



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

325 North Salisbury Street • Raleigh, North Carolina 27603  
Courier # 56-20-25

Michael F. Easley, Governor  
Carmen Hooker Odom, Secretary

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

December 9, 2002

### **DEAR COUNTY DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL SERVICES**

**SUBJECT: Challenge for Children, 2002 - End of Year Reports**  
and

**Challenge for Children, 2003 - Time to Make a Commitment**

We have just completed the sixth year of the **Challenge for Children**. The number of children in the backlog has declined for each of the six years. During 2001 the backlog was reduced by 9%. The number of counties participating in **Challenge for Children** has increased five of the six years. During calendar year 2002, ninety-eight (98) county Departments of Social Services accepted the challenge to make reduction of the foster care backlog a top priority. All participating DSS agencies received formal recognition at the Children's Services Conference in March 2002, and received their plaque or plaque insert during April.

It is now time for the county DSS agencies that participated in the **Challenge for Children, 2002** 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, 2003, will have entered the custody or placement responsibility of your agency prior to January 1, 2002. Children that came into your agency's custody between January 1, 2002 and December 31, 2002, are not to be counted in the backlog.

Included with this letter is information that the Division received from you in early 2002 identifying the children in the foster care backlog on January 1, 2002. Please review the information carefully, striking through the name of each child that left the backlog during 2002 along with the reason the child left the backlog, (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.

County DSS agencies that participated in the **Challenge for Children, 2002** should use the attached "**CHALLENGE FOR CHILDREN 2003**" form to identify any additional

children (i.e. not remaining on the original list) who are in the foster care backlog on January 1, 2003. The data will be compared to the data submitted in January 2002 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, 2002** but want to participate in the **Challenge for Children, 2003** should use the attached "**CHALLENGE FOR CHILDREN 2003**" form to identify all children in the foster care backlog on January 1, 2003.

In addition to the county-specific backlog information for January 1, 2003, all county DSS agencies that want to participate in the **Challenge for Children, 2003** must submit an agency-prepared statement of acceptance of the **Challenge for Children, 2003** 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 20, 2003, 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 accepted the **Challenge for Children, 2002**, will receive a formal commendation from the Division.

This is a most important challenge that we hope every county DSS will accept for 2003. Thank you for your consideration of this challenge. I want to personally commend all of the counties that participated in the **Challenge for Children, 2002**, and especially those counties that have participated for 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.

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) 733-4622.

Sincerely,



Sherry S. Bradsher  
Deputy Director

cc: Pheon Beal  
Child Services Team Leaders  
Children's Program Representatives

SSB:pbf

**CS-34-2002**



**NORTH CAROLINA'S VISION FOR THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM**

**Challenge for Children, 2003**

**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.

**EVERY NC CHILD DESERVES A FAMILY**

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Use additional sheets as necessary

## Promoting Placement Discussion

The Division realizes that DSS agencies in partnership with others have made tremendous gains in the foster care backlog reductions. Information received by the Division from county DSS agencies indicates that the children and youth lingering in the backlog are those children and youth that need special placement considerations. The Division encourages you to consider all permanency options when planning for these children and youths. Some exploratory questions for placement considerations are:

1. Is your agency providing independent living services for all youths aged 13 to 21 (LINKS)?
2. Has the agency involved extended family (aunts, uncles, cousins, etc.) in making placement arrangements?
3. If a child or youth was removed from a substance involved family does the family case plan include relapse considerations?
4. Has the youth needing placement been given an opportunity to provide input in placement discussions?
5. Has the case been referred for a CCPT review so that the CCPT can consider placement barriers that are systematic in nature?
6. Has the local Family Resource Center been utilized for recruiting a family for the child or youth? (In counties where applicable)
7. Is the family case plan strength based?