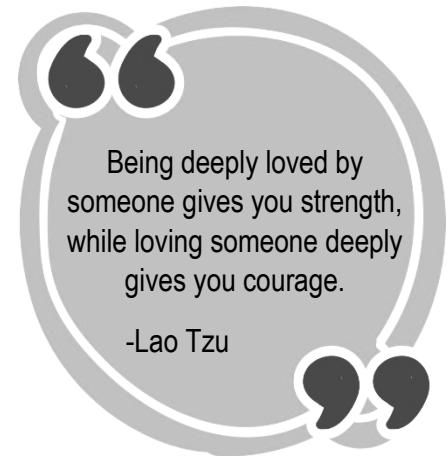


Celebrate Love

We continue to navigate through the complexities of this pandemic; undoubtedly, the journey has been challenging for everyone. The lives of all families have been disrupted, with unique impacts on families caring for children in foster care.

In adjusting to our current reality, we all are finding new ways to embrace the holidays and celebrate special events with family and friends. This month is a great opportunity to celebrate the strength of love and give thanks for those you love. Celebrating love within the family and strengthening relationships through connection meets a tremendous need for each of us.

As a foster family, the power and magnitude of your love extends beyond the walls of your home: the ripple effect on the families you help heal and reunite is profound. Although foster care is meant to be temporary, the impact of your family's love and acceptance in the life of a child in foster care is life-long.



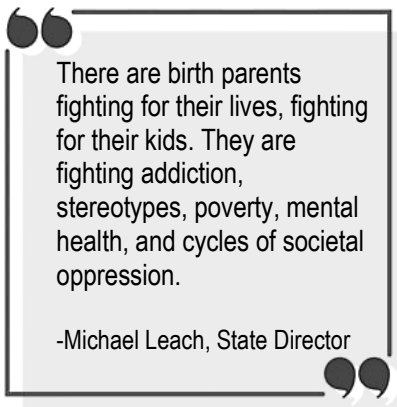
Being deeply loved by someone gives you strength, while loving someone deeply gives you courage.

-Lao Tzu



Leading the Way by Expanding Support to Families

DSS efforts to strengthen families were highlighted in a recent article by The Annie E. Casey Foundation. The piece focused on DSS and other stakeholders' work to build up our capacity for prevention. That's done by providing earlier support and services to build family strength and avoid the need for involvement from the child protection system. This approach is part of a national multi-year prevention effort called "Thriving Families, Safer Children."



There are birth parents fighting for their lives, fighting for their kids. They are fighting addiction, stereotypes, poverty, mental health, and cycles of societal oppression.

-Michael Leach, State Director

The initiative engages young people and families to learn firsthand about their concerns. Then by collaborating with community organizations, providers, the judiciary and other partners, the program can provide tailored support that meets the unique needs of families.

Michael Leach, DSS State Director, had this to say, "Over and over again, people are telling us that strong families are critical to the success of our state. So, we need to work with communities differently. Let's strengthen families. Let's help them heal on their terms."

Karen Bryant, DSS Deputy State Director of Child Welfare Services, says the state is working toward three goals:

- Reduce the number of young people going into foster care by building up prevention strategies available in the community;
- Support kinship caregivers, so that if children and youth must live apart from their parents — relatives have the means to provide them with love, stability and support;
- Drive down use of group placements. Research shows that children and youth thrive in families, not in institutions or group homes.

DSS is also providing new sources of support for kinship caregivers and building our child and family team meetings to involve parents and relatives in solving problems to meet their needs. Among the benefits: the ability to care for children in the least restrictive, family-like settings whenever possible — which is a key DSS priority.

You can read the entire article [here](#).



SC Foster Parent Town Hall

We continue to navigate through the uncertainty and constantly evolving circumstances of this pandemic, with unique impacts on the children and families involved in child welfare and the professionals serving them. This has been a challenging time for everyone involved in child welfare. Recently, we invited foster parents throughout the state to join us in discussing caring for children and youth in foster care during the pandemic with Dr. Brannon Traxler, Interim Public Health Director for DHEC and Michael Leach, State Director for DSS. 115 registered and attended the event live via Zoom! Training credit was also awarded to those that registered and attended the event.

For new placements, first 5-7 days would be the most important time to try to prevent spread in case a child was exposed prior to arriving.

