

**News and Updates from SCDSS | June 2024**



## Staying Committed to Excellence

As we step into the warmer months and embrace the energy that comes with the beginning of summer, I wanted to take a moment to thank all of you for your commitment to exceptional service in the communities you serve.

As we continue to navigate the challenges and opportunities that come our way, I want to encourage you on the importance of maintaining a high level of responsiveness and attentiveness in our community. Now, more than ever, it is crucial that we remain proactive in addressing their needs and concerns, and that we do so with empathy, compassion, and a genuine desire to help.

With the arrival of summer, we are presented with new opportunities to connect with those we serve and make a meaningful difference in their lives. Whether it is through offering resources, community activities, special events, or simply taking the time to listen and offer support, let

us seize this moment to strengthen our relationships and reaffirm our commitment to our communities and their well-being.

I hope every one of you are inspired to embrace the spirit of collaboration and teamwork as we embark on this journey together. By working together and supporting one another, we can achieve great things and continue to make a positive impact in the lives of those we serve.

Thank you for your dedication, your hard work, and your unwavering commitment to your mission. I am proud to be connected to such remarkable partners, and I look forward to all that we will accomplish together in the days and weeks ahead.



## World Elder Abuse Awareness Day Recognized in South Carolina

The South Carolina Department of Social Services (SCDSS) recognized June 14th as World Elder Abuse Awareness Day in South Carolina. The day is set aside as an opportunity to raise awareness of the abuse and victimization of older adults in our society. Abuse can be physical and emotional. It can also be neglect or financial exploitation. On World Elder Abuse Awareness Day, the public was encouraged to wear purple clothing or a purple ribbon. The color symbolizes the continuing problem of elder abuse around the world.

“Our senior citizens set an example for all of us through their decades of hard work and sacrifice. They should be able to enjoy their golden years without fear of victimization. But it takes all of us. Our seniors deserve our respect, our admiration, and our assistance in any way we can provide,” said Michael Leach, DSS State Director.

On June 14th at 9 am, a walk was held outside the DSS State Office at 1535 Confederate Avenue in Columbia to recognize World Elder Abuse Awareness Day. [Photos](#) and [video](#) are available from the walk to view.

“At DSS we believe that older adults should live their lives free of abuse, neglect, and exploitation and the fact that they are aging should never change their fundamental rights as humans and citizens of this state,” said Kelly Cordell, DSS Director for Adult Advocacy. “It is our hope that awareness events, such as this walk, will bring increased attention to the issue, as well as remind the public of the resources available for help.”

To learn more about Adult Protective Services and how to report the suspected neglect or abuse of a Vulnerable Adult, click [here](#).

## DSS State Director Michael Leach Named Outstanding State Member

Congratulations to DSS State Director Michael Leach for being named year's recipient of the



**MICHAEL LEACH**  
State Director, South Carolina Department of Social Services

Recipient of the **APHSA Excellence Award for Outstanding State Member**



American Public Health Services Association (APHSA) Excellence Award for Outstanding State Member! This award recognizes one state-level recipient (either an agency or an individual staff member) for their contributions to moving human services upstream to advancing social and economic mobility and/or for strengthening the human services sector overall.

Learn more by reading the official release [here](#).



# CHILD WELFARE SERVICES



## Family Reunification Month

*Reunification with parents and family is the best option and preferred outcome, when possible, for children removed from their homes and placed in foster care.*



## SCDSS Recognizes June as Family Reunification Month

The Department of Social Services recognizes and honors the month of June as Family Reunification Month to raise awareness and celebrate the work put into strengthening families. During the month, DSS recognizes families who have successfully reunited by overcoming challenges that require agency involvement.

This year's theme, as recognized by the American Bar Association, is "Let's Celebrate Unified Families in June!" This year's theme focuses on the importance of family unity, preventing removals, and separations whenever possible.

In the calendar year 2023, there were 1,503 children and youth reunited with their families in South Carolina. As of June 18, 2024, 633 children and youth have been safely returned to their families so far in 2024.

SCDSS State Director Michael Leach stated, “Our DSS professionals work tirelessly to keep families together and to bring families back together if they have to be separated due to safety concerns. Helping to strengthen family bonds, connecting families to community resources, and creating a secure, supportive environment for the children helps promote positive outcomes for families. So, throughout the month, let’s celebrate parents, listen to them, and provide them with resources that can help them stay together.”

SCDSS works with the Family Court, judges, attorneys, Guardians ad Litem, foster parents, child advocates, healthcare and mental health providers, non-profits, service providers, and other partners within the child welfare and well-being system to improve policies and practices to help keep families together.

The unified goal is to implement evidence-based interventions to improve outcomes for children and their families and provide support to families through forms of prevention efforts before child neglect and abuse ever occurs in the first place.

To see data on the agency’s reunification efforts, please click [here](#).



## 2024 Child Welfare Virtual Expo

DSS was thrilled to take part in the two-day Child Welfare Virtual Expo (CWVE) on Wednesday and Thursday, May 22–23, 2024. A central theme for this year’s expo was “Shifting Workforce Culture: A Road Trip Toward Safety, Trust, and Alignment.” A team of DSS leaders led a discussion on South Carolina’s Child Welfare Division.

Presenters included Michael Leach, DSS State Director; Emily Medere, Child Welfare Services Deputy State Director; Nikita Harrison, Child Welfare Operations Director; Josie Jones, Child Welfare Services Safety Division Director; Tumeka Fair Watson, Chesterfield County Director; and Sharvon Banks, Child Welfare Services Human Services Coordinator I.

