

Overview of Social Services Child Welfare Positions

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The goal of all Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) professionals is to strengthen families by assisting them in solving their problems as efficiently and effectively as possible. "Government should serve as a resource rather than a substitute for families. By strengthening the family unit, DFCS is working to lessen dependency while keeping families together and enabling those families to protect and care for their children," notes DHR Commissioner B.J. Walker. In particular, the professional working in social services is responsible for ensuring that children who remain at home are protected and safe, while children who must be removed from home attain safety and permanence.

Is a career as a child welfare professional right for you? This information and self-assessment tool will help you decide. If after your *careful consideration* there seems to be a fit between your educational background, career goals, and professional interests and Georgia DFCS, we invite you to send us a resume and cover letter. **But first, read and consider the accompanying text.** This document will provide you with:

- Key values of the Division
- An overview of DFCS child welfare services
- A realistic picture of challenges and opportunities of working in child welfare
- A description of children and families served by DFCS child welfare professionals

Background Information

Values of the Division

The Division of Family and Children Services is a high performance organization interested in potential employees who have the right motivation and attitudes to *add value* to the organization. Doing the "Right work, the Right way" is critical to the overall goal of strengthening families, and is based on the values and beliefs of the organization, that include:

- Welfare is not good enough for any family,
- Expect adults to work.
- Serve people as close to home and their communities as is possible.
- Be a resource and support, not a substitute, for families.
- Expect every consumer/customer/client to participate in their own recovery.
- Treat your consumer/customer/client as if they were family.
- Make it faster, friendlier and easier for families to deal with us.
- Deliver services as if we were not the only ones who could provide that service.
- Use data and information to make decisions.

DFCS and the Roles of Child Welfare Professionals

The Georgia Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) is the part of Georgia Department of Human Resources that receives and investigates reports of child abuse and neglect; provides services and support to families in need, locates relatives and foster families for abused and neglected children who cannot safely remain in their homes; helps low income, out-of-work parents obtain job skills and employment in order for them to get back on their feet; assists with childcare costs for low income parents who are working or in job training, and provides numerous support services and innovative programs to help and strengthen troubled families. In providing these services, DFCS child welfare professionals work cooperatively with other organizations, community services agencies, the schools, the courts and other community groups to accomplish the goals of safety, permanency, and well being for children and families.

DFCS employs approximately 2500 social services staff that are located in offices in each of the 159 counties in 12 regions of the state. In 2005, an additional 500 social services positions were

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funded by the state legislature. Because of these added positions and an emphasis on better assessment and referral (more than 14,000 families to community based resources and agencies), improved service delivery and supervision, the agency has reduced caseloads by 30 percent statewide and 51 percent in targeted urban counties over the past 2 years. This reduction in caseloads has allowed staff to provide more intensive focus on child protective services, and more opportunity to provide quality services to families and children.

Many of the situations in which social service case managers are involved are perceived as intrusions into clients' private lives, and are often highly emotionally charged. The children and families served by child welfare professionals in Georgia are among the most needy of our citizens and they often have multiple, complex problems that interfere with the quality of their lives and care for their children.

These clients receive legally required services and are often upset and angry with DFCS intervention in their lives. Child welfare professionals are employed by DFCS to assist these children and families as problems in living are identified, solutions are developed, and systematic plans are implemented to enhance their quality of life. Often the problems in living faced by these children and their families are exacerbated by the effects of substance abuse, violence, crime, mental illness, inadequate parenting skills, family disruptions, poverty and many other factors as well.

Major Program Areas

New DFCS child welfare employees are typically assigned to specialize in one of the major program areas, although in sparsely populated counties a child welfare employee may carry cases in more than one program area.

- Intake, Assessment and Diversion
- Child Protective Services(CPS) Investigations
- Family Preservation/Ongoing CPS Services
- Foster Care/Placement (relative, foster, adoptive, and guardianship families)

Intake, Assessment and Diversion: Through intake, assessment and appropriate diversion, DFCS supports families with serious needs by providing early intervention and referrals to community services rather than initiating a CPS investigation. Community partners include family counseling, mental health, food banks, substance abuse programs, churches and other faith-based organizations, etc.

Child Protective Services/Investigations: Once received, a CPS referral is investigated by a case manager who assesses risk and safety of the child. An investigation typically involves the case manager gathering information, making home visits, developing safety plans with the family, identifying relatives, and making collateral contacts. At times, the investigation may result in removing children in cases where they cannot safely remain in the home. At other times, if the report is substantiated, and the child can remain safely in the home with services, an Ongoing CPS case may be opened.

Family preservation/Ongoing Services: In situations in which a CPS report is substantiated, but the child's safety is assured, the case manager provides services to help families learn healthier ways of parenting their child(ren). The case manager engages the family in addressing the issues that led to the maltreatment, and provides them with support and services to address these needs. Activities may include holding a family team meeting, working with relative resources, monitoring the case plan, making home visits, transporting clients to access services, etc., all with the goal of strengthening the family so that the needs of the child can be met.

