
From: Dawn Ayers <dawnayers128@gmail.com>
Sent: Thursday, April 28, 2016 7:02 PM
To: Haley, Nikki
Subject: Fwd: Issues with DSS
Attachments: DSS001.pdf

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Dawn Ayers** <dawnayers128@gmail.com>
Date: Thu, Apr 28, 2016 at 6:58 PM
Subject: Issues with DSS
To: Keith.Frazier@dss.sc.gov, amber.gillum@dss.sc.gov
Cc: "kimberly.gist@dss.sc.gov" <kimberly.gist@dss.sc.gov>, donna.anderson@dss.sc.gov, katie brophy <katie.brophy@dss.sc.gov>, valerie.holland@dss.sc.gov

My husband and I first contacted DSS in June 2014 expressing our interest in adopting and/or fostering. We received a message from Kim Gist saying she had sent our information to a supervisor in the adoption office and also told us to contact Region I Adoptions in Greenville at [800-868-6595](tel:800-868-6595). We were then referred to Karla at Heartfelt Calling by Katie Brophy in November 2014.

We received the first email from Karla Nov 14th, 2014. We were sent several forms which we completed and sent via snail mail to Heartfelt Calling. We hadn't heard anything back, so I reached out via email on Dec 19th, 2014. I received a response from Kendra Faile asking for the info to be resent - so we printed out all the forms, completed them a 2nd time and mailed them on Jan 7th, 2015.

On Jan 8, 2015 - we received an email from Jennifer Lee, a Family Adoption Specialist at DSS, saying she had received our application. She then registered us for the Adoption Orientation on Pleasantburg Dr. in Greenville on Jan 26, 2014. We looked forward to meeting her - but when we went to the orientation, she was the only Adoption counselor that didn't attend.

I emailed her on Jan 30th - saying we were disappointed that we didn't get a chance to meet with her. She emailed back saying sorry she couldn't attend, but that we needed to get fingerprinting done as soon as possible. I then received another email from Ms. Lee on Feb 6th stating that our fingerprints had been received. She also told us we needed to register for Pre-Service Training as well as Adoption Specific Training - 3 days in all. My husband travels quite a bit for his job, We registered and attended the Pre-Service Training on March 13th and March 20th 2015 in Spartanburg. We had to wait until May 16th to take the Adoption Specific Training, as that was the only day my husband would be at home at the time they had a class scheduled.

The last contact we had with Ms. Lee was the Feb 9, 2015 email. I left voicemail messages, sent emails and never received a response. When we attended the training in May - we spoke with the instructor about our concerns about not being able to reach our Adoption Counselor. One of our classmates overheard us and told us Ms. Lee had left on maternity leave and that we had a different counselor now. She gave us a name, phone number, & email address for Connie Hunt ([864-282-4752](tel:864-282-4752), connie.hunt@dss.sc.gov). I called her and put her on speakerphone so both my husband and I could speak with her. All she said to us was "Look, I just found out I have to take over your case and I'm already too busy. And I don't have time to talk now - you're just going to

have to send me an email and I'll get back to you when I have time" and promptly hung up on us. I sent her an email on March 20, 2015 telling her we had completed all our paperwork and asked what address should we send it to - or should I bring it to her in person. She emailed back, saying only to email it to her at 714 N. Pleasantburg Dr, Suite 300, Greenville, SC 29607 to her attention. At the bottom of her email, it stated that she was an Adoption Supervisor.

We emailed our packet of information to this address on Monday March 23, 2015. (I started keeping track of all the dates things were being accomplished, already not feeling confident about DSS's process). Two months went by and didn't hear from anyone. Emails & voicemails were left with no response. We attended our class on May 16th, 2015. We talked to other classmates who had good experiences with their counselors - but found no one else who had the same counselor as we did. I called Ms Hunt again, someone else answered the phone - we were told she was out of the office. I said I was trying to find out the status of our packet of info that had been sent several weeks ago. We were put on hold a few minutes, then someone came back on and told us that our paperwork "never arrived...I can't find it" and told us it would be best if we just "redid all the paperwork and try sending it again."

