DHR/DFCS Community Forums

Region IIIa Report
December 2006

DHR
GEORGIA
DEPARTMENT OF
HUMAN RESOURCES

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Report prepared by:
Care Solutions, Inc., 500 Sugar Mill Road, Suite 170A, Atlanta, GA 30350
(770)642-6722 - www.caresolutions.com

Executive Summary/Regional Highlights

The third Regional Community Forum was conducted November 13, 2006 in Region IIIa at the Grove Park Recreation Center in Atlanta, Georgia. The forum was attended by 7 stakeholders and 19 DFCS staff, primarily county and regional staff and state-level executives. Stakeholders attending the forum included a state representative, a CASA executive director, and five social service agency executives. DFCS Director Mary Dean Harvey presented an overview of agency pressures, progress, challenges and strategies. Her presentation was followed by roundtable discussions of specific topics related to the agency's work and the federal Child and Family Services Review.

Out of these roundtable discussions several common themes emerged across the various topic areas. In general, participants discussed the need for additional resources, better communication and information sharing, and increased awareness and education among all involved in the child welfare system as well as the media and the community in general. Specific themes included:

1. The need for significant training for all stakeholders (various agencies that work with case managers, including law enforcement), as well as DFCS case managers/workers, with emphasis on what each agency's role is.
2. Funding is an emerging issue, especially for clients who don't meet the Medicaid model as funding is shifted to Medicaid; in addition, some counties may be running out of money.
3. The spirit of partnership should be encouraged among providers and DFCS, with regular meetings, thinking outside the box, and getting all parties to the table, including families, providers, mental health, DJJ, schools and DFCS.
4. The concern that typical teen expectations/needs may or may not be met, such as money for prom and activities like sports and other after-school activities, sleepovers, graduation, driver's licenses, auto insurance, etc.

Participants viewed the forums positively for two main reasons: (1) They see them as a means of increasing understanding of the agency and how agencies/organizations can work together better for children and families, and (2) they see them as a means of developing relationships and contacts, and sharing information among the various stakeholders who participated.

This report presents a brief snapshot of the region and the results of the Region IIIa Community Forum.

Introduction/Overview

The Georgia Department of Human Resources Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) conducted 13 regional forums among key stakeholders across the state in November 2006. The purpose of the forums was four-fold:

1. To respond to a Georgia Senate resolution (SR 1270) requiring the agency to seek community input.
2. To seek stakeholder input as required by the federal Child and Family Services Review process.
3. To present information to stakeholders on agency mission/vision, values, goals and challenges and outcomes.
4. To seek stakeholder input for continuous quality improvement.

DFCS Mission:

To strengthen Georgia's families – supporting their self-sufficiency and helping them protect their vulnerable children and adults by being a resource to their families, not a substitute.

The forums also provided an opportunity for stakeholders to hear from state-level leaders in DHR/DFCS as well as an opportunity for DHR/DFCS leadership and regional and county directors to hear from stakeholders.

Stakeholders invited to participate in the forums included legislators, judges, guardians ad-litem, school officials, residential care providers, foster parents/caregivers, service providers and local family and child-serving agencies, including public, private and faith-based organizations. In addition to these stakeholders, DFCS regional directors and county directors were invited to listen and to participate in their own discussions. Each forum included the following elements:

1. A PowerPoint presentation by a state-level DFCS executive
2. Small group participant roundtable discussions on selected topics
3. Report-out of roundtable discussion results

The first forum (Region IV) included a brief brainstorm on the strengths and weaknesses of DFCS, but this was abandoned in subsequent forums in favor of giving additional time to the roundtable discussions and report-outs.

In addition to stakeholder input from the regional and statewide forums, the state is seeking stakeholder input from three surveys:

1. An online stakeholder survey targeting the same groups represented at the community forums.
2. A statewide mail survey of caregivers, including foster parents, adoptive parents and relative caregivers.

3. A statewide mail survey of parents with DFCS involvement, including parents with children in foster care placements.

Results from each of the forums and each of the surveys are being compiled and will be posted online and included in the CFSR report. (See also Appendix IX, Community Forums At-a-Glance, for a brief overview of all 13 regional forums.)

The Community Forum Process

The Presentation

The PowerPoint presentation for each of the regional community forums, presented by a DFCS state-level executive, included the DHR/DFCS mission; values related to the three goals of safety, permanency and well-being; pressures facing the agency in recent history; data on agency performance; and current concerns and directions. Following is a brief summary of the presentation contents.

In 2004 DFCS experienced a sharp increase in the number of CPS cases. This contributed to investigations taking longer than desired, staff turnover of up to 42%, and of course, high caseloads.

In the best interest of children . . .

Safety
- *Protection from abuse and neglect*
- *Safely remain in own home whenever possible and appropriate*

Permanency
- *Permanent and stable living arrangements*
- *Continuous family relationships and connections*

Well-Being
- *Enhanced capacity of the family to provide for child's needs*
- *Child's educational needs are met*
- *Child's physical and mental health needs are met*

Since that time the agency has taken a number of steps to address those concerns:

- Using a diversion model that includes assessing families and, when appropriate, referring them for community services and supports rather than opening a CPS case. This model has resulted in fewer children in foster care by 2006; only 11 percent of 33,000 families were referred back to DFCS for a full investigation, and only five percent of those receiving a full investigation had substantiated abuse.
- Focusing on relative placements, when appropriate. Relative placements increased from 17% to 20% of placements by 2006.

These strategies have resulted in fewer children in foster care, reduced caseloads, reduced length of investigations, reduced staff turnover and helped the agency make progress on specific federal measures, including:

- Recurrence of maltreatment
- Maltreatment in foster care/placements
- Foster care re-entries
- Permanency (reunification, adoption, stable placements)
- Family capacity to provide for children's needs
- Services to meet educational needs
- Services to meet physical and mental health needs.

The final section of the presentation included a discussion of work to be done and steps being taken in the areas of permanence planning, independent living programs and behavioral health services:

- ***Permanence planning*** – staff development, family team meetings, working with partners on federal time frame requirements, permanent legal guardianship
- ***Independent living program*** – focus on youth development rather than emancipation, meeting youth educational needs, continuous improvement sessions with staff and partners, listening to teens in foster care
- ***Behavioral health services*** – "un-bundling" of rates for residential care and treatment, transitioning providers and helping them become Medicaid-eligible, behavioral health services now under the Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Addictive Diseases

See Appendix V for a copy of the PowerPoint presentation.

The Discussion Topics

There were six small-group discussion topics selected for their relevance to agency concerns and the CFSR process:

1. ***Reducing child abuse and neglect:*** Providing timely investigations and preventing the occurrence or re-occurrence of maltreatment (abuse or neglect) in the child's home or foster care setting.
2. ***Preventing out-of-home placements:*** Providing services and supports for families to enable children to remain safely with their biological parents as a primary strategy.
3. ***Preserving families:*** Maintaining family relationships and connections of children in the child welfare system; increasing the number of children reunified with their families and reducing the time it takes for reunification.
4. ***Supporting adoptions:*** Increasing the number adopted and reducing the time it takes for adoption for children who cannot be reunited with their families.
5. ***Transitioning teens to independence:*** Enabling children in foster care to transition successfully to independence/adulthood, preparing them to go to college and/or live on their own.
6. ***Stabilizing foster care:*** Increasing the stability of foster care placements so that the number of transitions for children in foster care is reduced.

Forum participants were divided into groups, and each group was assigned one of the above topics and given about 45 minutes to answer the following three questions about that topic:

- What are the most significant challenges?
- What strategies or steps can DFCS take to address or overcome these challenges?
- How can the agencies/organizations represented here work with/support DFCS?

Key discussion points were recorded on flip charts, and a volunteer from the group presented its key points to the full group. In addition, each table had a DFCS county director to take notes and answer questions as needed. Because attendance varied at each of the forums, not all six topics were covered at each forum.

To put the forum in context, following is a two-page summary of regional data on population, demographics, child abuse and neglect, foster care, health, mental health and early care and education.

