

December 2020

State Director's Angle **Reflections to Mark the Way Forward**

By State Director Michael Leach



I know 2020 has been a year none of us will easily forget. As I reflect on the immense challenges and opportunities we have experienced as a DSS Family, as a state, and as a nation over the past year, the overwhelming feeling I have is gratitude. This year has stretched our capacity, our endurance, our funding, and has immensely tested our resilience. As a team, DSS has emerged from 2020 stronger, more focused and more committed because of it.

Throughout this year, I have seen our DSS team members across the state step up in unimaginable ways, going above and beyond to serve others in this time of crisis. We have professionals across the state who are working to help people get food benefits to feed their families and because more people are in need, the increased call volume puts more pressure on our team members. We have staff working to make sure families continue to receive needed child support payments. We have staff working to set up temporary child care centers, and others who are providing needed support to those child care centers that are still

remaining open. We also have DSS professionals who are putting themselves potentially in harm's way in order to fulfill agency responsibilities around engaging and working with families and providing for the well-being of all of South Carolina's citizens. I want to thank our DSS professionals for their continued dedication, passion, and enthusiasm for what they do daily. I have heard so many stories of commitment to this work and

helping a colleague, neighbor and client during this difficult time. Our goal is to bring compassion and courage to the South Carolinians we serve, and Team DSS has accomplished that goal ten-fold in repeated measure over the past year.

I also want to thank our partners. Many of you have stepped into the gap over the last year, overextending yourself, your time and your resources to help the families of South Carolina survive this pandemic. You have joined with us in this work, to push ourselves in every area of the agency, striving to improve and grow how we do our work and continually drive towards that standard of excellence.

In striving to do our best for all citizens of South Carolina, part of our intentional focus over the last year has been to engage our staff, at all levels of the agency, around the issue of bias in decision making based upon implicit bias and racial bias. We ask that you join along with us to confront racial bias by being cognizant of decisions that may be influenced by bias on the basis of race and/or a focus on information that confirms pre-existing attitudes. As a child and family serving system, we recognize that we are not immune to the challenges posed by racial bias, and we recognize that these challenges affect you, our partners, as well.

We also acknowledge there are times when poverty is confused or misidentified as neglect. Poverty alone does not equate to neglect and we are working to transform this thinking with our staff to a focus on connection of resources. We acknowledge that there are times when families we serve enter our system as a result of bias, racism, and lack of access to resources. We also recognize that we cannot achieve our agency mission to promote the safety, permanency and well-being of children/youth, families and vulnerable adults, without confronting these issues head on. We ask you to join with us in this self-examination of thought patterns and motives and let's all strive to create a system that provides equal access and equal treatment and removes the stigma associated with asking for and receiving help.

Looking back, it would have been easy for us as an agency to stick to the bare minimum this year--goodness knows that the bare minimum alone had its' share of challenges. But I am not here, and we are not here, to do what is easy. We are here to push, to grind, and to stretch ourselves, our agencies, our partners, and our practices to transform the way we view and do the work, so that no child, individual, or family in South Carolina ever has to feel unsafe, lacking, or less than. It is our responsibility and our calling to accept this immense challenge and continue to push ourselves to level up in the coming year. Will you accept the challenge to level up with us? **We can. We will. We must.**

National Adoption Month Brings Happy Endings

*As National Adoption Month came to a close, DSS celebrated families across South Carolina finalizing adoptions of children from foster care who were waiting for a permanent place to call home – their **Forever Family**.*



Alexis Ragan, 18, (pictured above, first from left) shared her story of struggles and perseverance with WMBF in Myrtle Beach. She found her forever family in her teens, who often face challenges with getting adopted before aging out of the foster care system. Teens were a target group for this year's National Adoption Month awareness campaign. Alexis is happy, successful and looking forward to a career as a nurse. See Alexis' story [here](#).



WPDE highlighted the story of the Fowler Family of Horry County (pictured above), who adopted their first daughter, Kathy, 29 years ago. More recently, Jerry and Mary Fowler Mary completed the adoption of three more children, while Mary battled her way through COVID. Watch their heart-warming story [here](#).

All year long, SCDSS works diligently with community partners to find families that best match the unique needs of every child and youth awaiting adoption. Learn more about becoming a forever family for a young person through adoption. Visit [SCDSS Adoptions](#) online and view profiles of SC's waiting children by visiting the [SC Heart Gallery](#).

Home for the Holidays Success Story

By Terri Thompson, Richland County DSS Director

We all know 2020 has been far from a typical year. But for Richland County DSS, about seven new children entered foster care every week – a typical year for our county.

One week last month, six children entered foster care in Richland County from three separate families. They included two infants, one toddler, one preschooler, one seven year-old and one teenager. Because of our agency's and county's steady shift towards a "kin-first" mindset, five of these children were immediately placed with relatives. Based on statistics, had these children not been placed in kinship care, they most likely would have been placed out of our county, separated from their siblings, away from their relatives, friends, neighbors, churches, and schools... away from everything familiar that brought them comfort.



It took a lot of diligent work by our professionals to identify and locate family members to make these placements happen, but it's what we should do. And, it was worth it to these children who all got to remain in Richland County with relatives who stepped up to care for them.

