

# DRAFT

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**Georgia Department of Human Resources (DHR)  
Division of Children & Family Services (DFCS)  
Program Improvement Plan Fourth Quarter Report  
September 2009**

### Introduction

In response to a federal review of Georgia's child welfare outcomes, Georgia developed a two-year Program Improvement Plan (PIP) that was approved by the federal Children's Bureau of the Administration on Children and Families (ACF) and became effective September 1, 2008.

Georgia has begun work on all of the goals included in this PIP, having submitted as completed 61 (53%) of the 115 action steps included in the plan as renegotiated. (The state's June 2009 renegotiation request was approved regarding action steps (in four of 21 goals) related to its strategies for risk assessment, concurrent planning, and identification of service array barriers and gaps.)

Following is a brief summary of the activities and progress Georgia has made in implementing each goal during the fourth quarter of the two-year plan.

### **Strategy I: Develop and Pilot Family-Centered Practice Model**

#### **➔Goal A: Develop and pilot a Family-Centered Practice Model in innovation zones.<sup>1</sup>**

The agency has made several statewide policy and practice changes focused on the principles of family-centered practice. Included are requirements for Family Team Meetings, inclusion of the Family Preservation (ongoing services) model, individualized services and Independent Living services. The current focus is on practice change to ensure engagement of families, appropriate assessment, and continued involvement of families in the service continuum to improve child outcomes.

In this quarter, the agency's Education and Training Section developed and provided training on the Family-Centered Practice Participant Guide and Trainer Guide. State Office staff, Regional Directors, leadership and key stakeholders from the innovation zones received Family-Centered Practice training via a Breakthrough Collaborative Series meeting at the Georgia Tech Conference Center in June. A subsequent conference call was held to debrief and review questions with all participants.

Leadership, Administrators and Case Managers from the innovation zones were trained utilizing the Participant Guides for Family-Centered Practice in August at Augusta Tech, the Macon Methodist Home for Children, and at Fulton County DFCS offices.

Baseline measures for five Field Operations Review Guide (FORG) items have been established for the innovation zones and will be tracked quarterly (cases are reviewed monthly) to assess the effectiveness of the changes in policy and practice. These items include Permanency Goal for the Child (Item 7), Proximity of Foster Care Placement (Item 11), Needs and Services of the Family (Item 17), Child and Family Involvement in Case Planning (Item 18), Worker Contact with Parent (Item 20).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The innovation zones are Brantley, Catoosa, Fulton, Muskogee, Richmond and Walton Counties.

<sup>2</sup> Four of these measures correspond to CFSR outcome measures targeted in Georgia's PIP.

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## ➔Goal B: Improve and expand the Family Team Meeting practice statewide.

Family Team Meeting (FTM) Training continues to be offered to staff and to providers on a quarterly basis; reminders are sent out monthly. Three-day FTM training tracks for agency staff were held in June, July and August. In addition, the state sponsored a State Family Team Support Meeting and held a Train-the-Trainer training to which providers were invited in August.

The Program Evaluation and Analysis Section (PEAS) regional case reviews (11 regions) for quality assurance were used to assess FTM usage from October 2008 through August 2009. Of 691 cases assessed for FTM usage, 54% had received a timely FTM. Subsequent FTMs were conducted in 41% of the cases when identified as a need. Families were clearly included in 45% of the cases.

## ★Goal C: Promote placement stability and permanency through caseworker-child visit statewide initiative (“Every Child Every Month).

Based on draft CB comments from the Q3 submission, Strategy I, Goal C is completed.

### Strategy II: Strengthen Policy and Improve Practice to Ensure Safety of Children

## ★Goal A: Develop and distribute to intake staff statewide quality screening intake tool.

Based on draft CB comments from the Q3 submission, Strategy II, Goal A is completed.

## ➔Goal B: Improve ongoing risk and safety assessment tool usage statewide.

Georgia plans to adopt an enhanced safety and risk assessment practice. Draft policy has been developed, training is being created and the practice will be demonstrated in the six innovation zones selected because of demonstrated capacity to embrace new approaches to case practice.

