**DCS Open Line\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**State of Tennessee**

**Department of Children’s Services**

**Jim Henry, Commissioner**

**March 1, 2013**

Greetings,

This edition of DCS *Open Line* includesimportant information I want to share with you about the department.

**Great Work**! – I want to share with you an email I received this week regarding great work by a DCS caseworker.

“I am taking a minute to tell you about your, and my, case worker, Becky Russell.  I know too often all you hear about are from the unsatisfied, flustered and frustrated people dealing with DCS.  When the issues blew up with my daughter on Monday night, I ran into roadblocks and did not know where to turn.  I tried working with the courts and was told to get an attorney which would obviously take too long, talk with the police and see what they could do, etc.   I was then directed to file a complaint with DCS through my work EAP and see what would become, and referred to attorneys to get a swift resolution.  I found an attorney to draw up the paperwork needed and then I was fortunate to have Becky Russell as the case worker.  She jumped in immediately with a swift and thorough investigation.  And when she found out the full truth, she helped me ensure my daughter was not returned to the unsafe environment she had been removed from.  If all case workers were like Becky, and they had the time, our children would be a lot better off.  I cannot say enough about how great DCS performed in this occasion.

“Becky, you will never know how grateful I am for you and what you have given my daughter, and myself.  I now can go to sleep at night without worry for her safety.  Thank you so much.”

**Second Look Commission** – The Second Look Commission was created by the legislature in 2010 to review a sampling of cases each year which involve a second or subsequent incident of severe child abuse. The commission then provides its findings as to whether or not severe child abuse cases are handled in a manner that provides adequate protection to the children of this state to the General Assembly.

The commission is currently up for its sunset hearing in the legislature. We support the extension of the commission and hope that it passes so it is able to continue its work. I've attached the department's letter of support to this email.

**IV E Waiver Audit** – The department recently received official notification from the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) that the state passed its July 2012 federal IV-E eligibility compliance review. The review is conducted every three years in each state for the purpose of assessing state compliance with federal laws that govern reimbursement funding for children/youth in custody. Last July, the review team examined 150 case files from across all 12 DCS regions. A determination of state compliance required meeting an error threshold of no more than 10 percent of the total sample. Tennessee was deemed to be in substantial compliance of federal requirements with only a 6 percent error finding.

**Juvenile Justice Reports** – Two reports were released this week noting Tennessee’s success in reducing its reliance on confinement in response to juvenile crime. The KIDS COUNT report found the rate of youth securely confined in Tennessee dropped by 66 percent between 1997 and 2010. This was the largest decrease of any of the 44 states with decreases. The Justice Policy Institute's report, *Common Ground,* focused on five states, including Tennessee, that have been most successful in reducing youth incarceration. For more information, visit <http://www.tn.gov/tccy/index.shtml> .

**Juvenile Court and Community Intervention Services Grants** - Each county in the state is eligible to apply for these grants which seek to improve county juvenile court services or provide community alternatives to detention. Currently, there are 22 juvenile justice programs and nine community intervention programs receiving funding. In 2012, more than 5,000 youth received services in their home communities through these grants which totaled more than $4.8 million.

**Juvenile Justice Population Report** - As of February 28, the in-house Youth Development Center population count was 377. The available bed count was 42. The complete population report is available at <http://www.intranet.state.tn.us/chldserv/newsletters/February.28.2013.XLS>

**Child Fatality Data** – The Department of Health this week released information from the State Child Fatality Review team showing the overall death rate for Tennessee children dropped by 20 percent between 2007 and 2011. Notable factors in that reduction are a decrease in sleep-related infant deaths due to suffocation or strangulation, which were down 16.8 percent from 2010 to 2011, and a 20 percent drop in deaths of black children between 2007 and 2011. To view the full press release, visit <https://news.tn.gov/node/10324>.

**DCS Custodial Child Fatalities** –DCS has reviewed its 2011 and 2012 custodial fatality data and is reporting 14 custodial fatalities in 2011 and 11 custodial fatalities in 2012. We are now confident in our ability to pull these custodial numbers from TFACTS and hope to have our non-custodial fatality numbers available in the near future.

**Child Protective Investigative Teams** – The Northwest and Southwest regions hosted meetings of the regions’ Child Protective Investigative Teams (CPITs) this week. The meetings provided an opportunity to for these teams to strengthen their working relationships and receive important training. In the coming months, the department will be working to set up meetings such as these in all DCS regions across the state.

**TFACTS** – Significant improvements to TFACTS were made in 2012 with many more enhancements planned for 2013 (subject of next week’s TFACTS update).

2012 improvements included:

* When TFACTS began there were more than 2,300 defects. We began 2012 with more than 1,700 documented open defects. All Priority 1 (critical functionality broken) and Priority 2 (major impact to functionality) defects were corrected.  Only 383 Priority 3 (minor functional defects) remain. There are 82 service requests in the queue for recommended enhancements to TFACTS.
* Of the 82 documented “workarounds” to TFACTS functionality at statewide implementation in August 2010, only 5 remain to be eliminated in 2013.
* “Major” functional repairs in 2012 included: Person Search, “Finalist” Address Search, Case Recordings (Phase I), Resource Recordings, Fiscal/Payment functionality, Track Change, Link / Unlink, Targeted Case Management, Notice of Action, Incident Reporting and a host of other repairs too numerous to list here.

Questions or comments regarding TFACTS improvements may be directed to Deputy Commissioner Lee Gregory at Lee.M.Gregory@tn.gov.

**In Home Tennessee** – Through the In Home Tennessee initiative, 14 agencies in the Davidson County region have created the “Davidson County Parenting Collation.” One partner, Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools (MNPS), is working with the Martha O’Bryan Center, Exchange Club Family Center and DCS to provide parenting classes in Metro schools. The parenting classes have commenced in four schools currently, with Spanish as an option in one location. Catholic Charities also joined in this partnership and offered a parenting class in Arabic (a need identified by one school through the In Home Tennessee work group).

Two of the agencies in this partnership, Exchange Club Family Center and Youth Villages, mapped out the region's parenting needs based on primary child removal reasons and Child Protective Services referral data. This information will be used to ensure those areas deemed highest risk can be targeted for parenting classes as a first priority. For more information about the work on parenting education in Davidson County or about the In Home Tennessee initiative, email EI-DCS.In-Home-TN@tn.gov.

**Strengthening Relationships** – Davidson County Regional General Counsel Matthew Muenzen made a presentation to the Next Door staff this week in Nashville. Here’s a link to more information
<http://www.thenextdoor.org/2013/02/28/building-relationships-with-the-department-of-childrens-services/>

**Legislative and Constituent Services** – DCS Legislative and Constituent Services is the place where legislators and the general public can get answers to their questions about child welfare, help addressing their concerns and complaints, and access to information and guidance for working with the department. This is a large and diverse department to be informed about, so I encourage all DCS employees to help the general public and legislators learn more about our work when you have the opportunity.

**Final Vote on Desktop Background** - Thank you to all the DCS employees who voted on their favorite desktop background last week. We have narrowed the list to the top three for a final vote. Please cast your vote at the link below. Results will be shared next week.

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/Choose_Your_Background_2nd_Round>

Jim