Region 3 Data Snapshot

Population

Population (2005)	3,899,251
Children (Ages 0-19) (2005)	1,128,413
Population in Poverty (2002)	10.7%
Children (Ages 0-17) in Poverty (2002)	14.4%

Community

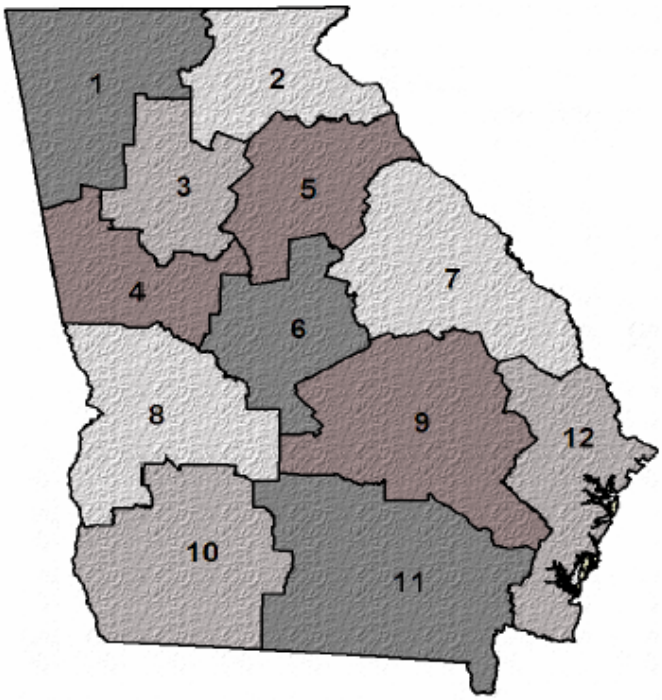
**Population Density (2000)	1,148.6
Total Housing Units (2000)	1,331,264
Housing - Urban (2000)	95.6%
Housing - Rural (2000)	4.4%

**Population per land square mile.

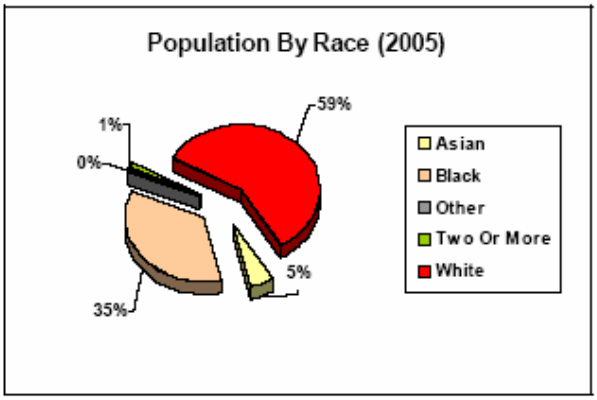
Demographics

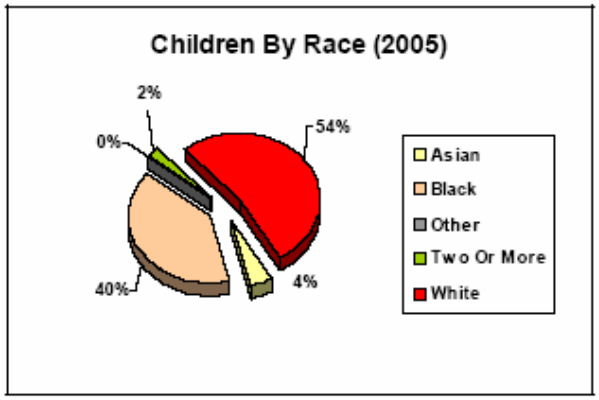
Ethnicity (2005)	
Hispanic Population	9.8%
Hispanic Children (Ages 0-19)	11.8%

Department of Human Resources
Service Delivery Regions

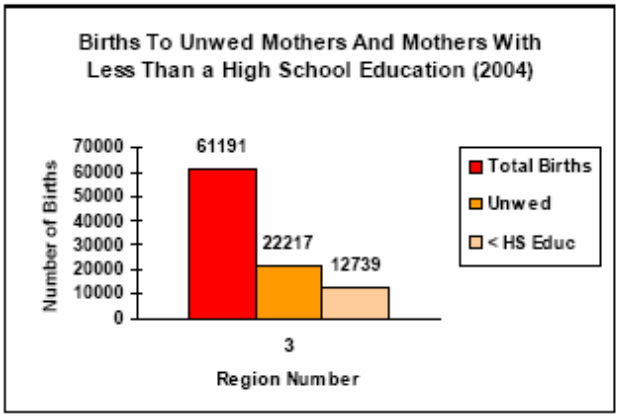


Sources:
US Census 2000
US Census Population Estimates July 2005





Infant Risk Factors



Child Abuse and Neglect

(2004)	Number
Total Child Abuse Reports	24,964
Total Reports Investigated	20,373
Total Reports Substantiated	8,067

Foster Care

	Number
Children in State Custody (2005)	4,861

Child Health

(2004)	Number	Percent
Peachcare For Kids	107,841	13.0%
Uninsured under age 18	12,739	14.7%

Region 3 (continued)

Child and Adolescent Mental Health

Georgia's Level Of Care (LOC) System for severe emotional disorders (SED) treatment (2006)	Number
Number of children in LOC	2186
Mental Health Gap Analysis (2005)	
Estimated number of children and adolescents with SED	64,475
Number of children and adolescents with SED needing public mental health services	23,424
Number of children and adolescents with SED served in the public mental health system	10,118

Early Childhood Care & Education

Subsidized Child Care (2005)	
Number of families served	13,269
Number of children served	25,116
Georgia's Pre-K Program (2004)	
Total number of 4-year-olds	58,093
Number of 4-year-olds enrolled	29,498
Percent of total 4-year olds	50.8%
Number of 4-year-olds at risk served	13,328
Percent of 4-year-olds enrolled at risk served	45.2%

Sources:
DHR Divisions of Public Health; Family and Children Services; Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Addictive Diseases
Georgia Office of Student Achievement

Region IIIa Community Forum Results

Attendance

The attendance goal for each regional forum was 24 stakeholders plus the DFCS regional and county directors from the region. Stakeholder attendance at the Region IIIa forum was 7 people, indicating that additional outreach would be necessary to increase attendance at subsequent forums. The group included a state representative, a CASA executive director, and five social service agency executives. DFCS staff were well-represented (19) and included regional and county directors from that region as well as state staff, including presenter Mary Dean Harvey, DFCS Director, and facilitator M.E. Wegman and from the DHR Office of Human Resource Management and Development. (See Appendix III for List of Attendees.)

Roundtable Discussions

The forum attendance allowed for the formation of two roundtable discussion groups comprised of stakeholders. Each group was assigned a specific topic for which to discuss challenges, ways in which challenges could be overcome and how agencies/organizations might work together to support DFCS in overcoming these challenges. Topics covered in this forum included stabilizing foster care and transitioning teens to independence.

Topic Discussions

Each table was assigned a specific topic for which to discuss challenges, ways in which challenges could be overcome and how agencies/organizations might work together to support DFCS in overcoming these challenges.

Following is a brief outline of the specific topics covered in the Region IIIa roundtable discussions and the key points raised in those discussions.

Stabilizing Foster Care: Increasing the stability of foster care placements so that the number of transitions for children in foster care is reduced.

Stakeholders:

1. What are the most significant challenges?
    - Early identification of relatives for placements; it is so much better if relatives are found
    - Communication among stakeholders; need better communication between caseworker and families
    - Need to provide services to families and involve service providers earlier in the process – case plans are not capturing the information that the service provider has

- Increase understanding of roles of the different agencies involved with children and families in the child welfare system
- Funding limitations
- High caseloads are still a problem, but family team meeting helps to improve communication

2. What strategies or steps can DFCS take to address or overcome these challenges?
    - Significant training for all stakeholders (various agencies involved that work with case managers) and case workers; training on what everyone's role is
    - Ensure all interested parties are at the table when decisions are made regarding a family's case; identify relatives; work harder to get all parties to family team meetings
    - Increase education of police/law enforcement (front line officers – need greater understanding of how to assess viable placement options when need to remove children)
    - DFCS should engage providers such as wraparound providers earlier in the process – don't wait for multi-disciplinary/family team meetings
    - Better tracking/monitoring of funding/county funds; cannot count on funds being available; need more funds – counties running out of money
    - Plan to meet needs of clients that don't meet Medicaid model as funding is shifted to Medicaid
    - Wraparound and family preservation services are funded through Medicaid, but this doesn't cover all children. If funds don't come from other areas many children will not receive services; need plan to address this

3. How can the agencies and organizations represented here work with/support DFCS?
    - Regular provider meetings with agency and partner administrators and supervisors: attend, provide input
    - Providers need to provide services, be accountable/accessible, and work in partnership with DFCS
    - Spirit of partnership – thinking outside of box and thinking about the end result we are striving for
    - Develop new programs to address specific needs of county
    - Court-Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) wants to do seminar on CASA program
    - Many children are in foster care for reasons other than abuse or neglect – other agencies/providers can find ways to assist DFCS in getting these children home

Transitioning Teens to Independence: Enabling children in foster care to transition successfully to independence/adulthood, preparing them to go to college and/or live on their own.

