and the courts have in addressing the needs of children whose migrant parents have been detained by immigration authorities or deported. Deportation or detention is an insufficient legal reason to interfere with the bond between those parents and their children who remain in

the juvenile courts, it is often difficult to find these parents and maintain the bond between them and their children.

In June, Lorenzen-Strait and his colleagues visited with OCA, DFCS county directors and leadership, and a number of child welfare attorneys in June to discuss how the federal agency can help in these cases. ICE can help locate parents who are in immigration detention so they can be notified of ongoing issues with their child.

**As a former child welfare attorney in Los Angeles,** Andrew Lorenzen-Strait knows and appre-

the US. Unfortunately, when children of these parents are involved with our child welfare system and





July 16, 2018

Page 3

## Meeting Faye McCord

**OCA's roving intern, Cassie Scoggins, visits Bartow County Juvenile Court and interviews one of its most experienced child welfare attorneys**

**Cassie:** Thank you for speaking with me, Faye. I am really interested to hear about your work with the juvenile court system. How did you get your start in this field?

**Faye:** In 2000, I founded my own law firm, and since then I have been serving as a guardian ad litem, children's attorney, and parent attorney for the Bartow County Juvenile Court. I really wanted to do something that would help kids have better lives, and thankfully, I found the perfect place to practice child welfare law. Bartow County is a model court thanks to the efforts of our former judge, Velma Tilley. She really made the court into one of best practices.

**C:** So what has changed since you began this work in 2000?

**F:** The biggest change that I have seen is

the increased value of child welfare law and professional attorneys in this field. When I began, juvenile court was seen as "kiddie court," but there has been a definite change in attitude. Child welfare attorneys can now be recognized and certified as Child Welfare Law Specialists (CWLS) through the National Association of Counsel for Children, and I was actually in the first group of attorneys to be certified. Now, there are 60 throughout the State of Georgia.

**C:** What are the greatest obstacles that you currently face when serving as an attorney for children and/or a guardian ad litem?

**F:** The greatest obstacle I have found is a lack of accurate information. At the beginning of a case, you have to rely on information from DFCS, but there are so many



**Mary Faye McCord**

- Cartersville, Georgia
- Law School: Georgia State University
- Admitted to the Georgia Bar: 1989
- Certified Child Welfare Law Specialist
- Supreme Court Committee on Justice for Children, "Child Advocate of the Year Award" 2005

other perspectives that have to be taken into account. Another obstacle is parents' ability, or lack thereof, to overcome substance abuse issues. Substance

See [FAYE](#), Page 5

#THEWEDNESDAYWHY

## WHY FAMILY PRESERVATION?

### What is family preservation?

Family preservation services may be offered by Georgia DFCS as part of a continuum of short-term, family-focused, community-based services for families that have or have had DFCS involvement due to child abuse or neglect. These services are designed to maintain children safely in their homes, prevent the unnecessary separation of families, and are offered as a safe alternative to out-of-home placement when appropriate. Support and therapeutic services include preventative activities, typically provided by community-based organizations designed to improve the nurturing of children and to strengthen and enhance the functioning and stability of families.

Federal and state law supports the use of family preservation services, which may include assistance with:

- Counseling/mental health treatment
- Substance abuse treatment
- Education
- Child care
- Employment services

### Why family preservation?

It is healthier and less traumatic for children to remain with their family when they can do so safely. Studies have shown that children removed from their family are twice as likely to develop Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) as U.S. military veterans. Also, with some of the highest numbers of children in foster care than ever before, the system is increasingly strained. Utilizing family preservation services where appropriate helps reduce the potential trauma to a child that may otherwise have been removed from his or her home and allows appropriate resources to be expended on a child that cannot safely remain in his or her home.

## Heard on the Street

**"The experience with DFCS has given us as parents a greater ability to succeed."**

**—Father of children in care**

This parent was sharing about his experience with DFCS and solution-based casework (SBC). His children were in care for just a week, but he had experience with DFCS from years before and talked about this experience being so much better even though having his kids removed was really difficult. The supervisor on the case also commended the parent for the effort he put in and noted that the court has embraced DFCS' practice model. He also said the case manager was the first one in his unit to be certified in SBC.



July 16, 2018

Page 4

## Prenatal, continued. . . .

disorder, or oppositional defiant disorder actually had suffered undiagnosed prenatal exposure to alcohol.

Hosted by the federal Children's Bureau and the [Center for Child and Family Futures](#), the two-day training provided participants with speakers well-versed in addressing children affected by maternal substance use and also gave the state teams the opportunity to refine the goals of their individual projects.

Judge Walker's team included her family treatment court staff as well as partners from Wellstar hospital, the Georgia's Department of Public Health and Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities, DFCS, the Administrative Office of the Courts, and OCA. As it begins its project, the team will focus on three primary goals:

1. Increasing the percentage of substance-using pregnant women who seek and receive regular and appropriate prenatal care;
2. Increasing the percentage of substance-using pregnant women who receive an appropriate prenatal plan of safe care prior to delivery hospital admission; and
3. Increasing the quality, amount, and consistency of family-centered services to substance-affected newborns and their families through voluntary or court-ordered interventions.

While this project will focus on improving practice in

Douglas County, the lessons learned will enable the state's public health, behavioral health, and child welfare agencies to improve practice and outcomes statewide for these children.