Foster Care/Placement (relative, foster, adoptive, and guardianship families): Children removed from their home and in custody of the State, are provided services by case managers to meet their physical, emotional, and developmental needs until they can be safely returned home, placed with a relative with custody, or legally adopted. Services are provided to their parents to help them address the issues that led to the child's removal so that reunification can occur. The case manager gathers information including about relatives, holds family team meetings, makes home visits, develops case plans with the family, transports clients to receive needed services to strengthen families with services to meet the needs of their child(ren). The majority of children in foster care are reunified with their families. However, when necessary to achieve permanency, the child may be placed permanently with relatives or placed for adoption.

The Challenges and Personal Rewards of Working in DFCS

Professional work in child welfare, though difficult, at times quite stressful, and challenging, can be quite personally and professionally gratifying. Those who value service to others are rewarded by the impacts they have on strengthening families, and the positive

changes they see in our most vulnerable children and families in need of attention, assistance, and personal and professional support. For many troubled children and families, change is a rather slow process, and positive steps occur a little at a time. Working with children and families with difficulties in living to produce a more positive, settled, and productive life is a significant challenge in child welfare. However, success in this human services professional context carries its own personal and professional rewards.

Community Partners

The most important aspect of the child welfare professional's job is direct interaction with the clients served (children, families and relatives) including direct, face-to-face contact with clients in their homes and in office conferences, and also other forms of communication (e.g., phone). However, the role of community partners is critical. Child welfare professionals in DFCS work cooperatively with many other organizations, agencies, and community support groups to improve the lives of some of Georgia's most needy, vulnerable, and troubled children and families. These include schools, mental health agencies, the courts, the medical community, and other social services agencies. Typically, multiple services are needed by the children and families served by DFCS and one role of the child welfare professional is to assist in providing and coordinating these services.

Staff Requirements

Applicants for child welfare positions in Georgia DFCS must have a bachelor's degree in a human services field from an accredited college or university and work-related experience. Degrees in human services fields include Social Work, Psychology, Education in Counseling, Counseling, Marriage and Family Therapy, Sociology, Child Development/Family Development.

A degree in Social Work is preferred, and **required** in some Metro Atlanta counties. Social Services Case Manager positions require one year of related experience (human services experience in the areas of case management, assessment and referral, supportive counseling, intervention, psychosocial therapy and treatment planning). Social Services Supervisor positions require two years of directly related experience. A two-semester internship at DFCS, working with a DFCS caseload, can substitute for directly related experience.

Most typically, applicants for DFCS child welfare positions are for the Case Manager position. All new Case Managers participate in a three-month, intensive training and certification process that includes in-class, on line, and on-the-job training. The training may require out-of-county travel with overnight stays, the costs for which are reimbursed. All or parts of this training may be exempted by DFCS for child welfare professionals with appropriate, documented educational preparation and/or public child welfare work experience. New DFCS child welfare professionals are assigned reduced caseloads and are provided with mentoring and supportive supervision during the three-month certification process.

Social Services Case Managers who work directly with families and children are given cell phones to use in the field and the use of a tablet personal computer. The tablet computer aids Case Managers in taking field notes for inclusion in case documentation, reviewing client history, writing case plans and other necessary and required paperwork. **Each employee must have a valid driver's license and use his/her personal vehicle when working with clients** (e.g. visits to homes, other agencies/organizations, courts, transporting children and/or adults). **Automobile insurance costs are the responsibility of the employee.** Mileage reimbursements are made at standard rates as approved by the State of Georgia.

Work in child welfare is unpredictable and often labor intensive. **Staff must be willing to work on call and work non-traditional**

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hours. Given the seriousness of some situations it is necessary for a child welfare case manager or supervisor to be on call after regular work hours and/or on weekends. Current DFCS policy allows for the accumulation of compensatory time in these situations, however, overtime pay is rarely allowed. By law, all child welfare professional staff members are subject to a criminal records check and drug screens.

A Typical Day as a Social Services Case Manager in Georgia DFCS

It is important that those seeking employment in Georgia DFCS give careful and thoughtful consideration to what the work actually entails, and whether this is the right job for you. The work is fast-paced and responds to the crisis nature of family situations, which requires good time management and organizational skills. A child welfare professional may come to work and not be able to accomplish any of the tasks on that day's *to do* list as new, more pressing problems become a priority. A case manager could expect to make home visits to assess the safety of, or danger to children reportedly abused or neglected, work with families to develop a case plan as well as assess the progress or lack thereof in meeting case plan goals. Transporting clients to receive health, mental health, substance abuse, and other treatment services is typical and can take up the better part of the day depending on where the client lives in proximity to service providers. Case managers write court reports on cases, provide court testimony and regularly work with attorneys for the parent, child and DFCS. Documentation on every case is critical, must be kept current, and may take from 20-40% of a worker's time.

