

Virginia  
Department  
of Social  
Services

Spotlight on

# Adoption

2013 Newsletter

## In This Issue

The Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS), Division of Family Services (DFS), is dedicated to strong families where the safety, permanency and well-being of children is paramount. We are committed to the goal of transforming our policies, programs and practices to strengthen families and improve outcomes for children and youth. We are responsible for support to our 120 local departments of social services in the following program areas:

- Prevention services (strengthening families through supportive services to parents and their children)
- Adult Services
- Child Protective Services (child abuse and neglect)
- Family Domestic Violence
- Permanency (adoption, foster care, independent living, interstate/intercountry child placement, respite services and safe and stable family services); and
- Quality Assurance and Outcome-Based Reporting and Analysis

This newsletter, *2012 Spotlight on Adoption*, shares personal stories of adoption, children currently awaiting adoption, statistics and promising practices identified through our local departments of social services; as well as public and private partnerships. Together, our focus is to unite children with the goal of adoption with loving families throughout the Commonwealth, reduce the time children spend in foster care and improve the outcomes for older youth in foster care as they transition into independent adults.

In 2013, our goal for the DFS newsletter is to spotlight our programs, promising practices and the personal stories of the families and individual lives we strengthen each day.



## Norfolk Adoption Day Celebration

The Norfolk Department of Human Services' Adoption Unit planned and executed its most ambitious campaign ever to promote the adoption of foster children who are unable to return to their biological families.

In observance of Adoption Awareness Month in November, NDHS social workers coordinated their first annual conference for adoption professionals. "Diversity in Adoption", held at the Norfolk Plaza Hotel on November 8, drew more than 145 professionals from as far away as Richmond and offered celebrated speakers and workshops about Foster Care and Adoption through the Eyes of Children, Adopting Siblings, and how race factors into the decision to adopt.

*story continued on next page*



*Herrera Family – Samuel – 11 months*



*Council Family – Halah 17 years old*

### Norfolk Adoption Day continued

On November 13, City Council celebrated adoption as Mayor Fraim read the City's annual proclamation acknowledging the importance of connecting children with permanent families.

Adoption Awareness Month culminated with a special ceremony on November 27 at Norfolk Circuit Court. The City's 6th Annual Adoption Day celebration was its largest ever, personally acknowledging 27 of the 31 children whose adoptions were finalized this year. Each family received a certificate and a family photograph with the Honorable Michelle Atkins, Chief Judge of Juvenile Courts. The special guest speaker was Jillian Jones, who shared her personal story of adoption. She and her husband, City Manager Marcus Jones, are also adoptive parents.

The Norfolk Sheriff's Office provided plush Teddy bears for each of the children and the Citizens Advisory Council to the Norfolk Juvenile & Domestic Relations District Court sponsored each family with four tickets to the Virginia Zoo. Last, but not least, Attorney Mary Commander purchased a candle for each family as a symbol of unification. The event culminated with refreshments sponsored by Peter G. Decker III, Nora A. Barnes & Besianne Maiden.

Watch Norfolk's Adoption Day Celebration unfold on [Norfolk's YouTube Channel!](#)

*(Reprinted with permission from Norfolk DSS/City Spotlight)*



*Blowe Family – Keyan – 10 years old*

## More Virginia Adoption Day Celebrations

Adoption Day celebrations took place throughout Virginia. [Click here](#) to see the 2012 calendar of events.

*Cassandra Calendar-Ray, Executive Director of the VA One Church, One Child organization in Richmond. They recently were involved with a match party event at the Science Museum on November 29th.*

## DataSpeak

**334** or **47.2%** of children adopted in Virginia in 2012 were girls.

**708** children were adopted from foster care in Virginia during state fiscal year (SFY) 2012.

**24%** of very young children (less than 2 years of age) were more likely to be adopted through a local department of social services.

The percentage of children exiting foster care to adoption has increased over the last 10 years from one fifth (**20%**) to one quarter (**26%**)





## Virginia's Children Currently Available For Adoption

[Shamara](#) wants to become a psychologist. She would also like to be able to help her mother. Her third wish would be for a laptop. This young person likes Italian and Mexican food as well as going to the movies, the mall and hanging out with her friends. She dreams of one day visiting Jamaica. She wants people to know that she is funny, outgoing and smart. She also wants her forever family to provide unconditional love and support.