They discussed leaving a culture and climate driven by compliance and fear in the rearview mirror and making their way to a destination point of a flourishing culture grounded in safety, trust, and alignment among professionals at all levels of the agency. They highlighted adaptive and technical leadership approaches that have led to successful transformation. Attendees left the session inspired to chart a course to a culture in which the child welfare workforce is equipped for success.



## Take Action 2024 to Change Child Welfare

Across the United States, child welfare agencies are recognizing the critical need for adaptive leadership and coaching skills to navigate the complex challenges facing the field. To address that need, DSS is excited to participate in the upcoming “A Call to Action to Change Child Welfare.” The international

virtual conference is being held October 7th-10th, 2024. Representing the agency will be Garry James, Director of Professional Development and Innovation, and Lew Rogers, Training Director/Leadership Development Team.

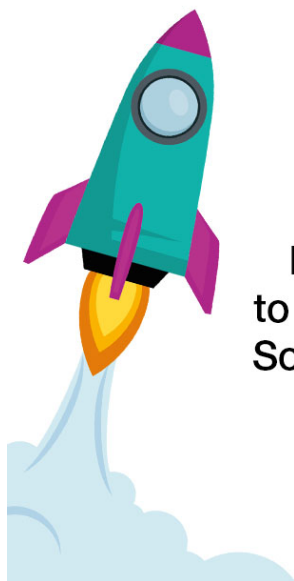
South Carolina is one of three states that will share information on efforts in building leaders, marshaling innovation, and providing adaptive and flexible responses to ever-changing environments in agencies and across systems. It is an effort to better serve children, youth, and families. South Carolina, Washington State, and Pennsylvania will each present their strengths and challenges. South Carolina's effort is embedded in Child Welfare through the training arm.

Leading through change in a sustainable manner is one of the biggest challenges of today's agency, organizational, and community leaders. Through utilizing the Coach Approach to Adaptive Leadership Model, each state is developing leaders who can lead from any chair, support cultural change, and build effective cross-system partnerships.

The South Carolina session is happening October 9th and is titled "Transformation Partners from Coast to Coast." The agency invested in the Coach Approach to Adaptive Leadership Model to create a learning organization and shift the organizational culture towards coaching. The state's strategy focused on building a coaching community of practice by developing certified coach mentors in each county and region. These internal champions support the implementation and sustainability of the Coach Approach to culture change through modeling, expertise, and commitment to the coach mentor process. The Community of Practice also includes learning circles facilitated by the state's coach mentors, allowing for maximum application, strengthening peer-to-peer networks, and mastering coaching competencies. As a result, SCDSS is succeeding in the transition from a model of compliance to competence, instilling confidence in frontline leaders, and creating a psychologically safe culture.

This presentation demonstrates how the Coach Approach to Adaptive Leadership promotes equity, diversity, inclusion, and justice by empowering individuals at all levels to lead change, fostering collaboration across systems, and prioritizing the voices of youth and families. By sharing their unique strengths, challenges, and strategies, Washington, Pennsylvania, and South Carolina offer valuable insights and solutions for building a leadership and coaching culture that can transform child welfare systems nationwide.





**\$8.4 million**  
has been paid in wage bonuses  
to **7,423** child care professionals in  
South Carolina through **SCBOO\$T!**

Apply now at [SCEndavors.org](https://SCEndavors.org)



\*As of 6/18/24



## SC BOO\$T Deadline is July 15th to Apply for Wage Bonuses to Child Care Professionals

The South Carolina Department of Social Services (SCDSS) SC Endeavors program announces that the deadline to apply for the SC BOO\$T child care wage enhancement program is fast approaching. Eligible child care professionals interested in the wage bonus program must submit their applications electronically by July 15, 2024.

Since the launch of SC BOO\$T, more than \$8.4 million in bonuses have been distributed to 7,423 child care professionals in South Carolina.

SC BOO\$T was launched on February 12th, 2024, in response to data indicating low wages for the early childhood workforce. This has a direct impact on turnover and providing high-quality environments for children and families.

“We have already received so many positive comments on the impact of SC BOO\$T,” said Melissa Starker, SC Endeavors Director. “Child care teachers and directors tell us it is helping them increase wages, in turn helping with retention. It is not too late for eligible early childhood professionals to apply to the SC BOO\$T program.”

### ***Child care professionals are also sharing impact stories including:***

- “The bonus will help motivate teachers I think to continue working in child care and it will show them that the state is recognizing that there is a struggle to keep teachers in child care.”
- “This will help those of us who are living paycheck to paycheck to be able to save or help with more bills. We love what we do, but the compensation isn’t always enough.”
- “This bonus will help me to continue providing quality care to our greatest asset- the children. Thank you, DSS, for working collaboratively and thinking outside the box to help the child care industry!”

SC BOO\$T is open to individuals who work in a DSS-regulated program, have been employed within the same program for six months or more, and are in a direct care position. To be eligible, applicants must have verified employment within the [SC Endeavors Registry](#), current [Career Ladder Level](#), and must complete the salary/wage information in the registry. Direct care staff must earn \$24 per hour or less, while directors or family/group providers must earn no more than \$30 per hour.

SCDSS is using federal ARPA (American Rescue Plan Act) supplemental funds for this one-time pilot program as allowed under federal guidelines. Data obtained from this one-time benefit could be used in potential program development and future funding requests to the South Carolina General Assembly.

