



familymatters

a newsletter for foster and adoptive families

Published by the Georgia Department of Human Resources, Division of Family and Children Services

New Year's Greeting from DHR Commissioner B.J. Walker

This issue of Family Matters marks the start of the second year of this newsletter that serves foster and adoptive parents.

We started Family Matters to improve communication between DHR and our foster and adoptive parents and to provide useful information on parenting and training opportunities.

I hope it has served this purpose and that it helps you understand you are a valued partner to DHR as we strive to improve services and the life chances of each child in our care.

Over the last year you have read in these pages about our new training program, and our improved assessment of each child's needs. You read about the new Foster Care Foundation that will bring us new foster and adoptive parents and provide better support to each of you. We announced innovations like our Safe Havens visitation centers that bring children, the birth family and foster parents together in churches and other public spaces. You may have first heard about our summer employment program, TeenWork, in these pages.

We hope this has been valuable to you and that you tell us what works for you and what you would like to see in future issues.

We are committed to continually improving our services that provide foster care and adoptions. We want to support our foster and adoptive parents and to listen to them.

We have plans to improve our child welfare system and you are central in those plans. We want children to live with caring families. We want more foster parents, and we need foster parents who can care for medically fragile children and children with emotional problems and who are trained to help teens who need special attention. For our part, we will offer more specialized training and more support.

We can't get where we are going without you. Every child deserves a loving home. Thanks for all you do.



Parents to Meet in March: AFPAG Conference

The Adoptive and Foster Parent Association of Georgia (AFPAG) will hold its 33rd annual conference at Jekyll Island, March 17th through 19th, 2006. Many new presenters and other features have been added, including new workshops, silent auctions, some surprise changes, and special entertainment for Friday evening.

This year we will also host a tribute to our local foster parent associations. A "President's Training Day" will be offered for leaders or representatives of county organizations. We plan to provide updated information on policy changes, new legislative action, and allegation support.

The rest of the conference will be just as exciting and informative. Popular presenters like Betty Hastings, National

THE 33RD ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE ADOPTIVE AND FOSTER PARENT ASSOCIATION OF GEORGIA (AFPAG)

MARCH 17 – MARCH 19, 2006 AT JEKYLL ISLAND

Foster Parents Association education chair, will return to train on their favorite topics. The new director of the Division of Family and Children Services, Mary Dean Harvey, will offer a special presentation: "Mary Dean Unplugged," at the Saturday evening banquet. She promises that participants will be given time to ask questions and receive answers directly from this top executive's desk. How wonderful and refreshing to see this type of commu-

nication for our foster and adoptive parents. Other outstanding guests will add their expertise to the agenda as we slide into our new theme "Advocating for a Brighter Future."

Additional information and registration forms can be downloaded from our web site: www.afpag.org. Please join us for another exciting year!

Sharon Carlson, president, AFPAG



Parenting Training: Children Who Challenge

The Georgia Center for Resources and Support offers regular training opportunities for foster and adoptive parents. In May 2006 the Center will host a daylong workshop in Toccoa on "Parenting Children Who Challenge" (date and location to be announced). For more information about training opportunities through the Georgia Center for Resources and Support or about the Center call 1-866-A-Parent or see www.gaadoptionresources.org.

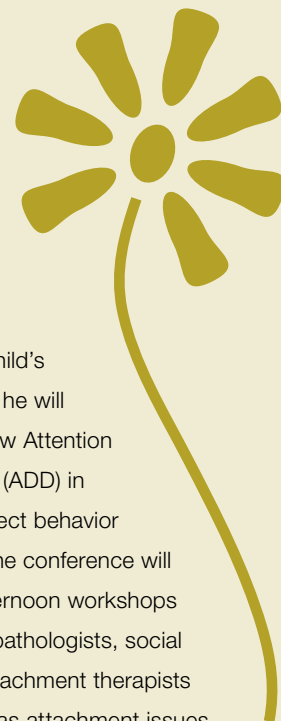
PLEASE SEND US YOUR EMAIL ADDRESS

Family Matters reaches over 10,000 foster and adoptive parents. We are proud that we can provide you with this information. *However, printing and postage costs are high.*

Please help us cut costs and send Family Matters to you faster.

If you send your **name, zip code and email address** to familymatters@dhr.state.ga.us we will email you future issues. Also, at any time, anyone can read the newsletter on the Web at dfcs.dhr.georgia.gov/familymatters.

Blooming Where You're Planted: GALAA Parent Conference



All foster and adoptive parents are invited to attend the bi-annual conference of the Georgia Association of Licensed Adoption Agencies (GALAA) on March 11, 2006 from 9:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. at the Intown Community Church at North Druid Hills Road and Lavista Road in Atlanta. Parents who attend will receive five hours of training credit

and a certificate of attendance. There is a minimal registration fee and lunch will be provided.

Titled "Blooming Where You're Planted: Part II," this event will take up where GALAA's 2004 conference left off, again featuring neuropsychologist Alcuin Johnson, Ph.D., as the keynote speaker. Two years ago

"Blooming Where You're Planted: Part I" was such a success that GALAA invited Dr. Johnson to return in 2006.