Creative, funny and cool are just a few of the words that would describe [Dylan](#). He is in high school and enjoys many things, including reading, skateboarding and doing tricks on a BMX bike. You might find Dylan reading mysteries or watching CSI on television.

For physical activities, Dylan loves basketball, football and working out in the gym. But, take him inside and he has just as many things he loves to do, such as drawing, wood working and listening to all kinds of music. When it comes to food, some of his favorites are Mexican and Alaskan crab legs.



[Tolando](#) is growing into quite a charming, young gentleman. Manners, neatness, politeness, independence and pride in his appearance are important to him. His passions also include board games, friendly competition, practicing his joke-telling skills and creating buildings and structures with Legos, magnets, and creativity. He hopes to one day build a miniature city. Perhaps a career in architecture or engineering is in his future? While he has many friends his own age and enjoys the typical activities of any 15-year-old boy, he is very intelligent and can converse and socialize easily with adults. The future is wide open for Tolando, but he longs for one missing piece – a forever family. "I just want a family that will love me and take good care of me. That's all," he says.



[Danielle](#) is much more than just a pretty face. She's a smart, creative, free-thinking young lady with many talents and interests. From reading and writing to singing and drawing, scrapbooking and beading to other arts and crafts, Danielle is well-rounded and skilled. An independent thinker, she enjoys discussing timely topics, news and current events and would welcome the opportunity to be on a debate team. An excellent student, she excels academically and aspires to attend college and build a career. To be around Danielle is to be drawn in by her exuberant personality, zest for life, quick sense of humor and the true spirit of not only a survivor, but a thriver. Always up for fun, Danielle says she's looking for a family that is "eccentric" and "a little different." Will you dare to be different for Danielle?



One look at [CJ](#) is all that is needed to know what a likeable, friendly, outgoing, and energetic youngster he can be. He is a big football and basketball fan but he also likes to participate in sports like swimming. CJ can be very affectionate, sensitive, and caring and he yearns for a home where he can feel safe, protected, and loved. A family that can meet his emotional and developmental needs will help this engaging child overcome the obstacles created by his past.

**Call 1-800-DO-ADOPT for further information.**

*story continued on next page*

# Virginia's Children Currently Available For Adoption

---



[Austin](#) is a bright eye young teenager with a quick but gentle smile. He is athletic and enjoys all kinds of sports. He especially likes to fish and hunt. He has a good appetite is learning how to cook. Austin enjoys school and id described as a bright child. He is an excellent reader and enjoys reading for leisure. His least favorite subject in school is math. His wish for a family is one that also enjoys the out-of-doors; attending sporting activities and especially likes to fish and occasionally go hunting. Having other children and pets would be great also. He is ready for his permanent family.



Meet [Katherine](#), an budding artist with a personality to match. Katherine's life has not been a easy, she was placed into foster care at an early age from an abusive situation and then placed in an abusive adoptive placement. She and several of her sisters were returned to foster care and she is now ready to become a part of a family who will love and care for her as she deserves. She is learning to control her temper and her aggression although she has an occasional slip. Katherine has a very colorful vocabulary which she uses often when upset or irritated. She would like to continue communication and frequent contact with her sisters but she understands that she will not be able to live with them. Although she understands this, she is not very happy with the potential arrangement. She enjoys church, especially praise dancing. She does want to remain in contact with her sisters but seems fine with being placed with a family by herself. She would greatly benefit from the encouragement and support of a family while she learns to overcome her behavioral challenges in her current therapeutic environment. Katherine needs a role model to help her develop a better sense of herself; to learn how to care for her body as well as her self-esteem. She is waiting for you!!!



Active and sociable, [Jeremy](#) loves to help out whenever he can. He enjoys photography and a variety of sports, including basketball and football. Tennis is his favorite. He also loves animals and participating in the Boy Scouts.

Jeremy is creative and curious. His favorite subjects in school are social studies and science. He dreams of an active two-parent family.

**Call 1-800-DO-ADOPT  
for further information.**

## In Their Own Words: The Powers Family

I was sitting in my car when I got the call from Children's Hospital. I knew that it was probable that Christopher would get the same diagnoses as both of his brothers, but was still shocked when they said that he was autistic too. I managed to hold it together until I got off the phone, but as soon as I hung up I burst into tears.

