



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



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

It is my pleasure to share April 2022 highlights with you.

Governor Henry McMaster proclaimed April 2022 as Child Abuse Prevention Month and hosted a press conference on April 7, 2022. When we raise awareness about protective factors and provide services that promote healthy minds and bodies for children and their families, we can all make a difference in preventing child abuse

On April 5, 2022, Attorney General Alan Wilson hosted a press conference for Children's Advocacy Centers (CAC) Day. CACs reduce trauma to children by providing a child-friendly setting where children can receive services and by providing a neutral forum for agencies to come together to engage in a coordinated and trauma-informed response to child abuse.

In this edition, we spotlight Cindy Dowdy who is retiring after working 30 years with the Guardian ad Litem Program. Volunteer Week was April 17-23, 2022 was, and we highlighted several of the almost 2000 individuals who serve volunteers with our agency.

The 124th General Assembly will come to a close in May, and our state legislators are continuing to consider legislative issues including the budget. We are grateful for the Legislature's support for DCA's FY23 budget requests, and we join other child advocates in supporting sustainable funding for a state-operated Psychiatric Residential Treatment Facility (PRTF) as discussed in previous updates as well as for 988.

Please feel free to reach out to me if you have any questions or recommendations for improving outcomes for children. Thank you for your support and interest in our work.

Sincerely,
 Amanda F. Whittle
 State Child Advocate and Agency Director



Advocacy | Accountability | Service

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988

Child Abuse Prevention Month



Photo source: WACH.com

Governor Henry McMaster proclaimed April as Child Abuse Prevention Month and hosted a press conference on April 7, 2022.

The press conference was attended by Governor McMaster, First Lady Peggy McMaster, Representative Beth Bernstein, Children's Trust of SC, the Department of Social Services, the Department of Children's Advocacy, Children's Law Center, S.C. Network of Children's Advocacy Centers, and other child advocates from across the state.



In addition to Governor McMaster, remarks were provided by Sue Williams (CEO of Children's Trust SC), Mike Leach (Director, the Department of Social Services, and Amanda Whittle (State Child Advocate and Director of the Department of Children's Advocacy).

Read the press release [here](#).

View the press conference at these sites:

<https://www.wistv.com/2022/04/07/gov-mcmaster-declares-april-child-abuse-prevention-month/>

<https://www.abccolumbia.com/2022/04/07/cchild-abuse-and-neglect-sc-governor-joins-state-agencies-and-organizations-to-recognize-growing-issue/>

<https://wach.com/news/local/gov-mcmaster-to-declare-april-child-abuse-prevention-month>



Retirement Congratulations: Cindy Dowdy



Cindy Dowdy

Congratulations to Cindy Dowdy who will be retiring in May after 30 years of service with the Cass Elias McCarter Guardian ad Litem Program!

Cindy shared, "When I began working with the Guardian ad Litem Program in October 1991, I had no idea what the GAL Program was about. Little did I know how much I was about to learn. Through the past thirty years, I have met some of the most remarkable people I have ever known. Volunteers who, without even a dime of pay, give so freely of their time and heart. Watching...and learning from this special group of people, I became a stronger voice for them, as well as for myself. I know I am a better person today because of the GAL Program. It has been an honor to work for this program, the GAL staff and the volunteers I have met along the way. I have always said if I could make everyone see this program through my eyes, everyone would want to be a volunteer GAL"

"To laugh often and much; to win the respect of intelligent people and the affection of children, to leave the world a better place, to know even one life has breathed easier because you have lived, this is to have succeeded."

— Ralph Waldo Emerson

"I will now begin the next chapter of my life. I plan to spend days in my front porch swing watching blue birds. I plan to begin the endless job of counting the sand on the beach. And I plan to dance and watch my grandchildren grow. Every night I will thank God for all the opportunities this wonderful program has given me. I have succeeded."



Children's Advocacy Centers Day



Attorney General Alan Wilson hosted a press conference for Children's Advocacy Centers Day on April 5, 2022.

In addition to Governor McMaster, remarks were provided by Bett Williams of Children's Trust SC, Tom Knapp of the S.C. Network of Children's Advocacy Centers, Shauna Galloway-Williams of the Julie Valentine Center, Karen Bryant of the Department of Social Services, and Amanda Whittle (State Child Advocate and Director of the Department of Children's Advocacy).



The press conference was attended by Attorney General Wilson, S.C. Network of Children's Advocacy Centers; Children's Trust of SC, the Department of Social Services, the Department of Children's Advocacy, Children's Law Center, and other child advocates from across the state.

Child Advocacy Centers (CACs) reduce trauma to children by providing a child-friendly setting where children can receive services and by providing a neutral forum for agencies to come together to engage in a coordinated and trauma-informed response to child abuse.



Child Abuse Prevention Month



Staff with the Department of Children's Advocacy were blue to raise awareness regarding Child Abuse Prevention Month.

The Division of Foster Care Review commemorated Child Abuse Prevention Month with originally designed HOPE T-shirts. The message illustrates FCRD's unwavering HOPE that together we can strengthen families to prevent child abuse and neglect.



The shirts were designed by Christina Grant, and the design also reflects the state motto: Dum Spiro Spero | While I Breathe, I Hope.



The Charleston office of the Cass Elias McCarter Guardian ad Litem Program posed together for a photo during April's Child Abuse Prevention Month. Thank you to Scott Wagner with the Charleston office for taking and submitting photos to raise awareness during Child Abuse Prevention month.

Region B of the Department of Children's Advocacy's Continuum of Care division gathered for a photo together after hearing a presentation by Tawanda Rouse regarding child abuse prevention.



