

The Practitioner

A monthly journal of practice tips and tools for child welfare professionals published by the DFCS State Office Social Services Section

Adoption Month Event Highlights

Raise Me Up and Heart Gallery Display
Sam Nunn Federal Center
61 Forsyth Street, Atlanta
November 19th
10am to 2pm

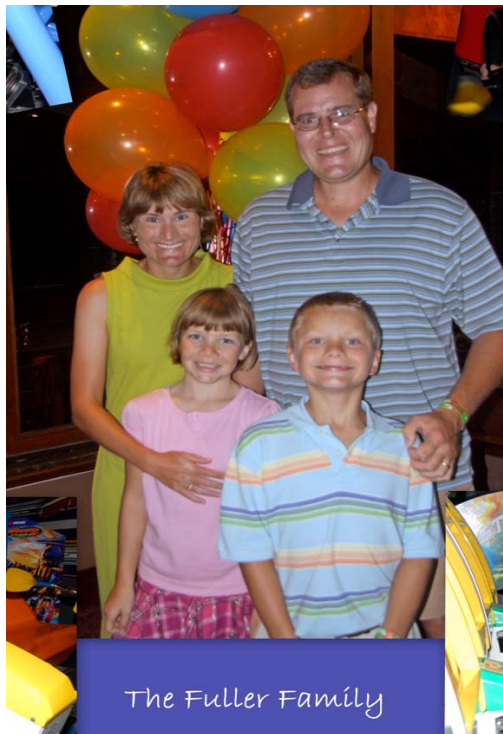
Display will feature children currently waiting for adoptive families. Agencies participating will also be on hand to talk about the Raise Me Up campaign.

Walker County Adoption Celebration
November 17, 2009
6:00 pm and 11:00 pm
 TV- event on local station to highlight and talk about the number of adoptions that have occurred and the need for future adoptive homes in the county.

Lowndes County 7th Annual Adoption Month Candlelight Ceremony
Courthouse, 108 East Central Avenue, Valdosta
November 7, 2009
6:30 pm to 7:30 pm
 Candle lighting Ceremony

For more information on local events, please contact your Regional Adoption Coordinator (RAC) or email the State Recruitment Manager, Shamim Neal Backus at snbackus@dhr.state.ga.us.

November is National Adoption month. It is a time set aside to raise awareness about the adoption of children and youth from foster care. This year's theme is "You don't have to be perfect to be is perfect parent." The 2009 celebration includes a more focused effort to reach out to the African American community and to build upon the Ad Council's new campaign supporting the Children's Bureau, the Adoption Exchange Association, and **AdoptUsKids**. You can see the ads at www.adcouncil.org.



"We had considered adoption for a long time, but when we saw Carl and Grace on Wednesday's Child we knew these children were meant to be our children." Keri Fuller

November 21, 2009 will mark the 10th anniversary. For more information on National Adoption Day, visit www.nationaladoptionday.org. Check with your Regional Adoption Coordinator for specific celebrations in your county.



National Adoption Month

You Don't Have to Be Perfect to Be A Perfect Parent

Celebrating Permanency

The monthly celebration of adoption to raise awareness, originated in 1976, when the then governor of Massachusetts, Michael Dukakis, announced an Adoption Week for his state. Later that same year President Gerald Ford proclaimed that Adoption Week would be celebrated nationally. As more and more states started to participate in Adoption Week it became clear that more time was needed for holding events. In 1990, National Adoption Week became National Adoption Month.

National Adoption Day

Today, National Adoption Month is celebrated during the month of November. It is a time to celebrate families formed by adoption and to bring about awareness to the fact that there are thousands of children in foster homes awaiting adoption throughout the United States. Agencies, communities, and stakeholders hold events during the month to bring the need for families into public view and hopefully recruit new families.

The celebration usually includes a National Adoption Day with courthouses throughout the nation setting aside a specific Saturday to finalize adoptions of children from the foster care system. National Adoption Day is traditionally held on the third Saturday of November.

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Adoption: Making it a Safe and Expeditious Journey

While adoption is often seen as a final step in the permanency process, the reality is that quality adoption work begins early in the life of a case. Achieving a successful adoption outcome in an efficient, expeditious manner requires recognition that quality adoption work begins prior to termination of parental rights. Carefully setting up the “dominos” of the case early and strategically helps ensure the key points “fall” appropriately and timely, allowing for a successful permanent placement in as expeditious manner as possible.



Six Characteristics of a Successful Adoption Program

Concurrent planning: a successful program embraces concurrent planning, a model of practice that allows agencies to seek and provide reunification and rehabilitation efforts while simultaneously developing an alternative plan such as adoption. For cases identified as appropriate for concurrent planning, identification of an appropriate adoptive family when adoption is the alternative plan allows the case manager to more effectively and expeditiously manage the case. In contrast, pursuing a sequential approach to permanency often leads to children lingering in foster care for years while experiencing multiple moves.

Aggressive diligent search for relatives: a successful program seeks and identifies potential relatives early in the life of the case. This practice is critical whether pursuing a concurrent case plan from the beginning or a TPR after a comprehensive reunification plan. Identification of suitable relatives should begin as soon as a child enters care. An aggressive diligent search practice identifies potential, appropriate relative placements early, thereby reducing the possibility of relatives seeking placement at the end of the case after the child is attached to his/her caregiver. Choosing between relative placement and attachment is most often an agonizing and difficult proposition.

Sibling friendly practice: a successful program recognizes the importance of a sibling-friendly practice. Careful planning should begin as soon as children enter care. For children separated at initial placement into foster care due to limited resources, sibling reunification planning should begin immediately. Critical assessment regarding separated siblings should begin early and continue often through the life of the case. Careful planning and preparation early for separated siblings reduces the chances of being faced with the difficult choice of choosing between the importance of the sibling relationship and attachment with the current caregiver.