Alone, I remember saying to myself, why couldn't just one of them not have it? I soon pulled it together and made up my mind that I would do whatever it took to make them well. God must have his reason and I had to have faith in his vision.

The next 10 years of my life were filled with doctors, therapists, and treatments. Whenever I felt overwhelmed

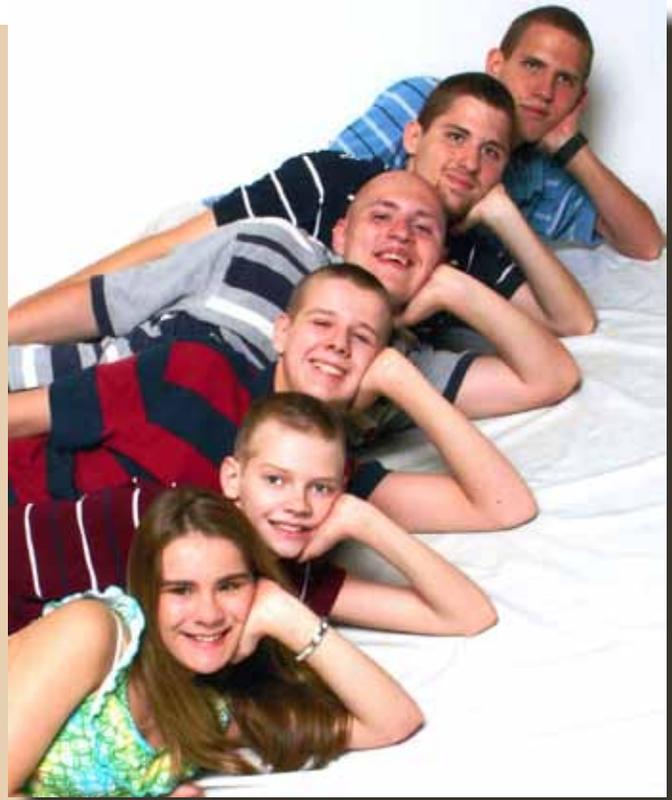
*"I soon pulled it together and made up my mind that I would do whatever it took to make them well."*

I tried to focus on them getting well. My marriage was falling apart, which was heartbreaking, but the lack of support from the boys' father had affected our marriage in many ways. The last thing I expected after my divorce was to meet the love of my life.

Winter was amazing! He was wonderful with the boys, and it was easy to see the family we could become through his eyes. Our only heartbreak was that we were unable to have any more children. We thought about adopting an infant but realized we would be placed at the end of every waiting list. We even considered an older child but thought that they may not be able to bond with us.

In 2010, we opened a "paint your own pottery" studio in our home town. A week before Christmas 2011, a little girl walked in our door with her social workers. Winter and I instantly fell in love with her. I could sense all the pain inside of her, but could also sense the overwhelming love in her heart.

We started a relationship with the Northumberland Department of Social Services (NDSS). I was impressed



*The Powers children: Bayley, Jacob, W.D., Joshua, Andrew, Christopher*

at how much they cared about the children entrusted to them. During one of our first weekend visits, Winter and I realized something was wrong with Bayley. She was telling us she loved us and didn't even know us yet. We informed NDSS and we started counseling. Bayley was diagnosed with reactive attachment disorder (RAD). Our wonderful therapist helped us understand RAD and also helped Bayley heal. In six months she graduated from therapy and bonded with us properly. We adopted Bayley in November 2011.

Shortly after adopting Bayley we got a phone call from NDSS asking if we would consider fostering two brothers whose placement was not meeting their needs. We arranged to paint pottery with them and brought all four kids with us. Upon meeting the boys we instantly thought they could possibly be autistic.

*"It was easy to see the family we could become..."*

One of the social workers had been thinking the same thing and thought they should be tested. We consulted with our three oldest because if anyone would know they would. I always say you can have a thousand people in a room and if three were autistic they will find one another.

*story continued on next page*

### *Powers family continued*

It's as if they have a language all their own and only they understand it. The boys agreed that they thought they were autistic as well. It was a unanimous family vote the boys, W.D. and Jacob were coming to live with us.

