Meeting Notes – Dec. 7, 2021

The LaFayette Rotary Club met on Tuesday, December 7, 2021. Calvin Milford was responsible for the program and invited Julia Ann Hyde, director of the Chambers County Department of Human Resources (DHR) and Layla Letson, one of the supervisors from DHR, to speak. Julia Ann began by announcing three adoptions that were completed yesterday. There have been 10 adoptions finalized this year. Seventy-one (71) children are currently in foster care in Chambers County. The highest number was reached two years ago when there were 89. Drug use by parents accounts for 75% of the foster care placements.

One of the successful interventions that has been put in place here in Chambers County is Dependency Drug Court. In this program there are no criminal proceedings. The focus is on treatment and accountability (through random drug screens). Chambers County is the most involved with drug court of any county in the state. A $64,000.00 grant was secured in order to train law enforcement and parents on drug abuse.

Last school year there were 199 reports of child abuse involving 309 children. Chambers County DHR investigates all allegations of drug abuse. Currently our DHR is unable to hire staff and only has two foster care workers. Children from Chambers County are placed in foster homes not only here in Chambers County but also as far away as Madison and Mobile. Chambers County currently has 40 licensed foster homes available. Twelve (12) new foster homes have been approved this year, but 10 have been closed. Often, foster homes are closed when the foster family adopts the foster children then does not have room to foster more children. DHR is always in search of more foster homes and offers classes three times a year for prospective foster families. Families must undergo a 10-week training program as well as background checks. Homes can also be provisionally licensed. This typically happens when a family friend or a schoolteacher or counselor who is familiar with the child needing placement volunteers to take the child into his/her home. That home can receive the child prior to the completion of the 10-week training program. Another option for some children is kinship guardianship where another family member takes the child into his/her home. Financial assistance is available to the family after six months of placement. DHR makes every effort to keep sibling groups together, however, there have been sibling groups as large as seven children, which makes it nearly impossible to find one home that can take so many.

The issues that typically bring DHR's involvement with a family include lack of parental compliance, physical abuse, neglect, sexual abuse, drug use and domestic violence. Layla encouraged any who might be interested in fostering a child or children needing a home to contact her.

Diane Sherriff