



VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

For Immediate Release

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Outstanding Advocates for Children Recognized

*Child Welfare Certificate of Appreciation Awards presented during
Child Abuse Prevention Month*

Richmond, VA (April 8, 2014) — The Family and Children’s Trust Fund of Virginia has announced the recipients of this year’s Child Welfare Certificate of Appreciation Awards. The awards recognize individuals whose prevention, intervention and treatment efforts in the area of child abuse and neglect have shown exceptional merit in Virginia.

“Preventing child maltreatment remains one of our highest priorities,” said Margaret Ross Schultze, Commissioner, Virginia Department of Social Services and Board member of the Family and Children’s Trust Fund. “The safety and well-being of Virginia’s children is paramount, and without the commitment and dedication of child welfare professionals across the Commonwealth, we would not be able to positively impact the lives of as many children as we do.”

The [Family and Children’s Trust Fund](#) is a public-private partnership that raises and distributes funds to prevent, treat, and increase public awareness of family violence. The Child Welfare Certificate of Appreciation Awards honor select public and private practitioners and business, volunteer, and community representatives who have made significant contributions in the child welfare arena in Virginia.

Awards were presented at this year’s statewide Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Conference in Richmond on April 7th. The conference is sponsored by the [Virginia Department of Social Services](#) and [Prevent Child Abuse Virginia](#) and co-sponsored by the Family and Children’s Trust Fund, Virginia Statewide Parent Education Coalition, and the Virginia Coalition for Child Abuse Prevention. April is recognized as Child Abuse Prevention Month in Virginia and across the country.

This year’s awardees include:

The Honorable Edward Berry

Presiding Judge, Charlottesville/Albemarle Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court, 16th Judicial District – Charlottesville

Judge Berry has been an attorney for 41 years and has served as a judge for the 16th District Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court for 21 years. As a dedicated advocate for children in his community, Judge Berry's leadership has resulted in the launch of the community's Best Practice Court Initiative, the establishment of Adoption Saturday, and the implementation of collaborative, teaming strategies to assist in case planning for children in foster care – long before family engagement was a best practice! In addition, he has presided over the Family Drug Treatment Court since its inception in 2002 and sets aside weekly time on his busy docket to focus on helping parents in dependency proceedings address their addiction. Throughout his career, Judge Berry has held the court, social workers, advocates and attorneys to the highest standard to ensure that the needs of children and families in his community are met.

Carrie Cannon, MPA

Program Director, Alexandria/Arlington Court Appointed Special Advocate Program at Stop Child Abuse Now of Northern Virginia – Alexandria

As the Program Director for the Alexandria/Arlington CASA Program, Ms. Cannon is responsible for recruiting, training, supporting and supervising nearly 80 volunteer advocates, while balancing a full CASA caseload. During her tenure, she has expanded the program to serve not only Alexandria, but Arlington as well and has led targeted recruitment efforts that have resulted in increased gender and ethnic diversity among volunteers. Ms. Cannon remembers virtually every family that her program has served and the circumstances that resulted in their court involvement – leading her to make recommendations for strategies and services to help other vulnerable children and families in similar circumstances. Ms. Cannon is always open to exploring innovative ideas with the ultimate goal of achieving a best practice standard for the families in her community.

Kay Kovacs

Retired, Former Executive Director of Children's Advocacy Centers of Virginia – Bristol, VA

Ms. Kay Kovacs is known for her tremendous leadership in the founding of the first Children's Advocacy Center in the Commonwealth. After attending training at the National Children's Advocacy Center in 1998, Ms. Kovacs brought home a vision for improving the system for children who experience abuse and neglect in Virginia. Ms. Kovacs used volunteer efforts to organize multidisciplinary teams and to secure community support and start-up funding for the Children's Advocacy Center of Bristol/Washington County, where she served as Executive Director from 1998-2004. Following her tenure there, she went on to serve as the Executive Director of Children's Advocacy Centers of Virginia, successfully garnered support from the Virginia General Assembly to provide annual funding to Child Advocacy Centers throughout the state, mentored fellow Child Advocacy Center directors, and organized what has become an annual statewide conference to provide training and education to a wide range of child advocacy professionals. Thanks to her pioneering effort and her unwavering commitment to ensure children who disclose abuse and neglect are not further victimized by the same system that is designed to protect them, there are now 15 Child Advocacy Centers in Virginia who serve more than 3,000 children!

