

FOSTER CARE NEWSLETTER

WATAUGA COUNTY DSS

SPRING 2025

FOSTER PARENT TRAINING

Do you know someone who wants to become a licensed foster parent? MAPP classes will begin March 20th at 6pm at Watauga County DSS. Contact Alice Langseth for more information!
828.265.8100



JANUARY STATS



# kids in care	45
Average age	8
Kids out of the county	24/45 or 50%
Avg time in care	2.15 years
# Watauga Foster Homes used	13
# Watauga licensed homes	29
# Available spots in homes	35

IMPORTANT DATES

Court	Payments
April 24 & 25	April May 9
May 12 & 13	May June 13
	June July 11



Every child Deserves a chance

The Joys of being a Foster Parent

by Brooke Moretz

I believe being a foster parent is a calling. It takes the true love of kids, lots of patience, time and understanding. I, along with my family, truly enjoy giving these kids a happy home to be in for the length of time they need. We enjoy getting to know the kids, being able to teach them things, and having them be a part of our family life and adventures. Being a foster parent is not always easy. It definitely has its challenges, physical & emotional, but it is extremely rewarding knowing/hoping we have made a difference in these kids' lives. One of the best things about connecting with the kids that stay with us is when you are able to keep in touch with them even after they move on to different places. I hope we can give them something that they can take with them through the rest of their life!

When I became a foster mom I was already a proud mom to 3 beautiful biological daughters. Since then we have added 2 more beautiful girls to our family through adoption which somewhat took us by surprise because we were not in it to adopt. It was to foster "only"! But that quickly changed and I wouldn't have it any other way. I thank god every day for all the opportunities he has given me to be a mom in so many different ways!

Foster Parent Shoutout!

Simon & Becca Esmond

This month I wanted to spotlight Simon & Becca Esmond! I've seen Becca do an amazing job with shared parenting with each family she has worked with! Together they have fostered children until reunification with parents; they have fostered children until they move to family members; and they have recently adopted a child from Watauga County. Simon, Becca, and their two children have shown so much love to many kids in Watauga County, and we are so grateful for everything they do to help us!

~Meredith Cole

Together, we can make a difference

Supervisor Introductions

Chad Slagle

Foster Care

Chad was born in Burlington, NC but move to western NC in Mitchell County when he was very young. Interestingly when Chad was born his parents were foster parents. Although he has few memories of the foster children in their home because he was so young he says it was always interesting to hear his family (including extended) talk about the different foster children and how they thought of them as part of the family.

After graduating from Appalachian State Chad was hired at Watauga DSS as a Child Protective Services Investigator in 1999. He became a Social Work Supervisor in 2008, supervising both Child Welfare & Foster Care. Due to continued growth in the Child Welfare unit, he handed the CPS supervisory responsibilities over to Melanie Ellis when she transitioned to CPS Supervisor. Chad's primary focus is working with foster care social workers, foster parents, clients & adoptions.

Chad says one of the favorite best parts of his job is being in a role that lets him see so many people overcoming what seems like overwhelming situations. "I'm amazed every day at how so many of our clients are some of the world's most courageous and strong people. I often believe they fill us with more hope than we give them."

Chad, his wife Gina and two children, Corbin and Brynn, live in Deep Gap. Gina is an IT Manager at Appalachian State. Corbin is a Senior, and Brynn is a Sophomore at Watauga High School.

Melanie Ellis

Child Welfare

Melanie Ellis began her journey with Watauga Co. DSS in 2013 as a BSW intern. In 2014, she was hired full time as a foster care social worker, and transitioned to the role of CPS supervisor in 2021. Melanie currently supervises intake, CPS assessments, and in-home services (everything that happens prior to foster care). Melanie enjoys hiking with her dog, Monte, and is known for her absurd love of all things cold & wintry. She also enjoys crushing the foster care supervisor, Chad, in Nerf Wars at the DSS office. In addition to her role at DSS, Melanie also serves on the Board of Directors for the Mediation & Restorative Justice Center and sits on the Drug Treatment & Recovery Court team.

A CHILD'S PERSPECTIVE

WRITTEN BY A WATAUGA DSS FOSTER CHILD

Hello! I am a 18 year old female. I have been adopted. I think the best part is it feels good to feel wanted. I hate to move, but now I have a forever home. What I have to say is find your forever child!



Refer prospects who complete MAPP class
GET \$100 gift card!

Refer prospects who get licensed,
GET another \$100 gift card!

Spring 2025 Student Interns

Kaysha Wizzart

Hi, my name is Kaysha Wizzart! I'm originally from California, and I have Caribbean heritage. I am a senior at Appalachian State University. I double major in Political Science with a concentration of pre-law, and Social Work. The reason why I am interning at Watauga DSS is to gain a hands on experience working with families and children. In my free time, I'm the president of a law organization that I founded. I also enjoy spending time outside in warm weather, and watching movies with friends and family.



