

Governor calls for faith-based effort to improve foster care

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Improving foster care for children is something that government can't do alone, Gov. Phil Bryant told a planning meeting to recruit more foster parents in Jackson on Friday.

The Governor, the director of Child Protection Services and leaders of the faith-based initiative known as Rescue 100 called upon churches and families to become involved in efforts to recruit, train and support foster parents.

Gov. Bryant said the thing he wants most to accomplish during his eight years in office is to improve the foster care system. But, he said, "The answer is not in the Governor's office, the Capitol, the Legislature. It is here with the church. When you step forward, things will change. We have been called to save the lives of the youngest and dearest among us."

Gov. Bryant, Chief Justice Bill Waller Jr., Justice Dawn Beam, Child Protection Services Director Dr. David Chandler and Jamie Walley, student and missions pastor at Meadow Grove Baptist Church in Brandon, talked about efforts to increase the number of licensed foster homes during a Rescue 100 Vision meeting Sept. 9 at the Mississippi Supreme Court.

Justice Beam, co-chair of the Commission on Children's Justice, is spearheading organization of Rescue 100 programs. Gov. Bryant last year persuaded Dr. Chandler to leave the Mississippi Supreme Court to head Child Protection Services.



Justice Dawn Beam, at left, talks to Gov. Phil Bryant at Rescue 100 meeting.



Child Protection Services Director David Chandler talks about the need for more foster parents.

The lives of abused and neglected children are at stake, Dr. Chandler told an audience of about 50 people at the Gartin Justice Building in Jackson. "A 3-month-old child with a drug-addicted mother has no chance but for you."

There are 1,096 children in foster care in Attala, Hinds, Holmes, Issaquena, Leake, Madison, Rankin, Scott, Sharkey, Warren and Yazoo counties, according to Chris Alexander, spokesperson for the Mississippi Department of Child Protection Services. There are more children than licensed foster homes in the area. There are currently 272 licensed resource homes in those same counties.

"Kids die," Walley said. "It is not an exaggeration....Lives are at stake and that is real."

"It's not a statistic," Walley said. "These are real kids that have names and deserve a home."

The goal of Rescue 100 is to provide 100 more licensed foster homes to meet the needs of abused and neglected children in Central Mississippi. Rescue 100 is

a collaborative effort among government, the faith-based community and the private sector.

Rescue 100 will hold its third weekend intense training for prospective foster parents Oct. 21-23 at Mississippi College in Clinton. Residents of Attala, Hinds, Holmes, Issaquena, Leake, Madison, Rankin, Scott, Sharkey, Warren and Yazoo counties are invited to participate.

Every foster home must be licensed. Completing the licensing process used to take many months. In an effort to address the need for more foster parents, Rescue 100 will pack into three days all the classes required for people to be licensed as foster parents.

Four orientations are scheduled before the training so that people considering becoming licensed foster parents can learn the requirements. Anyone interested in attending the weekend training must first attend an orientation. People may register at www.200millionflowers.org/rescue100. Each of the one-hour orientation sessions is scheduled for 6 p.m. Dates and locations are:

- Oct. 10, Canton, Madison Chancery Court Annex Building, Board of Supervisors Room, 146 West Center Street;
- Oct. 11, Jackson, Hinds Chancery Courthouse, 316 South President Street;
- Oct. 12, Vicksburg, Warren Chancery Courtroom, 1009 Cherry Street;
- Oct. 13, Brandon, Rankin County Circuit Courtroom, 215 East Government Street.

Walley, director of Church Relations and Training for the adoption agency 200 Million Flowers, works

with churches to encourage foster care and to help those churches provide support for foster care families. “If one family from every church in the state of Mississippi would be a resource family, there would be a waiting list” to become foster parents, Walley said.

Walley knows that he is asking people to do something extremely difficult. He and his wife Stephanie are licensed foster parents. “It’s the hardest thing I’ve ever done,” he said.

The little boy in their foster care came to them as a baby with severe medical problems. He was expected to need a kidney transplant. He had to be fed through a tube. They hope to adopt him.

Rankin County Court Judge Thomas Broome said later, “They took in a medically needy child who would be dead but for their care. Now that young man is thriving and has an opportunity for a wonderful life. It truly was a miracle.”

Judge Broome, co-chair of the Mississippi

Commission on Children's Justice, said, “There is a huge need for quality foster homes for our children because they are being removed from homes where they have been abused and neglected. They need foster families who will provide loving care, nurturing and support.”

As a County and Youth Court judge, Broome has to order removal of children from abusive and neglectful homes. What he sees all too frequently is that there is no local foster home available to take a child immediately.

“This effort today is an outstanding opportunity for churches and families to become part of the solution and provide these children with hope,” Judge Broome said.

Parkway Church Pastor Jason Dillon of Madison was among those who attended the Rescue 100 Vision planning meeting. “There is a growing interest in our family and our church to do foster care ministry,” Dillon said. Several families in his congregation do foster care, and five or six more families are interested.

“You can make a difference,” Justice Beam said Friday. “Our communities need to wrap around these families. It takes all of us as Mississippians.”



Jamie Walley talks about plans to recruit and train foster parents.