

dhhs Employee UPDATE

Our Mission: To serve the people of North Carolina by enabling individuals, families and communities to be healthy and secure, and to achieve social and economic well-being.

A monthly publication for employees of the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services

DHHS Interns Contribute as They Learn



Jordan Scarboro at NCSd



Jessica Parker (left) and Abigail Hall, Volunteer Services Coordinator, at Umstead



Connie Hedrick from Exceptional Equestrian program

Three summer interns are wrapping up their 10-week stints spent helping Department of Health and Human Resources staff at the N.C. School for the Deaf, at Umstead Hospital, and at the J. Iverson Riddle Developmental Center.

They are part of a select group of college students in North Carolina chosen for summer internships with state agencies through the State Government Internship Program, coordinated by the Youth Advocacy and Involvement Office of the Depart-

ment of Administration. Six hundred students from 82 counties applied for this year's internships. Eighty were selected. The positions pay \$8.25 per hour, enough to help with college expenses, or to take some financial pressure off families.

But more than the pay, the positions provide young people an opportunity to gain hands-on experience in career fields they may be considering. To hear their supervisors talk about it, having an intern aboard also benefits their operations.

"It's a win-win," said Dr. Linda Lindsay, director of the N.C. School for the Deaf from her office in Morganton. "It's a great opportunity for interns to get a glimpse into a world that perhaps they have not been a part of, to develop some skills, and perhaps to get even a deeper insight into what they want to do and don't want to do."

Jordan Scarboro, a rising sophomore studying business administration at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, grew up in Morganton,

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not far from the School for the Deaf. Her summer job put her to work designing museum exhibits, researching who is buried in a small cemetery on the school's grounds, and helping with museum fund-raising plans. "I have thoroughly enjoyed my time here," she said. "And I will definitely work with the museum in the future."

Her time spent at the school has broadened her life experience. "The lessons have been immeasurable," she said. "I've learned about research to help me in my schoolwork, I've learned about communicating as a whole. There's a kind of separate Deaf culture and I didn't realize that before. I've learned a lot about that – how people work together and form groups."

Connie Hedrick of Morganton graduated in the spring from Western Piedmont Community College with an associate's degree in applied science. She plans to continue her education in the fall. Hedrick has the Exceptional Equestrians Research internship at the J. Iverson Riddle Developmental Center in Morganton.

Dottie Reed runs the Exceptional Equestrians program at the Riddle Center, where horses are used for therapeutic riding. Riding the horses may help to build confidence and to rewire the nervous systems of those who may have difficulty with coordination.

"Connie spent the first two weeks talking to staff – occupational therapy and physical therapy staff – to determine which clients would be the best subjects for her research," Reed

said of Hedrick. "She went through all the previous work done by interns, saw what worked, and then improved on it. She's a horse person and a recreational therapist, so she's approaching it from a different standpoint."

Hedrick speaks with ease about the results of her internship. "I do sessions with the residents from the center, and from the community," she said. "I have this one client who has been coming here for four years. I finally got her on a horse last week. Another has a neurological disability. He couldn't hold his head up. I've got him now where he'll ride three or four times

"It's a win-win situation."
– Dr. Linda Lindsay, director, N.C. School for the Deaf

around the ring.... I'm seeing a lot of improvement."

Jessica Parker, a rising junior at Elizabeth City State University, is majoring in social work and has a minor in public administration. She is coordinating junior volunteer programs at John Umstead Hospital in Butner this summer.

"I think that Jessica has experienced a real introduction to volunteer management," said Linda Dameron, Umstead's volunteer coordinator. Parker is the program's third intern, and is building on a foundation put in place by the first.

"Interns come and we do work placements," she said. "We're placing them in computer services, nutrition services and work activities with

patients. We do lesson plans and arrange for different people to come in and talk with them about career opportunities." In addition, Parker said that she is spending time learning about volunteer administration with Dameron and Abigail Hall, Umstead's volunteer services coordinator.

Parker plans to enter the Peace Corps when she graduates from college, with an eye toward working afterwards on a master's degree in social work and public administration at UNC-Chapel Hill. Her long-term goal is to work in a nonprofit agency, doing administrative work and helping the homeless or children.