For more information about the program and how to apply, visit [scendeavors.org/registry/sc-boo-t/](https://scendeavors.org/registry/sc-boo-t/). Professionals who have questions about SC BOO\$T can contact SC Endeavors at 864-250-8581 or email [SCEndeavors@dss.sc.gov](mailto:SCEndeavors@dss.sc.gov).



## SC Endeavors Hosts Leadership Institute

Each year, SC Endeavors offers “Train the Trainer” seminar sessions to enhance the state’s registered and certified trainers’ foundational knowledge and strategies to increase engagement within training sessions for child care providers. The most recent professional development opportunity for trainers in the state was held on April 22 – 23 in Columbia.

The topic was, “Inserting Adaptable Performance Skills, Engagement Techniques, and Guided Redirection when Facilitating Workshops,” and was provided by Kirsten Rourke, owner of Rourke Training from Massachusetts. Trainers from around the state received many tools and techniques for keeping audiences engaged and learning interactive. Laura Shirley and Carrin Cross, both training coordinators at SC Endeavors, facilitated these events and were able to meet many of the trainers who work with SC Endeavors to provide quality training opportunities for child care providers.



## Health & Wellness Expo

On May 18th, Hope Bupe and Dominic Sims of the Child Care Scholarship Program took part in the Charleston Hispanic Association Health & Wellness Expo in North Charleston. They passed out giveaways and information on accessing child care scholarships and high-quality early childhood programs through ABC Quality.

# ECONOMIC SERVICES

Family Assistance | Early Care & Education | Employment Services

## Food Assistance for SC Families

### Helping Families Stretch Their Food Dollar

SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) helps low-income households to stretch their income to purchase food. The SNAP portal is a great way for recipients to apply/view the benefits.

Check it out [here](#).

# What is SNAP?



## **SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program)**

Provides low-income households with nutrition assistance by increasing the household's food purchasing power.

### **Who can benefit?**

You may be able to get SNAP benefits if you are:

- Homeless
- Unemployed
- Elderly or disabled and are low-income
- Receiving welfare or other public assistance payments
- Working for low wages or working part-time



[SNAP FAQ](#)



[SNAP Portal](#)

**DSS** SOUTH CAROLINA  
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES



### **When is it available?**

Qualified applicants for SNAP will receive benefits no later than 30 days from the date they applied. Some families and individuals may qualify for expedited services and will receive benefits no later than 7 days from the date they applied.

To check the status of your SNAP application call 1-800-616-1309.

### **What are the eligibility and application requirements?**

If your household passes the program's eligibility tests, the amount of SNAP benefits you get will depend on the number of people in your household and how much monthly income is left after certain expenses are deducted.

Visit the FAQ page and the SNAP portal for more eligibility information. You may apply for SNAP benefits online through the benefits portal, in person, by mail, or fax.



DSS Flyer 505 (MAY 24)

# DID YOU KNOW?

You may be eligible for SNAP Benefits even if you receive:

- Social Security
- Child Support
- Unemployment

To learn more, visit:  
[dss.sc.gov/assistance-programs/snap/](https://dss.sc.gov/assistance-programs/snap/)



Need to report suspected SNAP fraud, waste, or abuse online?  
**Click [HERE](#) to Make a Report**



## The 2024 Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program is here

This year's Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP) started June 1st.

The SFMNP is designed to help supplement the diets of low-income seniors with fresh, nutritious produce while supporting South Carolina's local farmers. This seasonal USDA grant program allows qualifying

individuals to purchase unprocessed fruits and vegetables from authorized farmers' markets, roadside stands, and community-supported agriculture programs.

For 2024, eligible participants will receive \$50 in the form of five checks (\$10 each) to spend at participating authorized locations. Qualified seniors will need to visit a designated location in their county of residence, complete an application, and present photo identification to participate. If approved, the qualified senior will receive their checks the same day. Applications will be accepted, and checks will be distributed on a first come, first-served basis in the senior's county of residence.

To qualify, South Carolina residents must be age 60 or older with a yearly income of \$26,973 or less (\$36,482 for 2 people), report their household size (jointly or separately), and have a legal form of identification.

To find a local distribution center by county, please click [here](#). For a list of authorized farmers' markets, please click [here](#).

The SFMNP is available in all 46 counties this year thanks in part to SCDSS' commitment to community partnerships and collaboration with senior serving organizations and non-profits throughout the state. SCDSS is continuing the partnership with [Coastal Carolina National Bank \(CCNB\)](#), to process the payments for the program. SCDSS appreciates CCNB for their support and partnership in helping to serve senior citizens and families. The SFMNP is administered by the South Carolina Department of Social Services. For more information, contact Willie Nixon at (803) 898-1760 or email [SFMNP-Applications@dss.sc.gov](mailto:SFMNP-Applications@dss.sc.gov).

For more information about the Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program please click [here](#).



# NEED HELP FINDING CHILD CARE?

[SCChildcare.org](http://SCChildcare.org)

**DSS**  
SOUTH CAROLINA  
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

**SC Child Care**  
EARLY CARE & EDUCATION

**A B C** Quality

## Employment Services

*Helping individuals achieve sustainability.*



# 77

TANF or SNAP E&T participants obtained employment in May 2024.

*\*(represents full- and part-time employments)*

learn more at [dss.sc.gov](https://dss.sc.gov)



# 378

TANF or SNAP E&T participants have cumulatively obtained employment in 2024.

*\*(represents full- and part-time employments from 1/1/2024 through 5/31/2024)*

learn more at [dss.sc.gov](https://dss.sc.gov)



# ATTENTION JOB SEEKERS

## Who Receive SNAP or TANF...

Each year DSS helps find jobs for thousands of recipients of [TANF](#) (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) and [SNAP](#) (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) benefits. Research shows that children are more likely to escape a life of poverty if their parents enter the workforce.

