

## A Message from the Executive Director

As I mentioned last month, Mississippi continues to rank among the best in the nation in many of the programs that we administer. We are also showing vast improvement in areas where we have struggled in the past. The reduction in the state's teen birth rate is a very positive trend that I hope that we can maintain. Improvements continue to be made every day in the delivery of child welfare services to those that are the most vulnerable in our society. Child support collections increased for Federal Fiscal Year 2013, even more than 2012. We continue to implement new processes and systems to ensure that this continues to improve.

How does this all happen in Mississippi, a small state with limited resources? The answer is simple — our people. Mississippians, traditionally, are among the most generous in the nation in contributing to charity. Many others volunteer and mentor those less fortunate in our communities. Those that work in service agencies, like MDHS, have a calling to serve and a desire to be the best that they can be.

Dr. Martin Luther King once said, "If a man is called to be a street sweeper, he should sweep the streets even as Michelangelo painted, or Beethoven composed music, or Shakespeare wrote poetry. He should sweep the streets so well that all the hosts of Heaven and Earth will pause and say, 'Here lived a great street sweeper who did his job well.'" You can interject: attorney, eligibility worker, social worker, or whatever occupation that you pursue into that quote.

We, at MDHS, are in the business to serve. The

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## Teen Birth Rates Down in Mississippi



Mississippi hasn't ranked the best in several health issues, including consistently coming in with the highest rates of teenage pregnancy and infant mortality. But the state with poor rankings has been working hard to shake off that identity and recently posted declines in both areas.

The state's teen birth rate fell from 65.6 births in 2008 to 46 in 2012, according to a report from the Mississippi Department of Health. "It's still very high compared to the rest of the country, but we're moving in the right direction," said Dr. Mary Currier, state health officer.

The issue of teen pregnancy was noted by Gov. Phil Bryant when he took office, issuing directives for the health department and the state Department of Human Services to develop plans to prevent and reduce Mississippi's rate.

"From the outset of his administration, Gov. Bryant has made confronting and reducing teen pregnancy in Mississippi a top priority," said spokesman Mick Bullock. "He established Healthy Teens for a Better Mississippi — a diverse group of health professionals, business leaders, community partners, youth and state leaders — to work around the state educating

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motivation to be the best at whatever role you assume in the organization should be the driving force behind your efforts each and every day!

How do we become the best that we can be? At MDHS we all share a common purpose of providing the best service possible to our customers, at the lowest cost possible to the taxpayers, with an emphasis on helping those we serve become self-sufficient. Sharing a common purpose and strictly adhering to our core values of: *Integrity, Outstanding Program Delivery, Self-Development, and Excellent Customer Service*, we should work on building relationships based on trust with our coworkers and those that we serve.

Relationships based on trust are developed when we have a strict code of behavior based on integrity. We first develop self-trust by establishing personal credibility. Then, through our actions and relationships, we earn the trust of others. We align ourselves with the values of the agency and build organizational trust. Once trust has been developed and we gain the knowledge that we need to perform our job duties, we choose our attitude. A positive attitude developed in a climate of trust aligned with others seeking a common purpose takes us to our next step, which is to perform.

Optimal performance can be achieved through a four-step process: *Plan; Do; Study; and Act*. First, we must PLAN. Take all of the knowledge you have accumulated, use the trust you have developed, and build a team. Set achievable goals and clearly establish the process and systems needed to reach the goals. Then 'DO' the activities needed to reach the goal. Always STUDY the results of your actions. Did we achieve the goal? If not, was the goal realistic, or did we fall short, and for what reasons? If the goal is achieved, what did we learn that makes us better prepared to reach even higher goals? The final step is to ACT on what we learned.

Following this process, slowly but surely, best practices and efficient procedures develop enabling us to be leaders in our industry. Our citizens deserve nothing less than our best!

Richard A. Berry  
Executive Director

communities about how to reduce and prevent teen pregnancy."

MDHS Executive Director Rickey Berry said that many programs across the state are in place to help encourage teens to make healthy choices and understand the consequences if they choose otherwise.

"Our goal, from the outset, was to help Mississippi teens understand that the best choice was to complete high school before having a baby. MDHS, through the Division of Family Foundation and Support and the Healthy Teens for a Better Mississippi initiative, wants to ensure that teens have access to accurate, relevant information so they can make healthy choices."

"The decrease of teen births, both here in Mississippi and nationally, is due to a decrease in sexual activity among teens and an increase in the use of birth control," Currier said, adding that education in schools helped drive the statistics down. Additionally, the state also showed progress in lowering its infant mortality rate, the first time in its history where it has a figure lower than 9 per 1,000 births, said Currier.

