

# DSSK TALK

*"People Focused & Service Driven"*

## MISSION STATEMENT

*The mission of the McDowell County Department of Social Services is to respectfully assist families and individuals by helping them to maintain, and/or enhance their quality of life; and to prevent abuse, neglect, and exploitation of vulnerable people in our community.*



## DIRECTOR'S EDITORIAL By Phillip Hardin

### The Importance of Change and Innovation

The tough economic condition has left us with increased caseloads and work that seems to never end. I was reading an article the other day about the need to look for new and innovative ways of doing business and thought that this had some pretence for today's situation.

Four monkeys were placed in a room that had a tall pole in the center. Suspended from the top of the pole was a bunch of bananas. One of the hungry monkeys started climbing the pole to get something to eat, but just as he reached out to grab a banana, he was doused with a torrent of cold water. Squealing, he scampered down the pole and abandoned his attempt to feed himself. Each monkey made a similar attempt, and each one was drenched with cold water. They finally gave up.

Then the researchers removed one of the monkeys from the room and replaced him with a new monkey. As the newcomer began to climb the pole, the other three grabbed him and pulled him down. After trying to climb the pole several times and being dragged down by the others, he finally gave up.

The researchers replaced the original monkeys, one by one, and each time a new monkey was brought in, he would be dragged down by the others before he could reach the bananas. In time, the room was filled with monkeys who had never received a cold shower. None of them would climb the pole, but not one of them knew why.

I use this analogy to make a point about the climate that exists today. It certainly is not business as usual. We need to look at different ways of going about our business; even if it means that we fail at some of the things we try. As long as we **fail forward** and keep looking for things that will give us an edge then we are making progress as an organization and continuing to do a better job for the clients we serve.

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### 2009 FOSTER CARE GRADUATES

BY: THERESA BEAM, LINKS COORDINATOR

Foster care can be difficult for all children at times, and especially for teenagers who have been in care during those teen years or who have actually aged out of care. Even though this can be difficult times for those youth, some manage to set goals for themselves and achieve them. This year there are seven youth who are either still in the agency's system of care or were in care while a teenager who have reached their goal of academic success. Six youth are graduating from their local high schools, some of them with academic honors and one youth has completed his GED. Our agency would like to congratulate those youth who have worked hard through their teen years and reached this goal. At least four of those who have graduated or earned their GED plan to attend college and continue their education.

At this time there are five other youth in care, or who have been in care, who are currently working towards their GED.

We, as an agency, are proud to have been a positive part of the success of these youth and wish them continued success in the future.



## FOSTER CARE PROGRAM



### Fostering Success

**By: Renee Barrier**

At McDowell DSS, we are blessed to have many wonderful foster parents in our agency who serve the children who need safe homes. These are people who dedicate their time and lives to caring for children who might otherwise have no one. Starting with this newsletter, we plan to feature foster families who epitomize the definition of great foster parents. So, without further ado, I am pleased to introduce you to Charles and Patsy Tieman.

Charlie and Patsy became foster parents about 2 years ago. They chose to foster after watching their daughter and son-in-law become foster and then adoptive parents. They saw first-hand the difference that willing parents can make in the lives of children who need love and structure in their daily lives.

When the Tiemans first started fostering, their desire was to work with younger children, but they were open to the possibility of giving it a shot with teenagers. Because of this willingness, Charlie and Patsy were almost immediately called to foster a teen from another county for a short period of time. This placement was a good experience for the family and they decided to continue the challenge of fostering teenagers.

Since they began in 2007, Patsy and Charlie have fostered 12 children and provided temporary respite care for several others. They have had at least one child in foster care in their home for the entirety of the past two years; many times they have shared their home with two or three children at once. One might ask, what makes the Tieman's such successful foster parents? One of the most important things they do is what we at DSS call "shared parenting". When a child comes into their home, Patsy and Charlie work very diligently to get to know the child and their background. Part of how they do this is by getting to know the child's parents. When kids come into the custody of DSS, many times the parents are worried about the care that their children will get in a foster home. Patsy and Charlie get involved from the very beginning by attending court dates, doctor appointments, school meetings, Child and Family Team meetings, visitation with parents, etc... This kind of involvement allows the birth parents to get to know the foster parents and to feel more comfortable with their children living in a foster home. Charlie and Patsy have also gone above and beyond the "normal" involvement of foster parenting. The Tiemans have invited the parents and other family members of the children in their home to come visit at their house. They have even asked birth families over to share in a holiday meal! The fact that the Tiemans are dedicated to working with the birth parents and to helping families work toward reunification is one of the main reasons that Charlie and Patsy are successful foster parents.