We started therapy again with our therapist, but she disagreed with us about W.D. and Jacob having autism. As much as we loved our therapist, we couldn't shake the feeling that the boys behaviors were autistic like. I have found over the years that most psychologists don't see enough high functioning autistics to truly know one when they see one. Secondly, as soon as they hear abuse, they attribute the behaviors to the abuse and forget a child with a developmental disability can be abused, too. We needed an expert opinion and some real testing done if we were going to find out what was wrong.

We decided to set up an appointment with Children's Hospital Autism and Related Disorder Clinic in Shady Grove, Maryland. In the meantime Joshua, Andrew, and Christopher, our older boys, asked my husband to adopt them as adults. Winter was honored and agreed.

It took a few months for us to fall in love with Jacob and W.D. but we simply couldn't help ourselves. Despite all the behavioral issues, we knew that deep down they had beautiful hearts and they just wanted to be loved like every other child. The boys graduated from therapy and we adopted Jacob and W.D. in August, 2012. In September, we took them to the Children's Hospital. When the results came back it confirmed they were indeed autistic. I didn't cry this time when I got the news. I now realize that God gave me three autistic boys early in my life to prepare me for my younger children, who would come along later in life. Thank you God for my five autistic sons and my little daughter with RAD. I have no idea what your vision is for my future, but whatever it is, I know it will be an amazing experience.

**Christina Powers**

## *In Their Own Words: The Gary Family*



*The Gary children*

We were looking to fill our – soon to be – empty nest through adoption. Having raised three of our own daughters and the fourth soon to graduate, we contacted our local department of social services and got the ball rolling. Several months after our approval we were approached about adopting two brothers. We wanted a boy, but *two*?

*“...the rewards of seeing them becoming free of hurts, fears and feeling safe are worth all the hard work...”*

It didn't take long to say yes! We knew the importance of keeping siblings together and enjoyed seeing the bond the boys shared.

Our experiences with the boys were nothing like our girls, however we soon learned their basic needs are the same. It has taken lots of love, patience, therapy and education to help these boys overcome their past. Let me tell you the rewards of seeing them becoming free of hurts, fears and feeling safe are worth all the hard work you put into your days raising your children.

Bill and I soon discovered we had more love to share so we contacted the social services for a girl, it didn't take long and we found a sweet girl who seemed to fit right in and shared our love for animals on our little farm (we call her our little Tomboy). As fate would have it a local family adopted her two brothers making it convenient for our families to meet for sibling/family get togethers.

At this point we have an 8, 10, 11 and our 17-year-old daughter at home. Yes, there are still adjustments being made and hurdles to overcome, however we are learning together to accomplish wholeness and healing. Next on our list are some home renovations so we can do some emergency foster care to help other children.

Foster care and adoption can be very rewarding. It does have its challenges, however the rewards far outweigh them. At some point when you look into their faces you will no longer see fear and mistrust, but in its place glimpses of love and peace letting you know you are on the right track.

**Bill & Shirley Gary**

# Top 10 Strategies for Adoption

Local departments of social services and private child placing agencies work together to achieve adoptions for children in foster care. Many of the activities below are done collaboratively between the public and private agencies. Here are their top ten strategies for making adoptions happen in Virginia.

- 10** **Wednesday's Child** has been quite successful in helping locate relatives of older children who later adopt the children.
- 9** **Bridging The Gap** between birth parents/relatives and the adoptive family to allow older youth to resolve their struggle about adoption.
- 8** **Family Partnership Meetings** where family members are involved in planning for a child's adoption. Engaging families help make youth feel better about being adopted.
- 7** **Strong Resource Programs** including high quality home studies, training, thoughtful matching of children/families and strong supports for resource parents.
- 6** **Assuring Post Adoption Services** particularly to maintain services that have helped stabilize placements. Strong Post Adoption work to provide early trouble shooting with families post finalization and follow up on any service requests.
- 5** **Internal Panel Process For Matching Children And Families.** A team process brings together a variety of expertise to the table. The team, which includes the family, looks at life-long challenges of the child who is to be adopted and a plan of action when continued support and services are needed.

