

A Message from the Executive Director

Summer is rapidly coming to an end. The children have returned to school, and the football season is in full swing. Now if we can just get some of that cool fall weather to move in!

There is nothing new to report on Olivia Y. Public Catalyst is on the ground and has met with several of us to begin the process of their evaluation. The scheduled completion date for their report is late November. We do have our agency hearing before the Joint Legislative Budget Committee September 22 and I am sure that much of the discussion will center around the recent court order.

We are coming to the end of Governor Bryant's first term. The future of the Division of Family and Children's Services is uncertain pending the completion of the organizational analysis. TANF is up for reauthorization. We are initiating an aggressive new SNAP Employment and Training Program. And we seem to be plagued with computer problems as we transition old systems onto new formats.

All of these factors contribute to an air of uncertainty unlike any that we have experienced in recent years. Regardless of how these individual issues are resolved, I can assure you that three things will happen. First, the Department of Human Services and its mission will continue. We serve approximately one in four Mississippians. Second, agency leadership will continuously remind you to be focused on this mission and not be distracted. The people that we serve are much too important to receive anything but our best.

The third thing that you can count on is that there will

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Forever Home for Little Girl



Tate County Family Protection Specialist Vatnisha Newson with Jenna who now has a forever home.

The numbers are staggering. During State Fiscal Year 2015, there were 47,510 reports of abuse and neglect received by Mississippi Centralized Intake. During the same period, the number of children receiving foster care services rose to 7,557. And of those children who were free for adoption, 323 placements were finalized. For children who come into foster care, a home of their own may feel like just a dream.

"Forever home" is a term frequently used within social services. But those of us outside the Division of Family & Children's Services may not "see" what "forever" means to a young child.

Little Jenna, who has been in state care since October 2012, stole the hearts of Region 2-East, Tate County, and it was their desire to see her placed with a forever family. As with many happy endings, this story took some time to reach the goal of permanent placement.

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Distributed by the
Mississippi Department of
Human Services
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Jackson, MS 39202
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be change. Whether it is new leadership, new computer applications, new program guidelines or whatever, you can be assured that in the age in which we live change will be constant. Those of us who have been successful and will continue to be successful are those who can embrace change and find opportunity in each new challenge.

It is no secret that most people fear change. Why is this so? The culture of the organization may discourage change. Change can be uncertain and difficult. Maintaining the status quo is easy. There are a lot of silos and turf that many people struggle to defend and maintain. Change typically brings with it accountability. In my opinion, the most challenging factor in change is lack of consistency.

So how do we confront this culture of change and uncertainty? Initially we must realize that change is not perfect and that there are going to be some bumps in the road. On the other hand, each of you can feel confident and assured that MDHS has a very strong infrastructure and is built on a solid foundation of service.

The ideal outcome of change is transformation. To achieve transformation and eliminate the inconsistency that is so damaging to the process you must have leadership. Of course, leadership starts at the top but leaders exist at all levels of the organization. The top leadership must instill a climate of openness, optimism and be totally committed to the organization and its mission. Once this has been accomplished, leaders at all levels must be patient, adaptable and above all else promote a spirit of teamwork. Culture change will come only if everyone buys in, has a vision of a brighter future and a spirit of perseverance.

It is because of this perseverance that MDHS will be successful. We are facing uncertain times. But how many times has this happened in the past? Each and every time MDHS has not only persevered but come through the challenge stronger and even more committed to serving our citizens.

Do not fear. This is a time of great opportunity. Embrace our strengths. Develop a strategic plan to address our shortcomings and prosper in the transformation!

Rickey Berry
Executive Director



From left, Meredith Johnson, Chris Johnson, Judge Lynchard, Jenna, Lauren Johnson and Hunter Johnson.

Social workers employ their skills to find or develop a safe environment for a child, whether through reunification with the family or placement elsewhere. For many children who come into foster care, there is a hope that the biological family can be preserved. However, when that is not an option, social workers look to other placements for the child that are healthy, safe and permanent. A home where the child can thrive and grow to be a healthy adult—a forever home.

Honorable Judge Lynchard, Jr. presided over the adoption of Jenna by Chris and Lauren Johnson. Their children, Meredith and Hunter, joined them for the celebration to welcome Jenna into their family. After almost three years in foster care, little Jenna got a new family and her own forever home.