Giselle Islas-Hernandez

Hello, my name is Giselle, I am an intern at Watauga DSS. I am originally from Chapel Hill but I came to study at Appalachian State University. I've always been passionate about working closely with families and individuals and learning more about the job of a DSS social worker. I have enjoyed my time as an intern and I am glad I have the opportunity to learn from an amazing team.

Be the change in a child's life

DSS Court Process

After DSS files a petition that begins a case in juvenile court, several types of meetings and court hearings may take place. These include:

- Nonsecure Hearing (also known as a "7-day" hearing)
- Adjudication Hearing
- Disposition Hearing
- Permanency Planning Hearing
- Termination of Parental Rights
- Post Termination of Parental Rights

The descriptions on the following pages are meant to give you an overview of these hearings and do not contain all of the detailed requirements of the law. If you have questions about your case, including the people involved, talk to your social worker.

- **Nonsecure Custody Hearing:** When a child is removed from home, a nonsecure custody hearing must occur within seven (7) days. As long as a child remains placed outside the home, nonsecure custody hearings must continue to be held until the disposition hearing is finished, unless the parent and their attorney agree to waive them. At a nonsecure custody hearing, the judge does not decide if what DSS states in the petition, the allegations, are true. The judge decides if keeping the child out of the home is necessary. If the judge decides it is, the judge also decides if the child should stay where he or she is currently placed. At every nonsecure custody hearing, the judge must ask certain questions:
 - ~ What is the identity and location of both parents?
 - ~ Has paternity been established?
 - ~ Are there relatives that can care for your child?
 - ~ Is it safe for the child to return home?
 - ~ What visitation is in the child's best interests?
- **The Adjudication Hearing:** This hearing must be held within 60 days of the date the petition was filed unless the judge decides there is a good reason to delay it. At this hearing, DSS must prove by clear and convincing evidence that the allegations in the petition are true. If the judge decides that the allegations have not been proven, the judge will dismiss the petition and the case will be over and the child will be returned home. If the judge decides that the allegations have been proven, the judge will decide if the child will be adjudicated abused, neglected, and/or dependent. Instead of having an adjudication hearing, the parties and their attorneys may agree on what the court should order. If this happens, the judge will enter a "consent order."
- **Disposition Hearing:** The disposition hearing may occur on the same day as the adjudication hearing or may be up to 30 days later. Disposition hearings are often less formal than adjudication hearings and all parties give information to the court about what they want to happen. In the disposition hearing, the judge decides what the best plan is for the child. The judge will decide where the child will live, whether there are any relatives that can help take care of the child, what type of visits the parent will have with the child, and what services the parent and child may need. The judge may also order each parent to receive certain services such as substance abuse treatment, parenting classes, or domestic violence counseling. The goal for most families is to reunite the parent and child but in some cases, the judge may decide that there should be another plan for the child other than reunification..

con't next page

- **Permanency Planning Hearing:** A permanency planning hearing must take place within 90 days of the disposition. After that, there must be at least one permanency planning hearing every 6 months, but often they occur more frequently. At a permanency planning hearing, the parties present information to the judge so that the judge can determine if appropriate efforts are being made to make progress on the child's current permanency plan(s). The judge may also order a change in permanency plan in order to achieve a safe, permanent home for the child within a reasonable period of time. The possible permanency plans for a child include: reunification, adoption, custody, guardianship, or APPLA (Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement). A concurrent plan must be ordered in addition to the primary plan. For example, a judge may order a child have a primary plan of reunification with a concurrent, or secondary plan, of guardianship.
- **Termination of Parental Rights Hearing:** A termination of parental rights (TPR) hearing is divided into two stages, adjudication and disposition. At adjudication, the party requesting TPR must prove to the judge by clear and convincing evidence that grounds exist for termination. If the judge decides that grounds do not exist, the judge will dismiss the case. If the judge decides that the grounds do exist, the judge moves to the disposition stage and must decide whether TPR is in the child's best interest.
- **Post-Termination of Parental Rights Review Hearing:** These hearings are required if the child is in the custody of DSS or another agency when the parent's rights are terminated. The first post-TPR review hearing must be held within 6 months of the TPR hearing and at least every 6 months after that until the child is adopted. The parent whose rights have been terminated does not participate in this hearing because, after termination, the parent is no longer a party to the case. The purpose of this hearing is to examine the plan for permanent placement of the child, to make sure the plan is adequate, and to make sure appropriate efforts are being made to carry out the plan.



A safe home for every child