Especially, at this time of year, I am most grateful when I think about children being reunited with birth parents, placed with caring relatives or in other family-like settings that make them truly feel safe, loved and at “home for the holidays.”



Coming in early 2021!

SCDSS Child Support Services Division Customer Service Portal for Parents

Whether you pay or receive child support, a new customer service online tool will soon be available to view important case information – any time, any day.

View payment information, hearing dates, established enforcement and system updates affecting your case. Customers will also be able to update contact and employment information as well as send inquiries to our customer service staff.

Early Childhood Outdoor Learning Environments Certificate Recipients

By Sherrie Dueno, Outreach Coordinator, ABC Quality

The push to get children re-connected to nature has elevated the importance of outdoor play and learning in child care facilities. Children's physical, social, and emotional development can be encouraged in these spaces.



The Division of Early Care and Education is excited to share that several ABC Quality and Child Care Licensing staff recently completed the *Early Childhood Outdoor Learning Environments* certificate, a 12-week online course developed by the Natural Learning Initiative at N.C. State University. The course provides foundational knowledge of naturalized, outdoor play and learning environments among staff and across programs. Equipped with this information, Division staff can more effectively assess these non-traditional spaces for hazards and support child care programs interested in creating naturalized, outdoor play and learning environments.

Providers interested in learning more about the benefits of outdoor learning or in joining the ABC Quality Family call toll free at 800-763-2223 or email abcquality@dss.sc.gov.



ADVISORY for PARENTS and CAREGIVERS of children learning at home...

The SC Department of Social Services must grant approval for temporary child care operations designed to support children during school-time care, e-learning care, virtual learning, and/or extended school time care due to schools not providing in-classroom instruction. [Learn more or apply for a temporary certificate to operate a school-age child care facility during the COVID-19 Pandemic.](#)



Click here to visit our website to learn more about Adult Protective Services

Did you know...

900,000 residents in South Carolina are age 65 and older? That's 18% of the state's entire population and almost 75,000 of these senior adults live in poverty.

Adult Protective Services and Response to COVID-19

By Rick Knight, Director of Administration, Adult Protective Services

COVID-19 has affected all of DSS, and the impact on Adult Protective Services (APS) is no exception. Based on data from DHEC, 404 long-term care facilities have had at least one case of COVID-19 since they started tracking this information in April. That includes 94% of all nursing homes and 41% of all community long-term care/assisted living facilities. APS has been tracking COVID's effect on adults in our system during this time as well. The number of APS adults in facilities that have had at least one case of COVID since April is 288. As of November 13th, a total of 123 APS adults have tested positive for COVID – 55 have been in long-term care facilities, 27 in hospitals, and 18 in their homes. Included in this number are 23 APS adults who died from COVID-related illnesses. Of the state's 46 counties, 33 have at least one APS adult who has tested positive for COVID.

Through all of this, APS case managers have continued to work diligently to conduct investigations and visits, as well as provide protective services. Many long-term care facilities and some hospitals stopped allowing visitors at some point during the pandemic, making visits difficult to conduct. While face-to-face visits are still conducted for investigations, APS case managers have been creative and resourceful to conduct telephone

and virtual visits for protective services. We extend special thanks to all of the APS professionals for working through difficult and stressful times to continue serving our vulnerable adults!



SNAP Program Gives Support to SC Families

By Amber Gillum, Deputy State Director, Economic Services

SNAP Education (SNAP-Ed) provides a combination of nutrition education, health promotion, and environmental support to low-income communities to improve the likelihood that families who are receiving SNAP benefits will make healthier food and physical activity choices. SNAP-Ed provides funding for behaviorally focused, evidence-based

nutrition education programs and obesity prevention interventions.

DSS contracts with four implementing agencies to provide nutrition education statewide -- Department of Health & Environmental Control, Clemson University, University of South Carolina, and Low County Food Bank.

Over 66,000 individuals received direct nutrition education in 2019. Nutrition education videos from Film Ideas reached 23,627 clients in health clinics and foodbanks/pantries. Nutrition education newsletter materials reached 1,650,000 clients and over 4.6 million digital and retargeting ads were distributed to promote programs and highlight where fresh local fruits and vegetables are grown.

SNAP-Ed is 100% federally funded. South Carolina received approximately \$4.4 million for federal fiscal year 2021. Learn more information about SNAP or apply for benefits [here](#).

2020 December Employee Of The Month ❄️



CONGRATULATIONS!

- Row 1: Marshmallow Guy; Martin Bailey, LMS Admin.; Lai Tai, CSSD
- Row 2: Nadija Ransom, Individual & Provider Rights; Andrea James-Favor, Pee-Dee Director
- Row 3: Janice Broach, Employment Services; Donna Shaw, Legal Services
- Row 4: Jennie Mitchell-Greene, APS

SCDSS Employees of the Month

Seven DSS professionals were recognized by Director Michael Leach as December Employees of the Month on December 3rd during a virtual luncheon.

