



# The DAS Digest

November 2021

## APS Investigator, Dakota Wright receives national award for her service helping seniors

Adult Protective Services (APS) Investigator **Dakota Wright** recently received national recognition for her work to assist seniors and disabled adults. She has been with APS for four years and currently works as an APS Investigator in Northwest Georgia. Her supervisors, Karen Gossage and Amber Allen, state that she is always one to offer assistance to colleagues, both on her team and off. Wright's passion for helping APS clients led to her recognition on a national level.

Wright received the Spirit of NAPSAs Award at the National Adult Protective Services Association (NAPSA) Conference in early November. The Spirit of NAPSA Award is given to a frontline APS staff member in recognition of their significant contributions to the growth and development of the APS program in their community, as well as to the field of abuse intervention.

When Wright accepted her award, she said: "I am overwhelmed with gratitude to have been selected to receive the Spirit of NAPSA Award. Thank you so much

for being here with me to share in this occasion. I am so honored to have my worked recognized by NAPSA and my supervisors. This is not something I did alone, there are many others who deserve to share in this award. I would like to thank Amber Allen, Karen Gossage, Tanya Poillucci, Abby Cox and Cathy Bahadur for putting my name forward to receive this award. I would also like to thank NAPSA for seeing and validating the everyday work we do and presenting me with the award. I will end with a quote from Edward Hale: I am only one but I am one, I cannot do everything but I can do some things and I will not let what I cannot do interfere with what I can do."

Wright always offers to assist her colleagues and has been doing outstanding work building bridges with law enforcement and reporters in her area. On a recent case that held many challenges, she worked with a client who was cognitively impaired and had been abused and abandoned by their caregiver. The client



Wright

was alone and did not remember to eat and had no way to meet their own needs. Wright connected with local law enforcement to ensure the client received the help they needed.

### What is NAPSA?

The National Adult Protective Services Association (NAPSA) is a national non-profit 501 (c) (3) organization with members in all 50 states. Formed in 1989, the goal of NAPSA is to provide APS programs with a forum for sharing information, solving problems and improving the quality of services for victims of elder and vulnerable adult mistreatment. Its mission is to strengthen the capacity of APS at the national, state and local levels to effectively and efficiently recognize, report and respond to the needs of elders and adults with disabilities who are the victims of abuse, neglect or exploitation, and to prevent such abuse whenever possible.

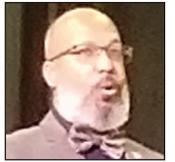
Congratulations to Dakota and to all of the amazing APS staff who work diligently every day to protect Georgia's vulnerable seniors and disabled adults.

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## PGO Section Manager presents on guardianship

Public Guardianship Office Section Manager **Carleton Coleman**



Coleman

attended the annual National Guardianship Association (NGA) conference in October, where he presented on guardianship deflection and rights restoration using supported decision-making. Along with representatives from the Georgia Advocacy Office, he discussed how providing supported decision-making helps individuals living with disabilities make their own decisions with the help of their trusted supporters. Coleman's sharing of his personal experiences in getting rights restored to individuals for which PGO serves as a guardian representative was well received and celebrated by the audience.

# Staff Shoutouts

**David Blake** recently gave a presentation to the Carroll County Sheriff's Office regarding the Georgia Abuse Neglect Exploitation (GANE) app. The GANE app was developed for law enforcement and other professionals who need quick access to tools and resources in the field when responding to crimes involving vulnerable adults. The information was very well received, and the app will be implemented with the deputies for their daily work in communities.

