

March 2021

State Director's Angle **R.I.S.E. to the Challenge**

By State Director Michael Leach



Our mission at DSS is an important one – to serve South Carolina by promoting the safety, permanency, and well-being of children and vulnerable adults, helping individuals achieve stability, and strengthening families.

To meet our mission there must be a focus on customer service and engagement of our clients and our colleagues in this work. Prioritizing customer service and engagement means accepting the challenge to R.I.S.E. to great leadership.

We strive to keep this in mind each day:

- **Respond-** Be responsive, answer calls, emails, questions. Even if the answer is, "Let me find out the answer and get back to you." Follow up!
- **Inspire-** Inspire others to do good work.
- **Support-** Support your team. Make sure your colleagues know they can count on you to get your hands dirty to move this work forward.
- **Encourage-** Praise good work. This work is hard. Encourage others specifically and often.

Reaching out to others is meaningful and powerful. Empowering those we serve to overcome obstacles

and challenging circumstances begins with our own ability to RISE.



As the March celebration of National Social Work Month comes to a close, DSS salutes social workers, across all fields, who make a difference everyday!

"Professionals in this field know that being a social worker means to elevate and empower others with a commitment and resiliency even when you feel you may have nothing else to give. Being a social worker also means helping individuals through complex, difficult, and traumatic situations, including the Coronavirus pandemic. It means to have hope and to give hope, while equipping others with the tools they need to solve their problems, to cope, and to succeed. Thank you to all social workers who sacrifice, give, and persevere to make sure that the individuals and families of South Carolina can be served and strengthened, and who give their all, daily to protect, serve, and improve the lives of others." --DSS State Director Michael Leach

CHILD WELFARE SERVICES



Learning from the Experts: Inclusion of Family and Youth Voice

By Steven Ferrufino, Assistant Director, Office of Child Health and Well-Being

Here at SCDSS, we believe that family-centered practice should be at the forefront of all we do and recognize the importance of including the voice of lived experience in shaping both our organizational direction and case practice. To demonstrate our commitment to this principle we have included this as a pillar of our newly implemented GPS Practice Model, which takes a family-centered stance that embraces the inclusion and engagement of youth and families.

Further highlighting this work, we have intentionally partnered with children and families that have lived experience in South Carolina's child welfare system to leverage their expertise in systemic reforms and other strategic initiatives. These partnerships have far-reaching implications which will enable us to better design a system of child and family well-being, improve our service delivery, promote safety, permanency, and well-being, and have the overall impact of strengthening families.

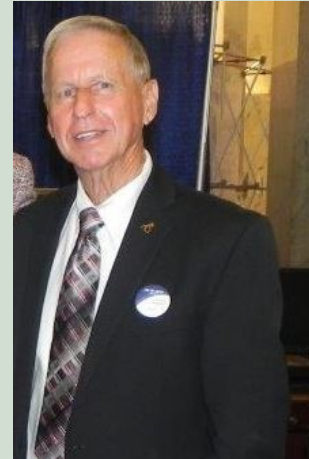
As we move forward with our practice improvement and transformation efforts, we endeavor to identify ways to enhance our partnerships with the children, youth and families we serve. We will honor our experts with lived experience when they say, “Nothing about us without us.” After all, we are BETTER TOGETHER and together, we can transform lives!

Foster Care Hero Lost but not Forgotten

By Pam Bryant, Public Information and Constituent Services Director

South Carolina has lost a true hero and fierce champion for children and families. Carl Brown, 81, died unexpectedly on Friday, February 26. Brown was founder and president of the SC Foster Parent Association, a partner agency to SCDSS for more than four decades, and played a lead role in the recruitment, training and support of foster families.

Carl and wife, Mary, led by example, opening their own home to more than 200 children in foster care, adopting seven children, and raising three birth children in their Elgin home. For many years, Carl and Mary maintained their foster home license, and were still caring for a child placed in their home at Carl's passing. The Browns continued personally mentoring other foster families and birth parents and were often contacted by former foster children who are now adults to express gratitude for the Brown's opening their hearts and home.



