

# Mississippi Department of Human Services

## The Beacon

### AUGUST



### *A Message from the Executive Director*

I know that you have heard me speak or write a good deal in the past year and a half about *continuous improvement*. I have mentioned many times that one of our agency values is **Excellent Program Delivery**. I am always stressing that to maintain a high standard of program delivery you do not reach a certain point and remain there.

We have to get better each year to meet increased expectations from our customers as well as our federal funding agencies. Incentive funding and national rankings for program delivery become more competitive with the bar defining success being raised each and every year.

I guess that the best example of the need for continuous improvement can be demonstrated by the cell phone/communications industry. Companies that are satisfied where they are quickly disappear from the competitive landscape. Those that are successful are continuously reinventing themselves and the products that they produce.

Although we are not a private company in a profit-driven environment, many of the same factors exist. We are called upon each and every year to do more with less.

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### **When We Breathe Them: Permanency Roundtables**



*Above from left: DFCS Region 5-W Director Tara LeBlanc; Pike County ASWS Randy Boyd; South Carolina Department of Social Services, Quality and Accountability Team Leader, Region 5 Malik Whitaker, J.D.; Hinds County Family Protection Specialist Angela Johnson; Roundtable Scribe Ebony Groves; and MDHS Executive Director Rickey Berry.*

Permanent placement for children in care can be a challenge, particularly if that child comes with siblings, may be a teen or has experienced great trauma either prior to birth or after. That is what the permanency roundtables seek to accomplish: permanent placement for children in care 36 months or more.

Everyone will agree that permanent placement is the goal when a child comes into care, and it is determined that going home is not an option. For children who have other siblings also in care, the challenge is to try to get placement for all children with one family.

Roundtable discussions bring together master level social workers, the case worker and other experts in the field to brainstorm possible solutions for those children where placement has not happened within 36 months. Multilevel discussions are held to determine what steps can be taken to find children the best possible forever home.

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MDHS has been successful over the past few years by improving our customer service and program delivery through improvements in technology. These improvements have come from incentive funds that we have earned by being high performers. It is becoming more and more competitive each year to be among the top in our "industry" and receive these rewards. In addition, many grants that used to be routinely awarded to states are now competitive, not only among the states, but also with private nonprofit and for-profit entities.

The challenge for MDHS, and any public service organization for that matter, is how do we remain competitive and maintain our edge in these ultra-competitive ever changing times. First, we have to tenaciously guard against complacency.

Whether you are an Alabama Crimson Tide fan or not, you have to admire Nick Saban as a leader and the remarkable success that he has achieved in arguably the most competitive environment that exists anywhere. Coach Saban once said, "Complacency is a human condition. It is the human condition to be satisfied if you do something extremely well. If you make an 'A' on a mid-term then you might take two weeks off and not study because if you make a 'C' on the next test then you have a 'B' average. It is not natural to be a champion. It is not natural to have to deal with being a champion in life."

Saban further said, "We live in a results-oriented world, but it is important to focus on the process of what it takes to be successful and remember that process." I could not agree more.

The little things that we do every day, do them with pride and precision. Hire the best people possible to help you accomplish your mission. Build a team and make sure that everyone is motivated regularly and is proud and energized to be a part of the team.

Together we will set the highest expectations and remain champions.

Richard A. Berry  
Executive Director



Malik Whitaker of the South Carolina Department of Social Services said, "South Carolina has effectively used the roundtable model. Using the phrase, 'Until we breathe them,' says to our people that you cannot come into a meeting in South Carolina and say this kid has exhibited behavior that causes us to move him to another place. What that says is, 'We as adults, who are responsible for these children, have not done what it takes to achieve permanency for that child.' That's unacceptable. It's the values in our staff we're changing. You'll not see 36 placements for a child. We won't allow it. We're at the level [in South Carolina] that permanency and urgency is a values-based process. We are instilling the value and urgency of kids having forever homes in our frontline staff. It drives effective practice. The roundtables are a collaborative process and have been a tremendous success in South Carolina. The number of children in custody dropped in half from about 5,000 in care to less than 2,500."