"So many factors are in play when you are dealing with the extremely complex issue of infant mortality," she said. "In order to continue to see this decline in the deaths of our infants we must ensure that women are healthy before they are pregnant and have access to good prenatal care when they become pregnant."

The two stats are also linked, Currier pointed out.

"We know that being a teen mom is a major risk factor for infant mortality, so access to care and education for teens is important as well. We must also continue to educate new mothers on the risk of smoking around infants, the importance of safe sleep practices and the proper installation and usage of car seats."

For information on events sponsored by the Healthy Teens initiative, go to: [Healthyteens.ms](http://Healthyteens.ms). Statistics on teen births in Mississippi can be found at: [MSDH Vital Statistics](http://MSDH Vital Statistics).

*Article by Dustin Barnes, reporter for the Clarion-Ledger. Reprint authorized.*

Nearly 2 out of 3 kids born to  
**UNMARRIED TEEN MOMS**  
live **BELOW** the **POVERTY LINE.**

# THE BEACON

For information or to submit articles for the Beacon, contact Julia Bryan at: [julia.bryan@mdhs.ms.gov](mailto:julia.bryan@mdhs.ms.gov) or phone 601-359-4517. To mail photos or articles, send to: PO Box 352, Jackson, MS 39205-0352.

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## Get Ready to Rock and Roll with the Great Central U.S. ShakeOut

"Drop, Cover and Hold On," the slogan for the **Great Central U.S. ShakeOut**, is an annual opportunity to practice safety during big earthquakes.

The ShakeOut urges us, our agency, communities, schools and churches to review and update emergency preparedness plans and supplies, and to secure our homes, work space and other areas we frequent in order to prevent damage and injuries.

The event encourages participation and invites state agencies and individuals to **register online**. To date, more than 1.2 million people have registered.

### Why should we prepare?

Mississippi is one of 10 states that would be significantly affected by an earthquake in the **New Madrid Seismic Zone** which experts say is at high risk for a moderate earthquake in the near future. Scientists estimate the probability is 25 to 40 percent of a magnitude 6.0 or larger earthquake occurring in this seismic zone within any 50 year period. **The Mississippi valley** could be hit by such an earthquake at any time. Quite frankly, the state is on borrowed time according to scientists.

Our agency will be participating in the Great Central U.S. ShakeOut Thursday, Oct. 17 at 10:17 a.m. You can register as a participant by going to: **ShakeOut Registration**.

During the exercise Oct. 17, to participate you will simulate your expected actions during an earthquake.

- **DROP** to the ground (before the earthquake drops you!).
- Take **COVER** by getting under a sturdy desk or table.
- **HOLD ON** to it until the shaking stops.

If there isn't a table or desk near you, cover your face and head with your arms and crouch in an inside corner of the building. Do not try to run to another room just to get under a table. The main point is to not try to move but to **immediately** protect yourself as best as possible where you are.

Earthquakes occur without any warning and may be so violent that you cannot run or crawl; you therefore will most likely be knocked to the ground where you happen to be. You will never know if the initial jolt will turn out to be start of the big one. You should **Drop, Cover, and Hold On immediately!**

MDHS offices should have received earthquake preparedness information. If you did not, contact the MDHS, Emergency Management Coordinator Alynda Ponder at 601-359-2616.



## 200 Million Flowers Promotes Permanent Placement for Mississippi Children



Families and youth are benefiting from a new partnership formed between MDHS and 200 Million Flowers, a relatively new adoption agency in Mississippi. The MDHS, Adoption Unit was approached last year by Craig Robertson, 200 Million Flowers' founder, with the question "What can we do to help you find forever homes for children in foster care?"

After a lengthy discussion of the state's successes and efforts for permanency placement, it was decided that the greatest need was to heighten awareness in Mississippi communities of children in foster care who need an adoptive family.

200 Million Flowers proposed that they be allowed direct contact with these youth so professional photo shoots could be scheduled with each. The goal is to create an online "Heart Gallery" which features all of the state's youth free for adoption viewable at [www.200MillionFlowers.org](http://www.200MillionFlowers.org) and [www.AdoptUSkids.org](http://www.AdoptUSkids.org). Portable displays will also be created for viewing at events. These services are being provided to the state at no charge.