Case managers for children in foster care also locate relatives and foster families or other placement services for children and physically transport children who may be upset about life circumstances. Many children have serious psychiatric diagnoses, have experienced significant trauma and may be further traumatized by being removed from their families. As with their families, the children may view child welfare workers as intruders rather than helpers. The work is sometimes quite unpredictable and stressful, particularly for new employees. Workers make unaccompanied home visits to clients homes, which may be unclean and in disarray, located in unsafe neighborhoods or isolated areas. Workers make regular phone and email contact with clients, service providers, foster parents, and others involved with the family.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

What is the starting salary?

Social Services Case Manager/Associate = \$25,895.00

Undergraduate Degree

Social Services Case Manager = \$28,543.00

Requires Bachelors of Social Work (BSW) Degree **or** Undergraduate Degree in Behavioral Science and 1 Year Social Services Experience **or** DFCS Internship

Social Services Case Manager/Advanced = \$29,970.00

Requires Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) Degree and 1 year Social Service Experience **or** DFCS Internship

Social Services Case Manager/Specialist = \$31,474.00

Requires Masters of Social Work (MSW) Degree

What staff benefits are included with the position?

Vacation Leave

Accrual is based on years of continuous service:

- 10 hours per month for up to 5 years of service (15 days each year)
- 12 hours per month from 5-10 years of service (18 days each year)
- 14 hours per month for 10 years of service or longer (21 days each year)

Sick Leave

Accrual is at the rate of 10 hours per month regardless of years of service. After 120 hours have been accrued, up to 24 sick leave hours per year may be transferred to personal leave

Holidays

State Holidays: 12 approved days per year

Insurance

Health, dental, vision, legal, disability, accidental death and dismemberment, healthcare and childcare spending accounts and life and dependent life insurance are available.

Retirement Plan

Employees participate in the Employee's Retirement System. Contributions are based on a percentage of salary. Group Term Life insurance is provided to all members of the Employee's Retirement System.

Deferred Compensation

Tax shelter plans are available that enable employees to provide for greater

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retirement security. Fund programs are available in both 457 and 401(k) plans.

Credit Union

Employees are eligible to become members of the [Human Services Employee Credit Union](#).

More detailed information is available at: <http://dhrjobs.com/benefits.asp>

What are the work hours?

The seriousness of some situations makes it necessary for a child welfare case manager or supervisor to work after regular work hours and/or on weekends. Employees may have the option of [flexible work hours](#), including [telecommuting](#). Alternative work schedules allow employees to work at varying times. DHR offers the following options: Staggered reporting times; daily flex; nine-hour day with alternate day off; and the 10-hour day compressed workweek.

How large are case/workloads?

This varies from county to county and from time to time. Five hundred additional worker/supervisor positions were recommended by Governor Purdue and funded by the Legislature lowering caseloads to improve client services and reducing turnover.

The most current data is available through the DHR website <http://dhr.georgia.gov/portal/site/DHR/> via the link "How do I..." "Find DFCS Outcome Measures and results."

What professional development opportunities exist?

The Division of Family and Children Services Child Protection Certification program provides professional knowledge and skills development for staff to help them develop the expertise needed in their specific jobs. Relevant professional development activities are offered that allow staff to be rewarded for engaging in continued professional growth. Experienced staff are required to maintain certification through 20 hours of in-service training each year. Advanced knowledge and skills training provided through the Professional Excellence program is developed in response to regional needs assessments.

More information is available at DFCS Education and Training Services Section homepage: <http://www.gadfcs.org>

What about personal safety on the job?

DFCS values the safety of its employees. New Case Managers receive both formal and on-the-job training to develop skills related to identifying, responding to, and resolving potentially dangerous situations. Workers are provided cell phones when working away from the office. Supervisors help case managers evaluate situations and, when deemed appropriate and necessary, a case manager may be accompanied by a co-worker or law enforcement when making home visits to clients. Case Managers learn to be aware, but not anxious. By anticipating crisis situations and practicing sound case management skills, Case Managers can diffuse most crises, and deliver services without jeopardizing worker or client safety.

What are the characteristics of a successful DFCS child welfare employee?

- professional commitment to and caring about clients and the larger profession of child welfare
- personal resilience and strong self-efficacy beliefs about the ability to work with clients to produce positive client outcomes
- efficient organizational and time management skills
- good oral and written communication skills
- positive work morale
- ability to be flexible in thinking and problem solving
- realistic expectations about the difficulty and challenges of the work
- ability to handle an often unpredictable work environment
- high frustration tolerance
- ability to balance the stresses in one's personal and professional lives
- willingness to be self reflective about one's work and to learn from others
- physical energy
- a sense of humor

What organizational supports does DFCS offer you?