The Tiemans want to share with everyone, that foster parents should not be afraid to keep teenagers. Many of the teens that they have had in their home have been the best kids and to quote Patsy, "just a joy to have around!"

The McDowell DSS would like to thank Charlie and Patsy for all of their hard work with the children in our county and also thank all the foster parents who dedicate their lives and hearts to this great service.

### Child and Family Team Perspective

**By: LaToya Conley**

As a facilitator of Child and Family Team meetings I believe the best thing about this service is giving our parents an opportunity to come to the table and share power with the other members involved. Besides, these are their children and families, who better knows their children and families than the parents. Many families are surprised to know that we not only want to know their strengths and desires, but also want to use them as a foundation for their plans. Parents should be considered as the primary sources when it comes to determining the resources, options, and recommendations to develop the plan that will keep their children safe and their families strong. Some parents may need help from supports or the agencies to find available resources and then they are successfully able to choose the resources they want and develop their plan. More importantly, the parents take ownership of their plan and every member (not just the parents) agrees to be accountable.

Prior to becoming a CFT Facilitator I was a Community Support/Qualified Professional for a local mental health provider. The way in which we facilitated CFT meetings was more service-driven and less family-centered. We were more inclined to lead the plan implementing services that we thought would be successful. Today we are certainly miles and miles away from this philosophy. Some would say that it takes more time for the social workers to prepare families for this process, and arguably so. Preparation is very important part of the process and if it is done properly with a family it takes less and less time before each follow-up CFT meeting. The outcome is open and clear communication and the family can begin to understand everyone's role and begin to work on their plan without any disruption or misunderstandings.

My recount of a successful CFT meeting: We recently had a case closure CFT meeting and the purpose was to acknowledge and celebrate the family's success, discuss the agency's decision to recommend custody return to the parents (relieving paternal grandmother of caregiver responsibilities), and develop plan for child to return to school in their home county. When the child came into custody there were many frustrating feelings (including the agency's frustrations); as this child was court ordered into the agency's custody during a Department of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention hearing due to truancy issues (refusing to go to school). The social worker, community support/mental health QP, DJJDP Court Counselor, the schools, and the family worked together to implement services that were beneficial to the family. During the case closure CFT meeting the family shared their achievements and was proud to discuss the great improvements in the child's behaviors. The family acknowledged that they were not fond of DJJDP and DSS involvement; however, they were glad their child was able to get the help he needed. The child and the parents are now reunified. The family agreed to consider voluntary services with agency if needed. Therefore, this was a true CFT success.

## ECONOMIC SERVICES

### Food & Nutrition

By: Denise Prewitt

The Food and Nutrition Unit recently received a grant from The Community Foundation of Western North Carolina. They had a special funding stream called "Recession Response Fund". This fund was set up for governmental agencies due to the state of the economy. Typically, The Community Foundation of Western North Carolina does not accept applications from governmental agencies.

Shaneah McCauley, Work First for Family Assistance Supervisor and Denise Prewitt, Food & Nutrition Supervisor got together and applied for the \$5,000.00 grant. The funds were split between the Food & Nutrition Units "Food Pantry" and the Work First "Garden project".

The great thing about this grant is the fact that ultimately it benefits the citizens of McDowell County that are being effected by the current economic downturn. This is just another example of how dedicated this agency is to helping those that are in need.



Food & Nutrition Unit

### ADULT MEDICAID / CLERICAL UNITS

By: Trish Fields

Over the past several months we have experienced an increase in people coming into our building seeking assistance. This increase has caused us to make some changes in the way that we operate our Clerical Unit. We have now opened a second window in the Front Reception area. They are being operated by Phyllis Lowe and Phyllis Revis. This was done to give the Customer quicker and more efficient service.

We have also introduced the use of issuing numbers to everyone who comes into the building. The client takes a number and when their number is called they step up to the window and discuss the nature of their visit. This helps with keeping the clients visit confidential.

A Resource Booklet has been created and placed in the lobby providing an overview of our agency and what we have to offer in the way of assistance. The County Channel is on the TV and runs throughout the day and we will be adding DVD's that will detail programs that we have to offer.

These changes have been implemented to meet the needs of our clients. We are here to serve them and they are our number one priority.

### WORK FIRST FAMILY ASSISTANCE UNIT

By: Supervisor, Shaneah McCauley

The Work First Family Assistance Unit would like to wish Margaret Myers a very fond farewell. Margaret has been with the agency since October 2007 when she was hired as part of a state initiated grant project. With budget decreases, funding for Margaret's position (as well as all those in similar positions around the state) was not renewed. Margaret has worked diligently with our disabled Work First Participants and has made great strides in helping them achieve self sufficiency. We will miss you, Margaret.