Lyndsey Hester, adoption specialist for 200 Million Flowers began this work by building relationships with DFCS adoption staff. What she soon learned is MDHS has passionate, dedicated staff that is both protective of this vulnerable population of youth and open to any avenue that would promote recruitment of forever homes for them.

After the first few photo shoots, word quickly spread from region to region that this was a great experience for both agency staff and children. Lyndsey reports that she has been overwhelmed with a growing love for these children and feels she has been extremely blessed by meeting them and sharing in their stories.

Rick Velore, 200 Million Flowers executive director, has expressed his desire to continue the Heart Gallery, and expand the site to feature every waiting child in the state. And he's already asking, "What else can we do to help?"

The Adoption Unit is looking forward to a continued partnership with 200 Million Flowers that has shown so much "heart" for Mississippi children.

TO DFCS staff: If you are responsible for finding an adoptive home for a child on your caseload who has not yet been photographed, contact Lyndsey Hester at 601-790-1188 to schedule a time.

## Region 4-N Celebrates Mass Adoption



Congratulations to Region 4 North which celebrated adoptions for four Winston County families who provided "forever" homes to a sibling group of five. The families are: Morice and Chinese Hathorn, Joyce Rush, Mary Hardin and Tanisha Lockett.

The mass adoption was held at the Winston County court house Aug. 21. Special thanks to Judge Joey Kilgore, Attorney Crystal Welch, the Mississippi College Law School, ASWS Joann Clark, FPS LaErica O'Neal, Adoption ASWS Carolyn D. Quin and Adoption Specialist Bobbie Yarbrough.

## Etta Smith Retires after 25 Years of Service



August 23, 2013, Pearl River County DHS recognized Etta Smith for 25 years of dedicated service with MDHS.

Etta began her journey with MDHS in 1988 as a physical control officer in Claiborne County and in 1993, she was promoted to an eligibility worker.

In 1998, Etta moved to Hancock County, excited to have the opportunity to help children in Mississippi by serving as a child support enforcement officer. By 2003, she was promoted to supervisor in Pearl River County.

Along with her duties at MDHS, Etta has served on the board of Mississippi Child Support Association.

We wish her well as she starts a new adventure.

## Paint it Purple to Promote Alzheimer's Awareness



The **Mississippi Department of Mental Health, Alzheimer's Association**, Mississippi Chapter, **UMMC MIND Center** and the Mississippi Department of Human Services, Division of Aging and Adult Services urged

everyone to help paint Mississippi purple Sept. 20 in honor of Alzheimer's Action Day.

Mississippians were encouraged to wear something purple and hang purple ribbons and bows at homes and workplaces to show support for people with Alzheimer's disease and the loved ones who care for them.

Lowndes County Director Jim Sutherland said, "My mother-in-law has Alzheimer's. She's 84 and it takes a huge toll on my father-in-law. My wife and I drive down to Greene County every two weeks to give him a break and help him out. It is a very sad disease. She survived breast cancer but this is totally different." He added that he would be proud to wear purple Sept. 20.

Show your support and wear purple. Also if you know of someone who is a caregiver or has a family member with Alzheimer's, ask how you can help. For more information on Alzheimer's, go to: **Alzheimer's Association**.



Noxubee County

Alcorn County



Sunflower County

## Change in the Air for Reshma Khatkhate



*Seated, from left: Patricia Leflore, Ruby Linson and Reshma Khatkhate. Standing, from left: Melody Tyler, Tommie Downey and Janice Wells.*

The E-Change Center in Bolton celebrated Reshma Khatkhate's "going away" party at Bonsai in Clinton Sept. 5. Reshma is moving to a program administrator position at the State Office. Everyone at the E-Change Center wishes her the best in her endeavors. She will be truly missed.

## Congratulations to Helen Barnes

Division of Budgets and Accounting, Purchasing Director Helen Barnes has been appointed to represent MDHS on the State and School Employees' Health Insurance Advisory Council. Helen's integrity, knowledge of the agency and devotion to excellent customer service during her tenure of over 30 years with the agency makes her an excellent representative for all MDHS associates. Congratulations, Helen, and thank you for your service!



## Highlights from Region 2-E



Region 2 East recently held a staff meeting to honor employees by awarding state service certificates and pins. Receiving 5 year awards were: Natalie Bryant, Christina Shumpert and Patricia Anosike. Ten year awards were presented to: Ruby McBride, Alice Alexander, Angelia Shoemaker, Tina Turner and Mary Leahman. Twenty year recognitions went to: Tonita Vick, Carol Johnson, Lori Weatherall and Dorothy Williams-Courtney. Daisy Holt was recognized for 30 years of service to the families and children of Mississippi. Thank you, ladies, for your service.