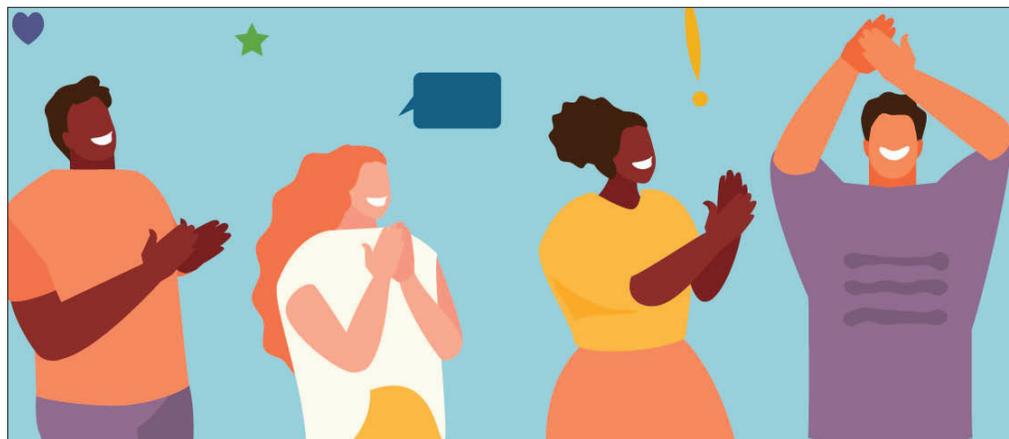
**Shawonda Wright** recently delivered a presentation on abuse, neglect and exploitation at her alma mater, Clark Atlanta University. Great job, Shawonda and David!

The Georgia Abuse Neglect Exploitation (GANE) app allows access to Georgia law, reporting agencies, financial capacity screening tool and Temporary Emergency Respite Funds. For more information and/or to download the GANE app, please [visit GANE app](#).

**Teresa Young** is one of the newest members of the DAS Program Integrity (PI) team and has proven herself to be invaluable to the PI unit, to DAS and to the aging network. She has already exhibited exceptional customer service by offering process improvements to the DAS Data System within the Adult Protective Services and Public Guardianship programs.

She is always willing to provide technical assistance and support for incoming helpdesk requests and pitch in to solve internal and external customers' problems. Thank you for all you do, Teresa!

**Megan Stadnisky** is the Evidence-Based Services Program Coordinator in the Livable Communities Section at DAS. For over 10 years, she has led Georgia's efforts to embed evidence-



based health and wellness programs into the aging network's toolkit. These offerings have included the Chronic Disease Self-Management Program, Tomando Control de su Salud, Diabetes Self-Management Program, Matter of Balance, Tai Chi for Arthritis, Bingocize and Aging Mastery Program. She has coordinated numerous federal and state grants and partnerships to expand these programs and is constantly on the lookout for new programs.

She recently presented to a national audience via Advancing States in a webinar titled, "Navigating Older American's Act Title III-D During the COVID-19 Pandemic." Perhaps her most significant contribution has been leading the Area Agencies on Aging, as they transitioned from in-person workshops and training to virtual platforms. This work allowed Georgia to continue offering these valuable programs during the pandemic and laid a foundation for expanding future access to these programs. Way to go, Megan!

APS advocate from coastal South Georgia, **Sharon Harrell**, recently worked with a 53-year-old disabled man. He was a double amputee with right side weakness and had one eye. At the time, he was wandering the United States living a homeless lifestyle. However, when his health started to decline, he was forced to

come to the reality that he might require a higher level of care. The client's original home was in Maryland, where his family is currently living. The client ended up in Glynn County after touring cities in northern Florida like Daytona, St. Augustine and Jacksonville. He had heart surgery while in Florida, so he decided to try to get back home but ran out of money. Harrell worked diligently with community resources to ensure his safety at a local hotel. The local hospital would not accept him, as he did not have any current medical issues that warranted admittance. We were able to use ERF funds to secure the hotel and nursing services until we met the criteria for a nursing home placement. Harrell was able to arrange a doctor's appointment, meals and had community partners check on the client. He also had an electric wheelchair that lost its charge. Harrell was able to work with community partners to try to repair the chair; however, the chair was not salvageable.

The Glynn County Homeless Coalition was able to help with assisting in getting a manual chair. In trying to arrange placement with community resources, the client decided he wanted to return to Maryland. Harrell changed direction and used her advocating skills and partnerships with community resources to get the client a bus ticket back to

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# Staff Shoutouts

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Maryland. Harrell stayed with the client and ensured he boarded the correct bus. Shout-out to Sharon for working so hard to ensure the client's safety and getting his needs met while in a state of crisis.