Isabel Blanco with the Casey Foundation said, "Roundtables are an effective tool for knowledge sharing. The process helps frontline staff understand what strategies will work with concrete cases. It's a form of supervision and a way of sharing knowledge. The structure introduces staff to each other across the state and builds relationships and trust while accomplishing the task of exploring possible placement options. It takes the focus off the barriers and looks at the possibilities. The process helps frontline staff see past the barriers to adoption for children who remain in the system. During roundtables, we encourage staff to never lose hope because when hope enters in, all things are possible."

Blanco continued, "Children's behaviors don't disrupt placement and make them unadoptable. A paradigm shift must occur in the minds of staff because children are not the problem. Children are going to act out of their hurt and pain and we, as professionals, must respond appropriately for them."

MDHS Executive Director Rickey Berry also attended the Permanency Roundtable session for Region 3-S and said, "I found the Permanency Roundtables very enlightening. It was encouraging to see the level of professionalism and eagerness displayed by our frontline staff to get our children into forever homes. I applaud them for their hard work to ensure our children are placed safely and appropriately."

## Do You Have a Facebook or Twitter Account?

Social networking is one of the many ways we stay connected with our friends and family. We also use it to find out what's going on in the world. "Like" the Mississippi Department of Human Services Facebook page at: <http://www.facebook.com/msdhs> or follow us on Twitter at: [http://twitter.com/MS\\_DHS](http://twitter.com/MS_DHS) to stay up on the latest happenings at MDHS.

Mississippi Department of Human Services monthly newsletter, [The BEACON](#).

For information or to submit articles, contact Julia Bryan, Beacon Editor at: [julia.bryan@mdhs.ms.gov](mailto:julia.bryan@mdhs.ms.gov) or phone 601-359-4517. To mail photos or articles, send to: PO Box 352, Jackson, MS 39205-0352.

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## DFCS Administration Unit Celebrates 107 Years of Service

The Division of Family and Children's Services Administration Unit recently recognized six employees who combined represent 107 years of state service.

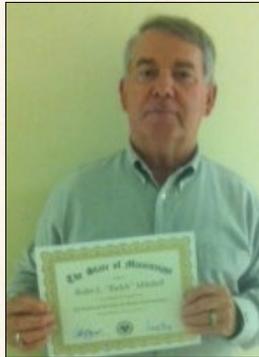
Personnel Unit Supervisor Betty Purvis received the Mississippi State Personnel Board 30 year service pin representing 35 total service years. Betty has been instrumental in restructuring the unit and reducing the length of time for processing personnel transactions.



Personnel Unit Eunistine Parsi, who has 26 years with the state, was presented the MSPB 20 year service pin. She assisted in the process of restructuring the Personnel Unit.



Rolin "Butch" Mitchell received the MSPB 20 year service pin. Butch conducts the quarterly



property audit for DFCS.

Gail Glenn has 16 service years and received the MSPB 10 year service pin. She handles all the division mail, checks requisition codes and serves as backup for DFCS front office. (Photo not available)

The Administration Unit also recognized two employees who were presented longevity certificates.



Vicki Hathcock (left) received the DFCS Certificate for five years of State service. Vicki processes requisitions for supplies and equipment, coordinates cubicle installations in the State Office, as well as in the counties, verifies timecards and invoices related to contracts and assists with requests for proposals and contracts.

Wendy Benoit Wilson (above, right) received the DFCS Certificate for five years of State service. Wendy prepares requests for proposals and contract/subgrants and has been instrumental in creating the new performance based contract unit.

## Federal Government Expects Quality Child Care

In a recent meeting for administrators of U.S. child care subsidy programs, the Office of Child Care shared their Strategic Framework outlining goals and expectations for child care subsidy programs. This framework identifies, "access to quality child care that supports parental employment in stable jobs that help them provide for their families" as the top expected outcome for subsidy programs.