Tate County FPS Vatnisha Newson, who worked the case, was instrumental in seeing this case through to permanency. We all join Region 2-E in celebrating Jenna's forever home.



The Beacon

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Agency Awarded for Excellence in Information Technology

5-state data clearinghouse cuts duplicate benefits payments



From right DFO Bureau Director Dana Kidd, MIS Division Director Mark Allen and MDHS Executive Director Rickey Berry.

By sharing data on food and disaster assistance beneficiaries with four partner states, Mississippi is saving about \$161,000 per month, or **\$1.932 million a year** in duplicate payments. But the group isn't keeping its success to itself. After all, the more states that participate, the more improper payments will be found, increasing the potential for savings.

The five states—Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana and Mississippi—saw the effects of benefits abuse and fraud after Hurricane Katrina struck the Gulf Coast in August 2005. In response, the states joined to create the National Accuracy Clearinghouse (NAC), a contributory system of beneficiary information that uses identity analytics and advanced linking technology to find duplicate benefit applications in near-real time.

"After Hurricane Katrina, there had been so many states involved in issuing food and disaster assistance, or [Disaster Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program] D-SNAP, there was a lot of room for duplicate participation and/or fraud across those states," said Joel Savell, project director of NAC. "The states were limited in how they could prevent that and ensure program integrity. It was pretty much a manual process due to the extent of the disaster."

The states came up with an idea to address not only the problem of fraud in disaster assistance, but in the food stamp program overall. The result is NAC, to which participating states regularly submit their contributory data in an agreed-upon format. As people apply for assistance, NAC uses algorithms to find overlaps in identifying information, such as names, social security numbers and birth dates, across the states.

A person who applies for assistance in Florida, for example, but who already was receiving assistance in Mississippi, would be flagged when Florida processed the application. Florida officials would then notify those in Mississippi that the family had relocated and that address changes had been made to their account. That way, Savell said, people don't receive duplicate benefits.

When NAC detects a potential duplication from an application in one state, it notifies the other.

A pilot test of NAC ran from June 2014 to May. Last summer,

the information from all five states was brought together, and since then NAC has been applied to each new SNAP and D-SNAP applicant at enrollment.

Alabama and Mississippi saw a 74 percent and 71 percent decrease, respectively, in the average number of dual participants per month after implementing NAC, according to the Public Consulting Group (PCG), which independently evaluated NAC. PCG also found that 72 percent of claims identified as dual participation were intentional program violations, while 25 percent were because of inadvertent client errors.

Following that success, the five states and PCG are finalizing plans for ways to bring other states on board. A report is due to USDA's Food and Nutrition Service, which provided a grant for NAC's development, by the end of August 2015. FNS will write its own report to submit to Congress at the end of November.

Tim Meeks, the NAC project lead, attributes the success not only to detecting and preventing more duplication, but also to the states' willingness to collaborate.

"The states came together prior to the pilot, we call it the consortium, and created a common set of business rules," Meeks said. "All the states were following the same set of rules specifically related to dual participation matches within the NAC process."

The investment in NAC is minimal; states can use existing automation and secure file transfer and web services to implement it. New states must pay a setup fee, and all states pay an annual hosting fee that is based on the average household member count. In Mississippi, the hosting fee is \$60,000 per year, but the system is identifying and preventing more than 300 dual participants, on average, each month putting monthly savings at \$161,000, after the hosting fee, Savell said. States stand to earn a return on investment within a month of using NAC.

And as additional states sign on, the savings will grow. "We know we will have the potential for dual participation in just about every state in the nation," Savell said. "So that is a very conservative number as far as savings is concerned because it only focuses on the other four states."

Whereas NAC is the product of a public-private collaboration, all states currently use the Public Assistance Reporting Information System, a federal/state partnership data-matching service that detects potential fraud. But the system's process is labor intensive and misses warning signs, according to a white paper from LexisNexis. As a result, Meeks and Savell said they hope NAC sees wider adoption after Congress' review.

Article by Stephanie Kanowitz, freelance writer based in northern Virginia.