**APS Team River Valley** remain steadfast as they continuously reach the agency's goal. Team River Valley consistently goes the extra mile in ensuring clients are safe and well to the best of their abilities. Additionally, on an as-needed basis, Team River Valley assists other regions while maintaining their own workload.

Team River Valley has many success cases that could be shared from each team member. However, at this time, DAS would like to give a special shout-out to Investigator **Serita Conaway**. Conaway always meets her clients where they are at as she builds rapport and encourages them to make good decisions that will allow them to be safe. She recently completed an assessment with a client with allegations of self-neglect who is estranged from his family and was incarcerated for 20 years.

Upon initial assessment, Conaway quickly noted the client exhibited signs of depression as he had no appetite and appeared to be confused. Her instincts and enhanced social work experience told her to follow up with client the following week. The client was home and not doing well. He was displaced, jobless and had lost hope in living. He refused to eat and planned to quietly pass away. Conaway chose not to allow the client to give up on life. Georgia Crisis Access Line (GCAL) was contacted. The client was assessed by GCAL and taken to St. Francis Emory Hospital and transported to Anchors Behavioral/Mental Health Services. He was treated and released with instructions to follow-up for long-term support. Upon his return to the community, Conaway followed up with him and continued to encourage him to want more for his life.

Conaway encouraged him to continue to meet his mental health needs to support him in getting his life back on track. She empowered and supported him in the best way possible: by answering the phone each time he called just to be a listening ear. She worked with the client, and he began to trust her.

Conaway worked with him throughout the investigation and provided needed resources and support to allow him to meet his needs. She was able to safely close the client's case as he sought mental/behavior health services to better his life. She received a call from the client after case closure when he shared that he found employment, has a girlfriend, is eating with no problems and is working

toward securing stable housing. Conaway was able to note immediately that the client was in a better emotional and spiritual state. The client thanked Conaway for her support as he works toward getting his life on track. Great job, Serita and River Valley Region APS team!



## How DAS sections serve Georgians: 60 seconds with Program Integrity

The Program Integrity (PI) section of DAS is a vital part of the organization. PI provides DHS, DAS and other federal and state funding and oversight entities with program performance data. PI also uses data and policy analysis to support the overall quality and effectiveness of a wide array of complex DAS programs.

This work includes analyzing the quality of services provided by the 12 Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) and providers. PI staff work closely with software vendor, WellSky, to continually enhance and maintain the DAS Data System (DDS) through the DDS Helpdesk and software development lifecycle management. Program Integrity is managed by Arvine Brown.

This section provides information and support to DAS, the AAAs and their providers to assist in making valid decisions regarding programs and policies that reinforce DAS' mission to enhance the lives of older Georgians, their families and caregivers.



## DAS celebrates November milestone anniversaries with staff

DAS honors the milestone anniversaries of our long-time employees. This November, DAS celebrates anniversaries for 16 employees. Thank you for your many years of service to help Georgia's seniors and disabled adults live healthier and stronger lives.

**Vivian Jackson**, 34 years

**Christy Folsom**, 27 years

**Debra Parrish**, 27 years

**Sherry Thompson**, 24 years

**Tisha Gay**, 19 years

**Blake Lanier**, 16 years

**Tammy Nance**, 16 years

**Adrian Copeland**, 12 years

**Marlo Tanksley**, 12 years

**Sharon Harrell**, 9 years

**Charlette Brown-McCoy**,  
9 years

**Danielle Carrington**,  
7 years

**Mary Heredia**, 7 years

**Orinthian Jones**, 7 years

**Almaz Akalewold**, 6 years

**Kearre Bussey**, 5 years

## Several new hires joined DAS as part of an integral team

DAS would like to welcome several new team members. Welcome to the DAS team! They include:

