



LIBRARY PARTNERSHIP

www.librarypartnership.org

"We truly feel that the Library Partnership is becoming a centerpiece of our community's efforts to positively impact the welfare of children." - Carressa Hutchinson, Resource Center Manager

What is the Library Partnership?

The Library Partnership is a place where families can go to obtain the services they need to increase their strength and independence. It is both a fully functional branch of the Alachua County Library and a neighborhood resource center where families can receive a myriad of services from any of our 40+ partnering agencies. And it is all for free.

In 2007, Partnership for Strong Families (PSF), the Department of Children and Families (DCF) and Casey Family Programs teamed up to develop a concept to reduce the number of children entering the foster care system by targeting vulnerable communities. "Hotspots" were identified by zip code and a list of potential social service providers was developed. The zip code where the Library Partnership is located had the highest rate of child abuse calls to the abuse hotline.

In June 2008, PSF met with community partners, including the Alachua County Library District (ACLD), to identify a place to open the resource center. Since the library was also looking to open a branch in Northeast Gainesville, collaboration was born between the two. The idea was that being collocated with a library would reduce the stigma people may feel about going into a social services center. Many in this community still had a fear or discontent with DCF held over from the days of Health and Rehabilitation Services (HRS), and PSF was still seen by many as an extension of the state. To encourage community members to seek out resources before abuse occurs, the stigma of asking for help and the fear of negative repercussions had to be dealt with. The library was the perfect solution.

In July 2009 the Library Partnership opened its doors to the community.

What is available?

Patrons have access to more than 40 community providers when they come into the resource center. The Library Partnership, with the assistance of community partners, assists families with services in the following areas:

- Family Support & Child Development – Family activities and services requested by the families, which may include but are not limited to: mentoring, parenting classes, tutoring, Girl Scouts and peer support.
- Health & Safety – Referral links to health services, resources for children and adults, Prevention and wellness education efforts.
- Self-Sufficiency – Concrete help for immediate needs with a view to long term solutions: GED, job skills training, employability, housing, transportation, managing a household budget and a clothing closet.

In addition, the Library Partnership has developed several regular programs to meet community needs.

- Fight for Your Money is the financial literacy course offered that teaches participants how to budget and manage limited resources. Graduates are eligible for \$100 off of their energy bill through Gainesville Regional Utilities.
- Job Fair and Career Day is a newer program developed in response to one of the most frequently requested services by patrons: assistance with employability. Job fairs are held at the center and are open to the community. There is a job board posted in the facility with available positions and the Library Partnership staff provides resume building, job search skills and interview technique assistance.



- F.I.R.S.T. (Families Involved in Reaching Success Together) is the parenting support and peer connection program the Library Partnership piloted in 2011. After successfully completing the 6 week course, parents were eligible to receive various incentives for their families such as a car seat for a pregnant mother-to-be and age-appropriate toys for children.

Who runs the resource center?

The bulk of the start-up and building renovation costs came from the Alachua County Library District and Casey Family Programs. The rent and utilities are split between PSF and the Alachua County Library District. Casey Family Programs has generously provided an annual lump sum to cover a portion of the staff salaries and operating costs. The rest of PSF's portion is made possible using prevention dollars through the state contract with PSF as a community-based care organization.

The Library Partnership is staffed by a full-time center manager and a full-time Family Support Facilitator who work in the Clinical and Community Services Department at PSF. The library side of the facility is completed operating by county library staff. Much of the day-to-day work, such as answering phones and greeting visitors, is completed by a team of volunteers.

Is it a success?

In short, yes. Of the more than 11,000 patrons who visited the Library Partnership in the 2010-2011 fiscal year, 97% reported they were "very pleased" with the services they received. And 98% of these patrons said they would "most likely" return again for additional services.

It is interesting to note that 47% of patrons indicated a family member or friend told them about the Library Partnership. In short, they heard it from their community. And we know that the community wants to be stronger. The most requested category of services (44%) were those geared toward self-sufficiency, such as job searching and money management.

Here are just a few stories from the people who've benefited from the center:

- A single parent whose house burned had been living in a motel for three weeks when she came to the Library Partnership. There she received assistance in obtaining funding to move into an affordable, safe apartment. With the support of several partnering agencies, she also received food, clothing and the household and personal hygiene items she needed.
- A young woman, enrolled in college, was providing non-relative placement for a child who otherwise would have entered foster care with little chance at reunification. This young lady could provide basic needs, but lacked resources to provide the child with toys, sufficient clothing and other necessary household items. The Library Partnership provided this for her, strengthening the placement for this two-year-old child and preventing removal.
- A woman came to the Library Partnership seeking help with her resume. She said, "I can't get a job, I have a learning disability. Nobody wants me. Everybody takes advantage of me because I can't fully understand what others want me to do." She participated in a career reinvention program of eight sessions that help patrons identify their dreams, skills, strengths and how to get where they want to be. After her second session, she said, "I believe in me. I believe I can do thing regardless of what doctors have said of my learning disability."

The facility has also earned national attention. In 2010, the Library Partnership was recognized as a *Bright Idea* program by Harvard University's School of Government. The Library Partnership was also instrumental in Alachua County being chosen as one of the *100 Best Communities for Young People* by America's Promise Alliance. This was an honor, as the Alliance is the nation's largest partnership organization dedicated to children.

