

ADVOCATES

State Partners Advocate for Children

Denise T. Barker, Executive Director

“Advocacy is the pursuit of influencing outcomes — including public-policy and resource allocation decisions within political, economic, and social systems and institutions — that directly affect people’s current lives.” David Cohen, Rosa de la Vega, and Gabrielle Watson, Advocacy for Social Justice (2001)

As many of you may remember, this is one of the first things I tell new staff and newly appointed local board members: *“Nobody said child advocacy was going to be easy.”* I have been saying that for a long time and I am sure someone said it to me many years ago. Never has it been more true than during the past two years – trying to accomplish so much with rapidly dwindling resources has indeed been a challenge. And, in spite of all the gloom and doom, I have seen some amazing advocacy efforts take place. The power of the human spirit is never more apparent than during a time of need – we continue to make a difference for our children.

At the top of my “true advocacy” list is the fact that Dr. Kathleen Hayes, Director of the South Carolina Department of Social Services, and I have had the opportunity (thanks to

many local review board members) to speak, as a unified team, to a number of legislative delegations around the state. Under Kathleen’s leadership at the Department of Social Services, we finally have a shared vision of how South Carolina should function for children who must enter the foster care system and what must be in place if we are to return children in foster care to permanent families as quickly as possible. The delegation members seem to be a little surprised that our two agencies have come together to speak to them with a common message, but I believe that it has been effective.

(continued on page 2)



Denise T. Barker,
Executive Director
Children’s FCRB



Dr. Kathleen Hayes
State Director
SCDSS

South Carolina
Governor’s Office
Children’s Foster
Care Review Board

Mark Sanford, Governor

Volume 24, Issue 1
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The Children’s Trust
OF SOUTH CAROLINA

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Mission Statement

The mission of the South Carolina Children’s Foster Care Review Board is to provide external accountability for the foster care system and to advocate on behalf of children in foster care.

Vision Statement

South Carolina will make child well-being a top priority by assuring safe, permanent families for all children in foster care.

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State Partners (continued from cover)

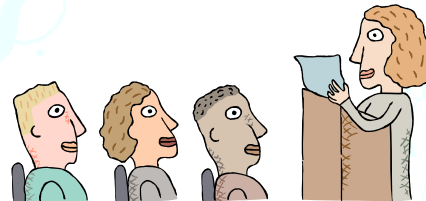
Legislators need to know how the drastic budget cuts are affecting children and families and they need to know that our two agencies plan to move forward, in spite of these limitations.

One important message being communicated to legislators is that amidst all the chaos, the State of South Carolina needs to continue the leadership that Dr. Kathleen Hayes has brought to the Department of Social Services. A new governor will be elected in November and because the Department of Social Services is a cabinet agency, the Director of that agency could change under a new administration. What we need is stability and a steady path toward progress, not more change and more upheaval. Based on what Dr. Hayes was handed when she came to the Department of Social Services and the unprecedented financial devastation she has had to manage, I find it simply amazing that she has been able to maintain her positive outlook and her focus on the well-being of children and families. The pressures and the tasks before her have been substantial and will continue to be difficult through these eroding economic times

Another message delivered to delegation members is my thankfulness to them for the quality of volunteers that they

continue to nominate for service on local review boards. I explain that without the continued generosity of most volunteers to willingly suspend per diem and travel costs, the Review Board would not have been able to sustain the staff that we have, or cover local reviews as required by law. All delegations have expressed their thanks and their gratitude to those who have made this sacrifice and have asked me to pass their thanks along to you. I explain that it is just another example of how important volunteers are to the fabric of child advocacy in South Carolina – I am proud to work for all of you.

I fear we are not through “the worst of times” just yet. Let’s continue to maintain our focus and our commitment to making South Carolina a safe place for our children. Nobody said it was going to be easy.



Review Board Staff News and Updates

We are most pleased to welcome Doretta Crosson-Irby as the newest member of the Foster Care Review Board team. Doretta joined the FCRB in October and already feels like a long-time member of our family. Doretta brings a wealth of experience from her most recent position as an Adoption Specialist with Region II Adoptions, as well as a tenure as a protective services worker in Richland County. Doretta is the coordinator for Review Board 12A, 14A, 15B and 15C.



