



## The Foster Family Foundation of Georgia, Inc.

### OVERVIEW

#### **EMBRACE: A NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION**

EMBRACE was organized in 2006 in response to a recommendation of First Lady Mary Perdue's Children's Cabinet. Its purpose is to increase the number of foster families in Georgia who are prepared to address the specific needs of those foster children who have been placed into state custody. EMBRACE is funded primarily with public dollars and works in collaboration with the state's Division of Family and Children's Services (DFCS). EMBRACE currently operates under the auspices of a volunteer board of directors that has entered into a contract with Metis Associates to provide the staff assistance needed to establish a sound organizational framework and strategic vision for the eventual launch of a statewide initiative.

#### **PHASE I: PROTOTYPE**

In January 2008, Embrace and DHR launched a prototype initiative in Region 17 (Cherokee, Cobb and Douglas counties) to increase retention of foster family homes.

#### **Core Strategies and Services**

EMBRACE developed and implemented a community-based prototype to support and retain foster families that is based upon the following **principles**: *Local decision making; Data driven decision making; Accountability for Results; Community engagement.*

Two **strategies** have emerged as core to the EMBRACE practice model constituting unique contributions to the EMBRACE/ DFCS/DHR partnership:

- Foster Parent Liaison (FPL) – the FPL links foster parents to each other and to community resources and facilitates positive communication and problem solving between foster parents and caseworkers and with community stakeholders (individuals, civic and faith organizations, the media, businesses and others).
- Community engagement – is an emerging strategy. The FPL is an ambassador within the community. Through positive relationships and increased awareness, FPLs create good will and recruit in kind and cash contributions in support of foster families and quality foster care.

Through a needs assessment process with foster parents, DFCS staff and community stakeholders, a menu of **services** to support foster families has been identified and prioritized during the prototype and include:

- Mentoring – for and by foster parents.
- Natural Helper – informal supports identified by foster parents.
- Communication – a variety of activities, (e.g., newsletters, websites, events), to keep foster parents, partners and staff informed and connected and to promote positive relationships.
- On-going, individualized training continuum – for new and veteran foster parents.

#### **PHASE I RESULTS**

- Over 250 foster families were served by Embrace during the Jan-Dec. 2008, Phase I of the prototype.
- Ninety percent of DFCS' foster homes were retained from January to June, 2008, thereby meeting the six month goal.
- Eighty one percent of DFCS foster homes were retained from January to December, 2008, thereby exceeding the twelve month goal of 75%.
- Of the foster homes that closed, over a third were closed because children were adopted, a "good" outcome. Excluding adoptions, the 12-month foster family retention rate was 86.9% in Region 17.
- The net increase in the number of homes was approximately three times that accomplished in the comparison period.
- According to foster parents, the Foster Parent Liaison strategy is the most effective support, with training, communication and small groups also proving effective.