



South Carolina Department of
**CHILDREN'S
ADVOCACY**
Advocacy. Accountability. Service.

MONTHLY UPDATE

Department of Children's Advocacy Monthly Update
Connecting with and updating our community

A Message from the State Child Advocate

The Department of Children's Advocacy has developed and is promoting a broad vision for reform in South Carolina:

- Joint trainings and meetings to promote access and awareness of an array of services that allow children to safely remain in their homes and communities or in the least restrictive, most family-like setting based upon their needs;
- Coordination of services and efforts for a system of care grounded in urgency, empathy and sustainability;
- Continued collaboration with child welfare partners regarding communication, service coordination and planning strategies to improve the timeliness of court hearings and outcomes for children.



This broad vision is steeped in collaboration. This month, I am sharing some of the meaningful opportunities we have created to work with others. Through collaboration, we are strengthening interagency communication, broadening awareness and resource-sharing, promoting life-saving care, and celebrating each other. Thank you for your support and collaboration.

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Strengthening Interagency Communication

The first-of-its-kind Joint Regional Collaboration and Education Sessions were held this month for the Pee Dee and Low Country regions. What began as conversations regarding a mutual desire to improve interagency communication grew into a joint effort among DSS, Cass Elias McCarter Guardian ad Litem Program, Richland County CASA and Foster Care Review Board to provide unique training sessions to highlight the strengths of collaboration for staff and volunteers.

Cass Elias McCarter Guardian ad Litem Director LaDara Josey, Foster Care Review Board Director Lisa Armstrong, Richland County CASA Director Dante Roberts, DSS State Director Mike Leach, and DCA Director and State Child Advocate Amanda Whittle are participating in four regional meetings. Director Leach shared his overwhelming sense of gratitude for the work of his staff and for agency partners and challenged everyone to be cognizant of racial bias, poverty versus neglect, and equal access to ensure that no child is unsafe, lacking or made to feel less than. He challenged the participants to collaborate, because we are “better together.”

The sessions also included panel discussions which were facilitated by DSS, FCRB and GAL staff from the respective regions. From DCA, this included Corlette Minor and Amanda Blackmon with FCRB; Scott Wagner, Melissa Powell, Christy Vinson and Paula Lance with the GAL Program; and volunteer Guardians ad Litem Mr. and Mrs. Flannery from the Pee Dee Region. The collaborative sessions were not only relevant and informative but also engaging and thought-provoking. Staff and volunteers with DSS, GAL Program and FCRB were invited to attend the first two sessions. Approximately 200 people participated in the Pee Dee and Low Country sessions, and two additional sessions are scheduled for the Upstate and Midlands regions in April.



Broadening Awareness and Resource-sharing



DCA Director Amanda Whittle was a recent guest expert at Ask the Experts, a virtual event sponsored by Children's Trust of South Carolina. Director Whittle shared, "I am excited about transforming our system to a child and family well-being system that improves outcomes and improves resiliency for children and families," she said. "It's important to strengthen families. It's important to strengthen communities. It's important to try to remove the stigma that's associated with folks who just need help." Whittle cited the website created by Children's Trust last

year, [scParents.org](https://scparents.org), as a valuable source of information when parents reach out for updated, accurate details about resources for families in their local communities. The website aims to destigmatize asking for help. To read the full article concerning the event, visit <https://scchildren.org/whittle-leads-new-agency-in-collaborative-work-on-improving-child-well-being/>.

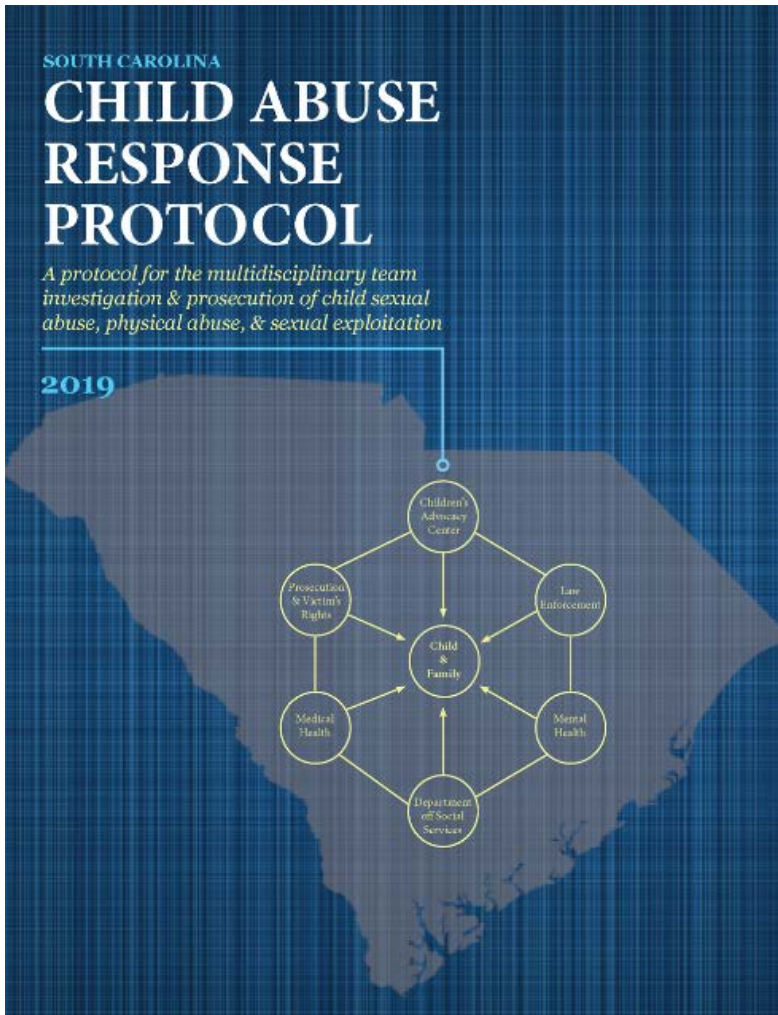
did you know?