Policies will be piloted with state office leadership and specified innovation zone staff in September 2009. The National Resource Center consultant visited the Innovation Zones in July 2009 to discuss preparation for changes related to the inclusion of the Family-Centered Practice Model, Risk Assessment, and Permanency and Concurrent Planning. To reinforce the new practice, DFCS will also be developing plans to provide supervisors with support on a regular basis during the early months of the new practice.

## ➔Goal C: Improve documentation.

The state is continuing to address documentation in staff training and presentations and enhancements to the SHINES data system.

### Strategy III: Improve Permanency Outcomes for Children and Families

## ★Goal A: Support Court Improvement Project (CIP) summits review of courts related to child abuse and neglect cases.

Completed.

## ➔Goal B: Support CIP review of courts related to child abuse and neglect cases to address problems of permanency, including adoption and APPLA.

The agency met with the Court Improvement Project and the Office of the Child Advocate in July and August this quarter. Additional concerns from the Office of the Child Advocate that were discussed included safety resources usage, runaway, child specific cases, and SHINES data concerns, which are being addressed.

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## ➔Goal C: Support court process to notify parents, foster parents, pre-adoptive parents and relative caregivers regarding their rights related to hearings and case reviews.

The Court Improvement Project has continued to survey and train foster parents regarding their right to be heard; 178 foster parents in 41 counties across Georgia have attended nine “Right to be Heard” trainings April – September 2009.<sup>3</sup> After the AFPAG conference in March 2009, AFPAG traveled with Juvenile Court Judge Britt Hammond (and member of Justice for Children), who presented this training to foster parents and helped them understand their right to be heard prior to and in court and their right to timely notification of court proceedings.

Foster parents received a pre-training survey to assess their knowledge on Right to be Heard and to have them express whether they were receiving notification of court proceedings and being allowed to attend and be heard at those court proceedings involving the foster children/child in their homes. Judge Hammond also offered foster parents multiple opportunities during the two-hour trainings to ask questions and seek clarification on this topic.

Following the March AFPAG conference, the agency completed an additional self-assessment related to the “Foster Parents’ Right to be Heard” and developed action plans for overcoming the barriers identified.

The agency is participating in the planning process for the 2010 Foster Parent Conference.

## ★Goal D: Collaborate with federal and state partners to improve permanency outcomes for children.

Based on draft CB comments from the Q3 submission, Strategy III, Goal D is completed.

## ➔Goal E: Cross-train SAAGs, GALs, parent attorneys, CJ/CJ, court staff, child fatality review committees and DFCS

Agency staff, community stakeholders, child advocates and the judiciary were afforded three opportunities through the Barton Law Clinic to attend trainings specific to permanency, family engagement, child development and the Interstate Compact for Placement of Children (ICPC). Training offerings included Permanency and Rules of Engagement by Sue Badeau of Casey Family Programs in June, ICPC by Judge Britt Hammond and Florida’s Compact Director Stephen Pennypacker in July, and Infant Brain Development and Trauma of Removal to Foster Care by Dr. Jordan Greenbaum in August. All of these trainings may now be accessed online by any stakeholder at <http://www.law.emory.edu/centers-clinics/barton-child-law-policy-clinic/presentations.html>.

Regional SAAG/County meetings were held in August in Macon and Cartersville.

## ★Goal F: Increase timely achievement of permanency for children through Permanency Unit Pilot in Region 4.

Based on draft CB comments from the Q3 submission, Strategy III, Goal F is completed.

## ➔Goal G: Update and/or develop policies and/or practice to improve permanency outcomes for children based on best practices.

In June 2009, concurrent planning work was initiated in six Innovation Zones (Catoosa, Brantley, Fulton, Muscogee, Walton and Richmond counties). The Professional Excellence Program conducted focus groups in four counties to assess internal and external stakeholder concurrent planning needs and staff and

<sup>3</sup> In FY 2007 there were approximately 4,750 foster care homes in Georgia.

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stakeholder training needs and to address questions and concerns regarding concurrent planning practice. Each Innovation Zone also designated staff members to participate in “Concurrent Test Teams”. Four concurrent test teams will be used to implement concurrent planning practice in the Innovation Zones.

