



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 (DCA) recognizes the need to gather and share resource information regarding the help that is available in South Carolina for children and families.

**The DCA launched its online Resource Library this month with a goal of reducing incidences of abuse, neglect and out-of-home placement of children by increasing access and awareness to the services available through state agencies.**

I appreciate the dedicated work of Kayla Capps (Deputy Child Advocate of Investigations); Melissa Fowler (Investigations Unit Investigator); Hayley Bolin-Salley (Investigations Unit Investigator); Haley Kiser (Spring 2021 Extern from the University of South Carolina School of Law); and Keywa Thomas (DCA's former Director of Communications) who helped bring this vision to fruition. We hope you will use and share DCA's comprehensive resource library to link people to reliable and relevant information about services provided by state agencies.

**The Resource Library is available at our website or [here](#)**



~Amanda F. Whittle, J.D., CWLS  
 Director and State Child Advocate

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**INTERAGENCY  
 COLLABORATION**

**GOVERNOR MCMASTER  
 THANKS DEPARTMENT OF  
 CHILDREN'S ADVOCACY**

## Foster Care Review Board Welcomes New Board Members During National Foster Care Month

May is National Foster Care Month. During the month of May, the Foster Care Review Board (FCRB) provided orientation for six new Board members. The Department of Children's Advocacy welcomes:

- Patricia Troutman, *Horry County FCRB*
- Heather Witt, *Spartanburg County FCRB*
- Tanya Camunus, *Greenville County FCRB*
- Richard Rasmussen, *Sumter County FCRB*
- Linda Holt, *Oconee County FCRB*
- Christy Coffee, *Anderson County FCRB*



FCRB Board Members are appointed for four-year terms by the Governor upon the recommendation of local legislative delegations. The FCRB reviews the cases of foster care children to determine what efforts have been made to establish a permanent home for the child. Local review boards submit a written report with recommendations to the court concerning each case, and that report is to be addressed by the court at the child's next permanency planning hearing. In 2019, the Foster Care Review Board conducted 8,048 foster care reviews. For more information about the Foster Care Review Board, click [here](#). For more information about National Foster Care Month, click [here](#).

### The S.C. Heart Gallery Features South Carolina Foster Children



#### Who Are Waiting on Their Forever Homes

*The children pictured below are interested in being adopted.*

*Do you have room in your heart and home for adoption?*



Nate was born in 2003. To learn more about Nate, click [here](#).



Tre'Shaun was born in 2005. To learn more about Tre'Shaun, click [here](#).