SCParents.org

In October of 2020, Children's Trust launched a website to assist South Carolina parents, and that website has grown over the past four months as new community-based services have been added. The website provides statewide resources for families searching for local services and support. Anyone can visit the website and enter a South Carolina zip code to find local services and supports within that community. The website is powered by a national resource network called Aunt Bertha, which makes it easier for people seeking help to find social services in their community. Organizations can register their information in the site by visiting search.scparents.org and clicking "Claim a Program." This will give community-based organizations the ability to update their services and contact information.



Coordinating Responses to Child Abuse



Director Whittle testified before the Senate Family and Veterans Services Subcommittee on March 9, 2021 regarding S. 229 which would ratify the Child Abuse Response Protocol. S.229 supplements existing law concerning use of Children’s Advocacy Centers, or “CACs.” CACs are designed to reduce trauma to children by creating a coordinated response that prevents or reduces repeated interviews. In creating the Child Abuse Response Protocol, the Children’s Justice Act Task Force sought and encouraged input from child abuse responders. CACs provide a forum for multi-disciplinary teams (MDTs) to identify resources for the children and families and to coordinate the work of each MDT participant. MDTs consist of case-specific representatives from law enforcement, the child’s school, the child’s Guardian ad Litem, the Solicitor, DSS Attorney, Alcohol and Other Drug Services, and Mental Health. S.229 contemplates that the Department of Children’s Advocacy would serve as the home for the protocol and as the agency to convene the first meeting and provide support. Director Whittle thanked the Senate subcommittee for their consideration of S.229, “S.229 contemplates consistent, coordinated access to services and

S. 229 (Child Abuse Response Protocol) is sponsored by Senators Shealy, McLeod, Hutto, Jackson, McElveen and Matthews, and there is a companion bill in the House, H. 3209, which is sponsored by Representatives Bernstein, Collins, Murphy, Felder, Cobb-Hunter and Henegan. S. 229 was moved favorably out of committee this week, and H.3209 is in committee

processes for abused and neglected children who intersect with law enforcement and DSS. It provides a child-focused, trauma-informed and coordinated approach to investigating, prosecuting and treating certain types of child abuse.”



Promoting Life-Saving Care



No matter how challenging the times, the S.C. Department of Mental Health (DMH) and the South Carolina Department of Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse Services (DAODAS) have teamed up to remind us that we are not alone in South Carolina. DMH and DAODAS are offering a safe, easy and free service that allows you to anonymously take a Self-Check Questionnaire and connect with a professional counselor who can offer guidance, support, and resources to help connect you with mental health and addiction services. They are ready to help if you are overwhelmed by COVID-19 challenges, feeling overly stressed or anxious, coping with a natural disaster, struggling with addiction, feeling depressed and don't know where to turn. Visit <https://hope.connectsyou.org/> to submit a questionnaire today.

While I breathe, I hope

Through an invitation by the Department of Mental Health's Office of Suicide Prevention, DCA Deputy Director Kayla Capps completed the five-day Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training for Trainers (ASIST T4T) to enable her to teach the two-day ASIST workshop and bring life-saving intervention skills to her own organization and other communities. She also completed safeTALK to complement the suicide prevention skills learned in ASIST. By carrying out the Tell, Ask, Listen and KeepSafe (TALK) steps taught in safeTALK, Deputy Capps is equipped to offer potentially life-saving assistance to someone experiencing thoughts of suicide.

The Committee on Children's 2019 Data Reference Book indicates that suicide was the #1 cause of death among children ages 10 to 14 and #2 cause of death among children ages 15 to 17 in South Carolina in 2017.

(JCLCC 2019 Data Book, childlaw.sc.edu)

Learn more about DMH's Office of Suicide Prevention here: <http://osp.scdmh.org/>



Effecting Positive Change



The Department of Children’s Advocacy has celebrated Social Work Month 2021 by spotlighting our social workers. March is designated as Social Work Month across the nation, and Governor Henry McMaster proclaimed March as Social Work Month in South Carolina. Governor McMaster’s proclamation adopts the national 2021 theme Social Workers Are Essential and recognizes that “social workers serve, advocate for, and help empower millions of Americans each day.” Social workers are essential to community well-being. Social workers are trained to help people address personal and systemic barriers to optimal living. They are employed to effect positive change with individuals, families, groups and entire communities. Social Work Month is a time to celebrate the great profession of social work, and **the Department of Children’s Advocacy recognizes and thanks our agency’s social workers who are making a difference for children and families in our state:** Melissa Burroughs and Haley Kiser (Investigations Unit); Stephanie Spink, Chloe Taylor and Coretta Bush-Etheredge (Foster Care Review Board); Kathy Bryant, Anna Roberts, Teresa Rhodes and Dorisenica Mack-Jones, Tamera Nichols, LaSaundra Barron, Shirley Floyd, and Angela Chandler (Continuum Of Care); Victoria Gaut, Rhonda Blanding, Celestine Cooper, Lenzene Rufus, Barbara Ann Woodbury, Ashley Smith, Quinte Blassingame, and Tricia Gravel (Guardian ad Litem Program).



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Growing a Community Where Children Thrive