***Dr. Chasnoff's article on missed diagnosis of substance effects, as well as other materials, can be requested on his [website](#).***

**Coming in September to the State Bar — Here's a Great Opportunity to Learn More About Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders! (Click on the Pic to Register)**



Legal Aid  
Atlanta

**Training on Fetal Alcohol  
Spectrum Disorders**

September 18 | 8 AM - 5 PM | 104 Marietta St. NW #100  
Atlanta, GA 30303

**Register at <https://conta.cc/2I4t84Z>**

General registration: free  
Registration & CLE credit: \$5



## Walker, cont'd....

-istering drugs to ease the infants' level of physical distress arising from prenatal exposure. Through partnerships we are building a safe place for women struggling with addiction to seek prenatal care and drug treatment to prevent separation at birth by having the child in the right hospital and the Mother in recovery. We can do this. We must do this.

**Left: Thanks to Judge Walker's prior work, mothers such as this one in her court got treatment and were able to give birth to drug-free babies!**



July 16, 2018

Page 5

## ICE, continued....

The agency can also facilitate visitation between a detained parent and child via phone, video, or in person. When family or juvenile court proceedings are in process, ICE can in many cases delay deportation or relocate the detained parent closer to the court so the parent can be involved in the proceedings.

In the box to the right, we have reprinted a quick guide to some of our immigration service's supports for families involved with the child welfare system. More information is available [here](#). OCA continues to work with our child protection agency, courts, consulates, and attorneys to ensure that children whose parents cannot legally stay in the United States are reunified with them in their home country or are otherwise able to maintain an ongoing relationship.

## Faye, continued...

abuse is one of the greatest causes of DFCS involvement in Bartow County, and up until recently, Bartow was the meth capital of the United States. We are now also seeing abuse of opioids, such as prescription drugs and heroin. This is tough to address, as there is a lack of community and family resources in the county and many parents find it difficult to overcome addiction without them. Poverty, coupled with substance abuse, is a huge barrier for these individuals, and it affects their ability to create a stable, safe environment for their children.

**C: Recently, our office has been piloting a project, PRE (Promoting Reasonable Efforts), in DFCS regions 12 and 13. The aim of this project is to take a broader and more intensive approach to implementing reasonable efforts to prevent removal of children while assuring their safety with a better continuum of options. In your opinion, do you feel as if reasonable efforts are made prior to the removal of children and their placement in foster care? If not, do you have any ideas that might help the promotion of such efforts?**

F: Because Bartow County is a model juvenile court, we take the reasonable efforts requirement very seriously. We very rarely find cases where reasonable efforts are not made. In cases involving heroin or meth, the children must obviously be removed from the home, but they are usually placed with family members. Kinship care is almost always the best option if kids can't stay with mom or dad. I honestly can't even remember the last time that I was contacted for an emergency removal staffing.

**C: Based on the experience you have acquired in the world of child welfare law, what is something you wish the general population knew about child welfare and dependency?**

F: I wish the general population would understand the vital importance of the juvenile court system in our society. I know that the topic isn't pleasant and it isn't exactly dinner conversation, but children are our greatest resource. We have to do everything we can to protect them and ensure that their needs are met. Each and every one of us working in the field of child welfare needs to educate the public on the importance of our work and how important it is to the well-being of our youth.

**C: Wow. What a great answer! Thank you for your time and for providing your valuable insight.**

F: You're welcome. I am always happy to help.





July 16, 2018

Page 6



## The Summit, Georgia's Child Welfare Conference

### Save the Date

December 3-5, 2018

### Last Week To Summit Proposals!

[Click Here to Submit a Proposal Online](#)

The Office of the Child Advocate, Supreme Court of Georgia's Committee on Justice for Children and the Division of Family and Children Services are pleased to announce the Call for Workshop Proposals for *The Summit: Georgia's Child Welfare Conference* to be held December 3-5, 2018 at the Omni Atlanta Hotel at CNN Center. You are invited to join other child welfare professionals at the second annual Summit, a statewide, multi-disciplinary conference for sharing best practices, and collaborating across professions. The theme for the 2018 Summit is Law, Policy, and Practice and the agenda is taking shape for an extraordinary program for all child welfare professionals – case managers, lawyers, judges, policy makers, Court Appointed Special Advocates, stakeholders and anyone interested in improving our system of serving Georgia's abused and neglected children.

If you are interested in being considered as a potential presenter during The Summit, [please complete the Call for Workshop Proposals](#) form and click "Submit." The submission deadline is **July 23, 2018**. If you need assistance please contact AK Consulting Group at 850-523-4200.

### Continuing Education

CLE Hours will be available

### Conference Hotel

Group Rate: \$159

[Book a Hotel Reservation](#) Online

### Questions?

Contact AK Consulting Group

850-523-4200

[Annette@akconsultinggroup.org](mailto:Annette@akconsultinggroup.org)

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

**Tom C. Rawlings, Director**

<https://oca.georgia.gov>

7 MLK Jr. Blvd, Ste 347

Atlanta, GA 30334

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

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

*To submit an article for the newsletter:*

- [rdavidson@oca.ga.gov](mailto:rdavidson@oca.ga.gov)

### Join us on social media!



[@GeorgiaOfficeoftheChildAdvocate](#)

<https://www.facebook.com/>

[GeorgiaOfficeoftheChildAdvocate/](#)



[@georgia\\_oca](#)

[https://twitter.com/georgia\\_oca](https://twitter.com/georgia_oca)



<https://www.youtube.com/channel/>

[UCqyCem2OBwAXWKmHp6kyYAg](#)