<http://gcn.com/Articles/2015/08/20/National-Accuracy-Clearinghouse.aspx?p=1>

Retirement - Kay Frost



Kay Frost, Special Assistant Attorney General retired with 28 years in state government. She spent 23 of those years with the AG's office representing MDHS and five working directly with child support. She was presented a certificate by Assistant Attorney General Earl Scales. Kay was a familiar face here at the State Office and she will be missed!

30 Year Service Pins



Congratulations to DFO Regional Directors Jacqueline Hughes from 2 West (center) and Jim Sims, 4 South (right) who were presented 30-year service pins by DFO Bureau Director Larry Strebeck who will have 30 years in November. We appreciate you all for your years of service to the agency and your continued dedication and contributions to the people of Mississippi.

Desoto County Celebrates Summer

With summer coming to a close, DeSoto Economic Assistance and Child Support staff enjoyed a luncheon August 27 celebrating the "Dog Days of Summer." There was a hot dog bar complete with chili, cheese, coleslaw, onions and baked beans. Also staff enjoyed cookies for dessert.



Ramblings & Events

Ramblings...

Why do we refer to hot summertime as the Dog Days of summer? According to an article written by [Becky Little and published in the National Geographic](#), the phrase referred to the dog star, Sirius and its position in the sky.

It wasn't until more recent history that people began to associate late summer's heat with dogs.

The article notes that "to the Greeks and Romans, the 'dog days' occurred around the day when Sirius appeared to rise just before the sun, in late July. They referred to these days as the hottest time of the year, a period that could bring fever or even catastrophe." Sirius, the brightest star in the constellation Canis Major, was thought to provide the heat associated with scorching summer days. Of course, we now know that heat is a direct result of the earth's tilt and exposure to the sun.

Events: What will you do as summer winds down?

Sept. 11 is the [Celtic Fest](#) to celebrate all things Irish at the Mississippi Ag Museum in Jackson.

Sept, 14-19, the 38th Annual [Mississippi Delta Blues & Heritage Festival](#) will take place in Greenville.

Sept. 26, [Wellsfest](#), which begun in 1984 as a gift to the community, is a family-friendly music festival hosted by Wells UMC, Jackson.

Sept. 26, 2-3pm, Rose Hill Historic Cemetery Costumed Tour in Meridian. Burial grounds for the King and Queen of the Gypsies of North America and the Romani clan. Go to [historicrosehillcemeterytours.com](#) for information.

Oct. 6-8 is [Cruisin' the Coast](#) in Bay St. Louis. Come enjoy the parades, vintage cars and music.

[Wolf to Woof](#) at the MS Natural Science Museum runs through Jan. 3. The exhibit showcases the history and biology of dogs.

Dress Code Update

Message from Executive Director Rickey Berry, dated Aug. 31, 2015:

I have received several inquiries regarding the possibility of continuing the business casual dress policy adopted for the summer after September 7, 2015. I know that this policy is very popular with our employees and seems to be an excellent morale builder.

While I am not ready to formally implement this as a permanent MDHS policy, I am authorizing the policy to continue indefinitely while senior management determines the long-term effect of a relaxed dress code on the quality of work, as well as productivity and the general climate of professionalism.

Business casual is defined as:

- Collared shirts with either long or short sleeves, or golf or polo shirts neatly tucked in. Dress or casual tops, or blouses worn appropriately with proper coverage.
- Neckties are not required.
- Dress or casual slacks, khakis or nice jeans.
- Dress or casual shoes such as oxfords, loafers, flats, pumps, wedges or nice sandals. Tennis/athletic shoes may be worn on Casual Fridays only.

Examples of inappropriate items include:

- T-shirts.
- Excessively revealing shirts or blouses.
- Tank or halter tops.
- House shoes.
- Flip flops.
- Pants or jeans with holes or slits, or cut too low to provide proper coverage.

It shall be our practice that you shall always dress appropriately for your scheduled activity of the day. If you are scheduled to go to a meeting either inside or outside MDHS and business attire is expected, you should dress in business attire for that day. If you are scheduled to appear in court, you should dress according to the standards set by the Judge.

I reserve the right to revoke this policy without notice at any time. Each division director has the discretion to determine what is inappropriate or offensive should a question arise within his or her division. Although most agency employees have been compliant and management overall has done a good job monitoring the policy, the primary reason that I am not ready to approve casual dress on a permanent basis is that there have been continued abuses: primarily t-shirts, tennis shoes being worn on days other than Friday, overly revealing clothing,

and shirts that are designed to be tucked being worn untucked. These behaviors, in addition to being a violation of policy, contribute to a general air of sloppiness which is not the image we should portray as an agency.