Thank goodness I had made copies of all the information - I printed out all the paperwork again and we spent several days once again filling out all the forms. Not trusting the mail - I decided to hand carry our paperwork to DSS on Pleasantburg Rd. on Wednesday May 27th, 2015. When I arrived, the front door was locked. A woman was coming back from lunch and said the door was always locked for security. I told her why I was there - she said to wait there and she went upstairs. A few minutes later, a young black woman came down (she had a DSS badge on, her name was Regina), said that Connie wasn't there that day and that she'd take our information and make sure it got to her. When I got back to work, I called Connie and left a message saying that I had dropped off our paperwork and left it with Regina and to please call us back to confirm she had it. We never heard back from Connie again.

I called Karla at Heartfelt Calling asking for help and she said she'd try to reach someone for us. On July 10, 2015 - I received a letter from DSS (it's attached to this email). The letter stated "Due to the amount of time since we last had contact with your family, we have closed your adoptive home application." We were completely devastated, as you can imagine!

The letter goes on to say that since they were receiving many applications for younger children, that for the next 6 months, they would only process applications for children who are 6 years of age and older or for families that were willing to accept a sibling group of 3 or more children. This really confused us as we clearly stated that we were interested in adopting or fostering a child age 5-12.

At the end of the letter, it states "Thank you for your interest in serving children in foster care, please contact us in January 2016 if you wish to proceed."

After this horrible experience with DSS - with the time, money, lost wages spent over a solid year of disappointment - my husband and I decided that maybe this was a sign that it just wasn't meant to be.

About a month ago, I received a call from a close friend, Lisa Morgan. She told me that her friend Shirley Terry worked at a day care where she took care of a little 3 year old girl that was currently in foster care with her co-worker Angela Sowinski. Angela did not feel like she was a good fit in her home and apparently talked to her DSS counselor about it - and she was told that they needed to find another foster home but one that was also interested in possibly adopting her. On March 14, 2016, my husband and I spoke with Angela on the phone and we were a bit surprised at how callous she was - complained the little girl required too much attention and that she was just "tired of dealing with her." She gave me her "licensing coordinator" Laura Morgan's name & number and told me to contact her. I left a message for Laura - I then received an email from her stating that she was "ordering our file" - the bottom of her email included a signature block stating she was a

Licensing Supervisor for Region 1 Foster Family Licensing in Anderson. After sending her 2 emails asking for the current status, we didn't hear back from her until April 14, 2016 - she apologized saying she had been out of the office on medical leave. She did say that for some reason the current care plan for the child was not to move her to another foster home.

At this point - my husband and I decided maybe fostering was a better way to go, so that same day I reached out to Karla Littleton again at Heartfelt Calling. Karla knew everything we had been through in the past year and agreed that there were major issues going on at DSS in regards to the adoption process and promised to try to help expedite our application. Karla also texted me that day saying that she saw that we had completed Pre-Service classes and confirmed we wouldn't have to go back through training and that we should be hearing back from someone about a home visit soon. She told us to take the medical forms to our physician to update the paperwork, which we have already done.

We received a call from Valerie Holland, Initial Licensing Coordinator at DSS on Pleasantburg Rd. and set up an apt for Friday April 29th, 2015 for a home visit. On April 25 at 4:30pm - I received an email from Ms. Holland confirming the apt set for our home visit and gave a very long list of several items she'd need to collect from us at that appt. My husband has been out of town on business since April 23rd so he arranged to come home a day early so he could make this apt and I arranged to have someone cover my shift at work so I could take the afternoon off from work (I'm a nurse at Bon Secours St. Francis). Since my husband has been traveling, I spent several hours Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday night, completing paperwork and making copies of all the items Ms. Holland asked for. This included driving to my doctor's office to leave paperwork for him to complete which I need to pick up in the morning.

When I left work today, I had a voicemail from Ms. Holland - reminding us of our apt on Friday and then also told me that she had spoken with her supervisor and that we would have to **re-take** all of the training classes since it has been over a year. I immediately called Ms. Holland and told her that the great delay in this entire process has been the poor management and complete lack of dedicated DSS personnel that we had contact with (or tried to). I told her about the letter we had received from DSS last July and she asked me to send it to her and then said we could just "cancel the appt tomorrow." I told her absolutely NOT - since my husband was already on his way home early - he changed his flight at our expense to be home for this appointment and my leave had already been approved.

We are beyond frustrated and disappointed at how DSS has continually dropped the ball in regards to our case. We fear spending any more time on this, only to be once again be left heart-broken. Can someone PLEASE help us?!?

Dawn and Michael Ayers
231 Abners Trail Rd.
Greer, SC 29651
[864-303-0635](tel:864-303-0635)