



VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

For immediate release

Contact: Joron Planter

Phone: (804) 726-7934

Email: joron.planter@dss.virginia.gov

VDSS Employee Recognized for Outstanding Work on Behalf of Children

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

Richmond, Va. (April 21, 2015) — The [Family and Children's Trust Fund \(FACT\)](#) of Virginia announced the recipients of this year's Child Welfare Certificate of Appreciation Awards at the annual statewide Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Conference in Richmond on April 13th. FACT is a public-private partnership that raises and distributes funds to prevent, treat, and increase public awareness of family violence. The 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.

The Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS) is proud to announce that Deputy Commissioner of Programs, Mr. Paul McWhinney, was recognized for his outstanding work on the behalf of the Commonwealth's children. Since 1975, McWhinney has distinguished himself in the field of public child welfare and social services. McWhinney was a leading force behind the Virginia Children's Services System Transformation which helped foster paradigm shifts in relationships between agency workers and families. This critical work was instrumental in efforts to decrease the number of children in Virginia's foster care system.

“The child welfare successes Virginia has achieved could not have been done without the tireless work of staff in local social services agencies, both public and private. They positively engage kids and families, giving them voice and choice to ensure their safety, stability and a sense of well-being. The ultimate goal of the work we do is to see that these vulnerable children have the opportunity to grow into socially and emotionally healthy individuals” said McWhinney. “While I am honored and humbled to be recognized, I know we all honor the folks who do the really hard work, day in and day out.”

Additional award recipients include:

- **Eastern Region Child Fatality Review Team**
- **Ms. Meaghan Gordon, CPS Family Service Specialist III**
Charlottesville Department of Social Services - Charlottesville
- **Dr. Allison Sampson-Jackson, PhD, LCSW, LICSW, CSOTP**
CEO, Integration Solutions, Inc. – Chesterfield
- **Ms. Michele Thames, M.Ed.**
Forensic Interviewer Supervisor, Children’s Hospital of the King’s Daughters, Child Abuse Program – Suffolk
- **Dr. Viola Vaughan-Eden, PhD**
PhD Program Director, Norfolk State University – Norfolk

The awards were presented during Child Abuse Prevention Month at the annual statewide Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Conference in Richmond on April 13th.

April is nationally recognized as Child Abuse Prevention Month in Virginia and across the country. Virginia has several networks in place to protect children and assist parents. Concerned citizens can anonymously report suspected abuse and neglect by calling Virginia’s 24-hour, toll-free hotline at 1-800-552-7096. [Local departments of social services](#) are charged with the responsibility to respond to all valid reports of suspected child abuse or neglect.

Parents who are feeling stressed can call 1-800-CHILDREN (800-244-5373) toll-free for tips, support and information on calming a crying baby and caring for children. Positive parenting tips can also be found on the VDSS [Web site](#).

The awards were 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.

Interviews are available upon request. For additional story ideas and for information on how your media outlet can help raise awareness of child abuse, neglect and prevention, please contact Joron Planter, VDSS, (804) 726-7934 or joron.planter@dss.virginia.gov.

###