- formal training
- quality of on-the-job supervision
- mentoring
- personal safety training
- professional development
- strong professional culture

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- support resources (e.g., tablet personal computers, cell phones)
- supportive administration
- promotional and career opportunities

(These findings are from the 2003 statewide study of child welfare employee retention and turnover in Georgia completed by the University of Georgia School of Social Work)

Self Assessment

Why should I take the self-assessment?

The presence of a consistent, dedicated child welfare worker has a direct, positive impact on accurate assessments of child safety and on permanency outcomes for children under the State's care. Turnover of staff reduces accurate assessments of child safety and a child's successful reunification with the family, placement with relatives or adoption. Staff turnover also interferes with the continuity and quality of services to children and families. **Thus, it is important for those considering a career in child welfare to carefully evaluate their own personal characteristics and to understand the DFCS work context as well.**

The self-assessment is designed to provide you with additional information about whether a position in child welfare in Georgia DFCS is for you. The items are related to employees' intentions to remain employed in child welfare. Therefore, an honest self-assessment can help you make a decision about whether employment in Georgia DFCS in child welfare is right for you. The self-assessment tool is ***anonymous*** and can assist you in deciding whether to make a formal application for employment in child welfare in Georgia DFCS.

In rating each self-assessment item, reflect carefully on your own personal characteristics and professional career as a potential employee in child welfare. **Be as honest as you can in your ratings of each item.** Use a pencil or pen and paper and record your numerical rating for each self-assessment item. There are no right or wrong ratings, only those that will inform you about the extent to which you may or may not be a good fit for a child welfare position in Georgia DFCS. Record and total your ratings, then compare your score to the ranges at the end of the self-assessment.

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Instructions: Read and respond to each item using this scale:

1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Agree, 4=Strongly Agree

1. I can't imagine enjoying any profession as much as public child welfare.
2. I intend to remain in child welfare as my long-term professional career.
3. I would remain employed in public child welfare even though I might be offered a position outside of child welfare with a higher salary.
4. I believe the personal and professional benefits outweigh the difficulties and frustrations of working in public child welfare.
5. I am not actively seeking employment outside the field of public child welfare.
6. I am enthusiastic about working in public child welfare.
7. My personal success in working with clients will not be an important factor in determining whether I will remain employed in child welfare.
8. Even though career and promotional opportunities in public child welfare are somewhat limited, I remain strongly committed to a long-term career in public child welfare.
9. Even though many DFCS clients live in disadvantaged and/or dangerous neighborhoods, I am willing to make home visits using my own automobile.
10. As a child welfare professional, I believe I can have a positive and long-lasting influence on children and families in need.
11. I am committed to working in public child welfare even though it requires a considerable amount of time (20-40%) to complete required paperwork and case documentation.
12. I am willing to be on call for work during evenings and on weekends if necessary, even though overtime pay is generally not allowed.

13. I am the kind of person that can handle a lot of ongoing stress and unpredictable situations and work environments like those in public child welfare.
14. I believe I currently have the educational background, personal experiences, and abilities to be successful as public child welfare professional.
15. I would continue to work in public child welfare even if I did not need the money.

Total your score and compare it to the score ranges and recommendations that follow:

Score Range **15–26**

Your self-assessment results show that it is **very unlikely** that you are a good fit for a job as a child welfare professional in Georgia DFCS. **This job is probably not for you.** Please review some of the other job opportunities with the Georgia Department of Human Resources at dhrjobs.com. Thank you for your interest in child welfare in Georgia.

Score Range **27-38**

Your self-assessment results show that you are **somewhat unlikely** to be a good fit for a job as a child welfare professional in Georgia DFCS. **This job may not be for you.** Please review some of the other job opportunities with the Georgia Department of Human Resources at dhrjobs.com. Thank you for your interest in child welfare in Georgia.

Score Range **39-49**

Your self-assessment results show that you may be a **reasonable fit** for a job as a child welfare professional in Georgia DFCS. **This job may be for you.** Please begin the application process.

Score Range **50-60**

Congratulations! Your self-assessment results show that you may be **an excellent fit** for a job as a child welfare professional in Georgia DFCS. **This job is probably for you.** Please begin the formal application process.

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If after careful self reflection and consideration you believe you are an appropriate fit for public child welfare work in Georgia DFCS, we invite you to send us a **professional resume** that describes your educational background, work experiences, and personal contact information, the names and addresses of three professional references, and a **cover letter of application**. In the cover letter, briefly describe your motivation and career goals related to working in the area of public child welfare and the personal characteristics and/or experiences that particularly distinguish you from other applicants, and that merit your selection for a public child welfare position in Georgia DFCS.