DSS is committed to continuing to help people in South Carolina find employment quickly and to develop the skills necessary to obtain careers in fields where jobs are available and in demand.

If you are, or know of, a recipient of either SNAP or TANF benefits who needs assistance finding employment, click on the buttons to the right for resources and assistance.



**Employment  
Services Contact Form**

**Job Fair Announcements &  
Employment Tools**

# ATTENTION, SOUTH CAROLINA EMPLOYERS! DSS Can Help You Build a Quality Workforce

The [SCDSS Division of Employment Services](#) works to support business owners who hire **SNAP** (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) and **TANF** (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) program participants entering the workforce. When you hire our customers, you become eligible for a variety of benefits, incentives and supports designed to meet your specific needs. Hiring through DSS Employment Services programs provides businesses and new employees a promising future. We assist with:

- Tax credit opportunities for employers
- Workforce Consultants statewide
- Vocational assessments
- Pre-screened job referrals
- Background screening
- Ongoing assistance

Click [here](#) to see how our community partners are changing lives!

## Child Support

**CHILD SUPPORT**  
Customer Service Portal



*A secure way for parents to access important information about their case. Parents will have access to view:*

- Payment information
- Hearing dates
- Enforcement measures in place
- Announcements affecting their case

*The Customer Service Portal can be used to update:*

- Address, phone, email
- Employment information

To access the portal, you will need to create a unique **USER ID** and **PASSWORD**.  
To get started, call 1-800-768-5858



**clientportal.dss.sc.gov**

### DSS Child Support Customer Service Portal

(Click the button above to access portal now.)

*A secure way for parents to **APPLY** for child support services and **ACCESS** important case information any time, any day, from any device.*

- Create a unique user ID and password.
- Apply for services or access existing case information.
- View payment information, hearing dates, enforcement measures in place.
- Receive occasional announcements affecting the case.
- Update contact information.



## NAPSA Conference

South Carolina's APS program was recently selected to present at the National Adult Protective Services Association's (NAPSA) annual conference being held in New Mexico this September. NAPSA received a record number of proposals this year so the fact that South Carolina was chosen is considered an honor.

Kelly Cordell, Adult Advocacy Director, and Brandi Nerud, Policy and Program Oversight Director with Adult Advocacy, will be presenting on the newly created Adult Centered Planning (ACP) program. Kelly and Brandi will discuss the research and planning that went into creating the program, outcome measures, success stories, and lessons learned. While the ACP program is similar to Child and Family Team Meetings (CFTMs) in Child Welfare, there are some significant differences, more specifically the adult decides who attends the meeting and what they hope to accomplish. There has been a great deal of interest in the program from a national perspective. South Carolina APS is excited to share this innovative approach to case planning with adults. In addition to the ACP proposal, Jan Nerud with DAODAS was also selected to present on opioid use in older adults and his collaborative work with South Carolina APS.

## APS Goes the Extra Mile to Provide Assistance

We would like to share a story about how Adult Protective Services is making a difference in the lives of those we serve, below.

Mr. R\* (now 76) entered the APS system on October 16th, 2011, after the boarding home where he was living was shut down and law enforcement placed him into Emergency Protective Custody. It was later discovered that Mr. R had been placed at the boarding home by Homeland Security a few years before coming into custody. Mr. R came to the U.S. via Mariel's Boat Lift which included a mass movement of approximately 125,000 Cuban asylum seekers to the United States from April to October 1980. Mr. R faced several challenges upon arriving in the US and eventually was incarcerated. After his incarceration, he lost his social security income and was unable to gain citizenship in the US. After APS involvement, Homeland Security no longer provided him with funding or income for housing.

APS secured housing for Mr. R in an assisted living facility, facilitated continuous mental health services, and ongoing medical care, and supplied all his clothes and daily necessities. Sesily Simmons, APS Richland County team lead, has continued to carry Mr. R's case even after she became the team lead because of her long-time connection with him. Ms. Simmons has exemplified the guiding principles of APS by treating Mr. R with dignity, continuously hearing his voice, and respecting his needs. She says, "Mr. R has continued to do well and thrive. He has made many friends who are like family to him. In his current house, they love Mr. R and state that he is always willing to help others. He enjoys simple things like drinking coffee and his favorite foods are shrimp fried rice and spicy Doritos."

After thirteen years of being in APS custody and after DSS paying approximately \$300,000 the agency finally caught a break when Elexias Cotton, APS Director of Administration, learned from DHHS Medicaid Liaisons that DHHS has a specific immigration policy that pertains to Cuban asylum seekers. Recently, DHHS determined Mr. R was eligible for Medicaid coverage which allowed APS to approach the court for dismissal

of custody and DSS to no longer pay for Mr. R's expenses. He is in a safe place where his well-being needs are being addressed.

*\*Client name changed for confidentiality.*

## SCDSS Agency Highlights



### DSS Announces New Richland County Director

The South Carolina Department of Social Services would like to announce Monita Dawkins as the new Richland County Director. She began her new position on Monday, June 3rd.

Ms. Dawkins began her career with the Cherokee County DSS office, where for over seven years she has served as an eligibility worker, Foster Care social worker, and investigator. Her social services career continued with Youth and Family Services in Charlotte, North Carolina.