SC Enterprise Information System (SCEIS)

The South Carolina Enterprise Information System (SCEIS) is consolidating more than 70 state agencies onto a single, statewide enterprise system for finance, materials management and human resources/payroll. SCEIS will:

- Replace outdated agency central systems: the accounting system, which was implemented in 1980, and the state payroll system, which came into use in 1969.
- Eliminate redundancies, reduce paper handling and provide more efficient processing – all of which is expected to result in significant state savings.

Beyond the efficiencies and cost savings achieved, SCEIS also will support improved services by state agencies, providing the citizens of the state with better service at reduced cost.

The launch of SCEIS for the Governor’s Office occurred in November 2009. As with any new system, there has been a significant learning curve during the transition. If you have any questions or would like additional information about SCEIS, please contact Felicia Lorick, Business Manager, at (803) 734-0217.

Directly Speaking . . . Details from Denise

By Denise T. Barker, Executive Director

It was with a very heavy heart that I sat and listened to the Department of Social Services (DSS) present its budget to the House Ways and Means subcommittee last week. To hear the numbers and to try to comprehend the effect of these horrific financial times on the people of South Carolina who are in desperate need of assistance is almost too much to take in. And sadly, we are not through the worst of it as all agencies are being told to prepare for another 10-15% cut in the coming year. We are all struggling to catch a glimmer of light at the end of this very dark tunnel. Here are just a few of the staggering statistics:

- ◆ 900,000 people currently receive some type of service from DSS
- ◆ 38% of those are children under the age of five
- ◆ 380 staff positions at DSS have been lost to budget cuts thus far
- ◆ 48 million dollars in State funding has been cut from DSS, which impacts the dollars South Carolina can draw down from Federal programs that require differing percentages of State matching funds. South Carolina is already two million dollars below what is necessary to maximize available Federal funding.

DSS State Director, Dr. Kathleen Hayes, told the subcommittee; “to meet prior reductions, we have implemented furloughs of five days and ten days, affecting all employees. We have implemented a Reduction in Force, continued a hiring freeze and eliminated recently vacant positions. To date, by releasing employees and leaving positions unfilled, we have reduced our workforce by 380 at a time DSS caseloads have increased dramatically. We have reduced services to our families and children by one-third in all contractual services. With additional projected cuts, we are concerned that we will not be able to meet our ongoing obligations. We are running out of options.”

Hayes stated, “families in South Carolina are hurting. We are seeing people who have never sought the services of DSS before.” While the budget has been shrinking, the number of families qualifying for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly Food Stamps) and Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) have increased by 31% and 46%, respectively since 2007.”

The Department of Social Services remains committed to working with the Review Board at the state and county level to ensure that our children in foster care are safe and moving toward permanency. Now more than ever the Review Board needs to be a working partner with DSS, and all agencies who provide services to our children, if we are to keep this vision alive. We must keep all avenues of communication open and working well if we are serious about wanting to make a difference for our children during these troubled times. The responsibility lies with all of us.

State Board Members

Martha “Sissy” Brock, 5th Congressional District, Chairperson (local review board 7B)

Charles (Chuck) Koches, *1st Congressional District* (local review board 9B)

Jo Hecker, *2nd Congressional District* (local review board 5B)

Carolyn Payton-Pinson, *3rd Congressional District* (local review board 10B)

Monica Hill, *4th Congressional District* (local review board 7C)

Vacant, *6th Congressional District*

Vernon McCurry, *Member at-Large* (local review board 13C)

ARE YOU INTERESTED IN BECOMING A REVIEW BOARD VOLUNTEER?

- ◆ You need to be at least 18 years of age and able to commit to spending one day per month reviewing cases. You will be asked to work with others in the child welfare system to bring about positive change for foster children.
- ◆ Each review board member is appointed by the Governor, upon the recommendation of legislative delegations, and is required to reside in the judicial district of the review board of which he or she is a member.
- ◆ For more information, please call the Governor’s Office Foster Care Review Program at 803-734-0480, or contact your local legislative delegation.

Committed to Kids! Smiling New Faces

Review Board New Member Orientation was held on November 9, 2009 for five new local review board members and one new staff member. Orientation was also held on January 25, 2010 for eight new local review board members.

