



North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services Division of Social Services

325 North Salisbury Street • 2410 Mail Service Center • Raleigh, North Carolina 27699-2410

Michael F. Easley, Governor

Pheon E. Beal, Director

Carmen Hooker Odom, Secretary

(919) 733-3055

January 6, 2006

DEAR COUNTY DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL SERVICES

**SUBJECT: Challenge for Children, 2005 - End of Year Reports and
Challenge for Children, 2006 - Time to Make a Commitment**

We have just completed the ninth year of the **Challenge for Children**. For almost a decade, the Division and County Departments of Social Services have worked diligently to make permanency for children a reality for children in the foster care system as well as child welfare professionals, child advocates and the community- at-large. The efforts have paid off as data reveals that children are not lingering in the foster care system. The number of children in the backlog has declined for seven of the nine years. During calendar year 2005, ninety-nine (99) Departments of Social Services accepted the challenge to make reduction of the foster care backlog a top priority. All are commended for their efforts in achieving permanency for children.

A need to insure self sufficiency, safety, permanence and the well-being for families and children lead North Carolina to the Multiple Response System (MRS). MRS a family centered approach to insuring safety, permanency and well-being for children. MRS is a reform of the entire continuum of child welfare in North Carolina, from intake through placement services. MRS is based upon the application of family centered principles of partnership through seven strategic components. In 2001, several County DSS piloted the Multiple Response System (MRS). The results of the pilot program revealed that MRS was widely embraced by families and communities. In January 2006, all counties will implement MRS.

MRS Strategies

North Carolina employs MRS through seven strategies. The seven strategies for system reform are:

- Collaboration between the Work First Family Assistance and child welfare programs.
- A choice of two approaches to reports of child abuse, neglect or dependency.
- A redesign of in-home services.
- A strengths-based, structured intake process.
- Coordination between law enforcement agencies and child protective services for the investigative assessment approach.
- Implementation of Child and Family Team meetings during the provision of in-home services.
- Implementation of shared parenting meetings in child placement cases.

MRS reinforces the goal of permanency, safety and well-being of children. MRS foremost supports a child's natural family and environment. MRS is a system grounded in prevention as well as intervention. MRS is a system that employs measures in a family that keeps a child safe before the child's condition rises to the level of abuse or neglect, as defined by North Carolina Law. MRS bolsters natural family resources to maintain a child safely in his or her home. MRS supports the **Challenge for Children** by:

- Maintaining children safely in their own homes
- Involving extended family at the onset of services, giving the family a sense of responsibility for the safety and well-being of the child
- Utilizing all resources to address the needs of a child to enable the child to reach and maintain permanency
- Use of Children and Family Teams and shared parenting if placement is needed to insure permanency

It is now time for the County Departments of Social Services that participated in the **Challenge for Children, 2005** to submit their year-end backlog information. Backlog is defined as those children who have been in the custody or placement responsibility of a County Department of Social Services for more than 12 months, regardless of their current living arrangement (i.e., placement.) In other words, the children in your backlog as of January 1, 2006, will have entered the custody or placement responsibility of your agency prior to January 1, 2005. **Children that came into your agency's custody between January 1, 2005 and December 31, 2005, are not to be counted in the backlog.**

Included with this letter is information that the Division received from you in early 2005, identifying the children in your agency's foster care backlog on January 1, 2005. Please review the information carefully, striking through the name of each child that left the backlog during 2005 along with the reason the child left the backlog e.g. (adopted, returned to parent, kinship care placement, etc.). Also identify those youth who are 18 years of age or older and remain in foster care pursuant to a Voluntary Placement Agreement (VPA)/ CARS (Contractual Agreement for Continuing Residential Support) so that they can be deducted from the official backlog count. This is done by placing an X in the VPA column.

To participate in Challenge for Children 2006, Departments of Social Services should use the attached Challenge for Children 2006 form to list all children that entered the backlog during 2005 and any child that was in the backlog before 2005 and is not listed on the enclosed print out of the children in your county's backlog. To determine if you have a complete backlog listing, review all of the names on the Division's backlog print out and the names on the Challenge for Children 2006 form to insure that all children in the placement authority of your agency prior to January 1, 2004 are listed.

The Division will determine the change in your backlog by comparing the backlog data you submitted for Challenge for Children 2005 with the data you submit for Challenge for Children 2006. The result of this comparison will be your backlog change.

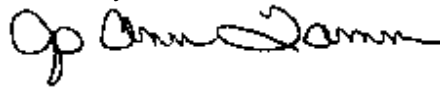
In addition to the county-specific backlog information for January 1, 2006, Departments of Social Services must submit an agency-prepared statement of acceptance of the **Challenge for Children, 2006** and the attached vision for the child welfare system, bearing the signatures of the agency Director and all of the agency's child welfare social work and supervisory staff (including IFPS, CPS, Foster Care, and Adoptions).

Please submit backlog information and your acceptance statement with signatures no later than January 30, 2006, directly to: Phyllis B. Fulton, N.C. Division of Social Services, Children's Services Section, 325 N. Salisbury Street, 2410 M S C, RALEIGH, NC 27699-2410.

As self-sufficiency, safety, permanency and well-being is the desired goal for all children, this is a most important challenge that we hope every county DSS will accept for 2006. Thank you for your consideration of this challenge. I want to commend all of the counties that participated in the **Challenge for Children 2005** and especially those counties that have participated for the past eight years.

This letter will be posted on the Division s web site. The letter with the attached listing of children in the backlog will be sent by courier service. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Ms. Fulton at (919) 733-2279.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "JoAnn Lamm". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and "L".

JoAnn Lamm, Chief
Family Support and Child Welfare Services Section

attachments

cc: Pheon Beal
Sherry Bradsher
Children s Program Representatives
Work First Representatives
Family Support and Child Welfare Services Team Leaders
Local Business Liaisons

FSCWS-02-06

**NORTH CAROLINA'S VISION FOR THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM
Challenge for Children, 2006**

COMMUNITY – BASED SUPPORT FOR FAMILIES...

promotes a family's ability to cope with difficult situations and resolve family problems.

ONE COORDINATED ASSESSMENT PROCESS...

involves the family in a comprehensive evaluation of their strengths and needs.

ONE CASEWORKER OR CASEWORK TEAM...

ensures that everyone is working together toward a permanent plan for the child.

ONE SINGLE, STABLE FOSTER CARE PLACEMENT WITHIN THE CHILD'S OWN COMMUNITY...

provides temporary stability until a lifelong home for the child is achieved.

A SAFE PERMANENT HOME WITHIN ONE YEAR...

for all children for whom a county DSS has legal custody or placement responsibility.

MULTIPLE RESPONSE SYSTEM (MRS)

MRS STRATEGIES

- A strengths-based, structured intake process
- A choice of two approaches to reports of child abuse, neglect, or dependency
- Coordination between law enforcement agencies and child protective services for the investigative assessment approach
- A redesign of in-home services
- Implementation of Child and Family Team meetings during the provision of in-home services
- Implementation of Shared-Parenting meetings in child placement cases
- Collaboration between the Work First Family Assistance and child welfare programs

EVERY NC CHILD DESERVES A FAMILY

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Use additional sheets as necessary