

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

325 North Salisbury Street • MSC 2410 • Raleigh, North Carolina 27699-2410  
Courier # 56-20-25

Michael F. Easley, Governor  
Director  
Carmen Hooker Odom, Secretary

Pheon E. Beal,

(919) 733-3055

July 21, 2003

**DEAR COUNTY DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL SERVICES**

**SUBJECT: Challenge for Children**

In January 1997, the Division issued the first **Challenge for Children** asking every county department of social services in North Carolina to make foster care backlog reduction a top priority for the child welfare system. For the purposes of the Challenge for Children, the foster care backlog refers to children and youth for which the County Department of Social Services has placement authority. The number of Challenge counties has grown five of the past six years. Sixty-seven (67) counties formally accepted the Challenge for Children in 1997. **As of January 2003, all 100 counties are participating in the Challenge for Children.** In 1997 sixty-seven counties reported a backlog of 6,034. In 2003, 100 counties reported a backlog of 4,774. Fifty-seven of the original sixty-seven counties had fewer children in their backlog in January 2003, than they did in January 1998. **Durham, Richmond, and Union Counties have experienced backlog reductions each year of the Challenge for Children program.** We applaud the efforts of every county that has accepted the Challenge.

The ninety-eight counties participating in Challenge for Children 2002 reduced the statewide backlog by 5%. In these counties, **2,254** foster children who were in the backlog on January 1, 2002 were no longer in the foster care system on December 31, 2002. Fifty-seven counties netted reductions in the backlog or had no change in the backlog. Forty-five counties reported fewer than 20 children in the backlog as of December 31, 2002. As of January 1, 2003, Alleghany and Jones Counties have no children in the backlog. Iredell and Union Counties, counties with a population of more than 100,000, realized a backlog reduction of 50% and 48% respectively. Your efforts continue to make a difference! We commend everyone involved for their efforts in achieving safe, permanent homes for children.

Since the start of the Challenge for Children, «County» County Department of Social Services has accepted the Challenge for «**Years\_Part**» years. In 2002, «County» County realized a backlog change of «**M\_2001\_**»%. Counties similar in population to «County» realized a backlog change of «**Other\_Count\_**»%. We want to recognize your efforts in participating in the Challenge for Children 2002. Included with this letter is a 2002 insert for your Challenge for Children plaque.

Dear County Director of Social Services

July 21, 2003

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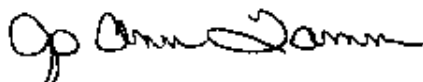
The Division is prepared to submit a letter of commendation to your Board of Social Services, Board of County Commissioners, County Manager, and legislative representatives recognizing the effort that your agency has made to reduce the number of children who have remained in your custody or placement responsibility for more than one year. The letter will recognize and commend your participation in the Challenge for Children, whether or not you were able to realize a reduction in the backlog. We ask that you review the attached letter to determine whether or not you would like to have it sent to your county's leadership. We are not able to honor individual county requests for modifications to the letter. Please submit the names and addresses of the persons to whom you would like to receive the letters to:

Phyllis B. Fulton  
N.C. Division of Social Services  
Children's Services Section, Policy & Initiatives Team  
325 North Salisbury Street, Suite 742-C  
2410 Mail Service Center  
Raleigh, North Carolina 27699-2410

It is important that you include the full name, title and address of each individual that you would like to receive a letter. We will not send any letter of commendation until we receive your response. Please submit your information **no later than August 15, 2003**.

In addition to this letter being sent to the leaders of your community, the Division encourages you to personally recognize your staff's commitment to safe, permanent homes for children and to educate your community about this important goal. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Ms. Fulton at (919) 733-4622.

Sincerely,



JoAnn Lamm, Program Administrator  
Family Support and Child Welfare Services Section

JAL/pf

cc: Pheon Beal  
Shery Bradsher  
Children's Services Team Leaders  
Children's Programs Representatives

**FSCWS-05-03**

(previously numbered FSCWS-04-03)



## 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

July 30, 2003

«Title» «First» «Name»  
«Agency»  
«Address»  
«City»

**SUBJECT: Challenge for Children**

Dear «Title» «Name»:

The foster care system provides an invaluable, often life-saving service for children who cannot remain safely in their own homes as a result of severe abuse, neglect, or dependency. However, foster care must be used appropriately as a temporary living arrangement since all children need the stability and security of a safe, permanent home. This goal can be achieved through reunification with parents when the child's safety can be ensured, through adoption, or through custody or guardianship with relatives or other caring adults willing to make a lasting commitment to the child. Consequently, it is a major goal of our child welfare system to reduce the number of children who remain in the custody of a county Department of Social Services for more than twelve months.

In January 1997, we issued the first annual **Challenge for Children**, asking every county Department of Social Services in North Carolina to make foster care backlog reduction a top priority for the child welfare system. This is a tremendous challenge, indeed, in light of the considerable effects of maltreatment on these children. The Challenge for Children grew out of our belief that concentrated focus and commitment must form the basis of any effort to reduce the backlog. Since 1997, more than eight thousand children have obtained permanency.

The **Challenge for Children 2002** ended with participating counties documenting a backlog reduction for the fourth consecutive year. From the eyes of a child, 2, 254 children that were in foster care on January 1, 2002, were in a permanent home on December 31, 2002. A clear focus on the safety and well being of children have made a difference for a lot of children and youth.

Because the Challenge for Children does not provide additional funding to participating county DSS agencies, it is unrealistic to expect that every county DSS can reduce the backlog through their participation. Consequently, every county DSS agency that accepts the Challenge for Children is to be commended for their effort and dedication. Your county Department of Social Services demonstrated their commitment and resolve by accepting the **Challenge for Children 2002**.

Date July 30, 2003

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I am asking that you join me in commending the «County» County Department of Social Services for accepting the **Challenge for Children 2002** and for its commitment to ensuring safe, permanent homes for abused and neglected children. I also ask you to commend this agency for joining with other counties in accepting the **Challenge for Children 2003**. As a leader in your community, I know that you will be interested in this important initiative benefiting your community's most vulnerable children.

Sincerely,

Pheon E. Beal

PEB/pbf