**Jessica Mitchell**

**Ginia Wood**

**Tina Jackson**

**Audra Dutton**

**Tina Taylor**

**Glenda Lambert**

**Shannon Kennedy**

**Jujuana Jackson**

**Patrece Spikes**

**Devaion White**

**Kayla Quimbley**

**Cassandra Jones**

**Warevetta Askew**

**Adenike Colonel**

**Ashley Stephens**

**Lisa Williams**

**Robert Watson**

# Area Agencies on Aging

## **How the Northeast Georgia AAA helped senior transition back home and thrive**

J.G. is a 78-year-old, non-ambulatory male who suffers with multiple health impairments, including centrilobular emphysema, dysphagia, atherosclerotic heart disease, chronic respiratory failure, generalized weakness, and hemiplegia and hemiparesis associated with a cerebrovascular accident. Since 2013, J.G. has suffered four strokes, which caused him to be non-ambulatory and totally dependent on others for care. His wife was unable to care for him, as she too had declining medical conditions; as a result, he was placed in two different nursing homes for a period of eight years.

After being unable to have nursing home visitation with J.G. from March 2020 through December 2020, his eldest daughter became interested in bringing him home from the nursing home, so he could be with family. J. G.'s family sought additional assistance to ensure that his health needs were met. His daughter quit her full-time job as a private duty nurse in December 2020 to take care of J.G. He was discharged from the nursing home on December 14, 2020, to live with his daughter. J.G. received in-home services under the Elderly and Disabled Waiver Program, Community Care Services Program and Money Follows the Person. Due to difficulty swallowing and his inability to maintain nutrition by mouth, J.G. received a percutaneous endoscopic gastrostomy (PEG) feeding tube. Shortly after returning home, he was placed under care of hospice. Currently, J.G. is thriving while living in his daughter's home with the assistance of home care aides and family. He no longer uses his PEG tube for feedings. He is doing so well that hospice services were discontinued

in August 2021. J.G. has strong family support and is now able to go out within his community to visit family members and friends.

## **River Valley AAA staff provide listening ear and resources to assist caregivers**

While November is National Family Caregivers Month, the aging and disability network knows that family caregivers deserve to be honored every day. Family caregivers dedicate their time, energy and hearts into caring for their loved ones. Georgia's 12 regional Area Agencies on Aging, or AAAs, provide life changing resources to caregivers daily.

Two staff members from the River Valley AAA shared caregiver interactions that left an impact on them.

I remember one interaction I had with a caregiver who was on the verge of caregiver burnout. She was taking care of her mother, father and aunt at the same time. During this time, her father had advanced dementia and several other issues. She took him out of his nursing home and was unaware that caregiver duties were so demanding. She did not understand the home and community-based services (HCBS)/Elderly and Disabled Waiver Program (EDWP) services, so I scheduled time with her to give her an extended tutorial on our services. I even quizzed her afterward to make sure she understood, so they could select the best service options. During the screening process, she began to open up to me and admitted that she wanted to drop her father off at the hospital and not look back. She made this statement because she felt that she ran out of options. I advised her not to do that but said nothing but "I'm here." I allowed her to vent for over an hour and a half. She cried,

screamed, cursed and self-talked before I replied to her. With my former case management experience, I knew exactly how to assist her, and I told her that it was okay to take him back to the nursing home to receive the proper care that he needs. She took a sigh of relief and told me she only wanted someone to agree with her to omit the guilt she felt. Before we got off the phone, she stated she just released over three years of repressed feelings, and the only thing she regretted was not meeting me sooner. Although the story is not out of the ordinary, I love allowing time for caregivers to vent. Sometimes a listening ear is all they need to keep going.

A River Valley AAA Outreach Specialist who does telephone reassurance also has a memorable client that he enjoys checking on.

One of my clients fell in her mother's yard in June, fracturing both arms. This left her bed-bound for weeks, and it was during this period that I made a telephone reassurance call to her. She told me what happened and said it was fortunate that she didn't fall on concrete that was nearby. She has osteoporosis and is awaiting surgery on a leg from another fall. I joked that we need to keep her off the floor and she agreed. I made her laugh a few times, and she thanked me for calling to check on her. Before I hung up, I heard in the background "that was a sweet call," and the client agreed.