Goodness of Fit: a characteristic of a successful adoption program is ongoing assessment of the “goodness of fit” between the caregiver and child. As described in *The Psychology of Adoption* (Brodzinsky and Schnecker, 1990) the “goodness of fit theories hold that an individual’s development is optimized in those situations in which compatibility exists between the characteristics of the individual and characteristics or demands of the salient environment.”

Effective planning – attention to detail: A successful adoption program is epitomized by careful planning and attention to detail. It is critical that case managers know and understand the policy requirements through the life of an adoption case.

Quality post-adoption services: Lastly, a successful adoption program is buoyed by strong post-adoption services. The needs of children adopted from foster care do not magically diminish upon finalization.

The journey to permanency for children in foster care should be well-planned and organized. Traveling to a new vacation destination without a map is a recipe for disaster; similar results can be expected when leading children in care to their destination without planning ahead. Viewing the case as a whole rather than one step at a time will help reach our goals more efficiently and more timely. ASFA legislates our sense of urgency; effectively planning and preparation is the road map to building permanent families through adoption.

What makes a good match? According to Child Welfare Information Gateway, the following factors should be considered:

- ♥ Does the family have the skills, abilities, knowledge, and desire to parent the child?
- ♥ Does the family possess the emotional and financial resources to meet the child’s needs? Do they know how to access them?
- ♥ Is the family’s lifestyle compatible with that of the child?
- ♥ Does the family have specific experience with needs similar to those of the child?
- ♥ Are the parents willing to learn more about caring for this child’s needs?



- ♥ Does the family feel that this is the right child for them and that their existing structure can grow and adapt to meet the child’s needs?
- ♥ Does the family have a network of family, friends, and professionals to provide emotional support for the adoption?

In addition to these factors, recent research identified several characteristics of families that appear to be predictors of adoption stability. Parents who have prior child-rearing experience, parents who are tolerant of a wide range of behaviors, and parents who have flexible and realistic aspirations for their children appear to be greater hope for success

Four special features have been added to the Georgia SHINES system to support the Every Child, Every Month (ECEM) practice. These new features will help Georgia stay on track to meet ECEM objectives and targets.

DOWN THE PIPELINE: SHINES INTRODUCES FOUR ECEM FUNCTIONS



Currently all documents, except criminal history, are allowed to be uploaded into SHINES, but policy strongly urges certain documents to be uploaded. For more information access SHINES and click on the question mark in the upper corner of the page. Then click onto “External Documentation” next to the book icon. Click “External Documentation Training” and then the link “External Documentation Types.” This enhancement is now available.

Case Watch Page

The new Case Watch Page will help take the tick out of the tock. This extraordinary SHINES tool features automated reminders that you still have a visit to make or that you’re quickly approaching the deadline for your investigation.

This fancy page has warnings, pop-ups, indicators, and explanations – all the bells and whistles! It keeps up with custody renewal dates, permanency review hearing dates, TPR petition dates and even dates of health screenings. It lets you look at the stage of your case in real time and know what’s still yet to be done. This enhancement will be available in December.

OBIEE Lens

Several charts have been crafted to track visits made (and not made) to children in Georgia’s foster care. One chart features a real-time snapshot of “how we’re doing.” This chart allows leadership staff to know in the blink of an eye which children are still awaiting our arrival...before it’s too late. Other charts provide a look-see at how the state has fared month after month, year after year. Another gives a glimpse at what our in-home visit percentage is for the whole state, each region, and each child – again, in real time!

The bonus chart will blow you away! It was designed around the parameters of the FORG case review items and will allow the State to dig deeper into trend analysis. Not only does it display the results of the case reviews, it allows the user to drill down and see traits of the children in the cases where we scored well or poorly during the period under review. Some of the dimensions that can be explored are geography, levels of risk, investigation outcomes, family violence, adult substance abuse, length of time in care, and prior diversions. There will be a preview of this feature during the November G Meeting.

Provider Portal

Providers will be able to access the SHINES Portal via the internet once they have been designated an authorized user by their agency’s site administrator, and have registered and set a password at the log-in prompt. They will not have full access to the actual SHINES system, but they will be able to see a list of all the children currently in the care of their agency to which they are assigned.

They will be able to see the child’s demographics and personal characteristics, placement type, removal reasons, legal county status, RBWO basic pay rate, and a list of dates of all the contacts that have been made to the child by their agency and DFCS. DFCS SSCMs will be able to view the documentation input by the provider and click a checkbox to acknowledge receipt and acceptance of the documentation. ECEM reports will be able to capture the contacts made and documented by the providers in the portal. As a result, DFCS SSCMs will not have to do any re-entering of this data.

Providers will be contacted about training dates soon.

NEWS & NOTES: ILP MEDICAID POLICY

This policy note was recently released to clarify procedures for the Chafee Independence Program Medicaid. It is effective immediately and supersedes any previous policy memo or policy in the Medicaid Policy manual, Section 2818.



Section 2818-1, under Basic Eligibility Criteria states: *a youth must have been in foster care the month of his/her 18th birthday and be under the age of 21.* However, the State Medicaid plan states that the individual: *must have been enrolled in Foster Care and received benefits **on their 18th birthday** in order to be eligible for continued coverage.*

It is **not** sufficient to meet Chafee eligibility for an individual to have been in care simply in the month in which the individual's 18th birthday falls, but must have been in DFCS custody **on** his or her 18th birthday. If you have any questions, please contact your Independent Living Coordinator, Regional Medicaid Field Program Specialist or the Child in Placement Medicaid Helpdesk on the OFI website.