"She's just full of energy. She's been just wonderful," Dameron said of Parker.

Supervisors all offer praise for the interns working with them this summer, and for the program that brought them to their work environments.

"It's been a good opportunity for our intern to develop some real skills that are translatable to life experiences later," said Dameron.

"This is an important, substantive service for the state to do this," Lindsay said. "It is a wise thing to do for the young people as well as the state. For a state agency, it's a great way to get some help to do time-limited projects that might otherwise stay on the back burner for lack of resources."

Reed summed up the benefits of having Hedrick at the equestrian program: "She's learning a lot, and giving us a lot, too." ■

N.C. Medicaid Ends Year \$350 Million Under Budget; Cost-Cutting Measures Contribute to Savings

North Carolina's Medicaid program has spent \$350 million less in provider payments than expected for the fiscal year just ended.

When the books close on the 2005-2006 fiscal year, which ended June 30, the state Division of Medical Assistance expects Medicaid's expenditures to total \$8.5 billion — about 4 percent less than budget writers had anticipated.

Dr. Allen Dobson, assistant secretary for health policy and medical assistance, credited increased enrollment in managed care networks, prescription drug savings and other cost-cutting initiatives for the reduced spending.

“The division has done a great job in its new role of proactively managing the Medicaid program. In doing so, we are constantly looking for opportunities to improve the care provided to our Medicaid recipients, eliminate unnecessary spending and assure that we are good stewards of the taxpayer dollar,” Dobson said. “It is my hope that we will continue to see a more controlled growth rate in the Medicaid program in the future as many of our new clinical and program initiatives become fully implemented.”

Medicaid is the government-managed health insurance program serving the poor and the disabled. More than 1.5 million North Carolinians were enrolled in Medicaid during the past year.

This year's annual Medicaid expenditures were only 3.89 percent higher than the previous year's. The bulk of the \$351.7 million savings is federal money, which picks up 62 percent of the state's Medicaid costs. The state contributes approximately 32 percent, and counties the remaining 6 percent.

Prescription drug initiatives were responsible for much of the cost savings. Medicare Part D, a new federal program that provides prescription drug coverage to seniors, now picks up those costs for about 210,000 North Carolinians who are dually eligible for Medicaid and Medicare.

Additional pharmaceutical savings resulted from tighter controls. Medicaid patients with eight or more current prescriptions are required to use a single pharmacist and to undergo a clinical review. The state also placed limits on “episodic” drugs such as sleeping aids, reasoning that a frequent need for them could indicate an underlying health problem.

Mark Benton, the state's senior deputy director of Medicaid, said besides keeping a handle on costs, such measures also help to ensure quality care. “We want

to make sure enrollees are getting the appropriate drugs at the right time, and that there are no adverse drug interactions,” Benton said.

Similar front-end monitoring of in-home personal care services resulted in additional savings for the year. Benton said the Legislature had mandated that Medicaid tighten up the policy for these services and better monitor who gets them. Costs for personal care services had been accelerating by high double-digit rates annually.

Other cost-control measures included increasing enrollments of Medicaid patients in managed care plans, mostly through the Community Care of North Carolina program. CCNC works with local providers and networks to give Medicaid enrollees a medical “home” for care of chronic or routine medical needs. About 75 percent of eligible Medicaid patients were enrolled in a managed care plan at the end of the fiscal year.

A separate Medicaid-managed health plan for the children of low-income working parents also ended the year under budget. N.C. Health Choice for Children, or NCHC, saved approximately 3 percent for the year, or around \$2 million, by focusing on eligibility and on reimbursement rates.

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Unlike an entitlement program such as Medicaid, NCHC provides coverage only to as many children as funding allows. Faced with having to cap enrollment, and possibly with dropping kids from the rolls, state Medicaid

officials instead limited enrollment by age. Children younger than 6 were shifted to Medicaid. More cost savings came from reducing the NCHC reimbursements for doctors and other health care providers to Medicaid levels.

The NCHC federal savings will be rolled back into the program to help cover next year's expenditures." ■

A DHHS Friend Leaves Raleigh



Secretary Carmen Hooker Odom hosted a reception for Rep. Edd Nye, who is leaving the General Assembly after more than three decades of service.