Orientation training is mandatory for all incoming board members and is offered at least four times each year. If you have review board members who have not completed this training, please encourage their attendance. Volunteer Guardians ad Litem, Guardian ad Litem staff, and other child welfare professionals are also welcome to attend. Please call (803) 734-0480 to reserve a space. The next **New Member Orientation will be held on Monday, March 15, 2010.**



November 9, 2009

Standing: Michael Dennis, 9C; Raleigh King, 3A; Joseph Postell, 3A; and Michael Hess, 1B

Seated: Stephanie Canter, 10C, and Doretta Crosson-Irby, Review Board Coordinator



January 25, 2010

Standing: Jack McCall, 13B; Cari Brinkusescu, 13C; Phyllis Yerace, 2B; Mary Long, 5E; and Barbara Jackson, 3B

Seated: Deborah Davis, 9F; Dana Kiser, 15A; and Wanda James, 12A

Adoption Day in Sumter County Family Court

By Stephen Clyburn, Program Supervisor



“Moose” McFaddin, Mary Beth Halverson and daughter Margaret

November is National Adoption month, a month set aside to raise awareness about the adoption of children and youth from foster care. This year’s celebration included the finalization of over 20 adoptions in Sumter County Family Court. I had the distinct pleasure of observing this special day. Among the hearings was that of Mary Beth Halvorson's daughter, Margaret. Mary Beth is one of our wonderful board members from Horry County (Review Board 15B). She and Margaret were very excited to become a forever family!



Stephen Clyburn, RB Supervisor and Margaret

The Honorable George M. McFaddin, Jr. and his sidekick “Moose” presided over the hearing.

Foster Care Review News and Views: Family Group Conferencing Comes to SC

By Beth M. Green, Program Director



What is Family Group Conferencing (FGC)? FGC is a practice that incorporates the belief that families are often best able to make decisions about their own family. FGC allows for families with children in the custody of the Department of Social Services to develop their own plan to ensure the physical and emotional safety of their children. FGC is voluntary. Families involved in FGC are assigned a neutral person to assist them in planning and facilitating their meeting. The process involves family members, friends, community members and professionals. The family decides whom they consider family and together they decide how to keep the children safe.

Why FGC works? Texas has implemented FGC and found it successful for several reasons. One reason is that it allows children to maintain their family and cultural connections. Another reason for success is that family groups know their own histories and can use this information to develop a safety plan to meet the needs of the children. FGC also allows children and parents to be a part of a wider system of support. It allows for building upon the group's strengths and abilities to protect and care for their young family members.

How did FGC come to SC? The South Carolina Department of Social Services has been able to bring FGC to South Carolina through a federal grant. The program, South Carolina Families First, has been implemented in 10 counties, with plans of expanding to additional counties. The counties currently served by South Carolina Families First include **Charleston, Berkeley, Dorchester, Beaufort, Colleton, Greenville, Greenwood, Oconee, Spartanburg and Newberry**. The program is operated with a staff of three. Pat Patrick is the program director, with Julie Schneider and Susan Wilson as regional coordinators. The goal of SC Families First is to serve 200 families per year.

How do families get referred for FGC? Anyone, including DSS workers, family members, Guardians ad Litem, counselors, school staff, etc., who knows of a family with children in foster care may refer to SC Families First. If the family is interested in FGC, South Carolina Families First will select a trained family coordinator. The family coordinator meets with the family and gathers information, including who the family would like to invite to the conference. The meeting is set and the family coordinator then contacts the individuals to be invited. The family group plans a meal to share during the conference. The conference is held with the facilitation of the family coordinator and a plan is developed. A follow-up meeting can be held if agreed upon by the family.

What can Review Board members do to promote FGC?

Foster Care Review Board members who review the cases of children in the above-named counties can play an important role in getting families referred to South Carolina Families First for FGC. Board members can begin by asking about and advocating for FGC at reviews. This is particularly important at first reviews, as FGC has proven most effective when children have been in foster care 6 months or less. Review Board members can also promote FGC by inviting the South Carolina Families First Staff to become a routine participant in local partners' meetings. At a time when resources, staff and state dollars are scarce, we need to take full advantage of this proven, federally-funded program. Thank you for putting FGC on your radar screen. Please keep us informed on how FGC is working in your counties.

JUST ANNOUNCED

2009 REVIEW BOARD MEMBER AND REVIEW BOARD OF THE YEAR

Mary Elizabeth Ouzts, Review Board 11B, is the Review Board Member of the Year, and **Review Board 16A**, York and Union Counties, is the Review Board of the Year. A special recognition of these volunteers for their hours of service to the children of South Carolina is being planned for the near future.