-Dr. Brannon Traxler, DHEC

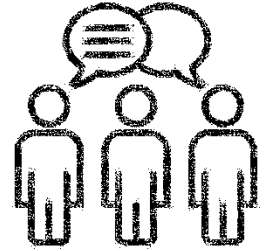
115 registered and attended the event live via Zoom! Training credit was also awarded to those that registered and attended the event.

If you were unable to join us for the live event, we will be providing the recorded event soon!

In- Person Visitation Guidance

The agency issued guidance surrounding in-person family visitation and case manager contacts with children and families. The plans reinforce our value of being family-centered as we support our children/youth and families during this pandemic. Because we understand our youth need to know and feel we are here for them, it's even more important for them to experience that with their parents/families! In the coming weeks and months, we anticipate the need to exercise flexibility often as COVID 19 planning changes and evolves.

We will respect concerns about the risks presented and will work together to minimize those risks, while maintaining healthy parent-child connections throughout our involvement and our responsibility to not only adhere to the family court order but also make sure children, youth, and families visit regularly/as often as possible.



Be sure to communicate your concerns and bring them to the attention of those involved in managing the case. Your concerns are important and as a valued partner they deserve to be heard and responded to.

You can view the issued guidance [here](#).

Court News

Chief Justice Suspends In-Person Court Operations

Pursuant to Order of Chief Justice Donald W. Beatty beginning January 11, 2021 all in-person court proceedings statewide are suspended until further Order of the Chief Justice. The order supports and encourages remote communication and technology to conduct proceedings.

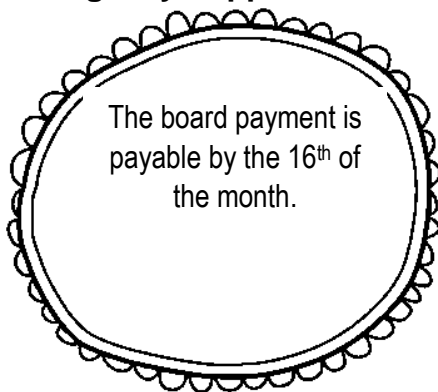


Additional court news can be found at sccourts.org

Board Payment

You will receive a board payment for each child based on the number of nights the child lives with you. The board payment is payable by the 16th calendar day of the month following the month the child is placed in your home. The board payment is to cover basic needs of the child such as food (at home and away), clothing, housing, transportation and education.

Emergency Supplemental Payment



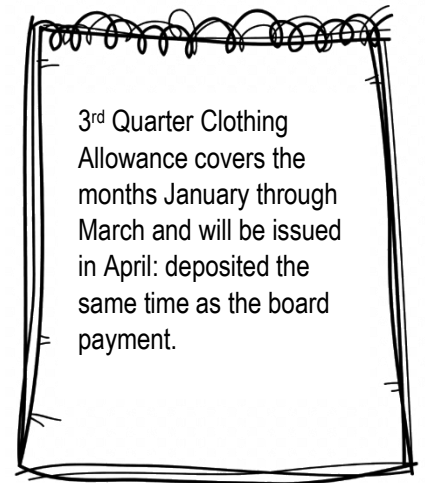
Foster parents are currently receiving an additional payment each month for each foster child and youth placed in their home due to the COVID-19 emergency. The supplemental amounts are based on the age of the child and the current board rates approved in state law, compared to computed USDA standard costs for our region. Foster parents will continue to receive the supplemental payment for all full month placements through September 2021.

Clothing Allowances

All clothing allowances (initial and quarterly) are issued through DSS's internal system, Child and Adult Protective Services System (CAPSS). This process will ensure the timely issuance of initial and quarterly allowances to eligible foster care providers.

Initial Clothing Allowance: The initial clothing allowance will be issued for any child that remains in foster care four days after entry. The payment is now being issued by staff in State Office and no longer by the county office staff. The payment will be issued to the foster parent that has the child on the fourth day of their entry into foster care.

Quarterly Clothing Allowance: A quarterly clothing allowance will be issued based on the following criteria: The child was in a licensed or provisionally licensed foster care placement the last day of the previous quarter and the child is in a licensed or provisionally licensed foster care placement as of the clothing allowance run date. All quarterly allowances are deposited at the same time as the board payment.