During the quarter there were meetings with innovation zones in July to review best practices, address questions and work on implementation plans. Also in July, a planning meeting was held and a presentation made at the monthly G-Force meeting.

A workshop training proposal was submitted in July and approved in August for the 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Child Placement Conference. The purpose of the workshop is to provide information on Georgia’s new concurrent planning initiative to the various child welfare stakeholders who will be attending the conference.

The third draft of the “Concurrent Practice Handbook” was e-mailed to external and internal stakeholder groups for feedback.

**→Goal H: Train foster care supervisors and staff on best practices for achieving permanency.**  
Case reviews for permanency goals and training are planned for the next quarter in the innovation zones.

## Strategy IV: Improve Service Array and Foster Parent Retention

**→Goal A: Individualize services for family members to meet their specific needs as identified in the risk assessment.**

In August a memorandum from Assistant Commissioner Mark Washington setting the expectation for staff to utilize Family Team Meetings to develop case plans, individualize services based on the identified risk and needs of the family, and to incorporate assessed needs of youth into their Written Transitional Living Plans was sent to field staff along with the revised Risk Assessment Policy. This revised policy is now incorporated into the online policy manual and provides practice expectations related to individualizing services for families based on the current risk assessment.

The Program Evaluation and Analysis Section (PEAS) conducted regional case reviews for quality assurance for the period October 2008 through August 2009. Of 691 cases assessed for the development of case plans based on FTM usage as well as the incorporation of assessments in case plans, 75% documented that case plans were developed from information gleaned during the FTM. Assessments were clearly incorporated into the case plan in 76% of the cases.

The agency’s Education and Training Section is piloting training for utilizing FTMs to individualize case planning.

**→Goal B: Improve availability of and access to services for families and children.**

Multiple activities have served to advocate for the use of LIPTs to identify strategies and resources for families and children:

- The Deputy for Field Operations sent a memo to field staff noting the expectation that County Directors, not a designee, will participate in LIPT meetings to monitor the progress of cases, ensure permanency for the children, build relationships within the community, and build support systems for children.”
- The Division of Mental Health, Developmental Delays and Addictive Disorders (MHDDAD) hosted a debriefing meeting in June for LIPT teams to support and encourage the LIPT process.

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- The Department of Human Services and MHDDAD have signed a Memorandum of Understanding specifying the establishment of “Local Interagency Planning Teams (LIPT) and Regional Interagency Action Teams (RIAT) to facilitate collaboration among the parties and to develop a reporting process to document the teams’ progress. Collaboration and communication among the parties is to focus on children and families, and KidsNet is to be used as the primary model for local interagency planning”.

**→ Goal C: Individualize services for youth to meet their specific needs related to education, employment, housing, supportive relationships and health.**

From July 2008, through June 2009, 1,646 older youth were assessed using the Ansell Casey Life Skills (ACLS) assessment; an additional 1,382 youth were assessed in July and August.<sup>4</sup> In August, the agency sent the Independent Living policy to the field. All current independent living coordinators have been trained on the ACLS.

**→ Goal D: Incorporate physical health, mental health and educational services for children in case plans as identified in needs assessments.**

The PEAS unit has been reviewing cases for best practices as well as barriers in meeting the health needs, mental health needs and educational needs of children in foster care as well as in family preservation cases. This information is shared with regional leadership and corrective action plans are developed to correct any identified deficiencies. In addition, the review results are available to all DFCS staff. Bi-annual trend reports are prepared and made available with trend data for the regions reviewed during the 12-month review period.

This information/data was presented at the August Leadership Lens Meeting and was shared with statewide leadership including Regional Directors, County Directors, Field Program Specialists and State Office staff.

**★ Goal E: Provide training and comprehensive support for foster caregivers through pilots in Region 17 and five additional counties (Fulton, DeKalb, Thomas, Colquitt and Mitchell).**

The Foster Family Foundation of Georgia, Inc., was organized in 2006 in response to the recommendation of First Lady Mary Perdue’s Children’s Cabinet. Its purpose is twofold:

1. To increase the number of foster families in Georgia who are prepared to address the specific needs of those foster children who have been placed into state custody; and
2. To engage local communities to partner with DFCS in support of foster families and to protect and the children of our State.

