

GEORGIA DIVISION OF FAMILY & CHILDREN SERVICES

STATE FISCAL YEAR

2019

ANNUAL REPORT



SFY2019 Annual Report
Tom Rawlings | Director

VISION, MISSION AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Vision

Safe children. Strengthened families. Stronger Georgia.

Mission

We prioritize the safety of Georgia's children in the decisions we make and the actions we take. We partner with families on their path to independence and build stronger communities with caring, effective and responsive service.

Guiding principles

As the Division of Family & Children Services we

- Commit to the safety of our children in the decisions we make and the actions we take.
- Empower, strengthen and support families on their path to independence.
- Embrace a servant's heart with compassion.
- Provide caring, responsive and effective service.
- Listen and respond to our constituents, communities and each other.
- Collaborate with our communities to create systems of support.
- Develop a professional and efficient workforce that never stops learning and growing.



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LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

A deep understanding of both State of Hope and Just Culture drives our work



TOM C. RAWLINGS
DIRECTOR

Dear partner,

We submit herein the Annual Report of the Division of Family & Children Services (DFCS) for the State Fiscal 2019 (SFY 2019) that ended June 30, 2019.

This year marks the 84th anniversary of the state of Georgia providing what was initially referred to as Aid to Families with Dependent Children. As we look to the future, we are just as committed now as we were some 84 years ago to do what's right for the long-term interest of our constituents throughout the state.

This commemorative booklet details our accomplishments in SFY 2019 and highlights the very commitment to family and children that has characterized DFCS operations since its founding in 1835. We recognize the paramount importance of moving forward with our quest to become a **State of Hope** – where we harness the power of communities to take care of their own. We know that when families and communities have the resources needed to raise healthy, happy children, Georgia thrives.

With this goal in mind, we proudly announced 10 new State of Hope sites in SFY 2019. These sites received implementation support while nearly 100 individuals and organizations were invited to join the ecosystem. DFCS launched the State of Hope initiative in 2018 to encourage nonprofits, philanthropies, governments, businesses and other community members to build local safety nets in education, trauma-informed service, quality caregiving and economic self-sufficiency. We expect the State of Hope ecosystem to foster more innovation to amplify the impact the network has on families across Georgia.

Another key priority linked to our workforce goal is the creation of a **Just Culture**. The Just Culture model engenders accountability, equity and impartiality among stakeholders. Under this model, agencies are held accountable for the systems they design and for how they treat their staff. Our goal is to create a workplace where everyone has a voice and where each person feels that they can openly voice opinions without fear of retribution. Just Culture allows us to focus on child safety – and will allow us to strengthen and retain our workforce.

A deep understanding of both State of Hope and Just Culture drives our work. Even if it means restructuring programs, we understand that doing so will ultimately result in a stronger, more friendly and reliable workforce. These improvements will set the stage for vigorous growth in the future.

Workforce development has been one of the three pillars of the division's operational blueprint. Without a strong workforce, we cannot keep children safe or consistently implement our practice model. We will continue to prioritize workforce development by: (1) creating an organizational structure that empowers frontline staff while assuring accountability and quality – or in other words, "just culture"; (2) recruiting, hiring, retaining and mentoring good staff; and (3) encouraging and rewarding innovation.

On the innovation forefront, the division also launched the **Click Safe** system in collaboration with the Georgia Tech Research Institute. It is currently operating in Region 4 and we anticipate rolling it out statewide in the future.

"Panic buttons" for the Click Safe software application (app) were issued to child welfare investigators and case managers. This smartphone-based app was designed to give case managers a feeling of greater security and peace of mind when they encounter risky situations or confront unpredictable individuals. The development of Click Safe represents the cooperation between two state entities to create a unique field-safety device.

This year we also saw that our constituents in the southernmost part of our state were heavily hit with devastating storms that caused tremendous losses to families and businesses in the area. I am proud of the role our agency played in helping those communities restore what they lost. That is our role – to act as an arm of help and provide much needed resources in a moment of crisis.

While we have made great strides with both our internal and external partners, none of what we do truly matters if we are not keeping children safe and helping families get the benefits they need to move from a state of dependency to a state of self-sufficiency. The structure, culture and climate of our organization have as much of an effect on this work as policy and practice have on our ability to achieve those ultimate goals.