Stakeholders:

1. What are the most significant challenges?
    a. Policies regarding "teen-age entitlements" such as money, prom, sleepovers, sports and other after-school activities, graduation, driver's licenses, transportation and auto insurance
    b. Relationships – for example, teacher couldn't take teen to church
    c. Visitation
    d. Re-opening the "path" for teens – get their buy-in; educating teens about casework, how and why they would sign themselves "back in"; re-entering care is often negative/through police
    e. Independent living program needs more autonomy to work specifically to meet the teen's needs
    f. As many as 50% of foster care re-entry is teens in some counties
    g. Teens enter care for different reasons than infants or children – re-examine whether these teens should be entering traditional foster care
    h. Teens' needs not being met
    i. Teens in joint Department of Juvenile Justice/DFCS custody
    j. County variances

2. What strategies or steps can DFCS take to address or overcome these challenges?
    a. DFCS/DJJ "partnership" with the Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Addictive Diseases (DMHDDAD)
    b. Obtain buy-in of juvenile judges
    c. Define rules – no more "passing the buck"
    d. Get all parties to the table: families, mental health, DJJ, school, DFCS
    e. Keep families accountable
    f. Assessing risk at beginning: "deprived teen" vs. "unruly teen"
    g. Better, specific, measurable, case plans – not just "attend parenting classes"
    h. Developing plans that everyone signs off on – must have commitment with accountability
    i. Policy vs. practice: it might not be written in policy, but must have the mindset: "If it were my child, how would I do it?"

3. How can the agencies and organizations represented here work with/support DFCS?

    Note reported

Participant Evaluations

Overall the Region IIIa Community Forum participant evaluations, completed by eight participants (stakeholders and DFCS staff), were very positive, with participants agreeing that they understood the purpose of the forum and that the presentation was helpful in understanding the DFCS mission, values and challenges. They felt the discussions were helpful to understanding the topic areas and that the output of the discussions would help DFCS improve its practices.

Participants were generally satisfied with the amount of time devoted to the presentation and the table discussion. The forum received an average rating of 5.86 on a 7-point scale.

Suggestions for future forums included:

- Invite more participants; provide more lead time; less graphs; have all attendees introduce themselves, including DFCS state and region staff
- Make them more frequent
- More advanced notice re: date, time and other logistics about forum; mail directions
- Hold more of them

Suggested topics for future forums included:

- Community Mental Health, specifically the CSBs - what exactly do they provide for children and families, where, cost, etc.
- Identify ways to further enhance current programs and how provider community interacts w/ DFCS
- Understanding the role(s) of the stakeholders/providers

See Appendix VIII for a complete summary of the participant evaluations for this forum.

Summary/Themes

The forum was very well received by those in attendance. Participants appreciated hearing about the changes in DFCS and having the opportunity to discuss the child welfare topics with others involved in the child welfare system in their own region. Participants – stakeholders and DFCS staff alike – were engaged in the discussions, and several common themes emerged across the various topic areas.

In general, participants discussed the need for additional resources, better communication and information sharing, and increased awareness and education among all involved in the child welfare system as well as the media and the community in general. Specific themes included:

1. The need for significant training for all stakeholders (various agencies that work with case managers, including law enforcement), as well as DFCS case managers/workers, with emphasis on what each agency's role is.
2. Funding is an emerging issue, especially for clients who don't meet the Medicaid model as funding is shifted to Medicaid; in addition, some counties may be running out of money.
3. The spirit of partnership should be encouraged among providers and DFCS, with regular meetings, thinking outside the box, and getting all parties to the table, including families, providers, mental health, DJJ, schools and DFCS.
4. The concern that typical teen expectations/needs may or may not be met, such as money for prom and activities like sports and other after-school activities, sleepovers, graduation, driver's licenses, auto insurance, etc.

Participants viewed the forums positively for two main reasons: (1) They see them as a means of increasing understanding of the agency and how agencies/organizations can work together better for children and families, and (2) they see them as a means of developing relationships and contacts, and sharing information among the various stakeholders who participated.

Community Forum Logistics

Thirteen regional forums were scheduled in November 2006 to allow key stakeholders the opportunity to hear a presentation on DFCS challenges, progress and indicators and provide input and feedback on specific topics of interest. A statewide "wrap-up" forum with representatives from each regional forum is planned for December.

Invitations

Each DFCS region was asked to submit a list of 100 stakeholders, from which invitees – 50 per region – were selected to receive formal invitations to that region's forum, with attendance targeted at 24. Plans were to replace invitees who could not attend with other appropriate representatives on the original list. Invitees included state legislators, local judges, attorneys, service providers, advocacy organizations, school systems, foster parents, etc. In addition, DFCS regional and county directors were invited to attend. (DFCS directors for subsequent forums were also invited to observe in preparation for the forums in their regions.)

Based on the attendance at the first forum, which had light response, Care Solutions consulted with some of the DFCS regional directors, providing recommendations for additional attendees, and DFCS county directors were asked to follow up with all invitees and replace those who were unable to attend as originally planned, expanding the stakeholder group as needed/recommended. This more intensive follow-up resulted in improved attendance in all but one of the subsequent forums.

The Regional Forums

Each regional forum participant received a folder with the agenda, a copy of the presentation, a map of forum locations, an evaluation form, an interest form for the statewide forum to be conducted in December and a card inviting them to take the online stakeholder survey.

Each 2.5-hour regional forum included a 30-45 minute PowerPoint presentation by an executive-level DFCS staff, including DFCS Director Mary Dean Harvey, DFCS Deputy Directors Isabel Blanco, Cliff O'Connor and Martha Okafor.

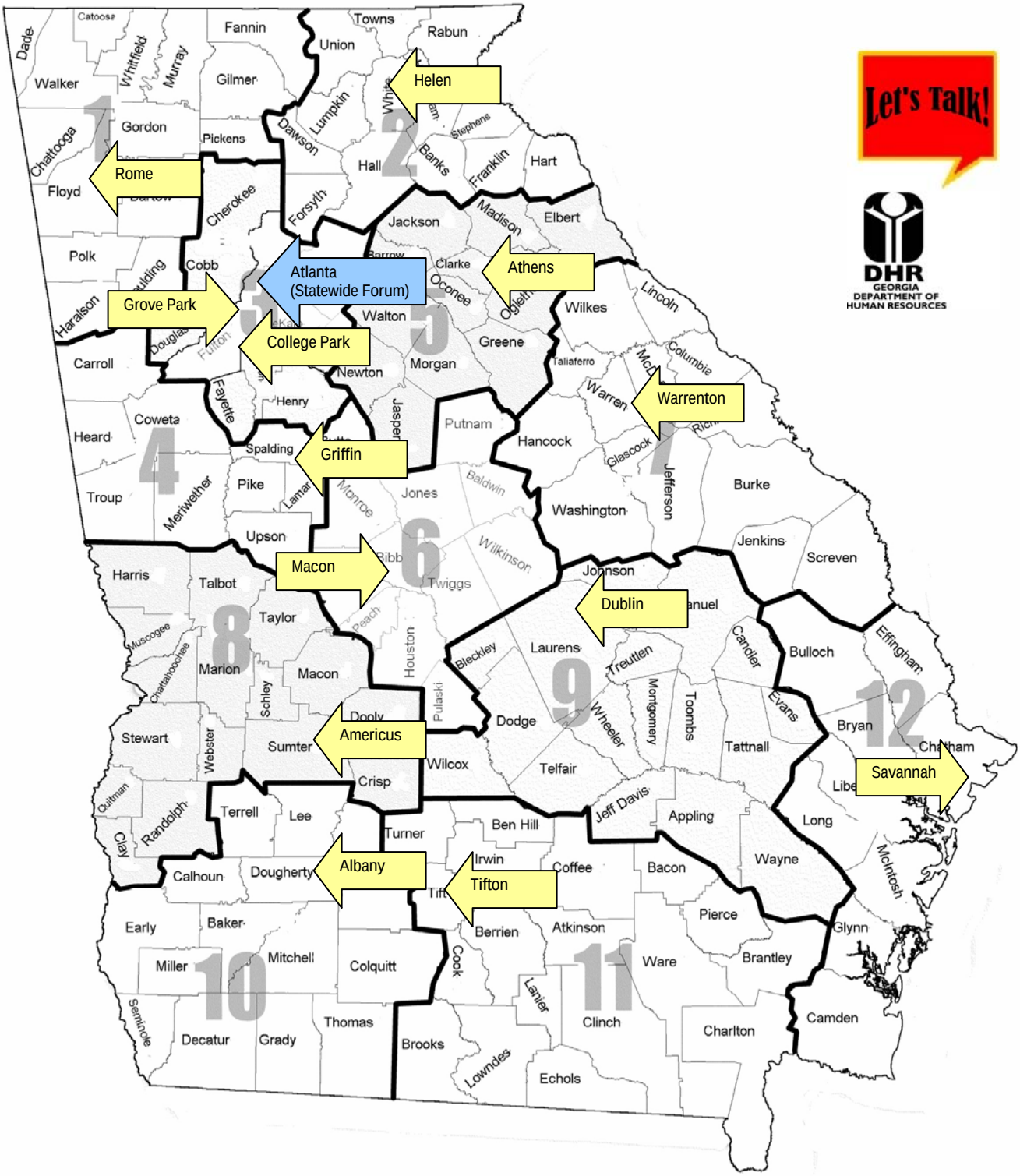
Following the PowerPoint presentation, stakeholder participants were divided into small discussion groups, and each group received a different topic for discussion. Topics included reducing child abuse and neglect, preventing out-of-home placements, preserving families, supporting adoptions, transitioning teens to independence and stabilizing foster care. (See Appendix VII for a complete description of the topics.)