DSS Director Michael Leach said of Brown, “Carl, as a leader of the [South Carolina Foster Parent Association](#), dedicated his life to bettering the lives of South Carolina's foster children. He opened not only his heart, but also his home to welcoming those who needed support the most. He was a champion to the cause we hold so dear. His decades of dedication made a difference in the lives of countless children and he left a lasting legacy we should all aspire to reach.”

Brown's leadership and advocacy for foster care extended well beyond our state and nation through his service as National Foster Parent Association president and vice president of the International Foster Parent Association. He was the recipient of numerous awards and honors, including the Order of the Palmetto – the state's highest honor awarded by the Governor. Those who knew Carl would easily agree there was no bigger advocate for our state's children in foster care.

Read more about Carl Brown's service in a recent *Post & Courier* feature [here](#).

CHILD SUPPORT SERVICES

DSS
SOUTH CAROLINA
DEPARTMENT of SOCIAL SERVICES



Coming Soon!

New Customer Service Portal for Parents Paying and Receiving Child Support

The SCDSS [Child Supports Services Division](#) will soon launch a new Customer Service Portal for parents – those paying child support and those receiving payments - so that they can view important information about their case – any time, any day.

Parents will be able to create a unique user ID and password and view important case information. This will include payment information, hearing dates, enforcement measures in place, and occasional announcements affecting our customers. You will also be able to update your address, phone number, employment, and email information.

SC Paternity Opportunity Program

...because establishing a legal father benefits everyone

What is Paternity? Paternity means legal fatherhood. If parents were unmarried at the time of the child's birth, they can complete a Paternity Acknowledgement Affidavit to create a legal connection between the child and their biological father. How does establishing paternity help my child?

- **Self Esteem** – All children benefit from knowing both parents care for them.
- **Family Identity** – Establishing paternity often affords children extended families and relationships with both sides of the family.
- **Shared Parenting** – Establishes parenting as the responsibility of both parents.
- **Health History** – Establishing paternity often increases the availability of health information.

Click [here](#) for additional resources for establishing paternity.



ADULT ADVOCACY

Protection. Respect. Independence.

DSS
SOUTH CAROLINA
DEPARTMENT of SOCIAL SERVICES



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: *Protection. Respect. Independence.*

By Rick Knight, Director of Administration, Adult Protective Services

Adult Protective Services (APS) is actively training program staff on the use of a new tool, designed to lay out clear elements of an accepted report of suspected abuse and/or neglect of a vulnerable adult, according to state law and APS policy.

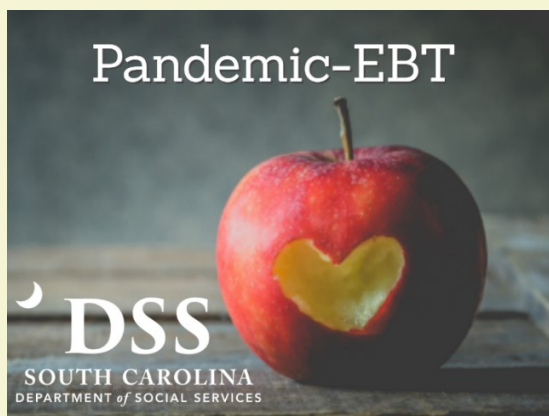
Those elements are **vulnerability**, which is determined by the intake tool; an **accusation of abuse, neglect, or exploitation**; an allegation that the **maltreatment was committed by a caregiver or the adult themselves**; and an allegation that the **maltreatment occurred in a community setting**.

The new tool is designed to emphasize **self-determination**, which is the concept that adults have the right to make decisions for themselves, even decisions that others don't consider "normal," as long as the adult is not harming others. APS continues to balance the protection of vulnerable adults with the personal freedoms of the adults. Learn more about APS [here](#).

ECONOMIC SERVICES

Family Assistance | Early Care & Education | Employment Services





Spreading the Word About the Next Round of P-EBT

DSS has been working to make sure the public is informed that South Carolina has obtained approval from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service for issuance of Pandemic EBT (P-EBT) benefits to eligible K-12 students for the 2020-2021 school year. P-EBT is an optional federal program designed to provide food benefits to children who have temporarily lost access to free and reduced-price meals at school due to school closures triggered by COVID-19.