NOTE: For anyone who would like to join our unit on June 30 at The Steak House – we will be hosting Margaret for a farewell luncheon (11:30 – 1:15).

## **EMPLOYEE RELATIONS COMMITTEE NEWS**

**By: Connie O'Brien**

Effective July 1, 2009 The Employee Relations Committee will consists of the following individuals who represent each unit within the Agency: Renee Barrier - Chair, Connie O'Brien - Co-Chair, Cindy Reel - Treasurer, Abby Pittman, Cheryl Woody, Jill Kehler, Tammy Webster, Cynthia Nettles, Elizabeth Gartner, Jay Lingerfelt, Stacy Poteat, Denise Freeman, Rob Farkas, Elisabeth DiSanto, Marcie Ownbey and Becky Burleson.

The committee would like to thank Margaret Myers, Pauline Buchanan and Amy Snider for their service to the committee. All of you have been instrumental in the success of this committee. Thank you so much for participation and dedication.

The committee is responsible for fund raising, coordinating social events, updating and reviewing personnel policies and manuals and other various duties as assigned by the Director, Mr. Hardin.

Over the past few months we have held several fund raisers such as Jeans Week, a Salad & Potato Luncheon and several raffles. We now have a balance of \$915.52 in our committee fund.

We have also completed several projects. We have completed the Customer Service Satisfaction Survey. This will be implemented in July. We have also made a few changes to the Dress Code. The policy now has a clear definition of a "Beach Flip-Flop". The Solicitation and Lost & Found policies have been removed.

We also put together an "Employee Appreciation Luncheon". This event was held at the YMCA's outside Pavilion on June 24. The Supervisors provided lunch from "Golden Fried Chicken". Even though the committee asked for this event, the real "Thanks" should go to the Supervisors and Mr. Hardin for making this happen.

We are in the process of changing the smoking area to the east side covered area. This change is being made because of policy. The Employee Manual states that there is to be no smoking near building exits/entrances.

This is your committee, if you have any suggestions or ideas for the committee to address, please contact your units ERC representative and we will discuss them at our meetings.

### **McDowell DSS Helps McDowell Early College Participant Succeed**

**By: Connie O'Brien**

Over the past few months you may have noticed that the Clerical Unit has had a new face working with them. That person would be Kelsey Styles, daughter of Vicky Styles who works as an Income Maintenance Caseworker in the Family & Children's Medicaid Unit.

When Kelsey was in the 8th grade, she decided that she wanted to participate in the McDowell Early College Program. She had to write an essay about why she wanted to be a part of the program. This essay was sent to Duke University who was responsible for selecting who would be accepted.

Kelsey will graduate in June 2012. She will not only have a High School Diploma, but she will also have an Associates Degree. But before she can graduate, she has to complete 100 hours of work experience. She has been able to accomplish that by performing various clerical duties in the Clerical Unit. Kelsey has been filing, making copies and unit packets for the Family & Children's Medicaid, Adult Medicaid and Food & Nutrition Units as well as performing some phone duties.

Kelsey stated, "I would like to thank everyone at The McDowell County Department of Social Services for giving me the opportunity to complete my work experience at your agency."

We would like to tell Kelsey that we are very proud of her and continue to follow her dreams. We wish you the best.

## SENIOR CENTER NEWS AND INFORMATION

### ADULT PROTECTIVE SERVICES

BY: MIRIAM EARLY

Cindy L. Reel began work with Adult Services March 9, 2009 as our Administrative Professional, filling the position left vacant by Pat Biddix. She is a native of McDowell County and familiar to many. Cindy is married to Eric Reel, and they have one dog, Conner. She quickly settled in as a vital part of our team due to her strong work ethic and tremendous sense of humor! We consider ourselves fortunate and blessed to have Cindy on our team.

Our unit recently began doing the case management for the In Home Aide program, which is managed by the Senior Center. This program is for Senior Citizens, and clients are NOT required to be Medicaid eligible. Personal care services and/or light household chores can be provided to recipients for a few hours per week. There is currently a waiting list, which is managed by Dawna Ledbetter. Interested persons can call Adult Services at 652-3800 for information about the program, or Dawna Ledbetter at 652-8953 to inquire about placement on the waiting list.

### Thank you DSS staff for volunteering at McDowell Senior Games!

The McDowell County Senior Center participants would like to thank the McDowell County Department of Social Services employees who volunteered during the McDowell Senior Games Event.