Each group was asked to identify the challenges related to its topic, strategies for overcoming those challenges and how the organizations present could work with and support DFCS in overcoming those challenges. At each table a DFCS director served as the table's recorder; stakeholder volunteers led the discussion, recorded highlights on flip charts and reported the highlights of the discussion to all forum participants.

The forums were facilitated by DHR Office of Human Resource Management and Development (OHRMD) representatives, including Steve Stewart, M.E. Wegman, Gabrielle Numair, Clyde Beckley and Janice Mileo. The facilitators reviewed the agenda and folder materials, organized and facilitated the discussion groups and group report-outs, and reminded participants to complete evaluation forms, turn in statewide forum interest forms and participate in the stakeholder survey.

Following the forums, independent consulting firm Care Solutions, Inc., compiled the group discussion notes and created a regional report of results for each forum. A final report will be compiled following the statewide forum in December. The statewide forum is expected to include a presentation on the results of the regional forum discussions, with participation by representatives from each regional forum.

DHR/DFCS Community Forum Locations 2006



November 2006

Region IIIa (Grove Park) - List of Attendees

Last Name	First Name	Title	Organization or County Affiliation
Miller	Betsy	Director	Children and Teenagers Foundation
Morgan	Alisha		Representative
Mowry	Patricia	Director	Turning Point - New Direction for Families
Mullins	Hugo	Director	Family Ties
Parker	Marian	Executive Director	Dekalb CASA
Phillips	Kim	Director	Transitional Family Services
Robinson	Zuleika	Representative	Richardson-Halsey Associates
			DFCS
Bailey	Gwendora	Regional Director	Region III DFCS
Bell	Robert		
Clark	Cyleuthia		Fulton DFCS
Crooms	Kym	Project Administrator	DFCS
Denney	Susan	County Director	Douglas Co. DFCS
Gaines	George		DHR/DFCS OHRMD
Harvey	Mary Dean	Director	DFCS
Herren	Kathy		
Joe	Kenneth	County Director	Fulton DFCS
Marotte	Judy		Cobb DFCS
Moore	Gloria		Region III DFCS
Norman	Evelyn	County Director (Henry)	Henry & Rockdale DFCS
Ratti	Cathleen	County Director	Clayton DFCS
Roberts	Mertia		
Smith	Lucy		Gwinett DFCS
Solomon	Walker	County Director	Dekalb DFCS
Thompson	Glenda	County Director	Cherokee DFCS
Wegman	M.E.		DHR OHRMD
Wrights	Betty	FPS - Team Leader	Region III Metro DFCS
			Also in attendance:
Davis	Dr. Cynthia	On-site Consultant	Care Solutions, Inc.
Rogg	Carla	On-site Consultant	Care Solutions, Inc.

Georgia Department of Human Resources
Division of Family and Children Services

Let's Talk!

DHR
GEORGIA DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES

Community Forum Agenda

November 13, 2006

Region IIIa

DeKalb and Fulton counties

I.	Welcome (3 min)	Walker Solomon, Dekalb Kenneth Joe,Fulton DFCS County Directors
II.	Agenda Overview (7 min)	M.E. Wegman DHR Office of Human Resource Management and Development (OHRMD)
III.	Framework for Dialogue (40 min)	Mary Dean Harvey, Division of Family and Children Services Director
IV.	Small Discussion Groups (60 min)	Invited Guests
V.	Feedback (30 min)	Invited Guests
VI.	Next Steps (7 min)	OHRMD Facilitator
VII.	Acknowledgements & Thank You's (3 min)	Mary Dean Harvey

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HUMAN RESOURCES

Welcome To
DHR-DFCS
Community Forum

Let's Talk

Overview of Agenda

Let's Talk

Why You Are Here

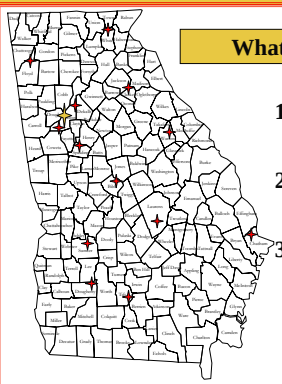
1. We Want To Hear From You
2. We Want To Share Our Values, Goals and Challenges
3. We Want To Engage The Community
4. We Want To Work Closer With The Community

Let's Talk

What's On The Agenda

1. A Presentation
2. A Small Group Discussion
3. Feedback on Table Topics And Questions
4. Next Steps

What's The Big Picture



1. 13 Forums Around The State
2. One Statewide Forum in Atlanta
3. Reports Developed And Posted Online

Let's Talk

Other Opportunities For Participation

1. Representation At Statewide Forum
2. Survey
3. Feedback At Anytime

Let's Talk

WELCOME!

Today's Presenter

Let's Talk

Forum Impact

- **Senate Resolution 1270**
  - **Resolution requests discussions on the mission, core values and beliefs of the division with regard to keeping children safe and protected.**
- **Child and Family Services Review**
  - **An assessment done every three years to see how well a state achieves positive outcomes in certain areas of child welfare services.**
- **A Commitment to Continuous Improvement**

THE DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES

IN THE BEST INTEREST OF CHILDREN

Georgia's Child Welfare System

A Status Report

November 2006

DHR Mission

To strengthen Georgia's families – supporting their self-sufficiency and helping them protect their vulnerable children and adults by being a resource to their families, not a substitute.

Areas of Focus In The Best Interest of Children

Safety

Protection from abuse and neglect

Safely remain in own home whenever possible and appropriate

Permanency

Permanent and stable living arrangements

Continuous family relationships and connections

Well-Being

Enhanced capacity of the family to provide for child's needs

Child's educational needs are met

Child's physical and mental health needs are met

Operating in the Best Interest of Children: What does that mean?

It means:

strengthening their connections with their biological families, whenever possible.

making sure they have reliable caring adults who will commit to be there for them.

doing all that we can to safely prevent children from ever entering the foster care system.

keeping children from having to grow up in foster care because we think about permanence from the day they come into state custody.

making sure families get appropriate and timely services when they need them, because stronger families means children are better off.

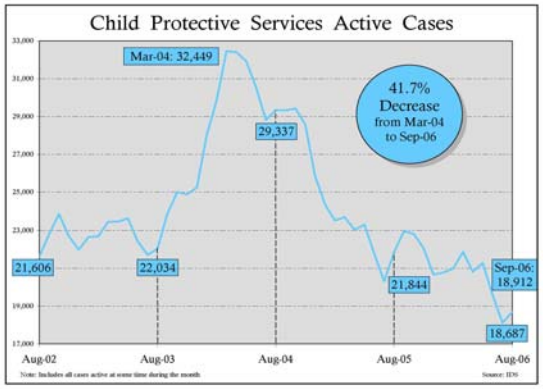
Pressures in 2003 and 2004 kept us from staying on mission.

In the spring of 2004, four issues were placing unprecedented pressures on Georgia's child welfare system.

- Significant increase in Child Protective Services cases (investigations) causing increased strain on caseworkers and resources
- Investigations not completed on a timely basis
- Over 40% annual turnover in caseworker staff
- High caseloads limiting the amount of time caseworkers can devote to families in need

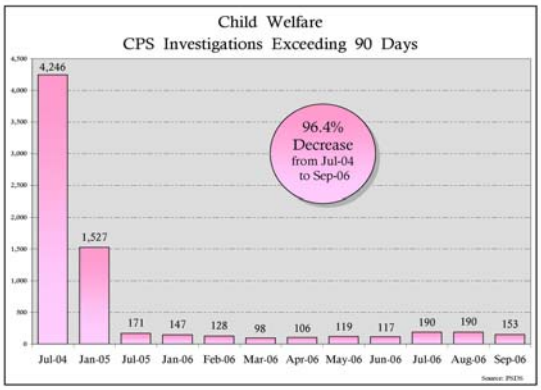
Pressures

1. Child Protective Services (CPS) Investigation Cases



Pressures

2. Untimely Investigations



Pressures

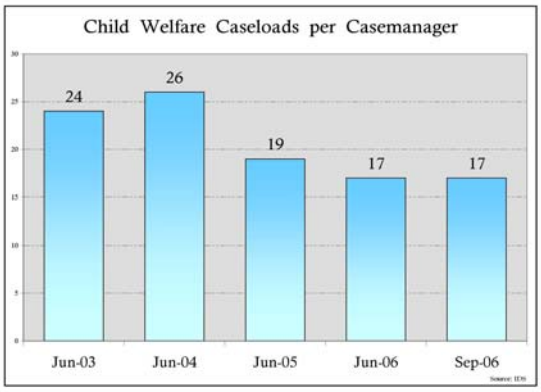
3. Staff Turnover

In 2004, DHR experienced annualized turnover rates up to 42 percent.