At right, Secretary Hooker Odom and Rep. Nye enjoy the moment when he was presented with a special "Friend of DHHS" award. At left, Rep. Nye and DHHS's Sharnese Ransome share a few words.



Jalil Isa

iSalud y Saludos!

The First City

One day, I hope to come close to visiting all of Latin America. Depending on how you count, that means there are no less than 20 countries to visit. Just recently, I got one step closer to my goal. I spent a few days in and around Santo Domingo—the capital of the Dominican Republic.

The capital city is considered the “first city of the Americas.” It was the site of the first European settlement in the New World. Christopher Columbus landed here in 1492. His brother ‘officially’ founded the city in 1498. As a result, you’ll find the oldest cathedral, hospital, and university this side of the Atlantic.

For me, this experience represented more than anything else an opportunity to come face-to-face with another Hispanic culture. While Dominicans form a large community in cities like New York, they’re also growing in numbers in places like North Carolina. In the Triangle alone, I have several close friends who are from this Caribbean country. However, I had never set foot on their homeland to see just what life in *Republica Dominicana* is like.

The first thing that struck me about life in this relatively small country, measuring slightly more than twice the size of New Hampshire, was its degree of poverty. The D.R. is poorer than I expected. I know it borders Haiti—the poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere. But I lacked thorough knowledge of the D.R.’s economic status. Sadly, it shares this common economic trait with a large number of the other poor countries that make up Latin America. Despite the conditions in this country of nearly nine million, however, you’ll see a surprising number of people who own cell phones, and who go out and enjoy themselves as best they can. But the inner workings of the country are those of a classic third-world country—another common theme in most of Latin America. The bureaucracy is everywhere, perhaps a lingering legacy of the 30-year dictatorship of Rafael Leonidas Trujillo, whose term ended only when he was assassinated in 1961. The country has gradually become more democratic, but has continued to struggle economically.

Yet, despite all this, it is clear this country shares many of the characteristics of its Latin neighbors such as Cuba and Puerto Rico. Dominicans are jovial individuals who don’t need to have their arms twisted to find a reason to throw a party. They share similar styles of food preparation. They also drive like maniacs. And I

can personally attest to that, as I rented a car while on my trip there. I definitely now feel like I’ve graduated to a new level as a driver.

The first thing I noticed behind the wheel of the car is that it’s perfectly acceptable to drink beer while driving! Also, this place lives up to the idea that “traffic lights are nothing more than a mere *suggestion*.” People rarely stop for more than a few seconds at most red lights. And it’s not uncommon to see *oncoming* traffic in *your* lane. Yes, it’s an experience not for the fainthearted. The natural beauty here is also noteworthy. I visited beaches, caves, and colonial areas of Santo Domingo that were reminiscent of Cuba’s *Havana Vieja* (Old Havana) and Puerto Rico’s *Viejo San Juan*; the condition of the buildings in Santo Domingo falls somewhere in the middle.

As a product of both Latin American and *North* American cultural influences, at times I felt like I was completely out of my element in the Dominican Republic. At other times, I felt like I completely fit in. And this is precisely the kind of experience many immigrants feel after assimilating into the United States. It is a natural feeling. It is then that a little patience goes a long way! ■

Jalil

Janice Petersen wins Ketty Award

At its June meeting in Albuquerque, New Mexico, the National Association of State Alcohol and Drug Abuse Directors recognized Dr. Janice Petersen as this year's recipient of the Ketty Award for her outstanding national leadership in substance abuse prevention services.

Dr. Petersen, MH/DD/SAS Division team leader for prevention and early intervention, was tapped as this year's honoree in recognition for her outstanding dedication and commitment on behalf of substance abuse prevention and for her leadership in the National Prevention Network. The association cited Petersen for "her leadership skills and her 200 percent philosophy through her commitment to the volunteer National Prevention Network by overseeing plans for this year's Prevention Leadership Academy and by chairing the national prevention workforce committee. Dr. Petersen also reviews grants for the federal Substance



Janice Petersen

Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration and Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, chairs the Southeastern School for Alcohol and Drug Studies and serves on the advisory board of the national Community Anti-Drug Coalition of America."

"I believe that when you volunteer you should give 200 percent. If you can't do that, don't volunteer at all," Petersen said in accepting the award.