Recognized for their hard work and leading with *Competence, Courage and Compassion* for the month of December are: (1st row) Martin Bailey, Training Division, Browning Road; Lai Tai, Child Support Services, Columbia; (2nd row) Nadija Ransom, Individual & Provider Rights, State Office; Andrea James-Favor, Child Welfare Services, Pee Dee Region; (3rd row) Janice Broach, Economic Services, Lancaster County; Donna Shaw, Legal Services, North Charleston; and (4th row) Jennie Mitchell-Greene, Adult Protective Services, Kershaw County.

Normally, the honorees would join Director Leach for lunch in Columbia, but this recognition meeting with the Director was held virtually due to the

ongoing pandemic. Each will still have the use of a designated parking space for the entire month, a DSS lapel pin, a gift card for purchasing their lunch during the virtual luncheon and an announcement sent to their local newspaper. Congratulations all!

SCDSS Partner Spotlights

Edgefield County Thanksgiving Giveaway A Big Success

Not even the COVID-19 pandemic could disrupt a Thanksgiving tradition that dates back more than a decade in Edgefield County. The Edgefield County DSS Team was served 109 families as part of their annual Thanksgiving Turkey Giveaway. The giveaway was held at the county office on W.A. Reel Drive. Moronda Talley, Edgefield County DSS Director said, "We would not have been able to do it without the efforts of our generous community partners, spearheaded by Pastor Judy Layman of **Living Word Fellowship.**" Talley noted that special precautions were taken to make sure all pick-ups were contactless and ensured that everyone was properly using PPE. Many thanks to **Trenton United Methodist, Johnston United Methodist and Harmony United Methodist** who also contributed to the success of this effort.





SC Foster Parent Association Social Worker of the Month

Jenelle Taylor is the **SCFPA** Social Worker of the Month for December. Taylor, a Case Manager with Horry County DSS, was described in the following was for her nomination: "[Jenelle is] amazing and truly cares about every single child on her caseload. She always makes herself available and provides needed information in a timely manner. During this trying time of COVID and virtual visits, Jenelle found very creative and innovative ways to make sure her children were seen and their needs met." Congratulations Jenelle Taylor, for your outstanding service to children and families! Special thanks to SCFPA recognizing our professionals!

On the Road to Independence with Chafee and ETV

By Nichole Turner, Youth Engagement Coordinator II, Chafee/ETV Program

The SCDSS Chafee and ETV (Education and Training Vouchers) Program's mission is to help teens and young adults with child welfare experience successfully transition into lifelong successful independence. We are proud of the many success stories of youth who have transitioned out of foster care prepared for the next phase of their lives as productive, self-sufficient adults. We are also proud to work with so many great partners, like **Leaphart Place**, who support our youth through this important period in their lives.



Leaphart Place is a supervised independent living facility in the Midlands Region. At the facility, youth are able to practice living independently and maintain employment to pay rent, while having the support of caring adults and wrap around services to strengthen their skillsets while on the road to independence. As a part of their programming at Leaphart, youth learn valuable transitional skillsets and because of the convenient location, have easy access to other necessities such as groceries, employment and education. The Chafee and ETV program salutes Leaphart for all you do to help our transitioning youth succeed.



Drive-Thru Job Fair - Greenville, SC



On the Road to Employment with Drive-Thru Job Fairs

The SCDSS Division of Employment and Workforce salutes the **SC Department of Employment & Workforce, SC Works, Harvest Hope Food Bank and other partner agencies** for bringing workforce opportunities to job seekers around the state.

More than 400 people came out to Harvest Hope Food Bank on White Horse Road in Greenville for a November 18th Drive-Thru Job Fair and nearly 150 cars lined up on December 8th at the Harvest Hope Food Bank on West Lucas Street in Florence.



Drive-Thru Job Fair - Florence, SC

A recent polling of Harvest Hope families in the Midlands revealed that over 40% are currently in need of employment. Due to COVID-19 and recommended social distancing guidelines, traditional job fairs are not feasible. Drive-thru job fairs provide opportunities to connect people looking for work with potential new careers as well as to provide curbside food pick-up so participants never have to leave their vehicles.

Many thanks to our partners who make these great events a huge success!

DSS church partner remembers foster families for Thanksgiving

A huge thanks to Cades United Methodist Church in Cades for donating \$50 IGA gift cards to all 20 foster parents in Williamsburg County for Thanksgiving.

Church staff handwrote each foster parent a card saying, "Thank you for providing a safe home for our foster children. We hope this gift will bless your home during Thanksgiving. With Love, Cades United Methodist Church".

This was such a kind gesture to all the families who help make a difference for children and youth!



SCDSS Launches New Online Portal for Abuse and Neglect Reporting



SCDSS's new web portal allows the public to **make online referrals of suspected abuse and neglect of a child or vulnerable adult.** Reporters may elect to make an anonymous referral or provide contact information to receive follow up on the disposition of their referral.



Report abuse and neglect
of children and vulnerable adults.



1-888-CARE4US

Season's Greetings!



SC Department of Social Services
P.O. Box 1520
Columbia, SC 29202-1520



SC Department of Social Services | P.O. Box 1520 , 1535 Confederate Ave., Columbia, SC 29204

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