With funding provided by DFCS, the Foster Family Foundation of Georgia (FFFGA) spearheaded the development of the EMBRACE prototype. In August responsibility for the ongoing operations of EMBRACE was transferred to the UGA/Fanning Institute. EMBRACE will continue as a public-private partnership among three entities:

- DHS/DFCS –will provide: 1) core funding for EMBRACE operations; 2) continued guidance concerning how EMBRACE fits within and adds value to the vision for child welfare; and 3) local level participation and collaboration in the functioning of the EMBRACE infrastructure and the delivery of EMBRACE core strategies and support services.

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<sup>4</sup> There were an estimated 4,440 Georgia children between the ages of 13 and 21 in foster care in 2005 based on AFCARS data and cited on the Kids Are Waiting website, a project of the Pew Charitable Trusts (www.kindsarewaiting.org), accessed October 2009.

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- UGA/Fanning Institute –will contract with DHS/DFCS to implement EMBRACE throughout the state. The Director of EMBRACE will be an employee of the Fanning Institute and will provide strategic and tactical leadership for expansion and ongoing refinement of EMBRACE.
- Foster Family Foundation of Georgia, Inc. –will serve as an advisor to the Fanning Institute in the implementation of EMBRACE. As a 501(c)(3) organization, it will assume responsibility for securing private sector investments to supplement public sector funding; Fanning Institute will provide staff support.

EMBRACE contracted with Metis Associates to complete an evaluation of the Pilot in Region 17 and to begin to look at data from the expansion into Region 15. The evaluation included surveying four foster parent focus groups, exit interviews with foster families opting out of the fostering programs (23 families), and monitoring of contact logs between foster parent liaisons and foster parents.

Also completed were a report on services and activities for Regions 15 and 17, an assessment of staff requirements, and the Fanning contract (SIV\_GoalE\_Action4, Exhibits 1-3).

## ◀Goal F: Establish internal foster care recruitment program.

All efforts of the Resource Development Innovations project support the development of a comprehensive statewide foster home recruitment and retention plan. This plan will support the implementation of the revised Permanency and Concurrent Planning practice and policy statewide in August 2010. A statewide analysis of resource development recruitment activities was completed in April 2009. Information is being gathered from each county to develop viable statewide recruitment and retention goals that are meaningful at the local and state level. The plan is expected to be completed and take effect by January 1, 2010.

## ★Goal G: Increase paternal family involvement through Outstanding Paternal Involvement pilot.

The Outstanding Paternal Involvement (OPI) pilot has generated the following strategies to improve paternal involvement:

- County FTM coordinators receive paternal contact information at FTM preparation stage and extend FTM invitation to paternal contacts as appropriate
- Paternal contact is monitored weekly on a scoreboard that tracks case manager successful contacts with fathers as a percentage of cases
- Complete “Strategies for Engaging Fathers” training for every case manager, supervisor and administrator in the Region. (completed June 09)
- Review and discuss data at monthly Regional G (management team) meetings
- Regional OPI Coordinator attends unit staff and unit meetings throughout the region to ensure line staff are aware of data and desired outcomes
- Schedule separate FTM for fathers if appropriate for the needs of the case

At the June regional leadership meeting, a presentation of visitation/contact data was used to demonstrate current progress on contact standards for children, mothers and fathers. The agency is able to analyze weekly as well as monthly contacts, which enables leadership to coach staff to ensure standards are met.

The Region 16 OPI pilot is completed. Based on this pilot, the best lesson learned is that the state needs to track and supervise parental contact vigilantly. The state is generating, through SHINES, the ability for staff at the case manager, unit, county, regional or state level to pull reports of contact data for children and parents. Case managers can look at the status and remaining contacts required for any case in real time. The state is generating, through SHINES, the ability to capture paternal involvement in FTMs as

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well as case planning. These SHINES enhancements are expected to be available online in December 2009.

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