DSS Payment Methods

DSS ePay Debit Card

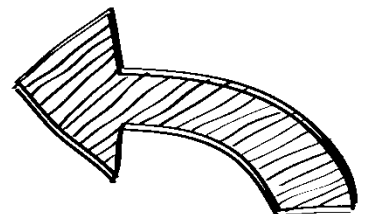
DSS ePay debit cards are automatically issued to foster parents the month after the first payment is to be received (foster care board payment, clothing allowance and/or supplemental payment, if applicable).

If the initial DSS ePay debit card has not been received by the 16th of the month or has been misplaced or stolen, the primary foster parent should call 1-855-270-4445 to request a replacement card. If a DSS ePay debit card is not the preferred method of payment, the foster parent should follow the steps below for direct deposit.

Direct Deposit

If direct deposit is chosen, the foster parent will need to complete the [direct deposit form](#) (DSS Form 1105). Email the completed form along with a copy of a voided check to Anthony.Brown@dss.sc.gov or Jasmine.Dubose@dss.sc.gov. Be sure to place the word 'encrypt' in the subject line of the email.

The State Treasurer's Office is moving towards all payments being issued in some form other than checks. If you are currently receiving a check for the foster care board payment, clothing allowance and/or supplemental payment, please consider choosing one of the other payment options above.





Woman, Infants, and Children Nutrition Program (WIC)

Foster families play an important role in their children's growth and development. Families who foster children under the age of 5 can apply for WIC to help with the cost of infant formula and other nutritional services. All foster children under age 5 are automatically eligible for WIC.

Call the local WIC office in your community to set up an appointment or call 1-855-472-3432.



At your appointment, a WIC nutritionist will talk with you about your foster child's health history and diet to identify nutrition and/or medical needs. WIC will provide you with nutrition counseling tailored to meet the needs of your foster child and benefits to buy healthy foods like

milk, eggs, cereal, vegetables, fruit and legumes, and whole grains. Food benefits are provided on an eWIC card. It operates like a debit card.

Foster children are eligible based on the child's income, not based on the foster parent's income. A foster child shall be considered a one person family where SCDSS is legally responsible for the child. Payments made by SCDSS for the care of the foster child shall be considered the income for the child.



View the Guide to Foster Children and WIC [here](#)



Social Worker of the Month: SC Foster Parent Association

SC Foster Parent Association wants to recognize workers who are making a difference in the lives of children. Nominate a future winner by sending the worker's name, contact information and reason for nomination to SCFPA. Each worker selected will receive a \$100 gift card and a Certificate of Recognition.

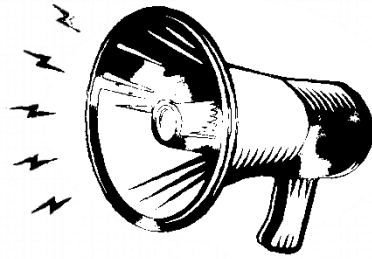


Congratulations, Reghan Timmons for being selected as the Social Worker of the Month for February 2021! Reghan works with Horry County DSS. One family had this to say, "Reghan is amazing and always helps when asked. There has not been a time I've called that she hasn't answered or called me back within the hour. She is a godsend to us as foster parents."

Make a nomination for the next winner [here](#)!

Training Announcements

As partners in the agency's mission to provide for the safety and wellbeing of children in foster care, foster parents must possess the necessary knowledge and skills to do so.



Health Care Oversight and Psychotropic Medication

Designated secondary medical consenters must complete the "Health Care Oversight and Psychotropic Medications Training" developed by SCDSS. A case manager must determine that a secondary medical concenter is reliable. This training is required initially to be designated as secondary medical concenter, and then annually thereafter.



What is this training? Why do I need it? How do I complete it? Find out [here](#).

Training Opportunities

- [Family Connections](#)
- [National Foster Parent Assoc](#)
- [USC Children's Law Center](#)
- [SC JCCA](#)
- [Tips for Child Care Institute](#)
- [ACEs](#)
- [Sharpen Minds APP](#)
- [Foster Parent College](#)
- [Child Welfare Information Gateway](#)
- [National Child Traumatic Stress Network](#)



SCFPA training is open to all Foster Parents, Adoptive Parents, Kinship Caregivers,

DSS Child Welfare Staff, GALs, Group Home Staff, and Child Placing Agencies. There is no charge for attending their trainings! Amid the pandemic, SCFPA, in collaboration with SCDSS, launched a Learning Management System in August 2020 with recorded webinars that you have FREE access to 24/7.