She served as a Child Protective Services social worker in a regular investigative unit, the specialized Conflict of Interests and Sex Abuse Unit, and as a Social Work supervisor of Investigative and In-Home Services. In addition, Monita served on the Child Fatality Prevention Team and created the monthly recognition of outstanding social workers. Monita retired from Mecklenburg County with 22 years of service. She has over 35 years of experience in Child Welfare. She then returned to Cherokee County and has served as county director for the past five and a half years.

"I appreciate the opportunity to become a member of the Richland County team. My career has been about serving families and sharing my knowledge to grow and strengthen leaders," said Ms. Dawkins.

"Throughout my journey, I operated by the Air Force core values of 'Integrity First, service before self, and excellence in all we do.' I believe that nothing beats a failure but a try, and we do not have problems, we have opportunities. With these values and beliefs, I know that our team will be successful in Richland County."

Monita is a graduate of the University of South Carolina in Columbia, holding a Bachelor of Science Degree in Criminal Justice and a Master of Arts in Counseling degree from Webster University in Greenville. She also has an associate degree from the Community College of the Air Force in Transportation. She's a retired Senior Master Sergeant, with 28 years of service with the United States Air Force. Monita is the proud mother of two children and a doting grandmother of one.

For more information on DSS services available for Richland County and the state at large, please visit the SCDSS website [here](#).



## Assistant Child Welfare Services Operations Director

A few months ago, a need was identified to align and structure the Child Welfare Services Operations Division with the structure of the other Child Welfare Service divisions. From that, an Assistant Child Welfare Services Operations Director position was developed. This position will directly supervise the regional directors for Child Welfare Services and assist in supporting oversight of county and regional adoption operations.

DSS is excited to share that we have selected Rachel Hollins to serve as the new Assistant Child Welfare Services Operations Director! Rachel began her new role on June 2nd. Rachel has over 12 years of experience in Child Welfare as her experience includes work as an adoption specialist, FCRB coordinator, and most recently for the last five years, program manager over project development for the Child Welfare Services Operations Division. Rachel has been very instrumental in the development of several system changes and will bring a wealth of knowledge and experience to this new position.

Let's congratulate Rachel on her new role!



## Beta Club Donation

On March 27th, 2024, as part of their senior project, the Wardlaw Academy Senior Beta Club donated dozens of bags for South Carolina foster children. The drawstring backpacks were filled with personal hygiene items, toys, books, pens/markers, and notes of encouragement. They also donated a box of 'extra' supplies.

The bags are brightly colored. The girls also color-coded the bags for each age group to ensure the gifts were age-appropriate. The students and teacher sponsor who delivered the bags also spoke with staff about child

welfare. Wardlaw Beta Club completes several service projects each year and regularly supports Saluda DSS. We appreciate their generosity and compassion!

Pictured above from left to right are CM Christine Bush, CM Beverly Riley, Kya McCormick, Madeleine DeLoach, Elizabeth Parks, CWA Tammy Brownlee, and TL Niesha Bush. The picture is used with permission.

## Berkeley County Shelter Assistance

On Tuesday, June 11th, 2024, there was a severe storm in Berkeley County which resulted in property damage and power outages. A decision was made to open a shelter at Westview Middle School and Berkeley DSS was called upon to assist.

DSS gives a huge shout out to Shadaisha Mustapher, Family Preservation, and Lasonia Martin with Medicaid for their work.

They answered the call and responded to Westview Middle School to complete their shelter duty shift. Both ladies were very responsive and showed up ready, willing, and able to help.

What a remarkable display of team spirit and community responsiveness!

Pictured from left to right are Lasonia Martin, a Red Cross Volunteer, and Shadaisha Mustapher.



## Breaking Down Barriers to Service

Tammy Fulwood, Domestic Violence Program Coordinator, Adult Advocacy, recently helped Hopeful Horizons, a local domestic violence program, purchase a vehicle with the Family Violence Prevention Services Act (FVPSA), ARP-Mobile funds. These funds expressly allow the purchase of vehicles when transportation is a barrier to services. This vehicle will be used by Hopeful Horizons staff to facilitate transportation of shelter clients and their children to schools, medical appointments, and other necessary destinations.

The ability to purchase a vehicle with these funds is extremely important to this and other domestic violence programs where public transportation alternatives are challenging and problematic. This is often a barrier to survivors receiving the supportive services to help them be successful. Tammy was able to coordinate efforts between Hopeful Horizons and some federal partners at FVPSA to reduce the transportation barrier for DV survivors in the Hopeful Horizons service area. The purchase was finalized on May 31st. Below is a message from Hopeful Horizons:

"We are very appreciative for the funding and support of SC DSS. A special thanks to Tammy to Fulwood, our SC DV Coordinator, from Hopeful Horizons!"

Pictured above are Tonya Doctor, Director of Residential Services; Kristin Dubrowski, CEO; and Jackie Antley, Lead Case Manager.



## NFL Superstar Carlos Dunlap Provides Household Items for Children and Families in Charleston County

The Carlos Dunlap Foundation recently provided cases of twin bed sheets, pillows, blankets, comforters, bedroom curtains, and stuffed toy animals for our families. It was so many items it took over 10 cargo vans to deliver. The Carlos Dunlap Foundation is doing great things for the community, especially for the children and families served. A huge “thank you” to the Carlos Dunlap Foundation!

## Upstate Adoptions Staff Appreciation Event

Upstate Adoptions recently hosted its annual staff appreciation event in May at Brookwood Church. The theme this year was “The Amazing Race.” Staff were reminded during the fun, games, and fellowship, that in this career journey, we are all working toward a goal.