## Highlights from Region 6

At a recent regional meeting, several Region 6 staff members were presented awards and certificates.

Lamar County Director Vickie Gray (below left) and Forrest County Director Wanda Simpson were presented Character First certificates for "Justice."



Stone County Director Cecilia Weathersby (at left) was presented a 30-year service pin and certificate.

Congratulations, ladies, and thank you for your hard work and dedication.

# County Corner - Panola and Pearl River Counties

This month, our travels take us to **Panola** and **Pearl River** counties.

Panola, which is the Native American word for cotton, was established Feb. 9, 1836. Panola County is one of the 12 large northern Mississippi counties created out of the Chickasaw Cession of 1832. Panola is made up of diverse terrains, communities and industries offering unlimited opportunities. It also fuses the rolling hills of North Mississippi to America's Fertile Crescent also known as the Delta.



You can't talk about Panola County without a mention of South Panola High School, known for their elite football tradition, taking home eight state championship titles in the last 10 years. Several NFL



players call Panola County home, four of which attended South Panola High School. The South Panola Tigers captured five consecutive MHSAA Class 5A State Championships from 2003-2007,

the longest streak of consecutive MHSAA State Championships since the association began holding playoffs in 1981.

Panola had a population of 27,845 in 1920 which grew to 34,707 by 2010. With 705 square miles, Panola has two county seats. Sardis is the 1<sup>st</sup> District county seat with a population of 1,703 in 2010; and Batesville is the 2<sup>nd</sup> District county seat with a population 7,463 at the 2010 census.

## Notable people

**Al Baker**, former Major League Baseball player.

**Cliff Finch** - governor of Mississippi from 1976 to 1980.

**Joe Gardner** - Mississippi state legislator.

**Peria Jerry** - University of Mississippi and Atlanta Falcons defensive tackle and his brother John, guard for the Miami Dolphins.

**Ronnie Musgrove** - governor of Mississippi from 2000 to 2004. Born in Tocowa in 1956 and reared in Batesville.

**Dwayne Rudd** - former NFL player for the Minnesota Vikings, Tampa Bay Buccaneers, Oakland Raiders, and Cleveland Browns.

**Deshea Townsend** - Pittsburgh Steelers defensive back.

**Wesley Walls** - former NFL player for the San Francisco 49ers, New Orleans Saints, Carolina Panthers.

**Charles P. Hall** - Lieutenant general of the U.S. Army, who served in both World Wars. He commanded the XI Corps during the Battle of Bataan.

Pearl River County was originally organized as Pearl County in 1872 using land taken from Hancock and Marion counties. Pearl County was short lived because of a sparse population and limited tax base. After being abolished in 1878, just six years after its creation, the land was returned to Hancock and Marion counties.

In the 1880s, the New Orleans and Northeastern Railroad built a rail line through the area which greatly aided in growth and economic progress, especially in the timber industry. In February 1890, they were ready to try again. The county was re-formed under



the name of Pearl River County using the same areas originally taken from Hancock and Marion counties. The name of the county was derived by the fact that it is separated from Louisiana by the Pearl River which makes up the county's western border.

Pearl River County encompasses 819 square miles and in 2010 its population was 55,834. The county seat is Poplarville.

Pearl River County hosts the annual Blueberry Jubilee the second Saturday of June, which includes arts and crafts, rides, vendors and rodeos. Located in downtown Poplarville, the Blueberry Jubilee attracts about 10,000 visitors each year and features storytellers, live entertainment, lots of food and down home southern hospitality.



## Notable People

**Glen Day**, PGA Tour Golfer.

**Whitney Miller**, America's first Master Chef.

**Herbert Theriot**, 1994 World Champion Tie-Down Roper. Multiple time NFR Qualifier.

**Theodore G. Bilbo**, U.S. Senator, was born in Juniper Grove, an eastern township of Poplarville in 1877.

Next month, we will take a look at **Perry** and **Pike counties**.

Until then, take some time and enjoy the beautiful fall weather and a daytrip through scenic, historic Mississippi.

# Practice Model Highlights

## *Walker Chosen for 7-W Practice Model Worker Recognition*



*From left: PMC Jacqueline Purifoy and Shawarner Walker.*

Shawarner Walker is new to the field of Social Work. She recently graduated from the University of Southern Mississippi and began her career with the agency in November 2012. Shawarner displays enthusiasm and passion for social work and her families.