P-EBT cards are expected to be mailed out by April 16, 2021 for students eligible for P-EBT benefits for the months of September 2020-December 2020. All P-EBT eligible students, including child(ren) in active SNAP households, will receive a new P-EBT card for the 2020-2021 school year.

For the 2020-21 school year, eligible children will receive a P-EBT benefit based on the number of days they attend school virtually each month. Children must meet all of the following criteria to be eligible for P-EBT benefits:

- Enrolled in a free and reduced-price school meals program or attending a Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) school.
- Attending a school experiencing pandemic-triggered closures or reduced attendance/hours
- Attending school virtually, either full-time or on a hybrid schedule.

For the 2019-2020 school year, DSS issued nearly \$159 million in P-EBT benefits to approximately 481,114 eligible children in SC. For more information on P-EBT and frequently asked questions about the program, click [here](#).

Expanding Fresh Food Opportunities in South Carolina

Norvell Gibson, Program Coordinator, Healthy Bucks Food and Nutrition Program



[Healthy Bucks](#) is an incentive program for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) recipients to help double the amount of fresh fruits and vegetables purchased from approved vendors with their EBT card. Healthy Bucks promotes health and wellness for SNAP recipients by providing more access to fresh, locally grown produce. South Carolina farmers and farmers markets benefit by having increased business as well as SNAP recipients' buying power also increases and food insecurities are lowered.

Healthy Bucks began in June 2014 with six farmer's markets in six counties. Since then, 40 farmer's markets/vendors have been authorized to administer the Healthy Bucks Program, covering 25 counties. Currently, 29 markets/vendors are active in 22 counties.

The COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 presented many challenges for farmers markets, independent farmers, and some of South Carolina's most vulnerable residents. In response to these challenges, DSS increased the maximum Healthy Bucks SNAP incentive amount to \$15 from May 1, 2020 to September 30, 2020. The purpose of this temporary adjustment was to further fight food insecurity among SNAP recipients and to stimulate economic stability for Healthy Bucks vendors whose businesses were negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Each year, more farmers are joining, and more SNAP recipients are learning about the program. Between 2019 and 2020, the total Healthy Bucks program expenditures went from \$121,700 to \$256,905. The start of 2021 has allowed virtual and in-person Healthy Bucks selling presentations. These presentations inform

farmers on how this program can benefit them, SNAP recipients, and their local communities. New Healthy Bucks vendors will be joining the program soon.

Child Care Provider Background Check Extension

*By Morgan Massenburg, Outreach Manager,
Division of Early Care & Education*

A federal waiver extends the deadline for child care providers to complete background checks to September 30, 2021, due to the extraordinary circumstances caused by COVID-19. The extended background check project resumed on March 22, 2021 for the Lowcountry Region and will begin on May 17, 2021 for the Pee Dee Region.

Providers are asked to have all fingerprints completed and the DSS Form 1706 Questionnaire submitted to the DSS Office of Inspector General within 45 days following the rollout date for their region. DSS also will continue with the Fingerprint 50% reimbursement project.

Learn more or apply at www.scchildare.org.



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.](#)

Helping Individuals Achieve Stability through Employment

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 from DSS can provide both your business and your new employee 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 view a [video](#) about how our partnership with Homes of Hope in Greenville, SC is changing lives!



SNAP Online Food Purchasing

To encourage the practice of social distancing and reduce potential exposure to COVID-19, the USDA has authorized purchases of eligible food items online with an Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) card from Walmart, Amazon, ALDI and Food Lion. SCDSS will update as other retailers and independent grocers in SC become approved by the federal government for online purchasing.

DISASTER SERVICES

Mass Care, Emergency Preparedness & Disaster Response



Staying Prepared for When Disaster Strikes

By Robert Burress, Director of Disaster Services, Emergency Management

It's 2:30 pm on a sunny day and kids are about to be released from school and a siren sounds. There has been an incident at a nuclear reactor in the county causing alarms to sound. Panic sets in for citizens and employees alike on what to do. That's when a DSS county office gets the call. They have been called upon to work with the American Red Cross and first responders to set up a decontamination and reception center for school children and citizens.