"Janice is a tremendous asset to our state," said Flo Stein, chief of the community policy management section for MH/DD/SAS. "Under her leadership, prevention services have grown both in quantity and in quality. Her professionalism brings honor to the prevention field."

The Ketty Award, given out annually since 1989, is named for Ketty Rey, a pioneer in the substance abuse prevention field. It awards National Prevention Network representatives who have made outstanding contributions to the network and to the field of substance abuse prevention.

Dr. Petersen lives in Raleigh with her husband and daughter. ■

Have you taken your HRA yet?

The health risk assessment (HRA) is a great way to become more aware of health risks and what can help reduce the risk of developing serious health conditions.

It takes only 15 minutes to complete the free confidential HRA. After taking the HRA, you will receive instant feedback on your individual health risks and you can choose from a variety of health resources for your needs.

N.C. State Health Plan members should go to: www.statehealthplan.state.nc.us.

Employees who are not members of the State Health Plan can take a free personal health risk assessment at www.fittogethernc.org/HRA.aspx.

Plan Members:

Complete your Health Plan Assessment by Sept. 30

and be entered in a drawing to win one of 20 \$150 Food Lion gift certificates!!

Williams gets N.C. Pediatric Society award

Dr. Luanne Williams, a toxicologist with the Occupational and Environmental Epidemiology Branch of the Division of Public Health, has received a 2006 Good for Kids award from the N.C. Pediatric Society.



Dr. Luanne Williams

The award recognizes individuals and organizations that initiate or promote a community or statewide effort to improve the health and well-being of kids of all ages. This award was given to Williams because of her work with

the Pediatric Society, the N.C. Health Services Commission and legislators regarding the dangers to children of wood treated with copper chromated arsenate (CCA). Williams and the Environmental Epidemiology team presented science-based information about CCA and its effect on children, answered questions from legislators, and dealt with challenges from industry groups.

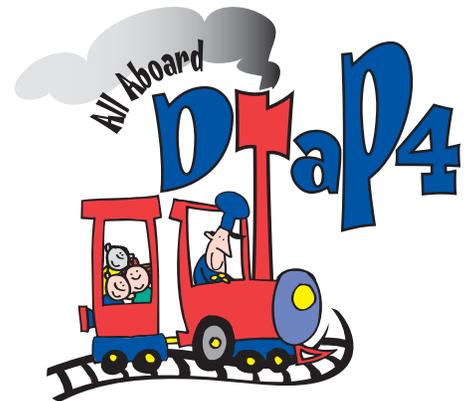
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August is National Immunization Awareness Month

The celebration of National Immunization Awareness Month in August calls attention to the importance of vaccines as a way to prevent serious, life-threatening diseases. In partnership with local health departments from across the state, the North Carolina Immunization Branch is celebrating National Immunization Awareness Month by encouraging North Carolinians of all ages to make sure they are current on their vaccinations.

August is the perfect time to remind family, friends, co-workers, and those in the community to catch up on their vaccinations. Parents are enrolling their children in school, students are entering college, and health care workers are preparing for the upcoming flu season.

An increasing number of pertussis cases and a decreasing childhood immunization rate are both challenges we currently face in North Carolina. So, this year, North Carolina is focusing on the message, "All Aboard DTaP 4." The DTaP vaccine protects against diphtheria, tetanus, and pertussis (whooping cough). Children need five doses of the vaccine to have the best protection against these diseases. This new statewide initiative aims to increase childhood immunization rates by promoting timely administration of the fourth DTaP dose at 15-18 months of age. The fourth dose is the most frequently missed of the series.



Immunization has been cited as one of the most significant public health achievements of the 20th century. Vaccines have eradicated smallpox, eliminated wild poliovirus in the U.S., and significantly reduced the number of cases of measles, diphtheria, rubella, pertussis and other diseases. But despite these efforts, today tens of thousands of people in the U.S. still die from these and other vaccine-preventable diseases. ■

DHHS WELLNESS AT WORK

Suzanna Young, DHHS Wellness Director

Snacking at work

It's two hours until lunch and your stomach is growling. You need something to eat—NOW. Do you make a fast trip to the vending machine in your building? Or did you forget to bring your lunch and then depend on a package of crackers and a soda to get you through the day?