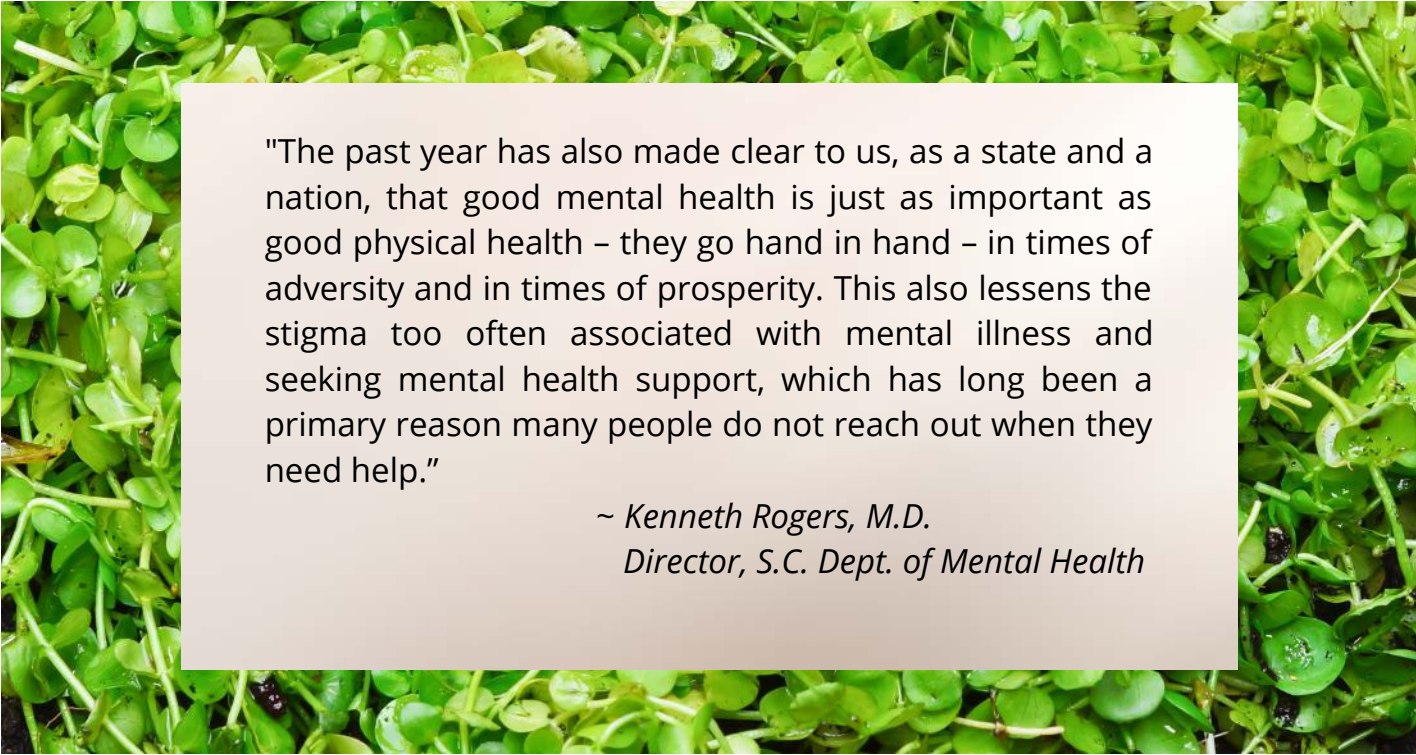
Roneisha and Ariana S. were born in 2005 and 2006. To learn more about Roneisha and Ariana, click [here](#).

## SCDMH Leads the Way for Mental Health Awareness Month



The South Carolina Department of Mental Health (SCDMH)'s mission is to support the recovery of people with mental illnesses, giving priority to adults with serious and persistent mental illness and children and adolescents with serious emotional disturbances. The Agency serves approximately 100,000 people each year, approximately 30,000 of whom are children and adolescents.

As South Carolina's public mental health system, the SCDMH provides outpatient mental health services through a network of 16 community mental health centers and associated clinics, serving all 46 counties, and psychiatric hospital services via three State hospitals, including one for substance abuse treatment. In addition to mental health services, the Agency provides long-term care services in one community nursing care center and three State veterans' nursing homes. (Click here for S.C. Dept. of Mental Health's website)



"The past year has also made clear to us, as a state and a nation, that good mental health is just as important as good physical health – they go hand in hand – in times of adversity and in times of prosperity. This also lessens the stigma too often associated with mental illness and seeking mental health support, which has long been a primary reason many people do not reach out when they need help."

~ *Kenneth Rogers, M.D.*  
*Director, S.C. Dept. of Mental Health*

## DCA Participates in 4th Annual South Carolina Infant Mental Health Association (SCIMHA) Conference



**When we think about mental health awareness, we may not think about infants. We may think that infants are too young to be affected by their surroundings, but research indicates that infants' surroundings and experiences do affect their mental health into adulthood.**

The Department of Children's Advocacy participated in a panel discussion this month during South Carolina Infant Mental Health Association (SCIMHA)'S 4th Annual Conference concerning Safe Babies Courts. The panel consisted of Department of Social Services Spartanburg County Director Josie Jones; DSS/DAODAS liaison Michelle Cunningham; Florida Magistrate Kimber Strawbridge; and Department of Children's Advocacy Director and State Child Advocate Amanda Whittle and was facilitated by the Safe Babies Court State Coordinator. Due to a successful grant submission by SCIMHA, Safe Babies Courts are being piloted in three South Carolina counties (Richland, Laurens and Spartanburg) with an intention to expand Safe Babies Courts throughout the state.