**For more information on improving the lives of children and families, please visit:**

[The Annie E. Casey Foundation](#)

[The Children's Bureau](#)

[The Child Welfare Information Gateway](#)

[The National Resource Center For Adoption](#)



- 4** **Dual Approval** of families as both foster and adoptive parents, since about 75% of foster parents become adoptive parents.
- 3** **Preparation Work With The Child** prior to placement and thoughtful transition planning. Be open with the child about reasons why moving, how that move will look, plan for ongoing contact with prior providers, etc. Include linking the child with providers who are specifically trained in adoption.
- 2** **True Concurrent Planning** from the beginning of the case. Identifying an adoption worker who monitors and provides information and co-case manages around alternate permanency goals.
- 1** **Aggressive Child Specific Recruitment** when needed is essential in making timely permanent placements.



# Highlighting Virginia's Adoption Services Statewide Efforts to Increase Adoptions of Children in Foster Care

---

**Virginia One Church, One Child (OCOC):** The Virginia Department of Social Services contracts with OCOC to recruit families for children in foster care with the goal of adoption. Initially only recruiting in the African-American faith-based community, OCOC now focuses its recruitment efforts to support other adoption contractors for any waiting child and family. OCOC also provides training in best practices for matching families with children and completing post-placement services. OCOC worked with 67 children in 2012.

**Change Who Waits:** Led by Pastor Chris Barras, faith-based adoption recruitment rallies, called "Change Who Waits," took place in the central and eastern regions of Virginia. Based on a model of recruitment used in Colorado and other states, Pastor Barras worked with faith-based adoption agencies and select churches to raise awareness about the children waiting for adoptive families in foster care. Their goal is to increase adoptions of children in foster care, so that families are waiting for children, rather than children waiting for families. Planning is underway to extend this recruitment effort to other regions of the state.

**Adoption Resource Exchange of Virginia (AREVA)/ADOPTUSKIDS/Heart Gallery:** AREVA provides statewide recruitment efforts for children in foster care who are legally free for adoption. As of May, 2012, 707 children and 262 families were registered. The [AREVA](#) and national [AdoptUsKids](#) websites feature photographs and narrative descriptions of children currently awaiting adoption. AREVA staff work with local agencies to host Heart Gallery exhibits in each of the Commonwealth's five regions, on a continuing basis. Heart Galleries showcase portraits and bios of Virginia's children waiting for adoption and a virtual Heart Gallery is also online. Information about the Heart Galleries is available at [www.heartgalleryva.org](http://www.heartgalleryva.org).

**Adoption Family Preservation Services (AFP):** [United Methodist Family Services](#) manages and provides for the statewide AFP services delivery network. [AFP](#) serves families who have adopted domestically and internationally. AFP offers families an array of services to support and strengthen family functioning and preserve adoptive families. Multiple program sites offer a variety of services tailored to the diverse rural and urban communities served. In 2012, a total of 315 families were served across these sites.

**Adoption Through Collaborative Partnerships:** Under the name "Adoption Through Collaborative Partnerships" (ATCP), 13 child placing agencies across Virginia provide services to *finalize* adoptions for a target group of 356 children and youth in foster care. Children served by the ATCP must have the goal of adoption and parental rights must be terminated. Children who are not in adoptive placements are specifically targeted for service by ATCP. In 2012, the ATCP contractors finalized 75% (267) of the children targeted for finalized adoptions.

## Policy Piece

Many children who are being adopted (and are NOT in foster care) and are eligible for Social Security Disability (SSI) payments may also be eligible for Adoption Assistance. The following "policy piece" was taken from the Federal Child Welfare Policy.

A child is eligible for adoption assistance if the child meets the requirements for SSI benefits and is determined by the State to be a child with special needs prior to the finalization of the adoption. No additional criteria must be met to be eligible for federally funded (Title IV-E) adoption assistance when eligibility is based on a special needs child meeting SSI requirements. Specifically, how a child is removed from his or her home or whether the State has responsibility for the child's placement and care is irrelevant in this situation. Only a designated Social Security Administration claims representative can determine SSI eligibility and provide the appropriate eligibility documentation to the State.

