



PARTNERSHIP FOR
STRONG
FAMILIES

PARTNERSHIP CONNECTION

OCTOBER - DECEMBER
2017



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OFFICE LOCATION

PSF Headquarters
5950 NW 1st Place
Suite A
Gainesville, FL 32607
P: 352.244.1500
F: 352.244.1647
www.pfsf.org

MAKING WISHES COME TRUE THIS HOLIDAY SEASON

By Aldreka Everett, Community Relations Assistant

This fall, more than 1,400 children in our care are already eagerly completing their holiday wish lists for our annual Wish Upon a Star holiday toy drive. This grand event begins in September and lasts throughout December as we collect three holiday wishes from each child in our care. These wishes can range from clothing to shoes to electronics to toys and everything in between. Once we collect the children's wishes, we then ask our community members, faith partners and friends to support the children in our care by purchasing at least two of these wishes making each child a \$50 commitment.

As the days progress, we send out stars to our donors that list the child's name, age, gender and their three wishes. Each donor will then shop based on the list and drop their presents off to us, creating Santa's little workshop here in our community. Before we know it, more than 5,000 presents have passed through our hands and into the hands of the children in our care.

This year, we are currently in need of donors to support WUAS and the more than 1,400 local youth who benefit from this program. Many of these children will not be able to be at home with their families for the holidays and deserve some extra holiday cheer. If you would like to get involved, contact Aldreka at Aldreka.Everett@pfsf.org or 352-244-1629 for more information.

If you have already signed up or plan to, we sincerely thank you for your commitment. We could not make Wish Upon a Star happen without you!



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MESSAGE FROM THE CEO



Stephen Pennypacker
President/CEO

Esteemed Community Partners and Friends,

Hurricane Irma has left her mark on Florida and our communities are still working hard to recover from the impact. While North Central Florida braced for Irma in September, our staff initiated a diligent and comprehensive communication plan to ensure that every child in our care was accounted for before, during, and after the storm. To those staff who took time away from their families and loved ones during the storm to ensure the safety of our children and families, thank you for your incredible commitment.

On the receiving end of those communications, our Partner Families answered the call with extraordinary efforts to care for their children while dealing with power outages, diminished phone service and, for some, severe damage to their homes. Many families even offered to temporarily house more youth so that everyone had a safe place to go during the storm. These Partner Families, indeed all our caregivers, displayed strength, courage and resilience during this strong and lengthy storm.

Another big issue facing the state and the child welfare system in general is the impending expiration of the Title IV-E Waiver. The waiver has allowed us flexibility in how we use funds for both prevention and services. One of our main uses for the waiver is funding for our resource centers. Congress has indicated that the waiver will not likely be renewed after 2018. The Florida Coalition for Children (FCC) is working with the Department of Children and Families and the legislature to address the implications this will have for the child welfare system in Florida. As we await news on the Title IV-E Waiver, rest assured that our staff is doing everything in our power to develop plans that ensure the stability of our prevention efforts, especially our Resource Centers. It is our passion to continue to serve our local community.

The FCC and the Department of Children and Families are also working to develop a joint strategic plan that will lead us into the future. This plan is being referred to as the "Path Forward" and is especially important heading into this next legislative session starting in January.

As always, we will continue to work hard to develop innovative programs that help families during crises and strengthen families to prevent child abuse or neglect on the front-end. Thank you for your ongoing partnership and support.

Stephen Pennypacker
President/CEO

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK: COMMUNITY AND GOVERNMENT RELATIONS UPDATE



The crisp air, football on TV and pumpkin-flavored everything are signaling the start to the fall season. This season brings our agency a couple of my favorite projects - National Adoption Month in November and Wish Upon a Star, PSF's largest donation drive of the year.

This year's Wish Upon a Star holiday toy drive is already amping up as some of our committed donors even beat us to the punch! If you've been wanting to get involved in this annual holiday tradition, now is the time. Wish Upon a Star is a great way to teach our young children about giving back while providing gifts that make the holidays brighter for every child in our care. Check out the story on the front cover for more information about this annual tradition.

You'll also want to save the date for our third annual Superhero

5K, which will be held on November 11 at Westside Park in Gainesville. Each year, this event helps us raise funds to recruit forever families for the more than 40 local youth who are currently available for adoption. The biographies and photos of these children are all located on our website - www.partnerfamily.org. We hope you'll race with us on this day to help ensure that every local child has a loving family to call their own.

I would be remiss if I didn't acknowledge and thank our staff, Partner Families, caregivers and community for pulling together as North Central Florida felt the effects of Hurricane Irma in September. While this storm brought to our community extensive damage, fear and stress, our families and youth stood strong and resilient as we faced this unprecedented storm.

I'm looking forward to this busy, bustling season and wish you and your families Happy Holidays and a prosperous New Year.

PSF EXPANDS AND INNOVATES

By Patty Carroll, Director of Community Relations and Recruitment

Partnership for Strong Families is excited to announce that we are launching a new initiative to help fulfill our mission. To increase our opportunities for development that will ultimately enhance our services to the children and families in our care, we have created four new entities that will help us accomplish our goals.

Over the past few years, funding from the Legislature has not been able to meet the increasing need as the children entering out-of-home care continues to rise across the state. Our growth and security is dependent upon our capacity to look beyond our Department of Children and Families contractual obligations and identify those areas where our expertise can be put to use - all with the goal of putting resources back into our local system of care.

Our agency has always been one that thrives on innovation to continuously improve the work that we do. It is now time to build upon that motivation. As such, these new entities are meant to drive the passion of our staff into opportunities for expansion and collaboration. As you'll see below, while each new entity is unique, all serve the same common goal for our children and families.