As I stated above, the vast majority of our employees have enjoyed the casual dress policy and while being comfortable, have maintained a neat, businesslike appearance.

I encourage each of you to respect the policy. If you have any doubts whether something meets the definition of business casual then it probably does not. I am calling upon supervisors to encourage our employees to participate in business casual to make the workplace a more enjoyable experience, but at the same time, I am looking to you to ensure that our standards of good taste and professionalism are maintained.

Thank you for your cooperation, and I appreciate the work that you do each and every day.

Executive Director Rickey Berry

What are Flip Flops?

Noun: a light sandal, typically with a sole of plastic or rubber, with a thong between the big and second toe, and no strap that secures the sandal at the heel.

The name "flip flop" originated because of the sound that is made by the slapping of the rubber sole on the bottom of the foot while walking.

Worn by many cultures, the origin of this style of footwear can be traced back as early as 1500 B.C. with the ancient Egyptians.



MDHS Training Opportunities

For questions or more information, contact Sandra Herring, Training and Staff Development Supervisor at 601-359-4394 or via email Sandra.Herring@mdhs.ms.gov. To register, go online to MELMS through ACE at DFA.

Sept. 9	State Office	Social Security Administration
Sept. 10	Pike County	New Employee Orientation
Sept. 10	Winston County	Stress Management
Sept. 15	Harrison County	Customer Service
Sept. 16	Jasper County	Conflict Resolution
Sept. 18	Desoto County	New Employee Orientation
Sept. 22	State Office	Sexual Harassment
Sept. 22	Desoto County	Conflict Resolution
Sept. 23	Harrison County	Transition to Supervisor
Sept. 23	State Office	Cultural Diversity
Sept. 24	Pike County	Customer Service
Sept. 29	Jasper County	Cultural Diversity
Sept. 30	Leflore County	New Employee Orientation

DFO Training Spotlight



The State Office recently welcomed child support enforcement officers from across the state to Jackson for training. These frontline employees represent the "face of MDHS" to Mississippi residents who come to county offices for assistance. We appreciate the division's diligent work to train and maintain quality staff.

Promoting Workplace Safety

Encourage and Promote Courteous Interactions

As a human service professional, you interact with a variety of people each day. When you are interacting from a position of authority—and when you are not—make it a priority to do so with courtesy. Even if your polite behavior is not immediately reciprocated, this will help foster an environment that values mutual respect among all individuals. Communicate values throughout your organization to:

- Be certain staff at all levels understand expectations relating to courtesy.
- Encourage leadership to model respectful attitudes and behavior.
- Embrace and value the diversity of your staff and those in your charge.
- Respect everyone's privacy.
- Expect the best from every staff member—and from yourself.
- Develop staff resources for dealing with personal problems that may interfere with job performance.
- Utilize respectful supervisory practices in dealing with staff discipline.
- Recognize that staff attitudes and behaviors impact the behavior of others.
- Handle grievances thoroughly and promptly.
- Provide staff with information and development opportunities to improve understanding of their role in promoting polite and courteous interactions.

Submitted by Emergency Coordinator Alynda Ponder, Source: crisisprevention.com.

THIS WAS MY FINAL RESTING PLACE



Safe Sleep Tips

 Always place babies on their backs to sleep.

 Use a firm sleep surface, such as a mattress in a safety-approved crib, covered by a fitted sheet.

 Have the baby share your room, not your bed. Your baby should never sleep in an adult bed, on a couch or on a chair alone with you or anyone else.

