



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 13, 2015

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Local Foster Care Agency Meets Goal for New Homes Four Months Early

GAINESVILLE, FLA –Partnership for Strong Families (PSF), the agency responsible for foster care and related services in 13 North Central Florida Counties, met their state goal of licensing 30 new homes this week, more than four months ahead of schedule.

Every year, the Department of Children and Families sets a state goal for how many homes each community-based care lead agency should license and tracks their progress throughout the year. PSF's state goal for the year was 30 new homes, but the agency plans to add many more to that number by the end of the fiscal year in hopes of strengthening the local safety net for children who must be removed as a result of abuse or neglect.

PSF is seeking an additional 20 families by the end of June and has a foster parent training class beginning February 17 to certify prospective families. While individuals or couples are completing the course, staff will complete a home study and background screens so that they can receive their license shortly after completing the 9 week course. This marks a significant shift the agency has made over the past year as the standard licensing traditionally took six to nine months.

“Our staff have worked hard to refine the licensing procedures that have been used for many years so that families complete the process more quickly, allowing them to be available for our community’s most vulnerable children at a faster rate,” said Stephen Pennypacker, CEO of Partnership for Strong Families. “We looked beyond the goal DCF set and determined that we need more caring Partner Families in our community, so we are pressing forward to license a record number of homes this year.”

PSF calls their licensed foster homes Partner Families because of their belief that these parents are an integral link between the birth family and the formal child welfare system. Several years ago, PSF began requiring these caregivers to do much more than the historical idea of foster parenting by setting the standard that Partner Families interact with the birth family and involve them in the child’s daily life whenever possible. Examples of this include supervising visitations, inviting the birth family to the child’s medical and school appointments or birthday parties and even serving as the parent’s mentor while they are working to achieve reunification.

The most pressing need is for Partner Families who are licensed for teenagers and sibling groups. Individuals and families interested in learning more can visit www.partnerfamily.org or call 352-244-1500.

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About Partnership for Strong Families:

Partnership for Strong Families is the lead community-based care agency for Florida Judicial Circuits Three and Eight, including Alachua County. PSF is contracted by the Florida Department of Children and Families to

deliver comprehensive child welfare services to children who are victims of abuse and neglect. Partnership for Strong Families also works with at-risk families to prevent child abuse and to decrease the risk of children entering the foster care system. PSF serves more than 5,000 children in 13 counties annually.