South Carolina Heart Gallery

By Millie Qualls, Heart Gallery Coordinator



THE POWER OF PARTNERSHIP

As most of our readers know by now, the South Carolina Heart Gallery began in 2005 with a small number of community volunteers and photographers who wanted to help find adoptive homes for children in foster care. By 2008 it was clear that the Heart Gallery was effective in educating the public about the need for foster and adoptive homes, as well as increasing child-specific adoption recruitment opportunities. In July 2008 a collaborative partnership was formed between the Children's Foster Care Review Board and the South Carolina Department of Social Services. This partnership enabled contractual funding to expand and enhance the Heart Gallery and provided a full time staff person to oversee its mission. The Heart Gallery was included in the State DSS Marketing and Recruitment Plan, and Regional Adoption Recruiters fully embraced their additional role in managing referrals, scouting locations for photo shoots, and assisting in finding community venues for photo exhibits.



Orphan Sunday Exhibit at Seacoast Church,
Myrtle Beach, SC



Photo Shoot at Riverbanks Zoo
Columbia, SC

From 2005 through 2008, beautiful portraits of 334 children were created by Heart Gallery photographers. The resulting portraits were featured in public venues around the state, as well as on the Heart Gallery website at www.scheartgallery.org. Multiple exhibits, presentations to community groups, and television and print media led to a huge jump in website traffic and inquiries from families interested in adopting. Best of all, 40% of the children featured by the Heart Gallery during this time were matched with prospective adoptive families!

2009 was bustling with activity. One hundred and forty-two children attended Heart Gallery photo shoots, thanks to the organization and dedication of Adoption Recruiters and Adoption Specialists. Thirty-four photographers volunteered their time and talent at these events, assisted by 38 Foster Care Review Board volunteers and staff members.

The combined efforts of the Heart Gallery Coordinator, the Adoption and Foster Care Recruiters, Foster Care Review Board staff and volunteers, a Charleston community volunteer, and the State Marketing and Recruitment Plan resulted in 126 public venues, seven exhibit receptions, six print articles, two television spots, and two radio spots. A message printed on state paycheck stubs during November reached an estimated 40,000 state employees. Fox Carolina and Ashley Furniture donated 10 months of online advertising and arranged a regional ad insert in the December issue of Better Homes & Gardens magazine. As a result, the Heart Gallery website received 133,452 unique visitors and 1,447 inquiries from families interested in adopting! This could not have been achieved without public/private partnership and investment in the future of South Carolina's waiting children.

Together, we are powerful. Through our partnership we *will* find permanent families. Let us embrace the possibilities that 2010 brings!

If you have not visited the Heart Gallery website recently, please do so, as it has been updated with many new photos. Just go to <http://www.scheartgallery.org>.

SC Foster Parent Association Provides Cars for Foster Youth

“ON THE ROAD AGAIN” is a project of the South Carolina Foster Parent Association in which used cars are donated to help foster youth as they travel the road to success. Cars are donated to the SCFPA and they have developed a partnership with the Cooperative Ministries to provide repairs and getting the cars street ready. The SC Foster Parent Association works with our counties and Independent Living program to identify children who could use a vehicle to help make the step into independence.

The success of this program is dependent upon donations from individuals in our communities. If you or anyone you know is interested in donating a vehicle, please contact Brian Marion at (803) 665-9225. The program will accept cars that are not in driving condition or that may need minor repairs, and will make arrangements to have the vehicle transported to Cooperative Ministries. Vehicle donations are tax deductible.

Pictured right (left to right) Shamekkico Weathers, Car Recipient; Patricia Jackson, Cooperative Ministries; Brian Marion, SCFPA; Mutia Graham, Car Recipient; Dr. Kathleen M. Hayes, Director, SCDSS; Mary and Carl Brown, SCFPA.



Richland County Review Boards

Submitted by Rachel Silver, Review Board Member, 5C



Volunteer Ferne Kantsiper “picnics” with friends

Thanks to our many volunteers and contributors, the Richland County FPA Child Care Program continued to thrive in the fall of 2009. Volunteers from Southside Baptist Church delighted the children and adults with pizza and snacks in September. We continue to average a 1:2 ratio of adults to children, which makes the evening smooth. And it’s hard to say who enjoys the experience more. These are some adorable children!