Volunteer Appreciation Week

We are highlighting our child advocates
DURING
VOLUNTEER WEEK



Thank you to Kelly Hoy
who has served as a volunteer Guardian ad Litem in Darlington County for 7 years

200

Our staff shared, "Kelly has a deep well of concern for children she is assigned to. She never fails to dedicate herself completely to her cases. Her desire to put the children's best interest at the forefront is evident by her actions and words. Our staff is blessed to have her experience and devotion working in conjunction with our office. Kelly has been an advocate for over 200 children during her years of service."

Thank you!

Governor Henry McMaster proclaimed April 17-23 as Volunteer Week.



We are highlighting our child advocates
DURING
VOLUNTEER WEEK



Thank you to the photographers
who volunteered for the 2022 Heart Gallery Photo Shoots!

Photographers for the Columbia, SC Photo Shoot:
Kris Copeland
Jamal Dewalt
Michelle Tate
Coreen Williams

Photographers for the Greenville, SC Photo Shoot:
Amber Gillum
Christina Grant

These photographers worked tirelessly for 32 children and youth who are awaiting adoption.

Thank you!

The Department of Children's Advocacy highlighted volunteers on social media to recognize and thank the almost 2000 volunteers who work with us as Board members on the Foster Care Review Board, as volunteer Guardians ad Litem or as volunteer photographers for the S.C. Heart Gallery photo shoots.

We are highlighting child advocates
DURING
VOLUNTEER WEEK



Thank you to Tony Soignoli
who has served as a Volunteer Guardian ad Litem in Anderson County for 12 years

Our staff shared, "Tony has dedicated over a decade of his time as a volunteer with the agency. He is always smiling, will go the extra mile to make sure his children's voices are heard, and is always willing to lend a hand." Tony shared, "I always go back to my first case and remember the sadness in the child's eyes" Staff added, "Tony has been with us for so many years and his dedication never wavered."

Thank you!

We encourage you to follow us on Facebook and Twitter to read more of our posts about the incredible volunteers who work with us to improve outcomes for children.



Thank you to Volunteer Guardians ad Litem

Thank you to Richard and Nancy Corbin

who will retire as Guardians ad Litem in
May 2022 after serving as volunteer
Guardians ad Litem in Berkeley County for 15 years.



Mr. and Mrs. Corbin became volunteer Guardians ad Litem more than 15 years ago. They initially discussed the program in the late 1980s when Charleston County opened the first program in the area. At the time, their work schedules did not permit their participation, but once they retired in 2004, it became a possibility. The Corbins signed up for the training as a couple, and both went through the training so they could work as a team. Mr. and Mrs. Corbin shared, "The sadness, anger, frustration and joy we have felt has made this such a rewarding effort. Receiving handmade Christmas cards, a shell or stone, drawings and letters from the children remind us how fragile their young lives are and hopefully that we made a difference in their later lives."

Our staff shared, "Mr. and Mrs. Corbin have been loyal and dedicated GALs since they started with the program. They develop strong bonds with the children on their caseloads, and they have been amazing advocates throughout their cases. Mr. and Mrs. Corbin will be retiring from the GAL program in May, and they will be dearly missed!"

Thank You!

S.C. Heart Gallery Photo Shoot



The S.C. Heart Gallery held two photo shoots during April in Greenville and Richland Counties.

32 children ❤️

Foster Care Review Division staff, Foster Care Review Board members, and volunteer photographers worked tirelessly to facilitate biographies and professional-quality photographs of 32 children and youth who are awaiting adoption.

Please visit the [Heart Gallery's website](http://www.sheartgallery.org) to learn more.



SOUTH CAROLINA DIVISION OF
FOSTER CARE
REVIEW



Guardian ad Litem Program Welcomes Program Coordinator



The Cass Elias McCarter Guardian ad Litem Program welcomes Jennifer Fenters as the Program Coordinator in the Chesterfield County office.



Jennifer is a Chesterfield County native. She is a 2007 alumni of Francis Marion University, where she majored in Political Science with a concentration in Criminal Justice. She comes to the GAL program from DSS with 10 years of experience in the legal department assigned to the child and adult abuse and neglect division. Jennifer is married to her high school sweetheart and they have three children. In her free time, Jennifer enjoys fishing.

Continuum of Care Region B Celebrates Youth's Story



During a discharge staffing with Wrap Team Lead Joy Hansen, Joy shared a story about a youth with whom she has been working and his increased connection to his community because wraparound was in his life.



SOUTH CAROLINA continuum of care

Youth has a talent for dressing up like Elvis and singing his songs while playing the guitar. Joy connected him with a local nursing home, and, as a result, he began performing on Friday evenings. The residents truly enjoy and appreciate his talent. This same youth started working at a retail store, and, after 3.5 months, he has been promoted and is working 20 hours per week! Continuum of Care leadership shared, "Joy doesn't stop advocating for her youth even when told no. She was persistent in calling community nursing homes until she found one that said yes! Joy is our ROCK STAR in Region B!"

988

What is 988?

988 will be a phone number for people to call (instead of 911) when they have a mental health crisis. It will go "live" in July of 2022.

988 is a response to the number of people dying by suicide and the level of distress South Carolinians are experiencing at this time.



What do we need?

South Carolina needs sustainable funding for a 988 Crisis Continuum of Care which includes:

- Mobile Crisis expansion
- Development of Crisis Stabilization Units and Crisis Receiving Units
- Capacity for additional calls to 988
- Diversion from Emergency Rooms

Those are important factors and access points which need to be directed to 988.

Recurring funding of \$15.15 million is needed for an additional call center, additional mobile crisis staff, additional Crisis Stabilization Units, and operating support.