A highly respected psychologist and educator, Dr. Johnson is best known for his evaluations of and advocacy for children with neurological disorders. He is well known in most school systems in the Atlanta metro area and beyond. His knowledge of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act is astounding and with this knowledge he has assisted many parents and school systems in developing the most appropriate Individual Education Plan for their child. Dr. Johnson has a sincere commitment to children and their families. He always assists parents in reaching the best outcome for their child.

In 2004, Dr. Johnson spoke on brain development and the impact of attention deficit

disorder on a child's brain. This year he will speak about how Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) in children can affect behavior and learning. The conference will also feature afternoon workshops led by speech pathologists, social workers and attachment therapists on topics such as attachment issues, sensory integration, and helping children transition from foster care to adoption. Dr. Johnson will also present a workshop on behavior management for children whose ADD/ADHD affects their behavior.

For more information on the conference and GALAA contact Laveda Doxey at the Georgia Center for Resources and Support: 404-929-0401 or see www.galaa.org.



Help These Sisters Find a Home Together

Temeshia (born 9/93) is a very lovable and well-mannered child. She enjoys watching television, listening to music, riding her bicycle and drawing. Enrolled in special education classes for those with intellectual delays, Temeshia has a great desire to learn. Her teacher describes her as a good student who follows directions very well and is excited about learning. Therapy and medication help her manage and understand her behaviors. Her teacher has noted a significant improvement, and says she believes that

Temeshia can reach any goal that she sets. She will require assistance to ensure that her academic needs are met.

Jasmine (born 6/97) is an affectionate and friendly child. She enjoys watching cartoons, riding her bicycle and eating out. Jasmine also enjoys playing with dolls and working on the computer. Those close to Jasmine believe in her ability to succeed.

Temeshia and Jasmine respond well to one-on-one attention, encouragement and praise. They may require

ongoing special education services. A loving and dedicated family is needed who can provide Temeshia and Jasmine with a great deal of structure, consistency, rewards and consequences, along with individualized attention. Their ideal family is experienced in parenting children with behavior issues.

If you would like to know more about Temeshia and Jasmine please call My Turn Now at 1-800-603-1322 and speak with the regional coordinator for your area.



Mary Dean Harvey New DFCS Director



In August, Governor Sonny Perdue and DHR Commissioner B. J. Walker announced the appointment of Mary Dean Harvey as director of the Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS). Harvey is a former director of the Nebraska Department of Social Services and long-time advocate for children.

"One of the best things we can do for children in the state's custody is to find the right people for management positions in the child welfare system," Governor Sonny Perdue said in a news release. "We began with DHR Commissioner B.J. Walker, who is redefining the role of a social services agency. Today I'm pleased to introduce Georgia to the person who's going to lead those workers in

strengthening families and keeping children safe: Mary Dean Harvey."

"As DFCS director, I recognize the importance of a strong family unit for all children," said Harvey. "Georgia's foster and adoptive parents play a strong role in helping to build that family unit for children in need. Your commitment to Georgia's children is greatly appreciated."

Mary Dean Harvey is a native of Louisiana, although she has spent most of her career in Nebraska. A former teacher and public school administrator, she was the director of Nebraska's Department of Social Services from 1991 to 1995. She also served as project director for Omaha Safe and Healthy Schools, president and CEO of the Boy's and Girl's Club of Omaha, and executive director of Girls Incorporated of Omaha. Harvey holds a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science from Grambling University and a Masters in Science in Secondary Education and certification in Educational Administration from the University of Nebraska at Omaha.

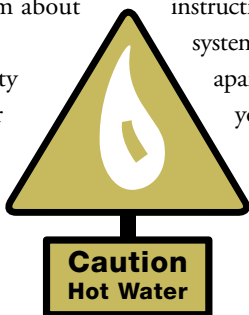
Hot Water Safety

Hot running water is one of the blessings of modern life, but it can be a hazard for children if the water is too hot. Every year in the U.S. hundreds of children, most under age five, are scalded by tap water.

Always test how hot water is before you use it, especially when you bathe children or infants. Test by hand or use a thermometer. You can get a bath thermometer, or use one made for candy or meat. A temperature of no more than 100 to 101 degrees is comfortable for bathing infants.

Never leave a small child alone in the bathroom. If older children help you take care of smaller children, be sure to teach them about safe water temperatures.

The U. S. Consumer Product Safety Commission urges everyone to lower their water heaters to 120 degrees Fahrenheit. (A bonus: You'll save money on heating bills.) Exposure to water that's 140 degrees can cause a burn in just six seconds, and water that's 130 degrees takes just 30 seconds to burn. Even at 120 degrees water can cause third-degree burns after five minutes of exposure.



Check the temperature of your hot tap water with a thermometer. If it's dangerously high, take action depending on the type of heater you have. If it's an electric water heater, call your electric company to adjust the thermostat. Some companies do this for free. Don't use your hot water for at least two hours before the setting will be changed. If you have a gas heater, call your gas company for instructions. If you have an on-line hot water system, call your fuel supplier. If you live in an apartment, ask the building manager how your tap water temperature can be lowered.