The message clearly directs state administrators in charge of overseeing child care subsidy with ensuring that the programs serving children in their state are of good quality.

Quality improvement is an ongoing process. More than 25 percent of Mississippi's licensed providers have demonstrated their commitment to engage in this process by volunteering to participate in the state's quality rating and improvement system, Mississippi Quality Stars. Additionally, MDHS Division of Early Childhood Care and Development offers several training and technical assistance opportunities for providers to receive support in offering the best care possible.

"We have the ability to make this outcome a reality for children in Mississippi. I know we have providers who have been working for quality for years. We will continue to support these and others in giving our children the greatest advantage possible," said Jill Dent, DECCD director.

Parents can search for quality rated programs at: [DECCD Provider Search](#).

Providers can access information about the Mississippi Quality Stars Program at: [MSU Quality Stars](#).

Providers can access information about training and technical assistance programs at: [Provider Training and Assistance](#).



## Family and Children's Services Coaches Corner



Each month we feature a frontline social worker who exemplifies the core skills being taught in the Practice Model.

Sarah Bean (center) a Family Protection Specialist for 11 years, has been through the training and was recently recognized for demonstrating all three core helping skills: genuineness, empathy and respect.

Sarah worked with four siblings who were removed due to neglect. After the mother had passed away, Sarah continued to work with the father and sought out grief counseling services for the family and arranged for special medical needs education for both the family and resource parents.

The sibling group was together throughout the life of the case in one resource home within 20 miles of their original home. The agency advocated towards placement with the father and preserved both maternal and paternal family connections for the children.

Sarah connected the father to appropriate individualized services to help him be successful in achieving the goals set forth in his case plan. Sarah visited the children at least twice a month, documented their safety and well-being and demonstrated excellent skills in applying full disclosure. She additionally met with the father after court proceedings to ensure he fully understood the process.

It is evident that Sarah fully embraced the Practice Model and has shown that implementing the components makes a difference in the achievement of positive outcomes. Sarah ensured that connections were preserved with the family and that they benefited from the services arranged for them. Sarah recognized the strengths of this family and utilized those strengths to provide appropriate services and address their underlying needs.

Sarah has been chosen as the Practice Model Worker of the month for Region 1-S because of her dedication and compassion, as well as quality social work displayed with her families.

We thank you, Sarah, for all you do.

## Minnie Lockett, 35 Years!



Pictured is Client Service Representative Minnie Lockett (left) receiving a certificate from Noxubee County Director Kay Papas recognizing Minnie's 35 years of service to the Mississippi Department of Human Services. Kay stated, "Minnie's knowledge and experience are invaluable to our office and the clients we serve. We cannot imagine Noxubee DHS without her." Minnie said that you should understand she is not of retirement age at this time! Congratulations to Minnie and thank you for your continued commitment to Noxubee County and Mississippi.

## Lana Taylor Supports the March of Dimes



Lana Taylor, Hinds County FPS recently shared the above photo of her daughter Iris and granddaughter Taylor Salley. Taylor was born at 32 weeks weighing 3 lbs., 11 oz. and spent the first seven weeks of her life in NICU. She is almost 3-years-old now and is a vibrant, happy, healthy girl thanks to the March of Dimes and great hospital care at Ocean Springs Singing River Health System. Join Taylor's Team and help support the March of Dimes, who say, "We will march on!" For more information, go to: [March of Dimes for Babies](#).

## September is National Preparedness Month



Preparedness should be something we do year-round, however, most of us do not. September is National Preparedness Month and each year the overall goal is to engage the public in making preparedness a part of their daily lives. MDHS wants to encourage our employees to do the same.

Begin now to develop an emergency fund and kit that includes water, canned goods and other necessary items. It is prudent to plan ahead rather than wait until disaster strikes because needed items and funds can be costly. When emergency funds and supplies are developed throughout the year the task isn't nearly as daunting or expensive.

