



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

325 North Salisbury Street • MSC 2408 • Raleigh, North Carolina 27699-2408
Courier # 56-20-25

Michael F. Easley, Governor
Carmen Hooker Buell, Secretary

Pheon E. Beal, Director
(919) 733-3055

January 15, 2002

DEAR COUNTY DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL SERVICES

**SUBJECT: Challenge for Children, 2001 - End of Year Reports
and
Challenge for Children, 2002 - Renew the Commitment**

We have just completed the fifth year of the **Challenge for Children**. The number of children in the backlog has declined for each of the five years. The number of counties participating in **Challenge for Children** has increased four of the five years. During calendar year 2001, ninety-seven (97) county Departments of Social Services accepted the challenge to make reduction of the foster care backlog a top priority. All participating DSS agencies were formally thanked at the Children's Services Conference in March 2001, and received their plaque or plaque insert during April. These county agencies also received invitations to participate in special training opportunities held across the state. In addition, letters of commendation were sent to legislators and public officials in participating counties.

It is now time for the county DSS agencies that participated in the **Challenge for Children, 2001** 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, 2002, will have entered the custody or placement responsibility of your agency prior to January 1, 2001. Children that came into your agency's custody between January 1, 2001 and December 31, 2001, are not to be counted in the year-end backlog count.

Included with this letter is information that the Division received from you in early 2001 identifying the children in the foster care backlog on January 1, 2001. Please review the information carefully, striking through the name of each child that left your custody during 2001 along with the reason (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) so that they can be deducted from the official backlog count. This is done by placing an "X" in the VPA column.

County DSS agencies that participated in the **Challenge for Children, 2001** should use the attached "**CHALLENGE FOR CHILDREN 2002**" form to identify any additional

children (i.e. not remaining on the original list) who are in the foster care backlog on January 1, 2002. The data will be compared to the data submitted in January 2001 in order to determine the percentage of change in your backlog over the past year.

County DSS agencies that did not participate in the **Challenge for Children, 2001** but want to participate in the **Challenge for Children, 2002** should use the attached "**CHALLENGE FOR CHILDREN 2002**" form to identify all children in the foster care backlog on January 1, 2002.

In addition to the county-specific backlog information for January 1, 2002, all county DSS agencies that want to participate in the **Challenge for Children, 2002** must submit an agency-prepared statement, poem, case example, sketch, or other type of illustration (have fun and be creative!) of "What Permanency Means to a Child." The statement/illustration must bear 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). These will be prominently displayed in the Children's Services Section throughout 2002.

Please submit backlog information and your statement/illustration with signatures no later than January 31, 2002, directly to:

PHYLLIS B. FULTON
N.C. DIVISION OF SOCIAL SERVICES
CHILDREN'S SERVICES SECTION
325 N. SALISBURY STREET, 2408 MAIL SERVICE CENTER
RALEIGH, NC 27699-2408

As in previous years, all county DSS agencies that accept the **Challenge for Children, 2002**, will receive formal commendation from the Division, recognition at the statewide child welfare conference (March 4-6, 2002, in Asheville), and invitations to participate in 3-4 special training opportunities during 2002. County DSS agencies with the most significant backlog reduction will receive special recognition.

This is a most important challenge that we hope every county DSS will accept for 2002. Thank you for your consideration of this challenge. I want to personally commend all of the county DSS agencies that participated in the **Challenge for Children, 2001**, and especially those counties that have participated for each of the past five years. Your willingness to accept the **Challenge** and the success that you have experienced are now receiving national recognition as a part of the child welfare reform effort.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Ms. Fulton at (919) 733-4622.

Sincerely,



Charles C. Harris, Chief
Children's Services Section

cc: Pheon Beal
Child Services Team Leaders

CS-02-2002

Children's Program Representatives

NORTH CAROLINA'S VISION FOR THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM

A SAFE PERMANENT HOME WITHIN ONE YEAR...

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

WHAT DOES PERMANENCY MEAN TO A CHILD? WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE? WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

EVERY N.C. CHILD DESERVES A FAMILY

Agency signatures

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Use additional sheets as necessary