Last week, I called her, and she's much better and not bed-bound any longer. She gets new casts this week which will allow her to scratch the itch under the cast. I joked that she must have the most brittle bones in the world, and she told me the physician who reads her DEXA scan results said she has the worst case of osteoporosis he's ever seen. I recommended she not

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# Area Agencies on Aging

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challenge anyone to arm wrestling, and she thought she could resist that urge. As I was hanging up, I heard, "It's so nice that he calls to check on you." She likes to talk and laugh, so I hope I make a difference in her life, even if it's for just a few minutes.

She receives home-delivered meals, in-home services and is on the waiting list for homemaker aid, and I told her that if she needed anything else, she should call our ADRC helpline. Her daughter is caring for her, but the client knows that the River Valley AAA has resources if she needs them. I also told her that if she ever needed to talk, she should dial my office number. She's always a pleasure to talk to, and she knows to expect a call from me every few weeks.

AAA staff members provide much needed lifelines to caregivers in times of great stress. Most family caregivers never intended to be caregivers for one of their loved ones. When the need arises, they selflessly step up and greatly appreciate resources that help them and their loved one.

Former First Lady Rosalynn Carter was exactly right when she said, "There are only four types of people in the world: those who have been caregivers, who are caregivers, who will be caregivers and who will need caregivers."

## **Sowega Council on Aging releases grant proposal to provide senior activities**

The Sowega Council on Aging released a mini-grant proposal in September offering local entities and non-profits the opportunity to provide senior activities in their local communities. Sowega Council on Aging has approved three grants to date. At this point, Sowega Council on Aging has approved applications from a local YMCA, library and family connection. Activities such as water aerobics, walking groups legacy books are being offered locally, allowing clients and seniors to engage in new ways within their communities. The agency has also added two new restaurants for a total of 22 centers without walls sites in the region.

## **Northwest Georgia AAA hosts virtual Dementia Training and self-defense class**

The Northwest Georgia AAA recently hosted an informative virtual Dementia Training for local law enforcement in Floyd County. Floyd County Sheriff Dave Roberson and his officers participated in the training to better inform themselves about what those living with dementia face every day. To learn more about the Virtual Dementia Tour, visit [Virtual Dementia Tour® - Second Wind Dreams](#).



**Seniors practicing self-defense at Senior Center in Haralson County**



**Instructors show seniors defense methods to protect themselves**



**Floyd County Sheriff's deputies attend virtual Dementia training**

Also in Northwest Georgia, the Bremen Senior Center in Haralson County works to educate the community. The center recently hosted a self-defense class for the county's seniors. Instructors taught seniors ways to protect themselves when out in the public.

# Area Agencies on Aging

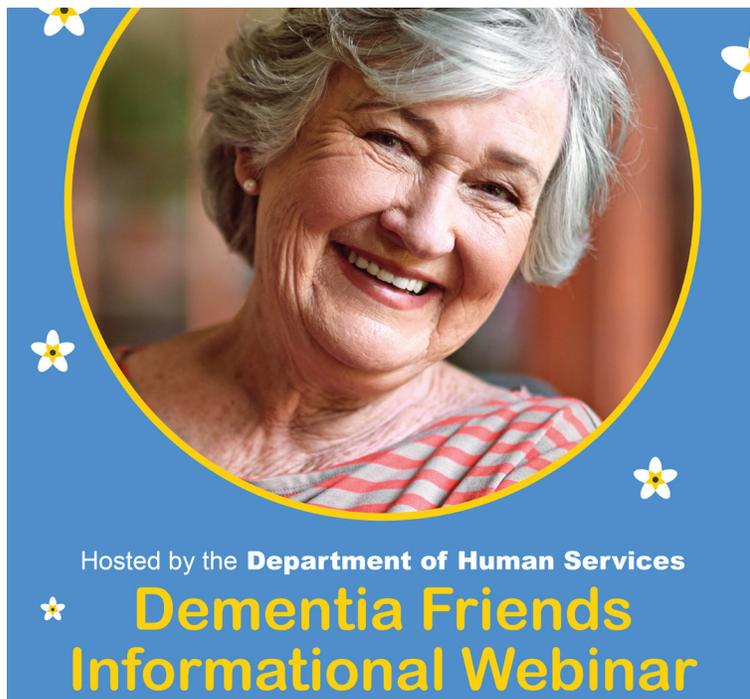


## DAS hosts National Family Caregivers Month

This November, DHS observed National Family Caregivers Month. The theme for 2021 was #CaregiverAnd, which honors caregivers who also have other jobs outside of caregiving. All month long, DHS focused on tips and tools to help families cope with challenges that may arise during emergencies and changes of circumstances. Several caregivers were highlighted and honored for the work they do 24/7.

