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CHILD WELFARE SERVICES

New Campaign Launched for Child Welfare Services System Transformation

By Pam Bryant, Director - Public Information and Constituent Services

On Friday, February 26, the SCDSS Child Welfare Services Division held a virtual launch party for the **Better Together: Enhancing Practice, Transforming Lives** statewide campaign. The campaign focuses on the Department's strategic, collaborative efforts to shift from a traditional child welfare system into a child and family well-being system aimed at achieving best outcomes for children, youth and families in South Carolina.

Nearly 1400 viewers tuned in to the virtual event that targeted DSS child welfare professionals, featuring a keynote address by Sandra Gasca-Gonzales, Vice President,



Center for Systems Innovation at the [Annie E. Casey Foundation \(AECF\)](#). AECF serves as a national partner and consultant to SCDSS, supporting the agency's efforts to build its capacity to achieve better results for children and families as well as to forge broad-based coalitions to advance child and family policies.

Gonzales said, "Families, young people and communities have the right to be involved in decisions affecting their lives and others involved in the system. Further, they should be involved in the design of the system's transformation because their perspectives can drive better outcomes." Emphasizing the important role community stakeholders play in supporting a child well-being system, Gonzales added, "If we really want to help children and families, we need to incorporate a Whole Family Approach to our work to help families and communities find their own solutions and to encourage a preventative rather than a crisis-driven perspective to problem-solving."

Attendees heard opening remarks from Gov. Henry McMaster, State Sen. Katrina Shealy, SCDSS State Director Michael Leach, followed by Karen Bryant, Deputy State Director for Child Welfare Services, who led professionals through a deep dive to understand the campaign purpose and goals. Bryant said, "The Better Together campaign is about the beliefs and values that undergird our current and future system. It's the impact we hope to have in effectively implementing all our strategic initiatives. We believe that together, we will develop a child and family well-being system that partners across agencies and with children, youth, and families. And, because we believe children, youth, and families are 'better together,' we are holistically striving to enhance practice and transform the lives of the children, youth, and families we encounter!"

Tecoria Jones, a national spokesperson representing birth parents who have interfaced with the child welfare system, shared her personal struggles growing up in foster care and as a parent involved with the system. Her poignant remarks offered encouragement for child welfare professionals to become more trauma-informed and family-centered in working with families. Young adult members of Youth Engagement Advocates (YEA!) shared their stories about being in foster care and their ideals for how the agency can authentically engage young people in reform efforts. All expressed their high hopes for DSS's endeavor to improve practices to achieve best outcomes for children, youth and families.

During the virtual launch party, Margaret Chapman, Adoptions Specialist in the Pee Dee Region, was recognized for creating the winning logo design (displayed above) that will serve as the brand for all ongoing campaign initiatives.

As Director Leach and Deputy Bryant closed out the event, common themes in their calls to action were aimed at motivating Child Welfare Services professionals to remain open to learning, growing and being stretched in their work. Leach encouraged staff to listen more, engage families and build relationships that support families with hope and the belief that they can address their needs. Bryant laid out action steps team members can expect in the coming months, including: opportunities to offer feedback from the frontlines, based on training and experiences; and, ongoing training and support to help professionals make informed decisions to effectively support, engage, and coach children, youth and families.

SCDSS recognizes that the success of the *Better Together: Enhancing Practice, Transforming Lives* campaign depends heavily on effective collaboration with parents, relative caregivers, foster parents and community providers, legal partners, the faith community and other key stakeholders to co-design solutions. Stay tuned as the Department builds out its public communication strategies around campaign goals and outcomes and shares progress toward system transformation.

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
29202

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