Please join me in thanking the following volunteers: Shanita Brown, Kate Bozik, Debbie Carter, Emily Dixon, Melanie Dodson, Doris Frank, Barbara Hinton, Ferne Kantsiper, Ernest McClerklin, Debbie McDaniel, Mark Moore, Mark Newsome, Corinne Robinson, Patti Rosefeld, Rachel Silver, Kathy Trice, and Vicky Vernon. These folks are the backbone of the program.

We look forward to meeting our new volunteers from Columbia College and 100 Black Women of Columbia, as well as our new graduate-level interns from Columbia International University. We’d like to meet you, too. We’re always here on the 4th Tuesday of the month. If you’d like to get involved, please send me an e-mail at rsilver@sc.rr.com.

Richland County Holiday Party:

Local Review Board members from all four of the Richland County Boards served refreshments to approximately 75 grateful guests who had a great time. Thanks to Pam Bond, Kate Bozik, Dottie Cronise, Emily Dixon, Jo Hecker, Remona Jenkins and Rachel Silver for hosting and providing refreshments for the event.



Back Row: Jo Hecker and Kate Bozik
Front Row: Leah Ballerstein, Dottie Cronise, and Robin Campbell

Review Board Round-up

By Review Board Coordinators, Program Staff, and Review Board Members

- ◆ **Review Board 3B:** Board members from Sumter and Lee counties provided holiday snacks to foster care staff during the December reviews to show their support and appreciation for their work.

Stephanie Spink, Coordinator

- ◆ **Review Boards 9A and 9C:** Review Board members provided holiday goodies for the case managers and foster care staff at Charleston County DSS in appreciation for their hard work. Thank you to all the board members for going the extra mile to make workers feel valued and appreciated.

Michelle White, Coordinator

- ◆ **Review Board 9D:** The first annual Foster Care Review Board 9D Christmas Partners Party was held on December 12, 2009 at Charleston Water System. The featured partner this year was Specialized Alternatives for Youth. They had several representatives from their office who provided games, presents, and plenty of holiday cheer. The board worked diligently over the past few months in preparation for the party to ensure that everyone had a good time. The event was catered by Greens Catering Services in Charleston. Each case worker in attendance also received a gift card from board members.

Barbara Acobe, Board Member

- ◆ **Review Board 10C:** Review Board members sponsored two foster children for the annual "Angel Tree", providing presents for the children. Jill McDonald, RB Chairperson, coordinated with the Anderson County FPA's President to co-sponsor the annual Christmas party. Sixty foster children attended the party and received toys and books donated by Concord Baptist Church, Bagel Shop, and Chick-fil-A.

Stephanie Spink, Coordinator

- ◆ **Review Boards 13B and 13D:** In September, several board members were in attendance at the Heart Gallery exhibit at Earth Fare "Locavore" event in Greenville. Along with RBC Anne Maertens, Susan Turner (13D), Jayne Crisp (13D) and Doris Blazer (13B) braved the cold and rain to greet and answer questions. Michelle Lyon, Region I Adoptions, also lent a hand and helped disassemble the exhibit.

Anne Maertens, Coordinator

- ◆ **Review Board 14B:** The holidays can be a hard time for children in foster care who are separated from their families. Review Board members collaborated with the local DSS office, and collected more than 500 Christmas gifts and \$800 in case donations for the children of the Lowcountry have a more joyful holiday. Their generosity rivals Santa's!

Emily Arnold, Coordinator

- ◆ **Review Boards 16A and 16B:** The York/Union Foster Care Review Boards hosted luncheons for both York and Union counties in appreciation for foster care staff and they work they do. Board members went all out this year to show workers what a great job they are doing and how very much they are appreciated. Great job!

Review Board Members from 16B, York County, collected used cell phones throughout the month of November 2009. The Board received \$90 for the phones and they will use this money to help foster children for various field trips, prom, etc. Board Members also donated some of their own money towards this fund. Thank you 16B Board Members!!!