Why is it important to prepare? Disasters are a fact of life and improving our preparedness as individuals and communities helps to improve our overall national preparedness and resiliency.

It is this resiliency, individually and collectively, which helped the state of Mississippi rise to and overcome the challenges of Hurricane Katrina eight years ago. Yet, we still have room for improvement and can be better prepared for disasters.

This September won't you consider what you and your family can do to become better prepared at home, school and work?

To help you and your family be informed and prepared, MDHS will be posting daily reminders and information on the agency [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) accounts. Like or follow us for information that can help you be prepared.



## Harrison County Retirement



The Harrison County DHS office recently celebrated the retirement of Linda Cuevas with a farewell party and decorations of blue and pink ribbons. Linda, a breast cancer survivor, served the state for 21 years. She started as an economic assistance clerk and retired as a clerical supervisor. The office gave Linda, as going away presents, a Nook, an engraved watch and decorative stones inscribed with Bible verses. She shared a poem she had written for the occasion with all those in attendance. Linda plans to spend her free time with her husband and is looking forward to traveling to her home state of Kentucky. Above, Linda is seated in front of some of the Harrison County staff. Congratulations and thank you for your service.

## Charity is a TANF SUCCESS!



It's always good to hear how our programs make a difference in the lives of those we serve. Charity Johnigan is one of those examples.

Charity relocated to Gulfport with her family and needed some assistance until she could get on her feet. Through the Upfront Job Search, she was referred to the TANF Work Program.

The Harrison County Child Support office was in need of some additional help and took Charity in. After only a couple of months, Charity's EXEMPLARY work and contagious smile landed her a full time job with the agency.

Welcome to the agency, Charity. We appreciate your hard work and dedication to the people of Mississippi. Above, Charity (left) and Case Manager Shirley Williamson.

## County Corner - Noxubee and Oktibbeha Counties

This month, our travels take us to [Noxubee](#) and [Oktibbeha](#) counties.

Noxubee County was one of 26 counties in Mississippi that was created by the Indian cession east of the Mississippi River. September 27, 1830, the U.S. entered into a treaty with the Choctaws in the forks of the Dancing Rabbit Creek which lay in the southwestern portion of what came to be Noxubee County. About 6,000 Choctaws and 500 whites met at the Choctaw Council Grounds to sign the [Dancing Rabbit Creek Treaty](#). In December 1833 Noxubee County was created by the state Legislature.

### Fast Facts:

- Noxubee, derived from the Choctaw word *nakshobi*, meaning to stink or stinking water.
- The county is comprised of approximately 700 square miles.
- Land in the county sold for about \$1.75 per acre in 1834.
- Macon, the county seat, was named for [Nathaniel Macon](#), a statesman of North Carolina and currently has about 3,100 people.
- The census in 1840 noted a population for the county of 9,975. By 2010, Noxubee County had grown to only 11,545.

Several roads were established in the area early on, one of which was the Jackson Military Road which runs through the county and was built by General Jackson's men on their way to New Orleans in the [War of 1812](#).

Noxubee was noted for its outstanding early education with the Gaithright Schools for Girls and Boys at Summerville (Gholson). Additionally, the [Calhoun Institute](#) was built by W.R. Poindexter as a boarding school for young ladies, which at the time, was said to be the most architecturally significant building in the state.



When the city of Jackson was destroyed during the Civil War, Governor Clark and the state Legislature set up state government in Macon at the Calhoun Institute.

### Notable People:

- Sports greats [Nate Hughes](#), [Bubba Phillips](#) and [Nate Wayne](#).
- Military notables [Admiral D.E. Dismukes](#), [Gen. James Longstreet](#) and [Gen. George C. Ogdan](#).
- Poets [T. R. Hummer](#) and [William Ward](#).
- Writer [Ben Ames Williams](#).
- Musicians [Carey Bell](#) and [Eddy "Chief" Clearwater](#).
- Native American [Pushmataha](#).
- [Margaret James Murray](#), the 3rd wife of [Booker T. Washington](#).