Everyone knows this is not a healthy way to eat, but lack of time and convenience often make us turn to vending machines when we are hungry.

Typical vending selections are high in sugar, simple carbohydrates, fat, and calories. Providing employees access to healthier snack options is a priority for DHHS wellness committees and the Division of Services for the Blind, which oversees vending contracts for state agency buildings. The goal is to offer at least five healthier snack options in each vending machine, as well as water and 100% juice in drink machines.

How employees can help improve snack options

Employees can make better snack selections and help their wellness committees ensure that healthier items are included in vending machines by:

- Reading labels and becoming more aware of the nutritional and caloric content of snack items;
- Letting wellness committee members know what types of healthier snack items they would purchase so wellness committees can convey this information to the vendor;

- Purchasing the healthier snack items—employees must realize that vendors cannot afford to continue to stock items that do not sell well on a regular basis; and
- In buildings without refrigerated vending, helping their wellness committees organize honor-system fresh fruit baskets.

Employees may also choose to keep a supply of healthier snacks at work, such as dried fruit, nuts, power bars or low-fat popcorn.

For healthy snack ideas go to:

www.myeatSMARTmove.com

Can between-meal munchies be prevented?

Eating a breakfast and lunch that is low in sugar and simple carbohydrates and includes some protein can prevent swings in blood sugar levels that cause hunger pangs between meals.

Include a slice of lean meat, an egg, peanut butter, cheese or yogurt; fruit rather than juice; vegetables; and whole-grain bread or cereals at meals. A more balanced selection at meals can help reduce hunger and prevent overeating between meals.



MH/DD/SAS Division hosts 1st N.C. Practice Improvement Congress

In May, the Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Substance Abuse Services hosted what it hopes will be an annual event, the N.C. Practice Improvement Collaborative (NC PIC) Congress. The collaborative is a key advisory group tasked with making recommendations to division leadership on support services that will lead to improvements in consumers' lives.

The division's chief of community policy, Flo Stein, spearheaded the effort to create NC PIC. She called the group "...a key element in the statewide transformation of the MH/DD/SAS system, namely what services should be available for consumers from our system."

Robert Gettings, executive director of the National Association of State

Directors of Developmental Disabilities Services, provided a keynote address. Gettings described several key issues for improving the quality of services. He discussed the need for reducing reliance on state institutions, improving case management performance, having better capacity for intervening in a crisis, promoting grassroots acceptance of people with disabilities, improving strategies for serving individuals with co-occurring disabilities, and building stronger community support agencies.

Another speaker, Dr. H. Westley Clark, director of the Center for Substance Abuse Treatment under the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, noted that "selecting evidence-based practices is one stage, but actually

implementing an evidence-based practice is a very different thing." He described several initiatives sponsored by SAMHSA to assist states and local consumers and providers in improving services.

Both presentations are available on the web at www.ncpic.net.

The NC PIC meets quarterly to review and discuss relevant programs. Annually, the group will present a report of prioritized program recommendations to the MH/DD/SAS Division director at the North Carolina Practice Improvement Congress. The division will then evaluate the programs highlighted in the report for feasibility and cost effectiveness and determine a timetable for endorsement and adoption into the public system. ■

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The General Assembly subsequently passed the School Children's Health Act, which will require North Carolina schools to seal arsenic-treated (CCA) wood used in school structures, and added a rule to the Day Care rules that also requires sealing of CCA treated wood play structures, decks and fences that are accessible to children and

making the soil underneath such structures inaccessible to children to protect them from arsenic poisoning. The EPA has found that using penetrating wood sealants—which is actually normal maintenance for outdoor wood structures—can decrease arsenic leaching up to 90 percent. ■

LeadershipDHHS

In April 2006, the inaugural class of LeadershipDHHS graduated. Those participants gained valuable insight into the inner workings of the department. At the same time, senior management gained a group of leaders, some of whom are poised for and ready to take on more responsibility within DHHS.