**“Infants and young children are most vulnerable to child abuse and neglect, with more than one-quarter (28.5%) of victims of maltreatment under age three.”**

In an [article published December of 2019](#), Casey Family Programs reported, “Infants and young children are most vulnerable to child abuse and neglect, with more than one-quarter (28.5%) of victims of maltreatment under age three. These same children frequently experience further trauma as a result of their family's involvement in the child welfare system, which at worst can include lengthy separations from their families and multiple placements. Research and experience have shown that separating children from their families creates lasting trauma, usually lifelong. Community-based and universal family supports can help keep children safe and families together, and ultimately prevent the need for court involvement.” Safe Babies Courts have improved outcomes regarding safety, time to permanency, preserved family relationships, placement stability, service delivery, cost savings and racial equity.

## DCA Participates in Conference (continued from previous page)



During this month's panel discussion, Judge Strawbridge shared that there are approximately 20 Safe Babies Court (SBC) sites in Florida now, and there were 374 active children involved in the SBC at the end of 2020. She reflected that, in Florida, 87% of removals are children under the age of three with a large percentage of the removals due to substance abuse with secondary reasons of neglect or domestic violence. She said none of the families who participated in the SBC in her jurisdiction returned to the court system last year. She shared that Florida is prevention-oriented and promotes protective factors for families, but getting to this point took a great deal of time and dedication.

**Judge Strawbridge described the implementation and expansion of Safe Babies Courts in Florida as being “six years of transformative work” which were slow but worth it!**

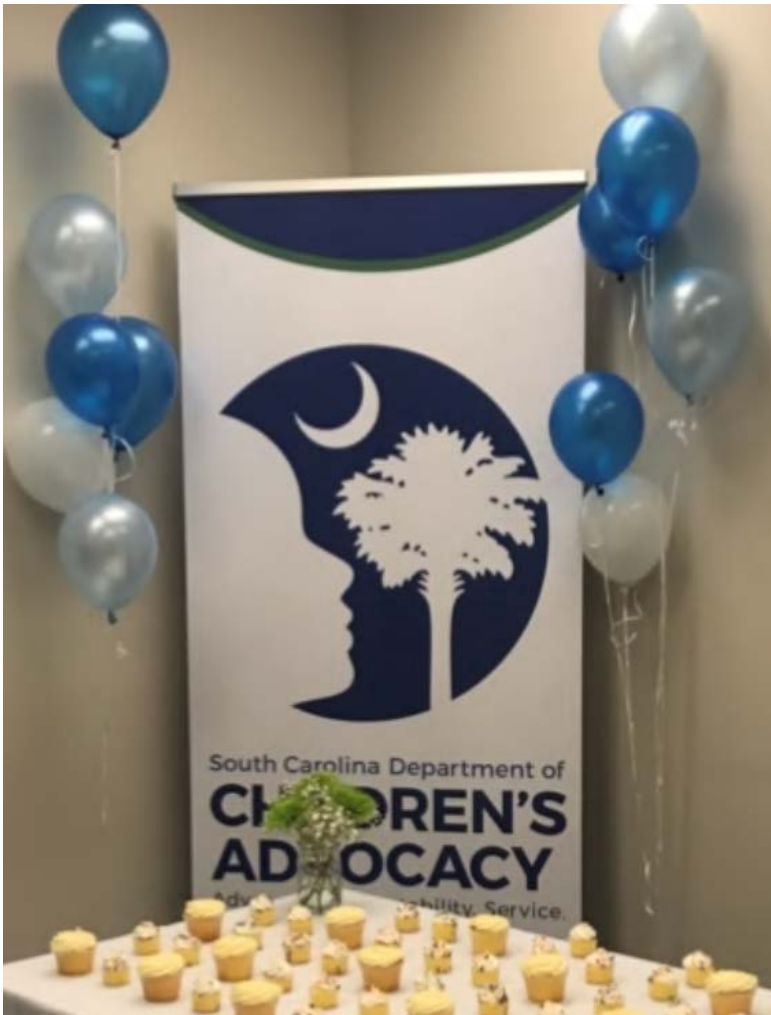
Spartanburg, Laurens and Richland counties were selected as sites for this grant based upon the availability and readiness of community partners, including legal and judiciary partners, with a commitment to innovative solutions to improve child welfare and court processes. We are grateful for the opportunity to bring more resources to our state for reducing trauma for children and strengthening families and communities. Learn more about Safe Babies Courts [here](#).