Michelle White, Coordinator



MaryAnn Riley and Zora Massing, RB 7C, serve refreshments at the Spartanburg County Foster Parent Association Holiday Party

Foster Facts—2009 Data Points

By Lisa S. Vosburgh, Data/Research Administrator

In preparing for the upcoming 2009—2010 Annual Report, I wanted to share the following preliminary data:

- ◆ The number of children active on June 30, 2009 was 20% higher than the same time in 2008
- ◆ The number of entries to foster care increased by over 10% from 2008
- ◆ The number of Areas of Concern reported at reviews increased over 2008
- ◆ The number of volunteer hours increased by 13% and the total dollar value of those hours increased by 25%
- ◆ The number of adoptions and children returning home increased slightly over 2008

According to the December 2009 North American Council on Adoptable Children report, in South Carolina nearly 2,000 children in foster care are waiting to be adopted. Adoption provides children with a lifetime of emotional and legal connections to a family. Children who cannot return home from foster care risk reaching adulthood without a permanent family of their own.

Foster care was intended to be temporary, but many South Carolina Children remain in care for years. For children waiting to be adopted, the average length of stay is nearly 40 months, or 3 birthdays. To shorten the time children spend in foster care, child welfare agencies must employ the best recruitment tools possible to find families.

Legal Lines: Legislative Update

By Michelle Dhunjishah, General Counsel

State Legislative Update

The legislature reconvened on January 12, 2010 for the second-half of a two-year session. Any bills that do not pass this session will have to be re-introduced next year. We anticipate a short session since it is likely that the legislators will take furloughs in light of the budget situation. Senator Fair and Representative Brady have introduced companion bills (Senate Bill 1172 and House Bill 4540) that will expedite foregoing reasonable efforts in severe abuse and neglect cases and that will require birth parents to demonstrate due diligence in their treatment plans before the court grants the parents more time to complete their treatment plans. We will monitor these closely and keep you posted on their progress. Additionally, the Joint Citizens and Legislative Committee on Children, chaired by Senator Fair, has met and we hope that committee will be able to push some important bills for children through the legislature.

Attorney Guardians ad Litem

Pursuant to an order from the South Carolina Supreme Court, attorneys will no longer be appointed as guardians ad litem in family court as of July 1, 2010. Attorneys currently serving as guardians ad litem will continue to serve in their roles until relieved by the court or until the matter has concluded. The South Carolina Guardian ad Litem Program and Richland County CASA will continue to provide volunteer guardians ad litem for children, but the family court will no longer appoint an attorney guardian ad litem when either of these programs is not able to assign a volunteer to the case. In response, the volunteer Guardian ad Litem Programs are working extra hard to recruit and train new volunteers in order to meet the increased demand.

Responsible Father Registry

The Responsible Father Registry is up and running at Department of Social Services State Office. Fathers who wish to receive notice of termination of parental rights or adoption proceedings, who are not otherwise entitled to notice pursuant to South Carolina Code Section 63-9-730, were able to register as of January 1, 2010. Registration is available on-line and in person. The Registry provisions will only apply to termination of parental rights and adoption proceedings as of July 1, 2010.

South Carolina Governor's Office Children's Foster Care Review Board

1205 Pendleton St., Room 436
Columbia, SC 29201

Phone: 803-734-0480
Fax: 803-734-1223
Email: lvosburgh@oepp.sc.gov
Website: <http://www.oepp.sc.gov/fcrb/>

Review Board Calendar

New Member Orientation	Mon Mar 15th	10:00 am - 3:00 pm Edgar Brown Building
State Board of Directors	Fri Mar 26	Edgar Brown Building Columbia
Confederate Memorial Day	Mon May 10	State Office Closed
New Member Orientation	Mon May 24	10:00 am - 3:00 pm Edgar Brown Building
Memorial Day	Mon May 31	State Offices Closed
Independence Day	Mon July 5	State Offices Closed
State Board of Directors	Fri July 23	Edgar Brown Building Columbia
New Member Orientation	Mon Aug 24	10:00 am - 3:00 pm Edgar Brown Building

All locations in Columbia, unless otherwise noted; times subject to change.

Advocates is published semi-annually by the South Carolina Governor's Office. The deadline for submission of articles for the next issue of *Advocates* (Summer 2009) is August 13, 2010.

Anyone wishing to submit an article should contact *Advocates* editor Lisa Vosburgh. Call 803-734-0474, or send an e-mail to lvosburgh@oepp.sc.gov.

The publisher reserves the right to make the final determination as to the content of each issue. Articles submitted are subject to editing and are not guaranteed inclusion.

NOTICE:
**If you no longer wish to receive
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September 3, 2010.**