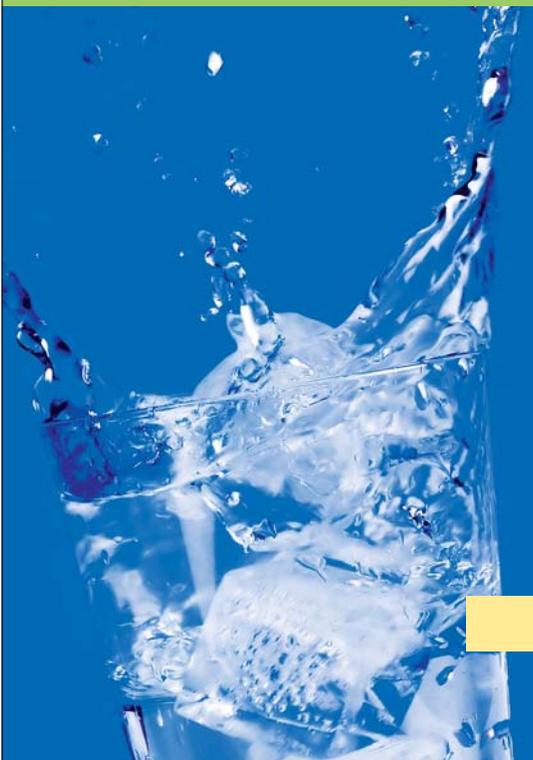
The overwhelmingly positive response to the first run of the Leadership DHHS program encouraged the DHHS Succession Planning Work Group to enhance the program for 2006-2007. Participants for the upcoming session will soon be notified of their selection. They represent a strong cross section of all the agencies and institutions of DHHS and vary in education, expertise, pay grade and tenure.

This year's participants will have their communication styles assessed by Dr. Jean K. Davis. Dr. Davis is a political science and public administration professor at North Carolina State University who also has an extensive background in human services delivery in the public sector. Additionally, participants will explore workplace ethics, the budget process, diversity in our state, and other pressing issues. Particularly, the Governor's Hispanic liaison will highlight the importance of understanding the impact changing state demographics will have on the demand for our services. The participants will be divided into work groups tasked with presenting a group project at the end of the program. This past spring, the group projects were evaluated by senior management, and two of the projects are currently being studied for implementation.

This program is one of the ways DHHS is preparing for the future. The DHHS Succession Planning Work Group, the secretary and all the senior staff are enthusiastic about this leadership development program. With the anticipated change in our work force due to attrition and retirement over the next three to five years, they see a tremendous need to identify and prepare future leaders.

For more information on LeadershipDHHS, please contact Sandra Trivett at Sandra.Trivett@ncmail.net. ■

Eat Smart, Move More Health Tip



Re-Think Your Drink

We all love a refreshing drink with a meal, as a snack, or after physical activity. Sodas, sweet tea and other sugary drinks taste great, but have a lot of calories and no nutrients. Next time you're thirsty, re-think your drink. Try water with lemon or other flavored, unsweetened drinks instead.

For more tips on how to re-think your drink where you live, learn, earn, play and pray, visit

www.EatSmartMoveMoreNC.com



Adoption Profile

Introducing Portia

Portia is a sweet and friendly girl with a smile that warms everyone's heart. Her current foster mom says she likes to be helpful in cleaning up her room and putting away groceries. Portia enjoys playing with Legos and jigsaw puzzles, playing on the computer, and going to the park or lake on a sunny day. She is proud of the ribbon she won for walking at Special Olympics. Portia also enjoys attending the ARC summer camp.

Portia is nonverbal and hopes to learn sign language. She also loves helping others like herself to learn new things and to be a positive role model for them. This friendly young lady attends special education classes, which she benefits from greatly. Portia is easily redirected to her tasks and demonstrates some independence within school and at home. She puts a great deal of effort into everything she does.



Portia
b. Sept. 29, 1989

A Family for Portia

A family that will love and care for Portia should be trained and able to assist her with her special needs. She will need plenty of assistance in self-help skills. Portia will benefit from an adoptive family that will challenge her appropriately and encourage her to strive for more as she accomplishes new tasks. The most important thing a family for Portia should provide her with is a wonderful environment with lots of one-on-one attention. An adoptive family for Portia needs to be prepared to provide ongoing care and support. (NC #026-2040)

For more information on this child or adoption and foster care, in general, call NC Kids Adoption and Foster Care Network toll free at 1-877-NCKIDS-1 (1-877-625-4371).