Some devices such as hot tubs have their own heaters. The Association of Pool and Spa Professionals says to use "discretion... in allowing children to use hot tubs and spas at all, since their young bodies may not adjust well to the high temperatures. If in doubt, check with your doctor." Never allow children in or near a hot tub without "eyes-on" adult supervision.

Children in Foster Care Exempt from Georgia Healthy Families

Georgia Healthy Families is a new statewide program to deliver health care services to members of Medicaid and PeachCare for Kids. The program, scheduled to begin implementation in April 2006, is a partnership between the Department of Community Health (DCH) and private care management organizations (CMOs). However, foster children are exempt, meaning they are not required to be enrolled in a CMO. The details for coverage of children who are exempt are still being finalized with DCH at press time. If you have any questions or concerns, contact your DFCS case manager.

The Bridge

By Wendy Haus Hanevold Ph.D., Consultant, DFCS Treatment Services Unit

A network of roads leads up to a bridge. A child crosses the bridge. A network of roads connects to the bridge on the other side. Foster parents are the bridge for children in foster care. They provide safety, direction, caring and knowledge. They are a way station between two points. A child enters their home from many different points – birth parents, relatives, foster care, group homes. The child leaves their home to continue a life journey. One road may be a repaired road that leads back to the child's birth family. Another road may lead to a new life with an adoptive family.

Children in foster care move between families. They have visits with their birth families or pre-adoptive families. Often they are lost and confused. Information is fragmented and routines may be disrupted by missed visits, failed promises and torn loyalties. Foster parents and families provide places of temporary sanctuary for children.

To be a beautiful and strong bridge, foster families need to be constructed of a powerful set of building materials.

First they have to be built with patience. Foster children are strangers who need time to connect and learn the ways of their temporary families. Go slow.

Bridges have to be built with truth. Most foster children have deep loyalty to their first families. Do not ask them to call you Mom or Dad, and do not tell them that they are “just like” your own children. After all, they will not be with you always and you do not have custody. Leave room for their first families through pictures and a clear message that they may talk about their first families without being judged or condemned.

Bridges have to be built with wisdom. Each family has a different set of rules. Tell children the rules and expectations for your family but acknowledge that their birth families may have different rules. You do not need to approve of those rules but simply recognize the right of their parents to have different expectations.

Finally, bridges have to be able to sway with the wind. They are tossed and pushed by storms, cars, and time.

Visits between families can be very intense, so be prepared. Tell the child the date of the visit and put the date on the calendar. For young children, put a sticker (or dot) representing the foster family on every date that does not include a visit. Put a different sticker (or dot) on the date of the visit. If the parents do not regularly show up for visits, do not bring the child to the visit until the parent arrives. For a child, waiting for an absent parent can be very stressful.

Ask the child to choose what he or she would like to bring and wear to the visit. If the child has become attached to you,

provide a transitional object that will move between the two homes (a stuffed toy, a necklace, a good luck piece in a pocket). After the visit, give the child time to reenter your home and recover from the visit. Set aside special time for the child to spend with you (a walk, a trip to the park, a story) or keep the child in sight. Many children throw tantrums within 24 hours of a visit or engage in repeated control battles to prove you are not their boss. Do not enter control battles with children. Acknowledge that they are probably upset after the visit and let them know that all feelings are OK, but they may not hurt themselves, hurt any one else or damage anything.

The final property of the bridge is noble solitude. The child will leave the bridge and move on to the road of re-unification or permanency. The bridge will be empty, with only a memory of the child's passage. The foster parents will have kept a log of information to pass on at the tollbooth to the permanent parents. The foster family will share memories, medical and school details, pictures and material goods. The foster child will have left an imprint on their homes and their hearts. The bridge will be silent for a time but soon the foster parents will hear the bustle of new arrivals driving up the road. A new journey has begun.





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CASA Volunteers Help Children

Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) are trained community volunteers who advocate for children involved in juvenile deprivation (abuse and neglect) cases. If you are a foster parent you may be visited by a CASA volunteer and asked to help provide information about the child in your care.

A judge appoints the CASA as an officer of the court. The CASA's job is to provide the court with independent, objective information about the child and make recommendations about the child's best interest. CASAs also continue to keep track of children while they are in foster care.

Your DFCS case manager may bring a CASA volunteer to your house for a visit, or tell you when the CASA will be visiting you. After that, the CASA will get in touch with you to let you know about follow-up visits. The CASA may visit or telephone you and/or the child every month or as needed.

Foster parents and CASAs need to understand each other's role and what to expect, so they can work together on behalf of the children. For any questions or concerns regarding a CASA volunteer, contact the supervisor at your county DFCS office.

The purpose of Family Matters is to strengthen the relationship between resource parents and the Georgia Department of Human Resources (DHR); supplement foster and adoptive parents' training; and keep parents up to date about

new policies and services. It is published by the Division of Family and Children Services

Please send us your comments and ideas for articles you would like to see in Family Matters to Barbara Joye, DHR Office of Communications,

Two Peachtree Street NW, Suite 29-426, Atlanta, GA 30303 or brjoye@dhr.state.ga.us.

Please also let us know if you do NOT want to receive future issues.