



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

January 5, 2004

DEAR COUNTY DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL SERVICES

SUBJECT: Challenge for Children, 2003 - End of Year Reports
and

Challenge for Children, 2004 - Time to Make a Commitment

We have just completed the seventh year of the **Challenge for Children**. We began in 1997 with 67 counties and in 2003, all 100 counties accepted the challenge to make reduction of the foster care backlog a top priority. The Division wishes to thank each of you for the dedicated efforts you have brought to this vital endeavor. Each of you have embodied the heart and soul of the state's effort to promote and enhance permanence for children. While the number of counties accepting the challenge has increased over the seven year period, the number of children in the backlog has declined for each of the seven years. During 2002 the backlog was reduced by 5%. The number of counties participating in **Challenge for Children** has increased five of the six years.

It is now time for the county DSS agencies that participated in the **Challenge for Children, 2003** 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, 2004, will have entered the custody or placement responsibility of your agency prior to January 1, 2003. Children that came into your agency's custody between January 1, 2003 and December 31, 2003, are **not** to be counted in the backlog.

We have made significant strides during our Challenge years to obtain permanent homes for many of our children. However, there remains an important group for which we must devote more of our time as it relates to permanence. We are asking that each of you make a concentrated effort to obtain permanence for your older children and youth during this next Challenge year. We ask that you continue to exercise creativity and leadership in attaining permanence for children who reach this point without a permanent family.

Included with this letter is information that the Division received from you in early 2003 identifying the children in the foster care backlog on January 1, 2003. Please review the information carefully, striking through the name of each child that left the backlog during 2003 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, 2003** should use the attached "**CHALLENGE FOR CHILDREN 2004**" form to identify any additional children (i.e. not on the list sent to you by the Division) who are in the foster care backlog on January 1, 2004. The data will be compared to the data submitted in January 2003 in order to determine the percentage of change in your backlog over the past year.

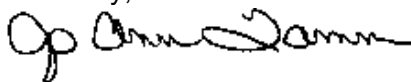
In addition to the county-specific backlog information for January 1, 2004, all county DSS agencies that want to participate in the **Challenge for Children, 2004** must submit an agency-prepared statement of acceptance of the **Challenge for Children, 2004** and the attached "vision" for the child welfare 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 31, 2004, directly to: **PHYLLIS B. FULTON**, N.C. DIVISION OF SOCIAL SERVICES, **CHILDREN'S SERVICES SECTION, 325 N. SALISBURY STREET, 2410 MAIL SERVICE CENTER, RALEIGH, NC 27699-2410**. As in previous years, all county DSS agencies that accepted the **Challenge for Children, 2003**, will receive a formal commendation from the Division.

This is a most important challenge that we hope every county DSS will again accept for 2004. Thank you for your consideration of this challenge. I want to personally commend all of the counties that participated in the **Challenge for Children, 2003**, and especially those counties that have participated for the past seven 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) 733-2279.

Sincerely,



Jo Ann Lamm, Program Administrator
Family Support & Child Welfare Services Section

cc: Sherry Bradsher
Pheon Beal
Family Support and Child Welfare Services Team Leaders
Children's Services Program Representatives

JSL:pbf

FSCWS-01-04

CHALLENGE FOR CHILDREN 2004

COUNTY _____

#	1 st Name	Last Name	X VPA	Race	Age	Gender	X if more than 3 Placements

**NORTH CAROLINA'S VISION FOR THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM
Challenge for Children, 2004**

Seven Strategies of North Carolina's Multiple Response System

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

Family For Kids Goals

- 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

Use additional sheets as necessary