The Dancing Rabbit Festival, which is held annually the 4th weekend in October, attracts visitors from far and wide.

### Oktibbeha County

Oktibbeha County was also part of lands which originally belonged to the Choctaw Indians. Indian artifacts more than 2000 years old have been found in the area. Oktibbeha County was formally organized on Dec. 23, 1833. By 1835, the county seat had been established at Boardtown, which changed its name to Starkville in honor of [General John Stark](#), a hero of the Revolutionary War.

### Fast Facts

- Oktibbeha, in the Choctaw language, means *icy water* or *bloody water*, thought to be named this because of a battle fought on the banks of a creek between the Choctaw and Chickasaw nations.
- 2010 Census counted 47,671 people within the county.
- The county is comprised of approximately 462 square miles.
- [Starkville](#) is the county seat with 23,888 counted during the 2010 Census.
- [Oktoc](#) has the oldest community club in the state and has not missed one single meeting since its beginning in 1927.

The first whites to settle permanently in Oktibbeha County were Presbyterian missionaries led by [Cyrus Kingsbury](#). They developed Mayhew Mission in 1820 which included a school for the Indians, a grist mill and a blacksmith shop.

In the spring of 1863 during the Civil War, Grierson's raiders came through the region and looted Starkville. The 1870s brought the first railroad into Starkville. On April 25, 1875, fire swept through downtown Starkville destroying 52 buildings.

Starkville is home to [Mississippi State University](#), and was ranked #18 nationally by Forbes magazine's "America's Best College Buys," and #84 by U.S. News and World Report for its Engineering School and #24 for Veterinary Medicine.

### Notable People:

[Machine Gun Kelly](#), Prohibition-era gangster

[Shane McRae](#), actor, appeared in Hack; guest starred on One Life to Live; Law and Order; Criminal Intent; and was one of the stars of the ill-fated sitcom, Four Kings.

[Major General William M. Miley](#) (Bud Miley), U.S. 17th Airborne Division WW II, former assistant professor of military science at Mississippi State University.

[Cool Papa Bell](#), African-American baseball great, member of the Baseball Hall of Fame

[Josh Booty](#), retired Major League Baseball and National Football League player

[Shauntay Hinton](#), Miss USA 2002

Next month, we will take a look at [Panola](#) and [Pearl River](#) counties.

Until then, take some time and enjoy a day trip through scenic, historic Mississippi.

## Duck Dynasty Meets Field Operations



*Back row, from left: Dennis Miller, Derrick Crawford, and Ross Crawford. Middle row: Larry Strebeck, Ronnie Hudson, Angie Hobby, Camile Johnston (attending for Annette Gant), Gwen Williams, Linda Slaughter and Martha Benjamin. Front row, kneeling: Lisa Johnson, Barbara Hammer, Debbie Grant and Cindy Brewer. Front row, standing: Sarah Bridge and Cathy Sykes.*

Putting a spin on the number one ranked television show, Duck Dynasty, MDHS regional directors came to the Division of Field Operations (DFO) Dynasty meeting at State Office August 21-22. Keeping with the theme were presentations by MDHS "Commander" Rickey Berry, MDHS Deputy "Commander" John Davis and DFO "Commander" Cathy Sykes. Other presenters included "Granma" Martha Benjamin's lessons on "How to Cook instead of Eatin' Slop"; "The Hammer" (aka Barbara Hammer) with her version of "Survival Skills;" Si's son David Noble who presented "Policy is a Strange Creature and the Call of the Wild;" and Brother Chris Christmas who presented "Low Tech Talk from a Hi Tech Brother." Region 1-N Director Lisa Johnson was welcomed as the newest RD to the group.