Each year DFCS lost almost half of their caseworkers.

Today, caseworker turnover has been reduced to about 26 – 30 percent, closer to the national average of 22 percent.

4 - High Caseloads



Reducing pressures on the system has allowed us to improve our practice and turn the tide on key indicators.

- More help for at-risk families who come to the attention of DFCS
- Fewer children in foster care
- More children living with relatives
- Progress on federal measures

Key Indicators

1. More Help for Families

Using a practice model called Diversion, informed and experienced case managers:

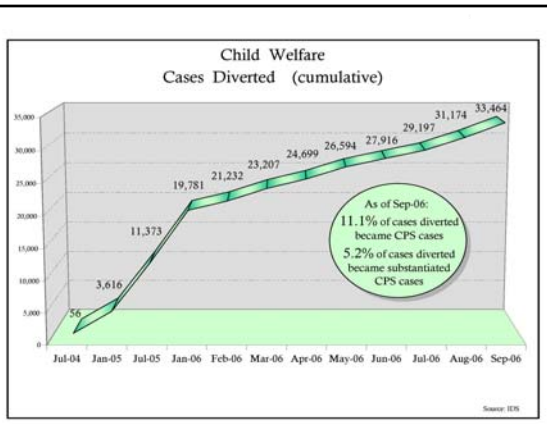
- Review the facts of the case
- Identify family needs
- Assess child safety
- Refer families to resources and services when a full investigation does not seem warranted

Since 2004:

- More than 33,000 families statewide have been diverted to other services and programs.
- 11 percent have been referred back for a full investigation
- Of those receiving a full investigation – only 5 percent have been substantiated

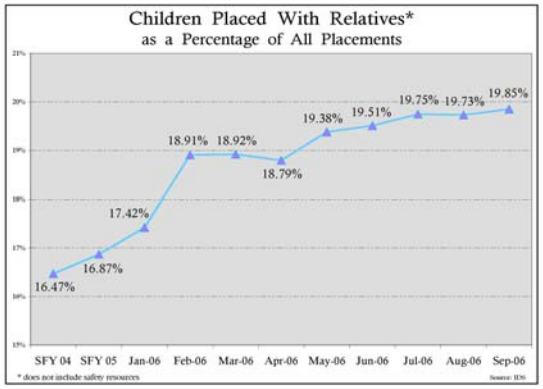
Key Indicators

2. Fewer Children in Foster Care



Key Indicators

3. More Children Living With Relatives



In turning the tide, we've made progress on federal measures

SAFETY

Data Indicators	National Standard	Georgia Rating	+ or - Conformity
Absence of child abuse and/or neglect in foster care	99.67	99.4	-.27
Absence of mal-treatment recurrence in all placement types	94.4%	93%	-1.4%

Federal Measures

PERMANENCY

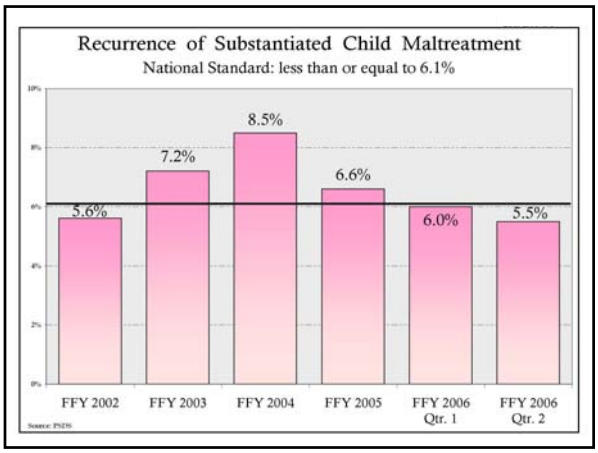
Data Indicators	National Standard	Georgia Rating	+ or - Conformity
Timeliness and permanency of reunification	110.2+	126.6	+16.4
Timeliness and permanency of adoptions	103+	93.5	-9.5
Permanency for long-stay children and youth	111.7+	112	+0.3
Placement Stability	108.5+	127.4	+18.9

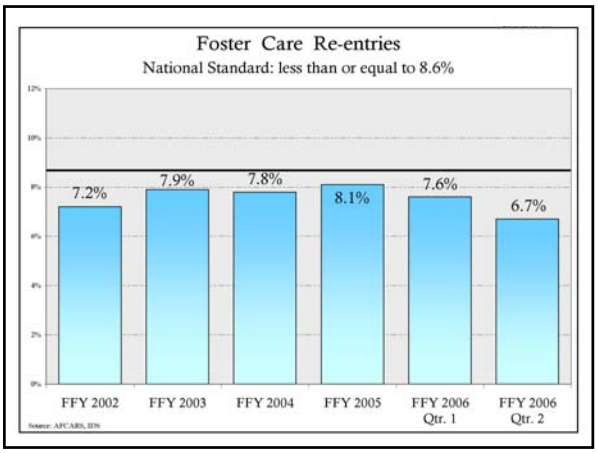
Federal Measures

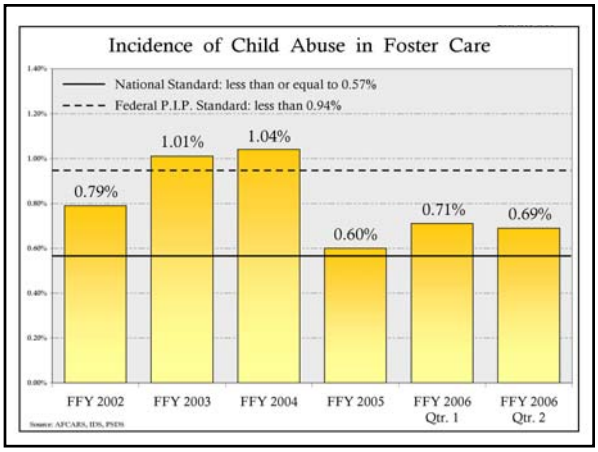
WELL-BEING

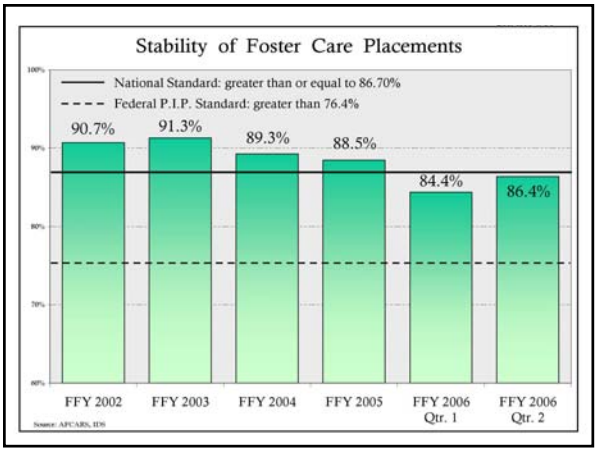
Data Indicators	National *Median* 2001-2004	Georgia Rating 01/06 – 06/06	+ or - Nat'l Median
Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children's needs	60%	51%	-9
Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs	83%	85%	+2
Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs	69.9%	61%	-8.9

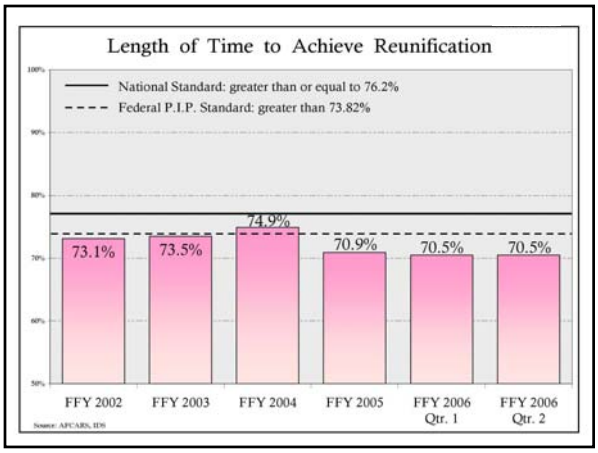
Current 2006 Data Indications

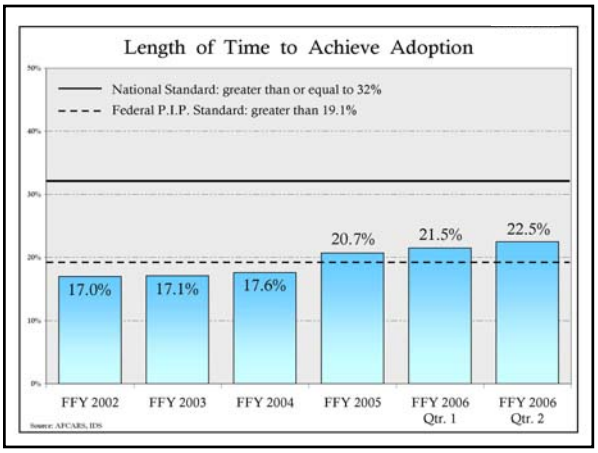

Recurrence of Substantiated Child Maltreatment
National Standard: less than or equal to 6.1%
5.6%
7.2%
8.5%
6.6%
6.0%
5.5%
FFY 2002
FFY 2003
FFY 2004
FFY 2005
FFY 2006 Qtr. 1
FFY 2006 Qtr. 2