No matter where you start in the race, you can finish first. Regardless of unexpected obstacles, U-turns, checkpoints, or puzzles, you just cannot conquer without the help of friends and colleagues. What matters most is how you play the game, think outside the box, and work together. Staff also awarded the annual staff-nominated “gold” superlatives!





## Horticulture at HHA Cares

HHA Cares is a small, family-owned and operated group care level 3, in the Midlands, and they pour so much into their girls.

They stick with their girls through their ups and downs, and it is rare for them to be discharged.

Their director is Shirpolle Penniston-Blair she loves her girls like they are her own, often calls just to share their accomplishments, and how proud she is of them!

We appreciate their team for wrapping around residents and helping them heal, grow, and thrive.

## Uplifting the Local Community

On May 19th, 2024, the ladies of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated Upsilon Omega Chapter, hosted a workshop on finance and spending habits. Several Midlands youth in foster care between the ages of 14 and 18 attended the workshop and engaged in many practice simulations tailored toward housing, banking, transportation, loans, etc. Thank you to Pee-Dee Regional Director Mrs. Andrea James Favor for her assistance in coordinating this event with DSS.





## Orangeburg Lily Pad Opens

A ribbon-cutting was held Wednesday, May 29th at the Orangeburg County DSS office for the latest Lily Pad room. The organization creates living room-like settings for children and youth awaiting appropriate foster placement.

Lily Pad founders Jennifer and Ben Tice were joined by Andrew Johnson, Orangeburg DSS Advisory Board Chairman; Charlene Nimmons, Orangeburg County Director; Kristi Bear, Interim Lowcountry Regional Director; and other DSS officials for the announcement.

With this new location, Lily Pad has transformed 21 spaces in South Carolina. More Lily Pads are being planned for DSS locations around the state. You can watch a video of the event by clicking [here](#).



## Tri-County Foster Parent Association Drop-In

The Tri-County Foster Parent Association held a drop-in for National Foster Care Awareness Month on Tuesday, May 21st, 2024, at Bamberg County DSS. Rosa Verner, Tri-County Foster Parent Association President, planned the event and invited all foster parents from the Tri-County area. It was attended by Salley Branch, Allendale County Director; Melinda Tyler, Bamberg County Director; Natasha Moody, Bamberg County Team Leader; Ethel Williams, Barnwell County Director; and Susan Jerkins, Barnwell County Team Leader.

Other attendees shared their stories of being foster parents over the years. DSS expressed appreciation and gratitude for them being foster parents to the children of South Carolina. All foster parents received a bag of items and recruitment material.

## ACP/CFTM Coordination

The Adult Centered Planning (ACP) team recently received a referral for a particularly challenging case. There had been numerous APS cases involving the adult and CPS cases involving her child. Due to the inability to reach the adult, Antranasha White, ACP Coordinator, went out to visit the adult to explain the ACP process and determine if the adult would agree to participate. During the visit, Antranasha noticed the child visibly needed care.

Antranasha wanted to help the child without overstepping her bounds with both APS and CPS case managers. She spoke with the APS staff and learned that despite the multiple cases, there had been no communication or coordination between the program areas. Concerned about the lack of coordination between program areas and how it was impacting the vulnerable adult and the child, Antranasha reached out to the CTFM coordinator assigned to the child case, Teresa Kearse. Both the ACP and CTFM coordinators agreed to check in with each other regularly and attend each other's meetings. While it is too soon to know the impact of the coordination, this is certainly a case that needs it. This is a great example of "One DSS" and collaboration across program areas.

While the ACP program is very similar in concept to the CTFM program, there are some key differences. One of the most critical is that adults in APS must agree to participate in a meeting and they choose who is invited and the goal of the meeting. The meeting is centered around the adult and their wishes. This allows the ACP Coordinators to focus on high-quality and personalized attention to each adult.

## SNAP Certification Graduates



On May 16th, 2024, Martha “Susi” Molina and Jeannie Johnson completed Economic Services SNAP Basic Certification Training as the top two graduates respectively! Both were humble and gave credit to others. Susi stated the instructors were fantastic and made it easy to understand. Jeannie stated the hands-on OJT they received before going to training gave them an advantage. Susi and Jeannie were celebrated with a plant, card, and balloons. We are so proud of your hard work!

The Saluda Economic Services team is pictured to the right. Shown on the front row left to right are Neilysha Plair, Susi Molina, Jeannie Johnson, and Debra Pixley. Shown on the back row left to right are Tyliyah Ryans, Tommie Deloach, and Chakita Werts.

## Collaboration Between Regions

The Lowcountry Well-Being team would like to recognize the assistance offered by Pickens County. They recently had a youth placed into emergency protective custody without a working wheelchair. This youth had a new chair in the Upstate, however he desperately needed the chair at Coastal Autism.

Pickens County identified a case manager who was completing monthly visits and volunteered to deliver the chair for Berkeley County. This was such a relief for the youth to finally be able to be seated in his chair and move around!

This shout out is to Pickens County Director Cynthia Wolthuis. DSS appreciates the helpfulness of her and her staff, especially Chelsea Hill and Samuel Stewart who picked the chair up and delivered it to the youth the very next day.

## The 2024 Atlantic Hurricane Season is Here

As hurricane season begins, you need to have the tools to prepare.

Residents can quickly determine what zone they are in using the Know Your Zone tool at [Hurricane.SC](https://www.hurricane.sc), and in the SC Emergency Manager mobile app.

The hurricane season lasts through November 30. Visit [scemd.org](https://www.scemd.org) for more information on the new hurricane evacuation zones and preparedness resources.