Source: ACYF-CB-PA-01-01 (1/23/01); 7/17/2006

Legal Reference: Social Security Act - sections 473(a)(2) and 473(c) ; The Deficit Reduction Act of 2005

# Meet Virginia's State Office Permanency Program Staff

## **Permanency Program Manager**

**Therese Wolf**

804.726.7522

[Therese.wolf@dss.virginia.gov](mailto:Therese.wolf@dss.virginia.gov)

## **Promoting Safe and Stable Families Grant**

**Curtis Smith**

*Fatherhood and PSSF Program Consultant*

804.726.7062

[Curtis.smith@dss.virginia.gov](mailto:Curtis.smith@dss.virginia.gov)

## **Adoption**

**Lyndell Lewis**

*Adoption Services Supervisor*

804.726.7531

[Lyndell.lewis@dss.virginia.gov](mailto:Lyndell.lewis@dss.virginia.gov)

**Sondra Draper**

*Adoption Resource Exchange of  
Virginia Coordinator*

804.726.7524

[Sondra.draper@dss.virginia.gov](mailto:Sondra.draper@dss.virginia.gov)

**Jackie Gill**

*Adoption Disclosure Specialist*

804.726.7526

[Jackie.gill@dss.virginia.gov](mailto:Jackie.gill@dss.virginia.gov)

**Thelma Myers**

*Adoption Records Specialist*

804.726.7511

[Thelma.myers@dss.virginia.gov](mailto:Thelma.myers@dss.virginia.gov)

## **Foster Care**

**Vernon Simmons**

*Foster Care Services Supervisor*

804.726.7530

[Vernon.simmons@dss.virginia.gov](mailto:Vernon.simmons@dss.virginia.gov)

**Cynthia Bauer**

*Senior Policy Specialist – Foster Care Primary*

804.726.7550

[Cynthia.bauer@dss.virginia.gov](mailto:Cynthia.bauer@dss.virginia.gov)

**Renee Garnett**

*Independent Living Education Specialist*

804.726.7944

[Renee.garnett@dss.virginia.gov](mailto:Renee.garnett@dss.virginia.gov)

**Kim McGaughey**

*Senior Policy Specialist – Adoption Primary*

804.382.3551

[Kim.mcgaughey@dss.virginia.gov](mailto:Kim.mcgaughey@dss.virginia.gov)

**Letha Moore-Jones**

*Independent Living Program Supervisor*

804.726-7576

[Letha.moore-jones@dss.virginia.gov](mailto:Letha.moore-jones@dss.virginia.gov)

**Patrick Plourde**

*Independent Living Program Specialist*

804.726.7577

[Patrick.plourde@dss.virginia.gov](mailto:Patrick.plourde@dss.virginia.gov)



Sondra Draper



Therese Wolf



Patrick Plourde & Lyndell Lewis



Curtis Smith

# From the Desk of Paul McWhinney Deputy Commissioner, Programs Virginia Department of Social Services

---

Colleagues and Friends,

The holidays are traditionally a time when family and friends gather to give thanks and also to celebrate, with much hope, the New Year to come. We look forward to another 12 months of good health, happiness and prosperity for our immediate families, because their safety and well-being is our most precious priority.

Unfortunately, many of Virginia's families are vulnerable and in crisis.

During Adoption Awareness Month, celebrated each year in November, I learned that as of October 1, 2012, there were 5,271 children in Virginia's foster care system with 1,335 of these children having the goal of adoption.

As I look forward to what will come in 2013, I can say with certainty that we will increase our efforts to ensure that these children – Virginia's children – find loving, forever families.

Many of these children believe they may never find loving families because they're too old (the average age of a child awaiting adoption in Virginia is 7) and are not the newborns many people imagine when they consider adoption. In some cases, siblings await adoption fearing they may be separated from one another. Waiting for a family that will adopt a sibling group, often means the children wait longer in foster care for their forever family.

Like you, I know that there are families throughout Virginia, who are ready to open their hearts and homes to these children. 2013 will be a year to recommit ourselves to making adoption a priority.

In addition to debunking myths and stereotypes about older children awaiting adoption, we have an opportunity to identify and implement promising practices – including Virginia's Heart Galleries, which take place throughout the state, during the 2013 General Assembly Session and also online – that bring prospective families together with children who are waiting to meet them and become a part of their lives and families.

Thank you for your continued support and commitment to these very special children.



Respectfully yours,

**Paul McWhinney**

*Deputy Commissioner, Programs*

Virginia Department of Social Services

## Thank You!

---

Thanks to:

**Cate Newbanks**, Director of *FACES of Virginia Families* and **Stephen Young**, *Shenandoah Valley DSS, Foster/Adopt Family Development Recruiter* for help with articles for the newsletter