Foster Care Re-entries
National Standard: less than or equal to 8.6%
7.2%
7.9%
7.8%
8.1%
7.6%
6.7%
FFY 2002
FFY 2003
FFY 2004
FFY 2005
FFY 2006 Qtr. 1
FFY 2006 Qtr. 2


Incidence of Child Abuse in Foster Care
National Standard: less than or equal to 0.57%
Federal P.I.P. Standard: less than 0.94%
0.79%
1.01%
1.04%
0.60%
0.71%
0.69%
FFY 2002
FFY 2003
FFY 2004
FFY 2005
FFY 2006 Qtr. 1
FFY 2006 Qtr. 2


Stability of Foster Care Placements
National Standard: greater than or equal to 86.70%
Federal P.I.P. Standard: greater than 76.4%
90.7%
91.3%
89.3%
88.5%
84.4%
86.4%
FFY 2002
FFY 2003
FFY 2004
FFY 2005
FFY 2006 Qtr. 1
FFY 2006 Qtr. 2


Length of Time to Achieve Reunification
National Standard: greater than or equal to 76.2%
Federal P.I.P. Standard: greater than 73.82%
73.1%
73.5%
74.9%
70.9%
70.5%
70.5%
FFY 2002
FFY 2003
FFY 2004
FFY 2005
FFY 2006 Qtr. 1
FFY 2006 Qtr. 2


Length of Time to Achieve Adoption
National Standard: greater than or equal to 32%
Federal P.I.P. Standard: greater than 19.1%
17.0%
17.1%
17.6%
20.7%
21.5%
22.5%
FFY 2002
FFY 2003
FFY 2004
FFY 2005
FFY 2006 Qtr. 1
FFY 2006 Qtr. 2

There is more work to do …

- Permanence planning for children
- Restructuring Georgia's Independent Living Program (ILP)
- Assuring that children receive the behavioral health services they need (as we retool the Level of Care (LOC) system and serve children in the least restrictive setting)

Permanence Planning for Children

Our Challenges:

Children should spend as little time as possible in state custody.

Need to start permanency planning when children first come into foster care.

We should work with the family, if possible, to make a plan for the child's future.

DFCS does not make decisions about children in a vacuum. We must work closely with the court system, CASAs and GALs, to develop timely resolutions for children who cannot be reunified with their natural parents.

Permanence Planning for Children

Steps We Are Taking:

- Retraining of caseworkers
- Use of Family Team Meetings at the beginning of case planning
- Closer work with the courts and other partners to educate them about federal time frames that DFCS is accountable for meeting regarding termination of parental rights (TPRs)
- More use of permanent legal guardianship with relatives and "fictive kin"

Restructuring Georgia's Independent Living Program (ILP)

Our Challenges:

- Emancipation, not youth development, is the goal of the current ILP program.
- We already know that we should be very worried about 18 year olds who are "emancipated" from foster care without committed, caring adults who will watch out for them or without a plan for education, employment and housing.
- The current ILP program is supposed to provide services to young people in foster care between the ages of 14 – 25, but less than 50 % of eligible foster youth were served in 2005.
- Only about 10-20% of 18 year olds who leave Foster Care have a HS diploma or GED.

Restructuring Georgia's Independent Living Program (ILP)

Steps We Are Taking:

- Expansion of TeenWork to make sure every 16 and 17 year old has the opportunity to have a summer job
- Work with Georgia's Dept of Education to target educational needs
- New program goals for ILP focused on key youth development indicators
- Weekly, data-based, continuous improvement sessions with ILP staff as well as internal and external partners
- Interaction with teenagers currently in foster care to hear their recommendations

Assuring that children receive the behavioral health services they need (as we retool the Level of Care (LOC) system and serve children in the least restrictive setting).

Our Challenges since 2004:

- 60% increase in the number of residential child caring institutions in Georgia.
- 600% increase in capacity at child placing institutions (per GAHSC).
- Consistent growth in both the number of children served and the level of expenditures in the LOC system (which includes shelters).
- Tremendous growth in "beds" has meant that individual providers are serving fewer children than they did a year ago.

Behavioral Health Services

These changing realities are putting new pressures on Georgia's child welfare system.

We have a dual goal of assuring that children continue to receive the behavioral health services they need, as well as helping current providers develop new and different ways to serve children and their families.

Behavioral Health Services

Steps We Are Taking:

DHR, DCH, and DJJ, with CMS approval are moving forward to complete the "un-bundling" of rates in the current LOC system by June 2007.

Work continues with providers to pace this transition and to help them become certified under Medicaid rehabilitation option.

Recommendations on room/board and watchful oversight recommendations from rate setting will be made in conjunction with a Kenny A rate reimbursement task force and preliminary work is already going on between providers and DHR.

Behavioral Health Services

DHR is consolidating all behavioral health services under its division of MHDDAD so that Georgia will have one system serving all children and adolescents.

This consolidated system will have a single point of entry to the system, a set of basic resources for all children in need, and a utilization management system to make sure that children receive the right services, in the right amount, at the right time, at the right price.

CONCLUSION

If "the best interest of children" is always our goal, then families cannot be the problem, they must be part of the solution. Therefore our vision for the future is building a model centered on the family - biological families, adoptive families, foster families.

We envision an integrated family support model, supported by DFCS case managers, Public Health nurses and practitioners, behavioral health providers and professionals, CMOs, family preservation providers, child caring institutions, child placing agencies and YOU!

Let's Talk

DHR
GEORGIA DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES

Let The Dialogue Begin

Presenter Bios

Mary Dean Harvey

Director
Georgia Division of Family and Children Services

Mary Dean Harvey became Director of the Georgia Division of Family and Children Services in August 2005, bringing with her an unparalleled degree of experience and a reputation as a strong advocate for children. As director of the Nebraska Department of Social Services, she pioneered welfare reform in the state -- developing a managed care program for Medicaid that improved services and saved $58 million, leading the development of a statewide computer system for AFDC payments, and introducing business practices that improved services and stabilized the department's workforce.

Ms. Harvey also served as project director for Omaha Safe and Healthy Schools, where she brought together a network of providers to give disadvantaged children and their families access to after-school healthcare, mental health, family development and early child development services. She was also president and CEO of the Boy's and Girl's Club of Omaha, and executive director of Girls Incorporated of Omaha, where she created the city's first mentoring program for young women.

She was also a teacher and administrator in Omaha public schools for seventeen years. Ms. Harvey holds a bachelor's degree in political science from Grambling University, and a master's in science in secondary education and Certification in Educational Administration from the University of Nebraska at Omaha.

Isabel Blanco

Deputy Director, Field Operations
Georgia Division of Family and Children Services

On assuming her new position as Deputy Director, Field Operations for the Division of Family and Children Services in 2006, Isabel Blanco already had a significant depth of experience with Georgia as an independent DFCS consultant through the Casey Foundation, which was contracted to improve the Welfare to Work outcomes for the state of Georgia. Over the last two years, Ms. Blanco has worked with much of the Georgia DFCS field organization, with an emphasis on Office of Family Independence (OFI) processes and outcomes.

Previously, Ms. Blanco served as the social services director for the Chicago Housing Authority, where she was responsible for overseeing the largest housing transition in the nation. She also served as the regional administrator for the State of Illinois Northwest Counties (the largest region in Illinois), which improved from worst to one of the best in the state under her leadership. She also has a wealth of experience leading other child welfare organizations in Illinois.

Reporting directly to Ms. Blanco in her new role are the DFCS Field Directors and Regional Directors, soon to be expanded from the current 12 to 17. Ms. Blanco received her bachelor's degree in psychology and sociology from North Park University in Chicago.