Volunteer Susie Wilhoit

McDowell County Senior Games Partici-



Do you know someone who is on Medicare and needs assistance in paying for prescription drugs? Medicare beneficiaries may be eligible for the federal Extra Help low-income subsidy program if he/she has limited income and resources. The Extra Help program can increase cost savings by paying for all or part of the monthly premiums, annual deductibles and provide lower prescription co-payments under a Medicare prescription drug plan. To qualify for Extra Help, the annual income must be limited to \$16,245 for an individual (\$21,855 for a married couple living together). Additionally, the total resources must be limited to \$12,910 for an individual (\$25,010 for a married couple living together). The resources do not include a primary residence or a vehicle. If you believe someone you know may qualify for the Extra Help program, please encourage them to apply on-line at [www.socialsecurity.gov](http://www.socialsecurity.gov), or contact our office 828-652-8953 to speak with a SHIIP volunteer who can assist them with completing the on-line application process.



# McDowell County

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## Board Members

Mrs. Pat Faulkner, Chair

Rev. Laura Myhr

Rev. Kemuel Travis, Vice-Chair

Mrs. Della Watson

Mr. David Walker

*June 16, 2009*

*Dear Staff:*

*We would like to say thank you for all of the extra effort and hard work you have put forward in recent months in serving the citizens of McDowell County. The Board realizes that the unfortunate economic environment in which we are living has created a huge increase in caseloads for all of the agency's staff and we are truly appreciative of the effort and hard work that you have put in to make sure that our most vulnerable citizens receive the benefits and services they need and are eligible for. All of these increased caseloads have been coupled with decreasing resources which means you have really been asked to work over and above what is in your job descriptions. We know that you have risen to the challenge and for that we are grateful, but the real beneficiaries of your work are the citizens of McDowell County. It is for that the Board of Social Services wishes to thank each and every one of you for the work that you do, the extra effort you have put forward, and for really living up to the agency's credo of being family focused and service driven.*

*Mrs. Pat Faulkner, Chair*

*Rev. Kemuel Travis, Vice-Chair*

*Mr. David Walker*

*Ms. Della Watson*

*Rev. Laura Myhr*

**JULY BIRTHDAYS**

- July 1 - Margaret Myers
- July 3 - Shaneah McCauley
- July 6 - Lynn Queen
- July 9 - Larry Richards
- July 12 - Debbie Street
- July 18 - David Hogan
- July 30 - Sabrina McIntyre



**AUGUST BIRTHDAYS**

- August 7 - Janice Hensley
- August 9 - Rose Kuhl
- August 13 - Connie O'Brien
- August 24 - Cindy Reel
- August 27 - Betty McKesson
- August 28 - Phyllis Revis
- August 30 - Randy Lavender



**SEPTEMBER BIRTHDAYS**

- September 5 - Phyllis Lowe
- September 23 - Michelle Hinson
- September 25 - Sharon Morrison
- September 25 - Ray Burleson
- September 26 - Latoya Conley
- September 27 - Rob Farkas
- September 28 - Ray Hemphill
- September 30 - Shirley Ward



DSS Launches Survey

The Department of Social Services is in the process of polling clients and customers about their experiences at the agency. All new clients coming in will be given a customer service satisfaction survey to complete regarding their visit to the agency. The survey asks questions about how you were treated, did all of your questions get answered and was their good communication between you and your case manager. The survey is completely anonymous but it does give the client to ability to put their name on it if they wish to be contacted about their visit. "Our hope is that the survey will help us quantify the type of service we provide and guide us in making changes to how we go about doing our business," stated Phillip Hardin, Director at DSS. The client will have the ability to drop off the completed survey at the agency after their visit is complete or mail it back to the agency at no charge. The agency will report the results of the surveys in upcoming newsletters.

McDowell County Department of Social Services

Customer Service Survey

1. How would you best describe your experience at DSS today?
2. Do you feel that you were treated fairly, courteously, and professionally?
3. Were we able to answer all your questions to your satisfaction?
4. Do you feel that you have good communication with your case manager?

(This includes in office and experiences over the phone.)

very Satisfied	Satisfied	Unsatisfied	Unacceptable

Other comments or suggestions:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Caseworker/Intake Worker's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Please be advised that these surveys are anonymous and your worker has no way of knowing who left these comments. These surveys will be used to better the quality of our service to the citizens of McDowell County.

If you would like to be contacted regarding your visit today, please leave your name; \_\_\_\_\_  
and phone number: \_\_\_\_\_.