“The core components are key ingredients to produce the environment and tools for systemic change. But we call ourselves an approach, not a model, because we know that policy, practice, and statutes are different in every state. The same way we meet parents where they are, we meet each system where it is, and help develop something that works for the community.”

- DARNESHIA BELL, TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE SPECIALIST, QIC-ITCT PROJECT, ZERO TO THREE

## DCA Recognizes Employees for State Service Milestones



DCA hosted a reception in its converted mail room.

During a virtual celebration on May 21, 2021, the Department of Children's Advocacy (DCA) recognized employees who achieved state service milestones:

### Five-Year Service Award Recipients:

- Keywa Thomas, Director of Communications
- Ja'Nae Middleton, Continuum of Care
- Joy Hansen, Continuum of Care
- Kate Nelson, Continuum of Care
- Leslie Johnson, Continuum of Care
- Shenita Hamilton, Foster Care Review Board
- Alexis Rodgers, Guardian ad Litem Program
- Darius Brown, Guardian ad Litem Program
- Sarah Schultz, Guardian ad Litem Program
- Christine South, Guardian ad Litem Program
- Margaret Anna Ponds, Guardian ad Litem Program
- Samantha Furr, Guardian ad Litem Program

### 10-year Service Award Recipients:

- Elizabeth Bryant, Guardian ad Litem Program
- Kimberly Ransom-Adams, Continuum of Care

### 20-Year Service Award Recipient:

- Estelle Stevenson, Guardian ad Litem Program

## State Office Staff Enjoyed a Reception Following Friday's Ceremony



*Heart Gallery Staff:*  
Latrice Williams and Millie Qualls



*Foster Care Review Board Staff Members:*  
Coretta Bush-Etheredge, Jessica Haygood,  
Corlette Minor, Chloe Taylor, Shenita Hamilton,  
Ashlee Patterson, Bria Parks



*Guardian ad Litem Staff Member:*  
Erna Jacobs

## DCA Shares Agency Mission and Highlights at Family Connection SC Conference

The Department of Children's Advocacy (DCA) participated in Family Connection South Carolina's Hopes and Dreams Conference. During a 90 minute afternoon session on May 24, 2021, DCA Director and State Child Advocate Amanda Whittle provided information about Continuum of Care, Foster Care Review Board, Heart Gallery, Cass Elias McCarter Guardian ad Litem Program and DCA's Investigations Unit to a group of almost 200 people. **Thank you to Family Connection SC for hosting this event and allowing free registration and CEU credits. Thank you to Jeannette Atchley (Continuum of Care), Shannon Wilder (Guardian ad Litem Program), Kayla Capps (Deputy Child Advocate of Investigations) and Petra Clay-Jones (Deputy Child Advocate of Program Operations) who monitored the chat box and provided information to conference attendees about our agency.**



## Agencies Plan Safe Sleep Campaign to Prevent Infant Deaths

The Department of Children's Advocacy has been collaborating with SCDSS, DAODAS, Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC), Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and other agencies and organizations to prevent sleep-related infant deaths - including plans for a Safe Sleep Summit and statewide campaign in the coming months. "Unintentional suffocation is the leading cause of injury death among infants less than one year of age in the United States with 82% being attributable to accidental suffocation and strangulation in bed. Understanding the circumstances surrounding these deaths may inform prevention strategies." Data source information is located [here](#). Click [here](#) to see SCDHEC's safe sleep video.