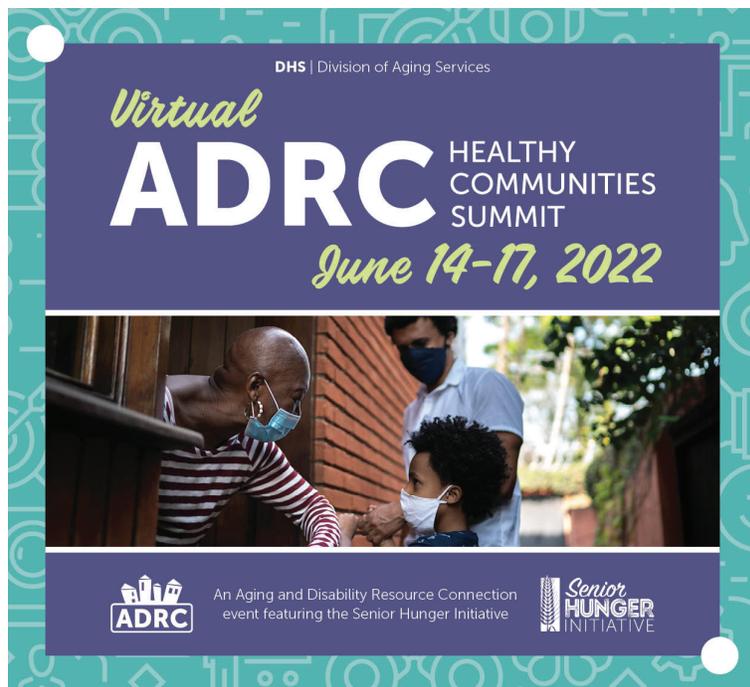
## National Older Driver Safety Awareness Week

In December, DHS along with the Department of Public Health (DPH), will educate the public and caregivers on keeping seniors safe behind the wheel. Caregivers and seniors will be able to assess their driving fitness and determine if they are still safe to be on the road. National Older Driver Safety Awareness Week aims to educate and inform so that seniors may drive safely.



## Dementia Friends hosts monthly webinar

Join us on December 6 from 6-7:30 p.m. [Register here](#) to Become a Dementia Friend – DeKalb County Public Library.



## Save the date for the 2022 ADRC Summit event

The Georgia Division of Aging Services invites you to save the date for the 2022 Aging and Disability Resource Connection (ADRC) Healthy Communities Summit. The Senior Hunger Summit will be merged into the ADRC Summit to bring you the same great experience in one conference!

## Join DHS for a fun filled holiday Bingo game

Join the Georgia Department of Human Services Division of Aging Services and AARP Georgia on Tuesday, Nov. 30 at noon for a fun and informative holiday bingo as we share caregiving tips for the holiday season. This bingo event will be filled with the sounds of holiday music and scenes from classic movies. Come in your holiday festive wear and be ready to have a good time! Registration is required. To register, [click here](#).

## Honor a centenarian in your community

Do you know someone who will be 100 years of age or older this year? Share their story with [kaylan.storey@dhs.ga.gov](mailto:kaylan.storey@dhs.ga.gov) so we can highlight them on our social media pages. [Click here](#) to request a DHS Centenarian Recognition Certificate. Please submit requests 45 days in advance of the honoree's birthday.

## Submit your DAS Digest Newsletter story ideas

Do you have a story idea for the newsletter? Want to give a shout-out for your coworker? Send your ideas to Kaylan Storey at [kaylan.storey@dhs.ga.gov](mailto:kaylan.storey@dhs.ga.gov).