**JOB CHANGES**

**Marcie Ownbey**— Marcie has moved from the Adult Medicaid Unit to the Foster Care Unit. She is supervised by Lynn Queen.

**NEW HIRES**

**David Hogan**— David Hogan has taken the position of Child Support Agent. He is supervised by Roger Elliott.

**Michelle Hinson**— Michelle Hinson has taken the position of Income Maintenance Caseworker I in the Adult Medicaid Unit. She has several years of office experience and recently relocated here from Florida. She is supervised by Trish Fields.

**Larry Richards**— Larry Richards has taken the position of Child Support Agent. He is supervised by Roger Elliott.

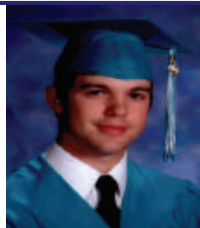
**Elisabeth DiSanto**— Elisabeth DiSanto has taken the position of Social Worker in Foster Care & Adoptions. She is supervised by Betty McKesson. She graduated Magna Cum Laude from UNC-Charlotte with a BA in Psychology.

*QUOTE OF THE QUARTER*

***Kind words can be short and easy to speak, but their echoes are truly endless. - Mother Theresa***

**ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Abby Pittman recently graduated Phi Theta Cappa with honors from Western Piedmont Community College with a degree in Human Services Technology. While completing her college internship requirements within the agency Abby made quite an impression. So much so, that she has been hired as a full time employee within the Work First/Child Care Unit. Abby is responsible for subsidy case management and provider reimbursement. Abby is married to Justin Pittman, and has two Children Audra and Dylan. Welcome Abby!



Andrew Ray Wheeler graduated from New Manna Christian School on May 29, 2009. He is the son of **Rhonda** and Lee Wheeler. **Rhonda** works in the Food & Nutrition Unit.



Jonathan Taylor Moore graduated from McDowell High School on June 12, 2009. He is the grandson of **Gary Dale** in the Adult Services Unit. He will attend UNC-A and will study Atmospheric Sciences.



Jarred Dylan Hollifield graduated from McDowell High School on June 12, 2009. He is the son of Bobby and **Kristin Hollifield**. **Kristin** works in the Child Support Office. He plans to attend MTCC and eventually become a High School History Teacher.

Congratulations to Justin and Devin Cole who Graduated from Patton High School in Morganton. They are the sons of **Melinda Cole** who works in the CPS Unit.



Jennifer Christine Wahl graduated from McDowell High School on June 12, 2009. She is the daughter of **Charles "Gene"** and Leah Wahl. **Gene** works in the Child Support Office. Jennifer plans to attend MTCC and is looking to go into Computer Graphic Design.

**STACY POTEAT** who is the Transportation Coordinator/Leadworker graduated in April 2009 from the University of Phoenix with an Associates of Arts in Business. She will continue working on her Bachelors of Multi-Media and Written Communications. Stacy states " Taking online classes is difficult, but I have learned to manage my time wisely and to be self disciplined. No one reminds me of assignments or teaches the material. I have to read the assigned chapters and complete corresponding assignments. " Stacy graduated with a 3.85 GPA. Congratulations Stacy!

*The Reason She's Leaving  
Claire Altese Hill*



Pauline & Bill Buchanan would like for you to meet their new Granddaughter. Claire was born April 27, 2009 at 9:58 a.m. She weighed 5 lbs. 2 ozs. And was 18 inches long. Pauline will be retiring June 30, 2009. They will be moving to Charleston to become full time Granna & Poppy.

*Congratulations Rob Farkas*

*It's a "Grandson"*



Rush Kelly Warren was born on April 29, 2009 to Justin Warren and Lauren Moore. He weighed 10 lbs. 11 oz. and was 21 inches long.

Justin is **Rob Farkas'** Stepson.



The West McDowell Jr. High Jazz Ensemble performed in Williamsburg, NC at Burton High School and attended an awards ceremony at Busch Gardens Theme Park Music in the Park weekend. The Jazz band placed 1st in Jazz Ensemble with a Superior rating. Jeremy Gaddy, son of **Teresa Duncan** Family and Children's Medicaid, plays Trombone in Jazz Ensemble.

**Ann Carroll** would like to recognize her granddaughter McKenzie Wright who made the straight A Honor Roll all year. McKenzie attends Eastfield Elementary School. Way to go McKenzie! Keep up the good work.

**Jiselda Lingerfelt** would like to recognize her nephew Cooper Reed Jackson who has graduated from More at 4 and will be going into first grade. Cooper attends Nebo Elementary School. Aunt Jay is very proud of him.