Thank you for the privilege to serve.

Sincerely,

Tom C. Rawlings
Director

STATE FISCAL YEAR 2019 HIGHLIGHTS

Creating a Just Culture of accountability and support in decision-making

A Just Culture is one that affords staff increased autonomy and accountability in decision-making, while also considering caseload sizes, staff experience, systemic issues and other factors. In 2019, Director Rawlings made the creation of a Just Culture at DFCS one of his top priorities. He encouraged the use of the Just Culture framework when reviewing cases and the importance of recognizing the difference between a mistake and an intentional disregard of policy and best practice.

Director Rawlings championed this cause in a variety of ways, including his weekly “**Tom’s Tuesday Talk**” video messages, presentations, speaking engagements and most importantly, in his one-on-one interactions with staff.



State of Hope network expands to include more than 100 sites statewide

More than 120 “big ideas” were submitted in the second round of applications for the State of Hope initiative.

Building on the success of the first round, the State of Hope advisory group looked for ways to support innovative and community-led efforts that focused on one or more of four “hope” areas:

- Education,
- Being/becoming trauma-informed,
- Quality caregiving
- Economic self-sufficiency

These priority areas have a significant impact on child safety, family resilience and community empowerment.

Of the 120 applications submitted, 100 were selected to as designated State of Hope sites, 10 were awarded funding and technical assistance, and a few others were deemed emerging sites, meaning that they have a great idea but require more time to build it out. All were invited to join the State of Hope ecosystem where they can access technical assistance, identify funding streams, build partnerships and connect with each other. DFCS, in partnership with Georgia State University’s Center for Professional Excellence (a part of the School of Social Work) and Georgia Family Connection Partnership, serve as the backbone organizations for the State of Hope.

Hundreds of child welfare professionals attend Georgia’s Child Welfare Conference

Several hundred child welfare professionals attended the second annual child protection and welfare conference, “The Summit.” Hosted by DFCS, the Office of the Child Advocate (OCA) and Georgia’s Supreme Court, this gathering united stakeholders from across Georgia to network, share best practices and announce new initiatives within their organizations.

The 2018 conference focused on the intersection between law enforcement, the courts and child welfare professionals.

Georgia is one of seven states selected for Workforce Excellence project

Georgia DFCS, in partnership with the University of Georgia and Georgia State University, is one of seven child welfare agencies selected as a “Workforce Excellence Site” by the Children’s Bureau and the National Child Welfare Workforce Institute (NCWWI).

The initiative will span four years and will be guided by NCWWI’s Workforce Development framework. During that period, the division will work to develop, implement and evaluate workforce development strategies designed to strengthen foundational workforce domains including:

- Recruitment and retention
- Supervision
- Organizational culture and climate
- Practice supports
- Work conditions and benefits
- Workload
- Education and professional development
- Inclusivity and racial equity
- Community engagement
- Leadership

Over the course of the project, MSW students will be recruited by the university partners and will receive full tuition stipends (funded by the Children’s Bureau) to either begin or continue working with DFCS upon graduation.



Family First legislation puts families first when placing children

The Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) became law in February 2018 and impacts range of existing child welfare programs including Titles IV-E and IV-B funding and eligibility requirements, the Interstate Compact for the Placement of Children, and the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program. The most notable change is to the Title IV-E funding that allows states to seek reimbursement for services to prevent the removal of child from home and into foster care. The legislation also limits the reimbursement for foster care maintenance payments for children living in congregate care settings.

STATE FISCAL YEAR 2019 HIGHLIGHTS

During SFY 2019, DFCS created a vision for how the FFPSA legislation can be used to support a comprehensive change within the child welfare system and established ways for FFPSA to:

- Safely prevent removals to foster care through targeted, effective, community-based prevention services
- Support extended family preservation to allow children to remain in their communities
- Ensure that children are placed in settings that meet individual needs and preserve family and community connections
- Invest in communities to provide adequate and effective service capacity statewide

DHS establishes the Interagency Workforce Opportunity Resource Committee (iWORC) to create a stronger workforce

The Department of Human Services (DHS) and DFCS participated in the collaborative iWORC to enhance the effectiveness of existing employment resources and connect customers to education and/or workforce-related services.