Clifford O'Connor

Deputy Director, Finance and Administration
Georgia Division of Family and Children Services

Clifford O'Connor came to the Georgia Division of Family and Children Services in 2004 as its Deputy Director, bringing a wealth of experience in public sector budgeting, management, and human service administration. In this position, he supervises budget, fiscal services, evaluation and reporting, and technology support.

Before coming to Georgia, Mr. O'Connor served for six years as chief deputy director of the Santa Clara (CA) County Department of Social Services, a $420 million operation with 2,600 staff, which provided adult and child welfare services, benefit services, and employment services. His prior experience includes 12 years with the Milwaukee County Department of Social Services, where he held several management positions and was named (in 1994) director of the $300 million, 2,200 staff county department.

He was also budget director for the Illinois Department of Employment Security and a budget analyst for the City of Chicago's Office of Budget and Management. He holds a bachelor's degree (cum laude) from Bucknell University and a master's of science in business (public management specialization) from the University of Wisconsin at Madison.

Martha N. Okafor, Ph.D.

Deputy Director, Programs and Policy
Georgia Division of Family and Children Services

Martha N. Okafor first joined the Division of Family and Children Services team as the Office of Family Independence Director in October, 2005, and was appointed to the position of DFCS Programs and Policy Deputy Director in January, 2006. She is highly skilled in engaging staff and the public in meaningful dialogue to improve public policies, proactive leadership, and social services programs.

Before coming to Georgia, Ms. Okafor was the director of the Family Health Division for the Connecticut Department of Public Health (2002-2005). There, she was responsible for maternal and child health, school-based health, community health centers, children and youths with special health care needs, adolescent health, newborn genetics/metabolic screenings, and early childhood systems. Prior to that, she was the social services administration manager/director for Connecticut's Department of Social Services (1993-2002).

Ms. Okafor holds a bachelor's degree in education and English language from the University of Nigeria, a master's of public administration in organization management and public policy from Ahmadu Bello University in Nigeria, and a master's degree in anthropology from the University of Connecticut. She received her Ph.D. degree in medical anthropology, health care management, and social sciences through the University of Connecticut.

For your group's topic:

1. What are the most significant challenges?
2. What strategies or steps can DFCS take to address or overcome these challenges?
3. How can the agencies/organizations represented here work with/support DFCS?

All table topics being discussed today:

1. **Reducing Child Abuse & Neglect:** Providing timely investigations and preventing the occurrence or re-occurrence of maltreatment (abuse or neglect) in the child's home or foster care setting.

2. **Preventing Out-of-Home Placements:** Providing services and supports for families to enable children to remain safely with their biological parents as a primary strategy.

3. **Preserving Families:** Maintaining family relationships and connections of children in the child welfare system; increasing the number of children reunified with their families and reducing the time it takes for reunification.

4. **Supporting Adoptions:** Increasing the number adopted and reducing the time it takes for adoption for children who cannot be reunited with their families.

5. **Transitioning Teens to Independence:** Enabling children in foster care to transition successfully to independence/adulthood, preparing them to go to college and/or live on their own.

6. **Stabilizing Foster Care:** Increasing the stability of foster care placements so that the number of transitions for children in foster care is reduced.

Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) Community Forum Participant Evaluation Report by DHR Region

Forum Date: **11/13/2006** ***City:*** **Atlanta (Grove Park)** ***County:*** **Fulton** ***Region:*** **3**

Total # of Responses: **8** ***Total # of DFCS Responses:*** **2** ***Total # of Non-DFCS Responses:*** **6**

Questions #1-#9 are based on a 5-point scale.		AVG	DFCS AVG	Non-DFCS AVG
1. The purpose of the community forum was clear.		4.29	4.00	4.40
2. The presentation was helpful to my understanding of the mission and values of DFCS.		4.29	3.50	4.60
3. The presentation was helpful to my understanding of the challenges facing DFCS.		4.29	3.50	4.60
4. The presentation information will be useful to me in my work with families in the child welfare system.		4.43	3.50	4.80
5. The table discussion was helpfull to my understanding of the issues surrounding our topic.		4.43	4.50	4.40
6. I had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and provide input in the discussions.		4.43	4.00	4.60
7. I believe the results of our table discussion will help DFCS improve its practices.		4.29	4.00	4.40
8. The community forum was well-organized.		4.29	3.50	4.60
9. Attending this forum was worth my time.		4.43	4.00	4.60
10. The amount of time for the presentation was:				
	N/A	13%	0%	17%
	About Right	88%	100%	83%
11. The amount of time for the table discussion was:				
	N/A	13%	0%	17%
	Too Much	13%	50%	0%
	About Right	75%	50%	83%

Question #12 is based on a 7-point scale.	AVG	DFCS AVG	Non-DFCS AVG
12. Please rate this community forum overall:	5.86	4.50	6.40

Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) Community Forum Participant Evaluation Report by DHR Region

Forum Date: **11/13/2006**	***City:*** **Atlanta (Grove Park)**	***County:*** **Fulton**	***Region:*** **3**
Total # of Responses: **8**	***Total # of DFCS Responses:*** **2**	***Total # of Non-DFCS Responses:*** **6**	

Primary involvement in child welfare system:

Agency/organization serving families in the child welfare system	50%
CASA/child advocacy organization	13%
DFCS	25%

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13. What could we do to improve future forums?

- Invite more participants; provide more lead time; less graphs; have all attendees introduce themselves including DFCS state and region staff.
- Make them more frequent.
- More advanced notice re: date, time and other logistics about forum. Mail directions.
- More of them - it was wonderful - More providers talking to each other.

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14. What discussion topics would you suggest for future forums?

- Community Mental Health specifically the CSBs - what exactly do they provide for children and families, where, cost, etc.
- Identify ways to further enhance current programs and how provider community interacts w/ DFCS.
- Understanding the role(s) of the stakeholders/providers.

Other Comments:

DHR/DFCS Community Forums At-a-Glance

REGION I
Date: November 13, 2006
Site: Floyd County DFCS, Rome
Host: Kathy Floyd, Regional Director
Presenter: Clifford O'Connor, Deputy Director Fiscal Operations
Facilitators: Stephen Stewart and Gabrielle Numair, DHR Office of Human Resource Management and Development
Stakeholders: 25
DFCS Staff: 15
Themes:

1. Child welfare is a community issue – not just a DFCS issue – and this must be communicated more widely. Community agencies and organizations should view the responsibility as a shared one.
2. Child and family services is a people business, and one-on-one interactions are critical to making progress for a family. DFCS can't help a family and make them the bad guy at the same time.
3. There is a need to improve the perception of DFCS in the community; it must be clear what DFCS can and can't do and that the goal of DFCS is to strengthen families.
4. More collaboration among agencies could help to use limited community resources more wisely. Structured partnerships and collaborations need to be established with courts, community agencies, and schools.

REGION II
Date: November 28, 2006
Site: Unicoi Lodge, Helen
Host: Amanda Morgan, Regional Director
Presenter: Amanda Morgan, Regional Director
Facilitators: M.E.Wegman & Gabrielle Numair, DHR Office of Human Resource Management and Development
Attendees: 22
DFCS Staff: 14
Themes:

1. Communication and collaboration at all levels needs improvement – between local agencies and DFCS, and between state-level DFCS and local agencies/organizations. Local agencies and DFCS need clear directives to operate in a more collaborative way.
2. More training is needed at all levels, including training for foster parents after recruitment and local DFCS awareness of local agency services.
3. Targeted use of resources is important, especially when many agencies see the same families, and the resources in rural areas are scarce.

4. Emphasize the role of the family in its own recovery and our role as partners to them, and to each other, to break down barriers between levels and among partners.
5. Appreciation was expressed for the spirit in which everyone engaged in the activity and how positive and generous all attendees were.

REGION III

Date: November 14, 2006
Site: Providence Baptist Church, College Park
Host: Gwendora Bailey, Regional Director, Metro Field Operations
Presenter: Martha Okafor, Deputy Director, Programs and Policies
Facilitators: M.E.Wegman, DHR Office of Human Resource Management and Development
Attendees: 27
DFCS Staff: 25
Themes:

1. Create partnerships and work with the community; partner better with others (schools, health providers, churches, etc.).
2. Increase communication in community and among partners to counter negative perceptions, dispel fear/myths and improve understanding of DFCS.
3. Be deliberate, proactive.
4. Provide additional resources and support services for children and families.
5. Increase staff development and motivation.
6. Teach prevention, e.g., coping skills, parenting, communication, substance abuse prevention.

REGION IIIa

Date: November 13, 2006
Site: Grove Park Recreation Center, Atlanta
Host: Walker Solomon (DeKalb) & Kenneth Joe (Fulton), County Directors
Presenter: Mary Dean Harvey, Director, Division of Family and Children Services
Facilitators: M.E.Wegman, DHR Office of Human Resource Management and Development
Attendees: 7
DFCS Staff: 19
Themes:

1. The need for significant training for all stakeholders (various agencies that work with case managers, including law enforcement), as well as DFCS case managers/workers, with emphasis on what each agency's role is.
2. Funding is an emerging issue, especially for clients who don't meet the Medicaid model as funding is shifted to Medicaid; in addition, some counties may be running out of money.