## DFCS Rolls Out Policy Revisions

DFCS Policy Unit Carolyn Gremillion and Jennifer Annison presented the most recent revisions in policy Sections A, B, C and D to Region 3-N Director Trudy Miller and staff in her area. This was the first of several presentations to assist with interpreting and clarifying policy changes. For information on hosting a DFCS Policy presentation for other regions, contact [Carolyn](#) or [Jennifer](#) via email.



## Congratulations to Aiken Village Preschool



August 22 it was announced that Aiken Village Preschool of Starkville achieved Star Step 5 of the Mississippi Child Care Quality Step System. As a result of this designation, the preschool is eligible to receive the 25 percent ongoing quality bonus. We are so proud of the commitment of Carol Jones and her staff for providing quality education for Mississippi children.

## Ninita Clarke Retires, 26 Years of Service



Ninita Clarke, Lowndes County child support enforcement officer retired August 31 after 26 years of service. Pictured with her is Field Operations Regional Director Ross Crawford of Region 4 North.

## Folks in Itawamba County Making a Difference



Case Manager Brandi Webb and Itawamba County Director Nina House were recently photographed reviewing a case for a client. Thanks so much ladies for serving the people of Itawamba County!

## CHARACTER FIRST

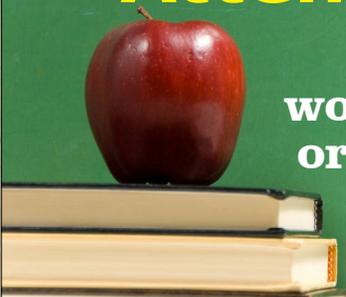


A Character First certificate for "Attentiveness" was presented to Won (Jinny) S. Laird, child support supervisor for Jefferson Davis and Lawrence counties June 26 at the Regional 5-E staff meeting. Jinny is like the "energizer bunny" who never slows down and does an absolutely excellent job in her leadership position. She always has a smile on her face and goes over and above to get the job done. She has been with MDHS for 19 years, the last two as a supervisor.

Character touches everything we do. It takes character to live with integrity, build healthy relationships and improve your work and world. Character First focuses on character-based leadership development at work, school and in the community.



### Definition of the Month: **Attentiveness**



Showing the worth of a person or task by giving my undivided concentration.

## MONDAY MORNING LEADERS



*From left: Leadership Trainer Mike Thornton; Subgrant Unit, Branch Director Cerissa Eubanks; DAAS, Program Administrator Tara Steverson; Oakley Youth Development Center, Director of Mental Health and Rehabilitative Services Charlotte H. Burrell, LPC, CAADC, CPS; DCS, Deputy Director Nicole McBeath; DCS, Special Projects Officer IV Alicia Jackson; Rankin County Director Sharon Womack; DPI, Bureau Director Geeta K. Foreman; DECCD, Certificate Program Supervisor Bryan Grove; Executive Director Rickey Berry; DCS, Programs Director Ronza Anderson; and Leadership Trainer and Legislative Liaison Charlie Smith. Also not pictured, Margaret Culpepper.*

MDHS strives to mentor and groom future leaders within the agency, knowing that for every leader, there should be someone ready to step up. One avenue offered for future leaders is the Monday Morning Leadership course facilitated by Charlie Smith and Mike Thornton. The class meets two hours weekly for eight weeks and are introduced to leadership concepts to improve their management and leadership ability. Monday Morning Leadership provides another development opportunity to build solid relationships across MDHS divisions with a focus on the agency's four core values. The core values are: integrity, excellent program delivery, self-development and outstanding customer service. Participants for the leadership series are nominated by their division directors. At the last class for recent graduates of the program, MDHS Executive Director Rickey Berry, Deputy Administrator for Programs John Davis, Deputy Administrator for Administration Will Simpson and Jim Nelson from the Mississippi State Personnel Board shared some leadership and management principles with participants.

**MDHS HAS A FRESH LOOK  
COMING SOON!  
A NEW WEBSITE AND LOGO  
COMING IN THE FALL...  
More details next edition!**