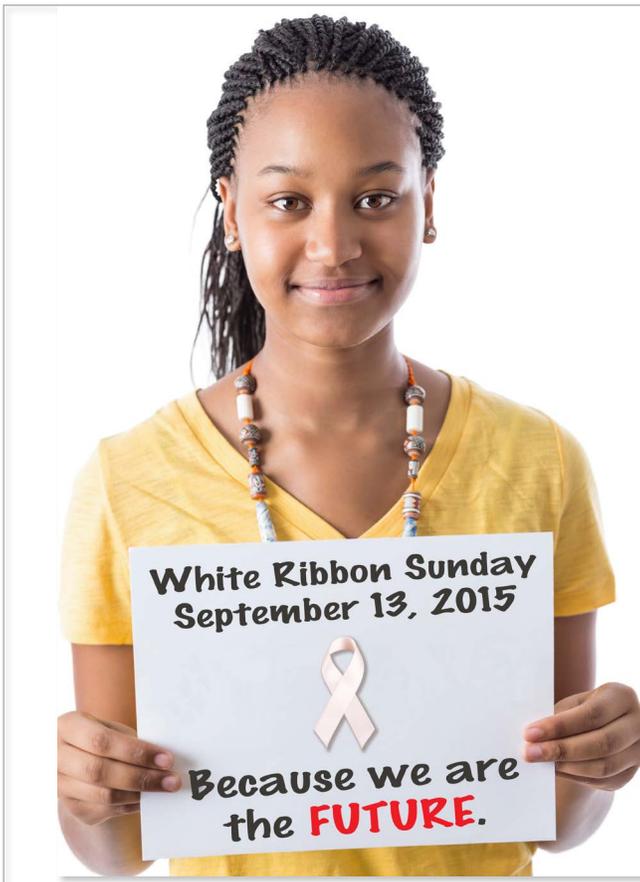
 Keep soft objects, such as pillows and loose bedding out of your baby's sleep area.

To report child abuse or neglect

800-222-8000
msabusehotline.mdhs.ms.gov

MDHS
 MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

White Ribbon Sunday Coming Up



This year, the state will recognize September as White Ribbon Sunday month with a signed proclamation by Governor Phil Bryant. The purpose of the campaign is to raise awareness for the need to protect the health and well-being of preteens, teens and single adults in the state.

This statewide observance calls on people to adhere to sexual purity and abstinence from premarital sex. The proclamation states that "we want to remind our citizens that virginity is not merely the physical abstaining from sexual intercourse, but also the mental and spiritual preservation of a person's wholeness until marriage."

Activities during the month will include events to promote abstinence, discourage at-risk behaviors and educate people so as to reduce the risk of unplanned pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases and other negative outcomes associated with the onset of early sexual activity.

Throughout the month of September, specifically Sept. 13, the Communities Working to Unite Youth, an organization in Rankin County, will be working with area churches to promote activities and messaging.

For more information, contact Tommye Morris at 601-936-3513 or via email at cwuyinfo@gmail.com.

Did you know...

In a recent report included in [WebMD Health](#), it noted that Type A workaholics may be setting themselves up for health risks, some of which could be serious.

Researchers looked at data on more than 600,000 people and found that those who worked more than 55 hours per week had a nearly 33 percent higher risk of stroke than those who worked a normal 40-hour week.

Why is working long hours bad?

Stress seems to be the leading cause of health risks. Work stressors include work-family conflict, job insecurity and a lack of "perceived fairness."

Unplug!

Take your vacation time, and if you can't afford to "get away," enjoy short breaks or long weekends.

During vacations, limit the number of work phone calls and put down the mobile devices.

Take a break during the work day. Whether it's a brief walk or taking lunch away from your desk, a break from the office gives the brain and body an opportunity to "reset."

Don't forget yearly check-ups.

Preventive check-ups are essential to good health, both on the job and off. Make time for a yearly wellness check. Go to knowyourbenefits.dfa.state.ms.us for information on covered expenses.

Couch-to-5k Going Strong



The MDHS Run Team has been actively training for local races. Robert Jackson, seated, and his wife Tammy, are leaders for the group, and both are training for half-marathons. Back row, from left: Aaron Tullos, Julia Bryan, Kathryn Carver, Jeanette Price, April Majors, Gail Smith and Eduardo Vazquez. Front row, Evelyn Dixon and Jackson. Also not pictured, Suzette Hankins, Sandra Herring, LaMelody Lewis, Bryan Grove, Tiffany Alexander, Allicyn Rosell and Geeta Foreman. Eduardo said, "I have enjoyed the opportunity to exercise and bring my two teenage sons along. We never thought we could run this far." The training for this group concludes at the end of September with an opportunity for a new training group to be announced soon. For more information, contact Robert Jackson at 601-359-4895.