This has not actually happened, but for some of our DSS county offices, like Fairfield County and many others across the state, preparing for the remote chance that this could happen occurs all of the time.

Every year, DSS employees practice and are evaluated by FEMA on just how well they are prepared to shelter citizens if a nuclear mishap occurs at one of our nuclear power plants. Our state and our DSS Mass Care teams work constantly to ensure that our most vulnerable populations have a place to seek shelter when they need it most.

Everyone thinks only of our agency's efforts in sheltering from hurricanes, but our employees are ready for it all. It does not matter if it is a hurricane, tornado, winter storm, or flood, our team is resilient and ready to step up and do what needs to be done, even during a nuclear mishap. They personify competence, courage, and especially compassion, to take care of those when they need our help most. Learn more about DSS's role as the state's mass care lead agency [here](#).

Partner Spotlights & Community Support



New Online Resource Launched for Kinship Caregivers and Children

HALOS, an organization providing support and advocacy to abused and neglected children and their caregivers, has partnered with DSS to launch the first-ever statewide online resources for the Palmetto State's kinship families.

The new resource, Kinship SC, seeks to promote the safety, permanency, and well-being of these children. The website offers community, state, and national resources for caregivers like legal assistance, housing support, and financial aid. And, thanks to it being an online platform, families can reach out for supports, even during the pandemic.

"Kinship caregivers play a very vital role in the child well-being system, said DSS Director Michael Leach. "Every day we work with family members who have stepped up, whether temporary or permanent, to be lifesaving support for a child or youth they love. This website will allow us to ensure South Carolina's caregivers have the support they need to care for our state's children."

KinshipSC has also launched a toll-free number for caregivers looking for assistance offered by their online platform. Callers can reach a HALOS staff member 8:30 a.m.-5:30 p.m. Monday-Friday at 1-(854) 444-3716. To learn more, you can go [here](#) and [here](#).



Preventing Child Abuse to Help Families Thrive

April is National Child Abuse Prevention Month and SCDSS is proud to partner with [Children's Trust of South Carolina](https://www.childrenstrust.org/) to help families thrive and prevent child maltreatment. Throughout the month, we will be celebrating the good things our communities do to support stronger families and keep children safe. It takes everyone working together to prevent child abuse.

During the month, pinwheels are displayed throughout the state as a visible show of support for keeping children in our community safe. A statewide Pinwheel Planting day is planned for April 16. Anyone wanting to report abuse or neglect should contact 1-888-CARE-4-US or 911 for emergencies. Non-emergency reports can be made online on the DSS website at [DSS.sc.gov](https://dss.sc.gov).

SC Foster Parent Association Social Worker of the Month

SCDSS would like to congratulate Shanetta Kirkland with Sumter County DSS, who has been named [South Carolina Foster Parent Association's](#) Social Worker of the Month for March 2021. Great job, Shanetta! Thank you for all you do for children and families in South Carolina!





Community Supporting Children in Foster Care in Greenville

By Dena Reeves-Green, Greenville County Director

Thank you to Cedrick Ritter, Broker in Charge

and Signature Real Estate of Greenville, SC for continuing to support the Greenville community.

Signature Real Estate donated 62 pairs of Nike tennis shoes for the children in foster care. Their company continues to donate a percentage of their monthly sales to the 'Signature Kicks' campaign to support foster children in Greenville county.

Their efforts are greatly appreciated!

Teens Show Love for Foster Youth

By Terri Thompson, Richland County Director



A huge "thank you" goes to the JV Girls Basketball team at Ben Lippen School.

As part of a service project, they recently donated items ranging from clothes to hygiene products to gift cards for our foster youth. There were even care packages made for our college students!

The students hope to continue to do this on an annual basis.

Thanks to all of the girls and parents who made this possible!



Report abuse and neglect of children and vulnerable adults.

DSS
SOUTH CAROLINA
DEPARTMENT of SOCIAL SERVICES

1-888-CARE4US

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



Report Abuse

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



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

[Unsubscribe sdorsey@statelibrary.sc.gov](mailto:sdorsey@statelibrary.sc.gov)

[Update Profile](#) | [Customer Contact Data Notice](#)

Sent by publicinfo@dss.sc.gov powered by