One of the main goals of iWORC is to improve employment and training service delivery across the State of Georgia through:

- Collaboration with like organizations to provide services to low income individuals and families
- Fostering internal partnerships to share lessons learned and best practices

Consulate initiative streamlines processes for reuniting families across borders

In January 2019, DFCS and the Office of the Child Advocate (OCA) established a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with various consulates that serve Georgia. This partnership originated with the development of an agreement with the Mexican Consulate to streamline and strengthen the processes for sharing information between the division and the consulates when attempting to reunite children with family members.

Director Rawlings met with representatives from the Latin American Consulates in November 2019 to discuss the project and has expanded the partnership since then.



This initiative also includes a partnership with community stakeholders and subject matter experts in the development of policy and training for DFCS staff related to working with immigrant and refugee families.

Leading up to the MOU, Director Rawlings made reunification involving children impacted by immigration a top priority. Director Rawlings is fluent in Spanish and has worked extensively on international child welfare issues. In late 2018, DFCS successfully negotiated the reunification of a deported Honduran mother with her four children after being separated from them for more than a year.

Click Safe pilot to launch statewide in 2020

The Click Safe System pilot wrapped up in 2019 in Northwest Georgia and will expand statewide by the third quarter of 2020.

Click Safe is a smartphone application and panic button fob that discretely notifies emergency personnel of the location of front-line case managers who need help.

DFCS helps Hurricane Michael victims

To aid thousands of residents in South Georgia who were impacted by Hurricane Michael, the DFCS Office of Family Independence quickly took action to help ensure that residents had access to food while rebuilding. Residents were given access to their food stamp (SNAP) benefits early so that they could stock up on groceries ahead of the storm.

After it hit, additional measures were put in place to allow replacement benefits to cover the loss of food due to power outages. The division worked with the USDA to allow SNAP recipients in affected counties to purchase “hot” or prepared food using their benefits, which is typically not allowed under the program. The division also ran a Disaster Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (D-SNAP) in 20 counties that were federally approved to receive relief. D-SNAP is an assistance program that provides relief to low-income families. 350 Georgia residents received assistance through D-SNAP.



“I am proud of the role our agency played in helping those communities restore what they lost.”

— Tom C. Rawlings, Director

THE DIVISION'S 2019 ACCOMPLISHMENTS



1,429 children adopted in SFY 2019

Last year, a generous couple in Northeast Georgia gave a sibling group of six children a forever home.

The children entered foster care in June 2017, and despite multiple efforts to find a placement that could foster all the siblings, it looked likely that they would have to be separated and placed in multiple foster homes.

A local foster family, the Whidbys, stepped forward and volunteered to care for them. However, the Whidbys had already adopted several children, and taking in six more would put them over the state's limit for a single family. Local staff got busy and obtained a waiver that allowed the brothers and sisters to stay together.

The Whidbys opened their home to the six young children, their two older siblings and their mother so that the entire family could stay connected. The six younger children were adopted by the Whidby family in December 2019.



787 SNAP recipients participated in the SNAPWorks program

Anton came to First Step Staffing in the summer of 2019. He was homeless and the primary caretaker of his six-year-old daughter. Due to his background, Anton was unable to secure permanent employment or housing, even though he had studied to receive his bachelor's degree in finance.

As a single father, finding temporary housing was an even greater challenge. In addition to housing stability for him and his daughter, Anton wanted to find an opportunity for a career – not just a job – where he could put his training and professional experience to good use.

Anton was immediately offered a part-time position at First Step and is working towards future full-time employment. First Step's staff was able to connect him to a housing resource, and now Anton and his daughter are living in their own apartment.

Anton said, "My SNAP benefits allowed me to provide food for my daughter while I wait for the chance to advance in my career. I am now training to be a Peer Support Counselor with First Step. Thanks to the DFCS SNAP program, I am able to work toward self-sufficiency while their supportive services assist me in giving my daughter an overall better life!" Anton is an example of a positive, generational change when opportunity, determination and supportive services are put in place.