For more on storms and staying prepared, please click [here](#).





## Activity Center for Children & Youth

On Thursday, May 23rd, SCDSS, Lutheran Services Carolinas, and Thornwell Children's Home partnered to open an activity center for children and youth in foster care awaiting placement.

In recognition of the opening, a ribbon cutting ceremony was held at the center.

Shown in the picture to the left are (L-R) Jaclyn Smith, Upstate Placement; Bethany Vause, Director of Community and Rehabilitative Services (Lutheran Services Carolinas); and Jocelyn Gibson (Placement Services Director).

## Make Plans to Take Part in a free webinar on Alzheimer's and Dementia Research

The webinar, hosted by Taylor Wilson with the Alzheimer's Association- South Carolina Chapter will cover the landscape of Alzheimer's and dementia research in an easy-to-understand format, including modifiable risk factors, biomarkers for early detection and diagnosis, and of course the latest advances in clinical trials, treatments, and lifestyle interventions.

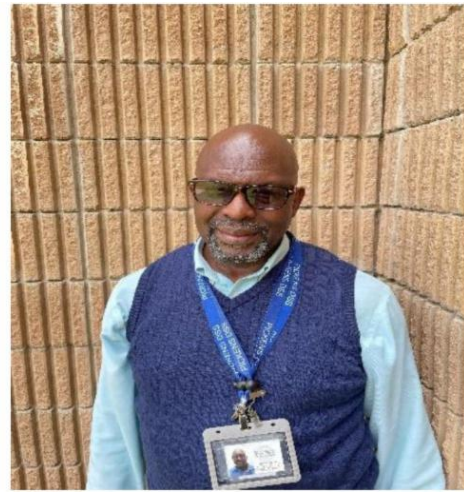
Register online [HERE](#).

## DSS Professionals Become Qualified Spanish Interpreters

A new session was recently conducted of the Interpreter Qualification Project with candidates from all over the state. This time it was hosted by Abbeville County DSS. Nine candidates were trained and five passed the full interpreter qualification on their first attempt! These workers can now assist in their offices whenever they are available or allowed by their supervisors and there are Spanish-speaking clients who need assistance from an onsite interpreter. The other four candidates were very close, and DSS is hopeful that with some time and practice, they will retest and also become qualified.

Thank you all and congratulations to the newly qualified bilingual staff!

## Pickens Staff Lends a Hand



On May 15th at 12:54 pm, Patti Rowe, Lowcountry RCC, sent an email to staff in Greenville and Pickens asking for assistance in picking up and delivering a custom-designed wheelchair for one of the foster youths from the Lowcountry. Knowing there were staff going toward Columbia in the next couple of days, an email was sent out to see if anyone could help out. CM Sam Stewart and CM Chelsea Hill answered the call.

Sam was heading to Myrtle Beach the next day, but he did not have time to get the wheelchair that afternoon. Enter Chelsea who volunteered to run to Easley to get the chair so Sam could come to the office early the next morning and pick up the chair. A call was made to National Seating and Mobility which normally closes at 3:30 pm and they agreed to remain open until Chelsea could pick up the wheelchair that afternoon. We let Patti know we could get the wheelchair to her in Columbia the next afternoon when Sam was returning from his visit in Myrtle Beach. Patti then let us know the wheelchair actually needed to be delivered to Coastal Autism Academy in Myrtle Beach, and not the Lowcountry, which was Sam's original destination. Sam was able to deliver the wheelchair directly to the facility saving staff from the Lowcountry a trip as well. We are all in this together!

Thank you, Chelsea and Sam, for not only helping the foster youth in Pickens County but also youth across the state!

## Family Connection



## Youth Connects with Family

We want to highlight a heart-warming story of a youth. He was in and out of the foster care system since birth. He was adopted at the age of 8 and a few years later his adoptive mother dropped him off at a local DSS office and later relinquished her rights. He has been in foster care for 7 years and has been through many trials during his time in care. He has always wanted to know his biological family and where he came from. Through combing of his CLEAR search, his paternal grandmother was located, and she was living in the same county where he entered care. She was actually a placement for him when he was an infant.

On May 7th, the court granted custody to his grandmother and there were no dry eyes in the courtroom. Through being placed with his grandmother, he has met and connected with many of his biological

family members. His wish to be out of the system and with his family has now come true. Moriyah Fuller, Upstate Adoptions case manager, was instrumental in his placement being successful with his grandmother, there were growing pains and along the way and Moriyah worked diligently to do whatever possible to iron out any needs the family had and building a strong team of support that would last long after their involvement with DSS.

## Kudos to Anderson County

Recently a call was received from a Family Preservation family who wanted to give Chris Davis a shout out! It was advised that Chris has been great as a case manager. They are the kinship caregivers for his case and stated that Chris is very engaging and very responsive. The family member admitted being very hesitant and weary of DSS involvement at first, but Chris took the time to sit down with them and explain everything in full. Chris made sure to ask them if they need anything during all the visits, and randomly checks in as well when one of the children is having behavioral issues.

We also have another shout out for investigator Jason Smith and Family Preservation case manager Corie Buddin. Jason and Corie have worked with a family whose home was literally coming off the foundation. They were proactive in finding a church that was ready and willing to assist in making the needed repairs.

Corie worked with the family to ensure that the child with delayed development gets connected with the right services and had met with the doctor to get those referrals completed. The two case managers and supervisor, Kellie Black, and Jamie McGuffin, have worked hand in hand in making sure the family's needs were met, and the home was safe.