Shawarner embodies the Practice Model Component Individualized and “Timely Case Planning” by going above and beyond the call of duty to schedule case activities during times convenient for her clients. It has been noted that Shawarner examines her cases individually and works with the families to collectively create plans to improve support systems, identify their strengths, and ensure the best interest of children involved. Shawarner works tirelessly to ensure that permanent connections are maintained.

In one case, she identified the need to support the permanent connection of an incarcerated father and his daughter who is in state custody while recognizing that relationship which should not end due to imprisonment.

While working another case, Shawarner recognized a child’s language disability and recommended appropriate services for the family. She has also ensured that the child received appropriate follow-up to determine if there is a need for special education services. This speaks to her assessment skills and her ability to utilize the Practice Model component “Mobilizing Services Timely.”

Shawarner has truly made great strides in field of Social Work and maintains a positive relationship with many of her clients due to her diligence, openness, genuineness, empathy and respect. In recognizing Shawarner’s work, Region 7-W staff nominates her as their Practice Model Worker of the Month.

## *Region 3-S Selects Morris for Practice Model Recognition*



*From left: ASWS Vernessia Harbin, FPS Christy Morris and PMC Indiana Brown.*

Christy Morris is a Region 3 South, Hinds County family protection specialist. She received her bachelor’s degree in Social Work from Jackson State University and has been employed by the agency since June 2012. Since then, FPS Morris has done a great job, dedicating herself to her families. Christy’s supervisor, Area Social Work Supervisor Vernessia Harbin, describes Christy as one who has grasped the concepts of the job and the Practice Model very quickly and it reflects in her work.

“She goes beyond the call of duty for her families and she is very self-motivated,” says Vernessia. “She always has her visits completed and documented in a timely manner.”

Christy stated that she comes from a family of 10 children and her mother was a nurse and an educator. Watching her mother’s work instilled in Christy a passion for helping others. Unsure of what to major in when she began JSU, an advisor recommended social work. She stated that, it was during an internship at Catholic Charities, she knew social work was her passion.

Christy works hard for her families, which for some cases, even extends through the weekends to ensure that family visits go well. It has been also noted that she has helped a young teen mother by teaching appropriate parenting skills and infant care.

Recently, Christy was observed as she worked a case where the children had been removed from their home and placed in foster care out of state. She talked to the family about their needs and mobilized appropriate services in a timely manner so they could complete their service agreement. She discovered the family lacked reliable transportation so she provided transportation each month so the family could visit their children. And throughout, she has continued to have dialog with the family and children about their case planning decisions and a permanency plan.

FPS Christy Morris is a hard worker and Region 3-S is pleased to recognize her as Practice Model Worker of the Month.

## Region 3-S Service Awards Presented



Region 3 South Director Linda Slaughter recently awarded two staff members with service pins. Hinds County Director Michael Miller was presented a 30 year service pin and certificate. Program Specialist Gaynell Whitehead was presented a certificate for 15 years of service. Congratulations to each of you for your dedication to the people of Mississippi.

## Former Foster Child Joins US Army and Enrolls at Ole Miss



Region 7 West, Harrison County Family and Children's Services, congratulates former foster child Zachary Davie Rogers of Gulfport for his most recent achievement - completing 16 weeks of basic training with the 198th Infantry Brigade, 4th Battalion of the U.S. Army in Fort Benning, Georgia. Private Rogers celebrated this achievement Sept. 5 at

the Turning Blue Ceremony followed by graduation Sept. 6. Zach plans to become a Reserve Officers' Training Corp (ROTC) representative at Ole Miss while continuing his education in the field of Pre-Law. Congratulations, Zachary, on this accomplishment and for dedicating yourself to serving and protecting our country. Pictured: Harrison County ASWS Taji Valentine and Private Zachary Davie Rogers.

## Welcome Airman Hobbs



February 2013, Air National Guard Airman 1st Class Michael A. Hobbs graduated from basic military training at Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio, TX and received his Department of Defence firefighter certification from Goodfellow Air Force Base in San Angelo, TX. He now serves with the Mississippi Air National Guard, 172<sup>nd</sup> Airlift Wing in Flowood and has joined MDHS as a systems operator for MDHS, MIS.

**NOTE: If you have a family member serving our country, active duty overseas, submit a photo so we can highlight their service.**



## CHARACTER FIRST

DEFINITION OF THE MONTH:

# JUSTICE

Taking personal responsibility to uphold what is pure, right and true.



A new MDHS website is on its way. Follow us on **Twitter** and **Facebook** for current news and updates.