So many of you have used this resource! 548 foster parents have obtained recertification hours through the site. Between October 1 and December 31, 2020, 287 prospective foster parents completed Pre-Service training!

See below for additional 2020 training accomplishments!

Check this out!

[Legal Guide for Foster Parents](#)

Understand the court process and your legal rights.

145 training sessions were offered on 62 topics- awarded 2,366 certificates!

334 people completed orientation via the SCFPALMS site!

71 new adoptive parents were trained!

Child and Adult Information Portal (CAIP) Training & Access

The Department of Social Services (DSS) is launching the Child and Adult Information Portal (CAIP) platform on March 15, 2021. CAIP is a virtual platform to view and share health, education and well-being information about children in foster care. The training is being offered as a recorded webinar by the University of South Carolina and there is a link to the training on the SCFPALMS (<https://www.scfpalms.com/>).

This training will teach foster care providers how to access and enter a wide range of important information about the children in their care, including Child Information, Visitation and Maintaining Connections, Health Information, Education Information, Awards and Achievements, Family, Adult and Community Connections, Special Interests and Events.

Once this virtual training is complete, foster care providers will receive a secure username and password from SCDSS to access CAIP. Foster parents can then access CAIP using a smartphone, tablet, desktop or laptop computer. With the username and password, foster parents and providers will be able to log in to a secure website to instantly view and update important information about the children in their care, such as:

- Previous school records
- Special education and 504 accommodation information
- Behavioral plans
- Educational meeting details
- Awards and achievements
- Medical appointments and medications
- Visitation and maintaining connection

...and much more!

Orthodontic Program: SC DHEC

Orthodontic and related services are available to children with conditions of the face, jaw, mouth or teeth that affect normal functioning. Program services are limited to children with severe impairments that will lead to worsening health conditions if not corrected.

You can find out more information [here](#).



Snapshot of 2020

As we look back on 2020, we were able to accomplish a great deal together- amidst a pandemic nonetheless! There is not a simple way to sum up the past year, except to say it was a year unlike any other. It stretched our capacity, our endurance, our funding, and immensely tested our resilience. It would have been easy for all of us to stick to the bare minimum this year, goodness knows that the bare minimum alone had its' share of challenges.

459
adoptions
were
finalized!

1, 551
children were reunified
with families!

643
new
foster
homes!

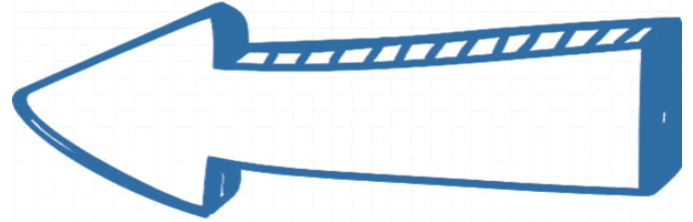
As a team, DSS has emerged from 2020 stronger, more focused and more committed because of it. Please take a look below at a snapshot of the many accomplishments DSS has seen during the past year!

- Implemented a 24/7 Child Abuse and Neglect & Vulnerable Adult Abuse Hotline, with one phone line (1-888-CARE4US) along with a web-based reporting option for non-emergent referrals.
- As the use of congregate care settings for an initial placement has declined, the use of kinship placements has increased. For example, the use of kinship placements increased from 3.9% of all initial placements in January 2020 to 13.4% of placements in December 2020.
- Developed and implemented Well-Being Teams to provide increased support to case managers in meeting the medical (20% increase), dental (26% increase) and behavioral health needs of children and youth. As of December 2020, 89% of children in foster care are up to date on well visits.
- Improved Child Support collections by 13% and responded to all customer needs within 48 hours of contact.
- Processed over 317,000 applications for SNAP and TANF, an over 150% weekly increase over 2019.
- Deployed Pandemic EBT to over 480,000 children and brought nearly \$159 million additional federal SNAP benefits into the hands of South Carolina families and the state's economy within a three-month period.
- Approved SC Childcare Vouchers for over 15,500 children and enrolled an additional 301 child care providers in the ABC Quality Program.

... among MANY other accomplishments!

Looking Forward to 2021!

We have great things planned for the agency in 2021, program and practice improvements across all areas and a renewed focus on quality training for staff, increased and improved services to clients, and a renewed commitment to advocacy for the great professionals of the agency!