3. The spirit of partnership should be encouraged among providers and DFCS, with regular meetings, thinking outside the box, and getting all parties to the table, including families, providers, mental health, DJJ, schools and DFCS.
4. The concern that typical teen expectations/needs may or may not be met, such as money for prom and activities like sports and other after-school activities, sleepovers, graduation, driver's licenses, auto insurance, etc.

REGION IV

Date: November 9, 2006
Site: Spalding County DFCS, Griffin
Host: Lee Biggar, Regional Director
Presenter: Isabel Blanco, Deputy Director, Field Operations
Facilitators: Stephen Stewart & M.E.Wegman, DHR Office of Human Resource Management and Development
Attendees: 12
DFCS Staff: 11
Themes:

1. The conflict between having more open communication among agencies about children and families to better support them and the need for confidentiality, especially given the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) privacy requirements.
2. The public perception that DFCS "takes children" vs. the agency's mission/work to help families with services and supports.
3. The need to improve the agency's relationship with foster parents, specifically to improve communication, show appreciation and provide supports.

REGION V

Date: November 28, 2006
Site: Clarke County DFCS, Athens
Host: David Kelley, Regional Director
Presenter: Clifford O'Connor, Deputy Director, Fiscal Operations
Facilitators: M.E.Wegman & Gabrielle Numair, DHR Office of Human Resource Management and Development
Attendees: 17
DFCS Staff: 16
Themes:

1. Rural dynamics are much different, with factors such as isolation, poverty and access to services more of a concern. Due to lack of transportation, solutions such as home-based services and co-located services should be considered.
2. Individual county departments should be evaluated separately for issues such as staff turnover, caseload and continuity of communication within DFCS that can affect families in the system.
3. Community education is needed regarding what DFCS does in all areas (adoption, child abuse/neglect, etc.). In addition, social service agencies and DFCS could

benefit from community dialogue/collaboration and information sharing on a regular basis.

4. Teens need a safety net after foster care, which should be a caring family or adult put in place before age 18; more specialized services for teens could help better transition them to independence.
5. Foster care could be improved with more specialized recruitment of foster parents (in local areas and for teens and special needs children) and more flexibility regarding relative placements.

REGION VI

Date: November 21, 2006
Site: DHR Middle Georgia Training Center, Macon
Host: Jeff Baggett, Regional Director
Presenter: Mary Dean Harvey, Director, Division of Family and Children Services
Facilitators: Stephen Stewart & M.E.Wegman, DHR Office of Human Resource Management and Development
Attendees: 31
DFCS Staff: 16
Themes:

1. More education and training is needed for the DFCS workforce, foster parents, partner agencies, and other community entities. Also, the community needs more information about how DFCS and social agencies work.
2. Partnerships and collaborations should be encouraged and developed, recognizing that this is not just DFCS work; it is the people's work.
3. DFCS policies need to be examined to make sure we are not "shooting ourselves in the foot" with procedures and rules that are cumbersome or too absurd.
4. Need for more resources in rural communities (transportation, mental health, wraparound services) and increased use of existing resources to prevent referrals to DFCS.
5. Develop and utilize more early intervention and prevention strategies and resources.

REGION VII

Date: November 29, 2006
Site: Warren County High School, Warrenton
Host: Glenda McMillan, Regional Director
Presenter: Isabel Blanco, Deputy Director, Field Operations
Facilitators: M.E.Wegman & Janice Mileo, DHR Office of Human Resource Management and Development
Attendees: 29
DFCS Staff: 16

Region VII - continued
Themes:

1. Maximize resources through collaboration and education. Improve relationships with community partners. Must have everyone at the table on a regular basis; less talk, more action.
2. Need to have more programs on the prevention side; make prevention a strategy; focus on the child's early years.
3. Teens need the ability to participate in after-school programs and other teen activities, as well as work; life skills training is needed to help them transition.
4. Strict interpretation of policy is frustrating; it may not always be in the best interest of the child; need more flexibility in interpretation.

REGION VIII

Date: November 15, 2006
Site: Sumter County Extension Center, Americus
Host: Margaretha Morris, Regional Director
Presenter: Mary Dean Harvey, Director, Division of Family and Children Services
Facilitators: Stephen Stewart & M.E.Wegman, DHR Office of Human Resource Management and Development
Attendees: 22
DFCS Staff: 18
Themes:

1. Provide more forums like this in the community to create a better understanding of DFCS and a better dialogue among community agencies.
2. Public education is needed to change the perception that "DFCS takes your children" and remove the element of fear associated with DFCS.
3. More resources in smaller counties and rural areas are needed, especially transportation, parenting classes, and mental health services.
4. Normalize the lives of teens in foster care (e.g.: driver's licenses, car insurance, teen activities).
5. More intensive training is needed for foster parents, and more information should be given to them about the child's needs (education, health, social, etc.) when they take the child into their home.
6. Allow DFCS to wrap policy around families, not families around policies.

REGION IX

Date: November 16, 2006
Site: Laurens County DFCS, Dublin
Host: Nina Davis, Regional Director
Presenter: Martha Okafor, Deputy Director, Programs and Policy
Facilitators: Stephen Stewart & M.E.Wegman, DHR Office of Human Resource Management and Development
Attendees: 17
DFCS Staff: 14

Region IX – continued
Themes:

1. More careful recruiting of and intensive training for DFCS case managers is needed to help lower turnover and sustain current staff.
2. DFCS needs to collaborate and partner more with the community and "work at the front door;" provide for cross-training among agencies for a better understanding.
3. Address the lack of resources in smaller counties (e.g.: parenting classes, mental health services and domestic violence services); there is a disconnect between policy and services.
4. Agencies and DFCS need to communicate better and think more outside the box to consider things that may have not been tried. Conduct additional workshops/forums on specific issues to explore them together.
5. DJJ and DFCS are not always able to work together due to time constraints, but all parties should be at court together, where the judge can focus on the entire family, not just the children.

REGION X

Date: November 20, 2006
Site: Dougherty County DHR Building, Albany
Host: Connie Hobbs, Regional Director
Presenter: Martha Okafor, Deputy Director, Programs and Policy
Facilitators: M.E.Wegman & Clyde Beckley, DHR Office of Human Resource Management and Development
Attendees: 36
DFCS Staff: 15
Themes:

1. Increase communication, especially about the direction DFCS is taking to address reputation and increase understanding in the community among families and partners.
2. Collaborate and hold inter-agency meetings; to establish meaningful partnerships; DFCS needs to define why it wants to partner, who it should partner with and what to expect from partnerships.
3. Address the lack of or limited resources; lack of awareness of available resources.
4. Increase education for the community, partners and families about opportunities (services and resources) for families.
5. Address staff turnover and train staff well.
6. Share information with families; prepare families.

REGION XI

Date: November 20, 2006
Site: Tift Rural Development Center, Tifton
Host: Connie Hobbs, Regional Director
Presenter: Martha Okafor, Deputy Director, Programs and Policy

Region XI – continued
Facilitators: M.E.Wegman & Clyde Beckley, DHR Office of Human Resource Management and Development
Attendees: 32
DFCS Staff: 16
Region XI – continued
Themes:

1. Provide for more services and resources, particularly mental health services, especially in rural areas.
2. Increase staff and reduce caseloads.
3. Educate youth, families, and foster parents; especially provide specialty training for foster parents to help them handle challenging children.
4. Improve communication statewide; change public perception of DFCS; everyone needs to be aware of child abuse and neglect.
5. Increase prevention measures; set up programs to provide mentors and role models.
6. Hold multi-agency, multi-disciplinary meetings and staffings.
7. Involve business and community organizations in collaboration.

REGION XII
Date: November 17, 2006
Site: Chatham County DFCS, Savannah
Host: LeRoy Felder, Regional Director
Presenter: Martha Okafor, Deputy Director, Programs and Policy
Facilitators: Stephen Stewart & M.E.Wegman, DHR Office of Human Resource Management and Development
Attendees: 16
DFCS Staff: 16
Themes:

1. DFCS needs additional staff to reduce caseloads.
2. Additional resources (and access to available resources) are needed, especially prevention resources for substance abuse and pregnancy: resources for families before children are removed from the home.
3. Educate legislators and the community about the needs of children and families; hold more community/public forums.
4. Recruit more and higher quality foster homes; provide more support/resources for foster parents, e.g., wraparound services, increased reimbursement.
5. There are concerns about placing children with relatives motivated by financial reimbursement or who were not good parents for their own children; conduct a thorough investigation of relatives.
6. Children and parents need more frequent visitation when the children are in placement.