



B. J. Walker, Commissioner

Department of Human Resources • Division of Family and Children Services • Mary Dean Harvey, Division Director  
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October 7, 2005

**MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** County Directors of Family and Children Services  
DFCS Field Operations Directors  
DFCS Regional Directors  
DFCS Social Services Field Staff

**FROM:** Mary Dean Harvey, Director  
Division of Family and Children Services

**SUBJECT:** Out-of-Home Care Management – Urgent Directive

Now that DFCS has spent the last year getting a much better handle on the front door of child welfare services, it is important that we become more focused on making sure that children in our care are in the most appropriate placements. Over the last year, several trends are clear in the statewide data:

The overall number of children in out of home care has dropped modestly (down 7.7% from July of 2004 to May of 2005).

The proportion of children placed with relatives remains unacceptably low and needs to increase (at approximately 14% of total placements, 30% is the goal).

The number of children placed in family foster homes has dropped by 18.5%.

The number of children in LOC (Level of Care) has risen by 6.5%.

While the drop in the total number of children in out of home care is a positive reflection of our efforts to appropriately manage the front door to child welfare, we have significant work to do to make sure children are in the most optimal placements. As a whole, DFCS is not sufficiently utilizing relatives as a placement resource. While efforts are occurring to stimulate the development of more private agency foster homes, we must be careful to maintain and find as many family foster homes as we can since there is still a scarcity of high quality foster homes for some groups of children. A very troubling trend is the increased utilization of LOC. Congregate care is not the optimal placement for most children. The data suggests that we are placing some children in LOC because of a shortfall in other placements resources rather than because it is the most clinically appropriate care.

1. County social services case managers and supervisors are responsible for **expediting step-down leveling of all LOC cases immediately**. Working in consultation with the Regional Director, County Directors must provide coordination and oversight for this effort.
  - Remind providers that they should go ahead and step-down those clients deemed appropriate by their clinical staff/consultant to lower levels, **without waiting for a utilization review recommendation or prior approval from DFCS**. FY06 LOC contracts allow for this with notification to DFCS on the step-down effective date.
  - When a lower level is established, the new lower rate is not effective until the 1<sup>st</sup> day of the month following the date of the LOC leveling change. Therefore, the Treatment Services (TS) Unit will need to complete leveling case reviews by mid-month to expedite the step-down process for eligible cases, and ensure completion by the end of the month.
  - Current year LOC contracts contain changes that region and county staff should review and become familiar with in order to effectively manage the state's LOC spending.
  - Any questions regarding the changes in the current year LOC contract, which contains numerous revisions, should be directed to the Social Services Treatment Services Unit.
2. On an on-going basis, continue to **actively recruit and increase the number of DFCS foster homes** in each county to increase the number of placements closer to biological families and home communities.
3. **Increase appropriate relative placements** (In its performance management strategies, DFCS has set a 30% increase goal for relative placements in FY06 for each county department).
4. **Ensure the length of stay in LOC placements** is monitored so that children do not remain in that placement longer than is clinically necessary.
5. Monitor, limit and **reduce the length of time youth are in emergency shelters**.
6. **Reduce assessment level periods:** less than 30 days for levels 1 – 3; and less than 50 days for levels 4 - 6.
  - Reference Cliff O'Connor's memorandum dated August 8, 2005, in which he addressed lengthy LOC placements in assessment status. This is not in the best clinical interest of the client.
  - To further reduce assessment level lags, I am directing Regional Directors to immediately notify their Field Operations Director of any cases remaining in assessment level beyond 60 days. Leveling decisions on these cases must be made by the end of October 2005.
  - As needed, Regional Directors will consult with their Field Operations Director and/or the SS Treatment Services Unit in order to assist county staff to immediately resolve leveling decisions.
7. **Utilize non-approved programs as a last resort**. Request waivers from the Treatment Services Unit prior to placing a child in a non-approved program. The approved LOC provider list is available at [www.galocweb.com](http://www.galocweb.com).

8. **Due to budgetary and programmatic restrictions, it is imperative that local DFSC staff persons refer potential LOC service providers to the Social Services Treatment Services Unit at (404) 657-3572 to ensure that all parties clearly understand the Division's needs and recruitment priorities.** As information for you, our priorities for recruiting child placement and child care institution providers are those agencies and institutions who provide therapeutic residential services to the specific populations identified below:
- Oppositional defiant disordered youth and delinquent adolescents (males and females);
  - Medically fragile infants, children and youth;
  - MRDD (mental retardation and developmentally disabled) populations; and
  - Under-served populations in South Georgia.
  - Level 1 CPA providers.

The DFCS Management Team and I realize that this will require enhanced efforts. However, as our goal is to secure the most optimal outcomes for children and families, it is essential that this becomes our work.

MDH:cs:w

Enclosures

c: DFCS Management Team  
DFCS Social Services Unit Managers