Below you will find a brief highlight of some of the goals we plan to accomplish in 2021.

- Rollout new process for Central Registry Portal and streamlined background check process.
- Roll out of Pandemic- EBT 2.0 for children and families across the state once our application is approved by the USDS FNS.
- Full Implementation of the Family Court Case Management System (FCCMS) (we are at 45 out of 46 counties) and Child Support customer service portal (Middle of March).
- Implement a Child and Adult Information Portal (CAIP) which will allow foster parents and providers to access and update important information for the children in their care. All information entered in the CAIP will be automatically updated in DSS' CAPSS documentation system.
- Develop strategy for integrating race equity practices in to initiatives across the agency.
- Implement the use of evidence-informed assessment tools in Child Welfare to better assess strengths, needs, and develop planning for placement and service provision.
- Create and enhance policy guidance for quality practice across the agency.
- Streamline data collection and dissemination and develop and implement training for staff on actionable use of data in practice.
- Advocating for legislation to benefit the children and families we serve – to include: Extension of Foster Care (S.221/H.3509); Kinship Care (S. 222/H.3214) and implementation and compliance with the Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) to be implemented in October 2021 (S.441/H.3567).

Find out more about The Families First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) [here](#)

Did You Know? The agency’s dashboard, which is accessible at our website, provides you with data regarding SC Child Welfare: investigations, foster care, reunifications, finalized adoptions, and more. View the dashboards [here](#)

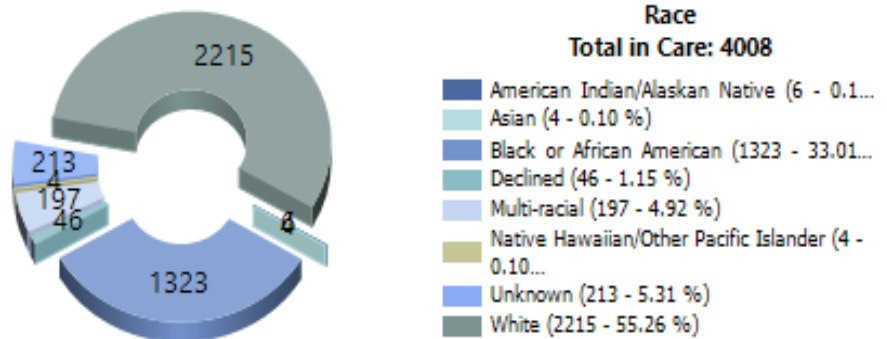
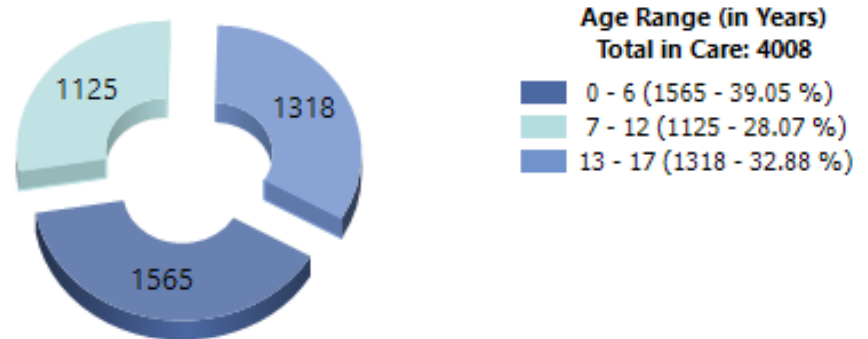
Children and Adolescents in Foster Care: Here in South Carolina

Currently in South Carolina, there are 4,008 children and adolescents in foster care. The Foster Care dashboard provides the demographic information of children and adolescents receiving foster care services across the state with the ability to drill down by counties.

You can view the Foster Care Dashboard [here](#).

DSS recognizes the importance of placing children and youth in family-like settings as the next best placement, if placement with kin is not possible. Currently, 84.7% of children and youth in foster care are placed in family-like homes and kinship care.

Teens are less likely to live in Family like settings compared to younger children. From a recent analysis on the need for foster homes, DSS’s highest need by age was for youth who are ages 13-17 years.



There’s been a 7.5% increase in families inquiring to foster teens based on the last three months of inquiries compared to the same three months a year ago!

Source: Heartfelt Calling