

## Purpose of Citizen Panel Review

- Review all cases of children in foster care;
- Assists DFCS in identifying and developing local resources or services needed to promote permanency for children and families;
- Citizen Panels meet with parents, children, relatives, DFCS case managers, foster parents and other professionals to determine what progress has been made towards permanency planning;
- Records and submits findings and recommendations to juvenile court judges;
- Explores reunification and other permanency options during the review process;
- Tracks the progress of children, families and DFCS case managers between reviews.



Desiree Sutton Peagler, Chief Judge  
Linda Bratton Haynes, Judge  
Vincent C. Crawford, Judge  
Fatima A. El-Amin, Judge

For additional information about the program  
contact DeKalb County Juvenile Court

DeKalb County Juvenile Court  
Gregory A. Adams Juvenile Justice Center  
4309 Memorial Drive  
Decatur, Georgia 30032

Teinika Lewis  
Phone: 404-294-2738  
Fax : 404-297-3997  
E-Mail: [tmlewis@dekalbcountyga.gov](mailto:tmlewis@dekalbcountyga.gov)

## Judicial Citizen Panel Review Program



*Every child deserves a safe  
and permanent home.*

## A Solution to Permanency Planning

### Background Information



Based on the belief that children need the stability and support of a permanent home and family in order to grow and flourish; and that they need the sense of lifelong belonging and continuity that only a permanent home can provide, the United States Congress enacted The Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act (P.L. 96-272), on June 30, 1980, which provides federal support for permanency planning for children in foster care.

Passage of this milestone legislation in permanency planning mandated a review process for all states receiving federal funds for foster care services and required that permanent plans be developed for all children in foster care. In order to receive matching federal funds for foster care payments, states must develop an agency and judicial system to regularly review the cases of children in foster care. Utilizing citizen volunteers became an efficient and effective resource to meet federal and state requirements.

### The Judicial Citizen Panel Review Program

The Judicial Citizen Panel Review Program is a program of the Georgia Council of Juvenile Court Judges, and was established in response to the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980. This program was founded in 1985, on the belief that children are entitled to permanency and stability in their lives.

The program is unique in that it uses local volunteers to form citizen panels that review cases of children in care twice each year to ensure that children do not remain in foster care for long periods of time without a plan for permanency. Volunteers also identify resources for children and families and play an important role in educating families served by the panel.

Volunteers are sworn in by local juvenile or superior court judges and represent a cross-section of various racial, socio-economic, religious and educational sectors of a community. Volunteers receive 15 hours of specialized training from the staff of the Council of Juvenile Court Judges and then become sworn officers of the court.

Since 1991, over 900 citizens have

### DeKalb County's Judicial Citizen Panel Review Program

been sworn in to serve as Judicial Citizen Review panel members in DeKalb County. To date, we have approximately 150 active volunteers who serve on 16 different panels. Each panel meets once per month at DeKalb County Juvenile Court, to review cases of children in care.

The panel's role is to meet with the parents, children, DFCS case managers, foster parents and other family members and professionals to determine what progress has been made since the previous review and to develop goals for achieving permanency. The volunteers record their findings and submit their recommendations to the Juvenile Court Judges which outlines the goals that must be accomplished before it is safe or appropriate for the child to return home. If reunification is not possible, other permanency options are explored.

Our Citizen Panel Review Program has received awards for outstanding community service from United Way and the DeKalb County Community Relations Commission. Participation in the panel program benefits not only children and families, but volunteers also gain useful experience and take pride in knowing that they have helped improve the life of a child.