Lyndell Lewis

Adoption Supervisor, Virginia Department of Social Services – Richmond, VA

Ms. Lewis has 25 years of experience in public child welfare as a state administrator in adoption and foster care. She has demonstrated a steadfast commitment to the safety and well-being of Virginia's children through her work on Virginia's kinship and subsidized care initiatives and

statewide family preservation efforts. Most recently, she worked tirelessly to support former Governor McDonnell's "Virginia Adopts: Campaign for 1,000," which exceeded the goal of getting 1,000 of Virginia's foster care children matched with an adoptive family. Of those matches, 523 adoptions were finalized by December of 2013, and the list keeps growing! Ms. Lewis is a champion of new ideas and creative approaches for attaining permanency for children and regularly shares child welfare findings with state and local agency staff to promote good practice. She is a passionate advocate for the rights of children and families and has dedicated her career and her heart to positively impacting a number of programs across the child welfare continuum.

Ellen Mitchell

Executive Director, Safe Haven Child Visitation Center of the New River Valley – Pulaski

Ms. Ellen Mitchell's 20 years in law enforcement provided insight into her community's need to provide a safe place of children to visit with their families during court-ordered monitored exchanges and supervised visitation. Her experience, coupled with her compassion for children, led Ms. Mitchell and her brother, Mr. Ken Hall, to open the Safe Haven Child Visitation Center of the New River Valley. Ms. Mitchell regularly goes above and beyond the call of duty by taking time to meet personally with families, dedicating her own time to organize fundraising events, and regularly expanding her knowledge in the field through webinars and networking. With an amazing ability to build relationships, Ms. Mitchell collaborates regularly with law enforcement, the court system, county administrators, and other community leaders. Ms. Mitchell's work at the Safe Haven demonstrates the difference that a strong leader can make in one community.

Libby Vinsh

Social Work Supervisor, Prince George County of Social Services

Ms. Libby Vinsh has spent the last 39 years working on behalf of children and families at the local social service level. After beginning as a social worker at Petersburg Social Services, she took on progressively responsible management positions, including serving as the Chief of Services before transitioning to Prince George Social Services as a supervisor. Throughout her career, Ms. Vinsh has mentored dozens of social workers and has provided unwavering support to them through the highs and lows of direct service work. In addition, for years Ms. Vinsh has used data to challenge her staff, improve local agency performance, inform the development of new agency initiatives, and challenge the Virginia Department of Social Services to strive for continuous quality improvement. She demonstrates a wealth of knowledge, understanding, and compassion and remains as committed to the safety and well-being of children today as she was when she first began her career.

Julie Walls, LCSW

Clinical Director and Group Facilitator of Healing Hearts – Newport News, VA

Clinical Supervisor for Newport News Department of Human Services' Structural Family Counselors and Family Engagement Specialists – Newport News, VA

Ms. Julie Walls is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker in Newport News, Virginia. In her thirty-six years as a social worker, one of Ms. Walls' greatest accomplishments was the establishment of the Healing Hearts group therapy program for foster care youth in 2009. Ms. Walls innovatively developed a group curriculum to provide grief and loss support for children in the custody of Newport News Department of Human Services. In addition to her full-time commitments as a clinician in private practice, Ms. Walls has dedicated countless hours of her time and given her own resources to develop the program, facilitate groups, and supervise the 25 agency social workers who assist with Healing Hearts. Through her various roles, Ms. Walls has made significant contributions to the full spectrum of child welfare services and has provided

outstanding prevention, intervention, and treatment supports to children and families in the Newport News community.