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

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

Michael F. Easley, Governor   Pheon E. Beal, Director
Carmen Hooker Odom, Secretary   (919) 733-3055

December 20, 2004

DEAR COUNTY DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL SERVICES
SUBJECT: **Challenge for Children, 2004 - End of Year Reports**
                                              And
             Challenge for Children, 2005 - Time to Make a Commitment

We have just completed the eighth year of the **Challenge for Children**. The number of children in the backlog has declined for seven of the eight years. During 2003 the backlog was reduced by 1%. During calendar year 2003, ninety-seven (97) Departments of Social Services accepted the challenge to make reduction of the foster care backlog a top priority. During 2004 the original sixty-seven counties received a trailblazer plaque recognizing the county for seven years of continuing participation in **Challenge for Children**. These counties fortitude demonstrated that permanence for children is an attainable goal. Other participating counties received inserts for their **Challenge for Children** plaque. All participating counties are to be applauded for their efforts in achieving permanency for children. The Division and county Departments of Social Services continue to find creative approaches to enhance safety, permanence and well being for children in our state.

It is now time for the county Departments of Social Services that participated in the **Challenge for Children**, **2004** 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, 2005, will have entered the custody or placement responsibility of your agency prior to January 1, 2004. **Children that came into your agency's custody between January 1, 2004 and December 31, 2004, are not to be counted in the backlog.**

Included with this letter is information that the Division received from you in early 2004 identifying the children in your agency s foster care backlog on January 1, 2004. Please review the information carefully, striking through the name of each child that left the backlog during 2004 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 2005, Departments of Social Services should use the attached Challenge for Children 2005 form to list all children that entered the backlog during 2004 and any child that was in the backlog before 2004 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 2005 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 2004 with the data you submit for Challenge for Children 2005. The result of this comparison will be your backlog change.

In addition to the county-specific backlog information for January 1, 2005, Departments of Social Services must submit an agency-prepared statement of acceptance of the **Challenge for Children, 2005** and the attached vision for the child welfare system, bearing the signatures of the agency Director and <u>all</u> of the agency s child welfare social work and supervisory staff (including IFPS, CPS, Foster Care, and Adoptions).
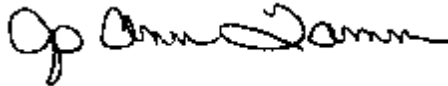
Please submit backlog information and your acceptance statement with signatures <u>no later than January 30, 2005</u>, directly to:

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

This is a most important challenge that we hope <u>every</u> county DSS will accept for 2005. Thank you for your consideration of this challenge. I want to personally commend all of the counties that participated in the **Challenge for Children, 2004**, and especially those counties that have participated for the past seven 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,

Jo Ann Lamm, Chief
Family Support and Child Welfare Services Section

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

JSL:pbf

CHALLENGE FOR CHILDREN 2005

COUNTY_____   COUNTY CONTACT NAME & PHONE

_____

1st Name	Last Name	VPA	Race	Age NOT BIRTHDAY	Gender	# Placements	Date of custody/ Placement

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

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EVERY NC CHILD DESERVES A FAMILY

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_____   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____
Use additional sheets as necessary

Promoting Permanency Discussions

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?
8. How are other counties doing it? (Collaborate with counties with similar demographics to gain ideas around permanency)