These are just two cases in Anderson where the team has really shown their use and understanding of the agency's GPS model.

## Family Resource Fair

On Saturday, June 8th, the Marion County DSS office took part in the Diaper Giveaway and Family Resource Fair. It was hosted by Man 2 Man Fatherhood Initiative SC.

The organization provides free community-based services and support for fathers and families in the surrounding Florence counties.

Their mission is to strengthen families through father engagement with the goal of helping men to be great dads. You can learn more by visiting their website [here](#).

Thanks to everyone who participated!



## Lowcountry Foster Parent Appreciation Event

The Lowcountry appreciation event was held on May 18th at Colleton County High School.

It was a huge success! Andrea Clements, former foster parent, was the keynote note speaker. America Jimenez, a former foster youth, delivered a powerful message about her experience in foster care and finding herself and a sense of peace.

Arnetta Washington, Lowcountry Kinship Coordinator, was the Mistress of Ceremony.

The Lowcountry FFALS staff should be recognized as well for all the time and effort expended to put on such an amazing event to honor the local foster parents.

The following Lowcountry families were honored: Rachel Leonard and Oliver Collins, Cheryl Folsom,

Joyce Hall, Mark and Carolyn Evans, Ronnie and Annette Reed, Kenneth and Carrie Showman, and Katherine Ford.

Shown in the picture above are county leaders (L-R) Arnetta Washington, Lowcountry Kinship Coordinator; Katina Ferguson, Dorchester Team Coordinator; Charlene Nimmons, Orangeburg County Director; Lakeshia Bryant-Seabrook, Lowcountry FFALS Team Coordinator; Susan Fosberry/Beaufort Team Coordinator; Bridgett Gray-Peebles, Hampton County Director; Darrell Morris, Charleston County Director; and Rochelle Priester, Jasper County Director.

## Richland County Team Building

On May 31st, the Richland County Family Preservation program area held an annual team building at Seven Oaks Park. The time was filled with presenters from Justin Pepper House, which houses homeless women and children. Also on hand were representatives from Crossroads Substance Treatment Center.

Each team was creative in their unit shirt designs. Awards were given out for FP Leader of the Year, Case Manager of the Year, Rookie of the Year, and Highest Percentage of the Year, among others. Food was catered by DSS's very own, Katasha Davis.



**DSS** SOUTH CAROLINA *June 2024 Employees Of The Month*

 Victoria Mack	 Rhonda Goodman	 Rebecca Crenshaw	 Devorah Cant
	 Mykia Young	 Kendrick Grimsley	 Sherri Amick

Row 1: Victoria Mack, Child Support Services, Lowcountry; Rhonda Goodman, Adult Advocacy Services, Anderson; Rebecca Crenshaw, Economic Services, Greenville; Devorah Cant, Office of the Inspector General, Columbia  
 Row 2: Mykia Young, Child Welfare Services, Anderson; Kendrick Grimsley, Staff Development & Training, Columbia; Sherri Amick, Office of General Counsel Services, Columbia

## SCDSS Recognizes June Employees of the Month

DSS professionals are being recognized by DSS State Director Michael Leach as agency Employees of the Month for June 2024.

Staff selected by their program area leadership for the Employee of the Month Program will enjoy lunch with the State Director along with other attendees, a dedicated parking space to use for the month, a photo and write-up displayed at State Office, and a write-up sent to their community newspaper.

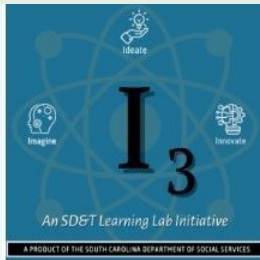
Congratulations to all!

## American Red Cross Training

On Tuesday, May 21st, DSS professionals from around the state took part in a training at the Red Cross Blood Donation Center on Bull Street in Columbia.

Multiple sessions were conducted by the American Red Cross providing Harden Street staff with vital information covering hands-on CPR and AED instruction.

Each course lasted an hour and served as an opportunity to learn potentially life-saving methods to use during an emergency.



## DSS Podcasts for the Public

DSS makes podcasts available [on the DSS website](#) for professionals seeking to enhance knowledge and skills. The i3-Imagine.Ideate.Innovate Podcast, hosted by the Staff Development and Training Division, highlights innovative ways to improve policy, practice, and the culture within the social services profession.

The Driving Sustainable Success in Child Welfare Podcast, hosted by the Child Welfare Division, prompts great discussion and explores strategies for serving children and strengthening families. Be sure to check them out!

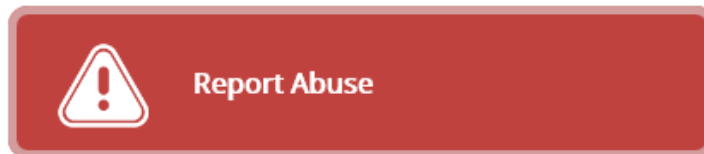


# Report abuse and neglect of children and vulnerable adults.

**DSS**  
SOUTH CAROLINA  
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

# 1-888-CARE4US

**Click the red button  
to make an online  
report of suspected  
abuse and/or  
neglect, now!**



*Reporters may remain anonymous or provide contact information*

*to receive follow up on the outcome of their report.*

SC Department of Social Services

P.O. Box 1520

Columbia, SC 29202-1520

[www.DSS.sc.gov](http://www.DSS.sc.gov)



SC Department of Social Services | P.O. Box 1520 1535 Confederate Ave. | Columbia, SC  
29202 US