10,995 children avoided foster care through Safe at Home initiative

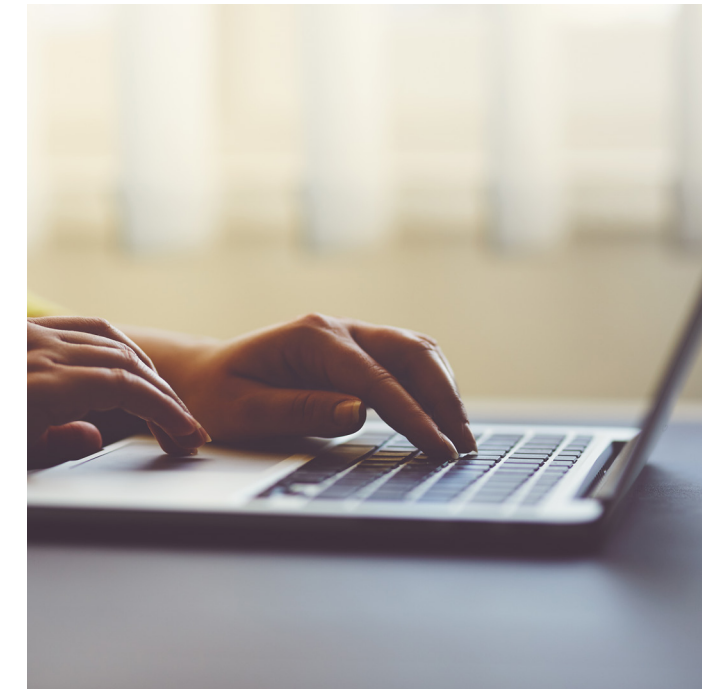
This initiative is centered on collaboratively strengthening and reinforcing best practice strategies that both increase the effectiveness of protecting children within their own homes and streamline the time it takes to reunify families when the conditions for returning a child home are met.

From SNAP recipient to DFCS employee

Alma relocated to Georgia from Chicago in the summer of 2019 hoping to reinvent herself. She applied for SNAP benefits while seeking employment and was classified as an Able-Bodied Adult Without Dependents.

She applied for many jobs, including one with DFCS, as she had recently graduated with honors from Chicago State University. She was ultimately hired by DFCS, which allowed her to no longer need food assistance. When asked about her new career with the division, she said, "This is my dream job! I love helping people and now I get to do that every day. It is a newfound freedom to be able to support myself without the help of a partner or public aid."

Alma continued, "if I can do it, anyone can. I hope my story encourages someone to press on to achieve their goals."



"This is my dream job! I love helping people and now I get to do that every day."

— Alma , DFCS employee

2019 BY THE NUMBERS

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)



9,887
total TANF cases



1,522
TANF cases including an adult required to participate with the work requirement



8,365
TANF cases that are child only cases



\$257
average monthly allotment per household

Medicaid



831,738
average number of families with medical coverage assistance



542,489
average number of individuals with medical coverage assistance

Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program



191,435
households served

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)



1,458,118
average number of individuals who received SNAP assistance



375,411
average number of household who received SNAP assistance



\$269
average monthly benefit for SNAP households

Child Protective Services

126,364
reports investigated by Child Protective Services

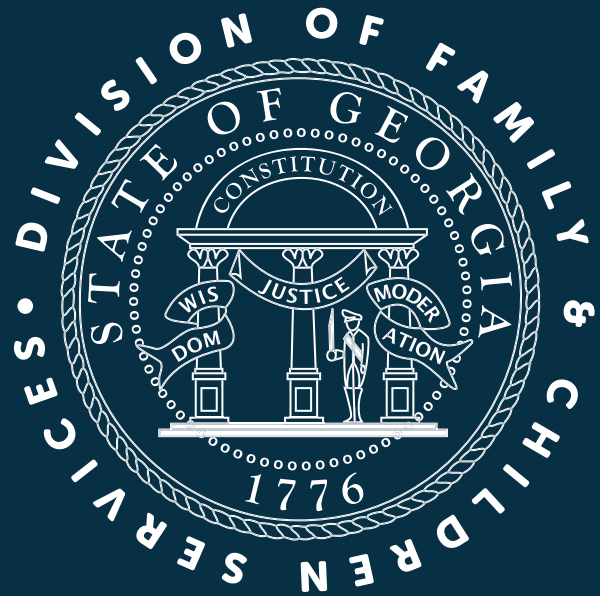
4,273
average number of family preservation cases each month

5,003
average number of family support cases each month

4,373
average number of children available for adoption each month

13,779
average number of children in foster care each month

1,429
children available for adoption in SFY 2019 found a permanent home



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