## DAODAS Launches Embrace Recovery!

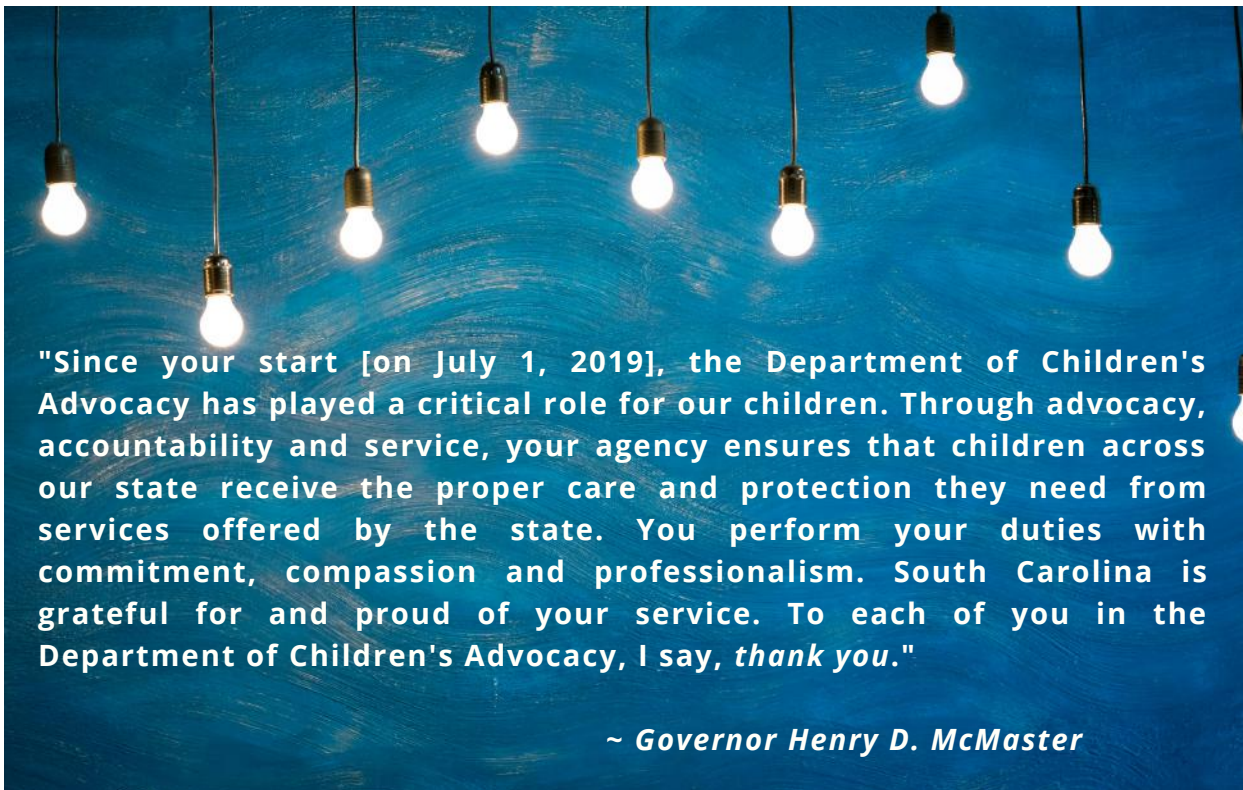
Director Whittle was proud to stand with Department of Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse Services (DAODAS) Director Sara Goldsby, Governor Henry McMaster, South Carolina Law Enforcement Division (SLED) Chief Mark Keel, Embrace Recovery's Gregory Jacobs, and others from all over the state for Embrace Recovery SC's kickoff to promote and support alcohol and substance abuse/addiction recovery in South Carolina. **Learn more [here](#).**



## Governor Henry McMaster Thanks Department of Children's Advocacy



During a virtual employee celebration ceremony on Friday, May 21, 2021, Department of Children's Advocacy staff received a prerecorded message of recognition and support from Governor Henry D. McMaster. In addition to family members of Estelle Stevenson who was recognized for 20 years of state service, approximately 100 DCA employees attended the event by Webex. In his message, Governor McMaster thanked South Carolina state employees and specifically recognized the Department of Children's Advocacy. The S.C. Department of Children's Advocacy appreciates Governor McMaster's encouraging message for our staff and for all state employees.



"Since your start [on July 1, 2019], the Department of Children's Advocacy has played a critical role for our children. Through advocacy, accountability and service, your agency ensures that children across our state receive the proper care and protection they need from services offered by the state. You perform your duties with commitment, compassion and professionalism. South Carolina is grateful for and proud of your service. To each of you in the Department of Children's Advocacy, I say, *thank you.*"

~ *Governor Henry D. McMaster*



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