In short, PSF has created a solution to diversifying our funding sources. By looking at the strengths of our organization, the Board of Directors and Executive Leadership team identified three areas of strength that will be developed into businesses to help increase the revenue for the PSF.

Our board for these entities, comprised of Ed Peddie, Michael Bowie, Donovan Arnold, Hap Caldwell and Jo Haley, have already begun meeting to steer the direction for these new agencies. The timetable they've created has challenged us to achieve full implementation by January 1, 2018. Be on the lookout for more information as we continue to develop these new initiatives.



DON'T FORGET TO SIGN UP FOR THE SUPERHERO 5K!



CALENDAR OF EVENTS

National Adoption Month

November 2017

Follow PSF on Facebook to stay up to date throughout the month of November regarding happenings in the community related to National Adoption Month.

PSF Superhero 5K

November 11, 2017

Join us at Westside Park as we race to ensure every child in our system knows the stability of permanency. To register or for more information, visit PSFSuperhero5K.org.

Finalization Day

November 29, 2017

We are teaming up with Patticakes to celebrate National Adoption Month Finalization Day in Alachua County. The celebration will be from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. at Bo Diddley Plaza.

Holiday Office Closures

November 23 - 24, December 25,

January 1

Please note that PSF offices will be closed the above dates for Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Years.

PARTNER SPOTLIGHT: AUTO PLAZA OF GAINESVILLE

By Aldreka Everett, Community Relations Assistant

The bedrock of Partnership for Strong Families' success is the overwhelming support we receive from our community members. Through every drive, event and call for support, there are many individuals, businesses, faith partners and organizations that step up for the children in our care. One business specifically, Auto Plaza of Gainesville, has become one of our most loyal and enthusiastic donors.

Located at 2222 North Main Street, Auto Plaza of Gainesville is a used car dealership that has been open since 2014. For the last three years, Auto Plaza has become known as a reputable dealership throughout the city of Gainesville. As they have continued to make a name for themselves through their hard work and dedication to excellent customer service, Auto Plaza desired to partner with an organization that makes a big impact within the Gainesville community. To them, what PSF does is of the utmost importance as they believe it is vital that our community puts family first and does all it can to care for our most vulnerable youth.

In April, during our Child Abuse Prevention (CAP) month campaign, Auto Plaza generously supplied funds for prevention efforts by donating a portion of their car sales to us. These funds are used to purchase safety items for individuals within our community who are in need of the additional support to ensure their child's safety. Auto Plaza stepped in to support us again this summer by agreeing to host a donation drop-off box for this year's Back to School drive, while also donating brand new school supplies and proceeds from their car sales during the month of July. Even more exciting is their commitment this holiday season! Auto Plaza has agreed to support our annual Wish Upon a Star holiday toy drive to ensure that every child in our care receives a merry Christmas. Their continued commitment and impact is far reaching. We are so grateful for their support and are thankful for their investment into the children and families in our care.

For more information about Auto Plaza of Gainesville, please contact them at 352-519-5897.



INNOVATION IN DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SERVICE APPROACH

By Samantha Tracy, Senior Community Relations Professional

PSF's effort to better serve families have recently resulted in a dynamic new position to assist our staff to more effectively address domestic violence cases. In September, PSF added a Perpetrator Intervention Consultant, a position unlike any other in child welfare nationwide. This role will provide consultation on cases with domestic violence involvement and assist with improving systems coordination related to perpetrators as parents.

Historically, child welfare has only focused on working with the survivor, leaving the domestic violence perpetrator's issues with coercive control and their role as a parent unaddressed. PSF collaborated with key agencies to examine how the system approaches these cases and look for ways to improve outcomes. With the generous support of Lutheran Services of Florida, who currently covers all expenses related to the new staff position, PSF was able to hire a Licensed Mental Health Counselor to fill the role.

Leveraging an existing partnership between the Florida Department of Children and Families and the Safe & Together Institute, an internationally recognized leader in domestic violence, PSF will receive comprehensive support from the Safe & Together Institute. This includes personalized trainings and consultations, data analysis and reviews to track the impact of this position.

The Perpetrator Intervention Consultant will also analyze the intersection of substance abuse and mental health related to domestic violence perpetrators. Our ultimate goal in this approach is to ensure that, in addition to adult and child survivors being at the forefront of our work, we can also effectively engage perpetrators to prevent future occurrences of coercive control in family dynamics.

NATIONAL ADOPTION MONTH

By Hannah Green, Adoptions Recruitment Specialist

National Adoption Month is my favorite campaign as it highlights our wonderful children and adoptive families. Last year's National Adoption Month felt like a whirlwind as it was only my second month working at PSF. It was a fantastic way to begin my journey as the Adoption Recruitment Specialist. Despite the stress and major learning curves, the community's involvement overwhelmed me. Our team spoke at six schools and five churches last November, and we plan to do the same this year. We also will be participating in a few new and returning events.

PSF will once again host our 3rd annual Superhero 5K Run/Walk on Saturday, November 11 at Westside Park in Gainesville. The race will start at 8:30 a.m. Prizes will be awarded to the top 3 male and female runners in each age group based on race results. Additional prizes will also be awarded to those wearing the most authentic superhero costume as well as the best superhero family. We are also encouraging a friendly competition among businesses and groups this year by presenting an award (and bragging rights) to the largest team registered for the race. Funds raised from this event will go toward finding forever families for children awaiting their permanent homes. For more details and to register, visit PSFSuperhero5K.org.

On November 29, we are excited to team up with Patticakes and celebrate National Adoption Month Finalization Day in Alachua County. I was a teary mess last year, but it was one of my fondest memories. The event will take place from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. at Bo Diddley Plaza following our finalizations at the courthouse. There will be ice cream, family photos and fun activities. I hope to see the local community support the families who will be finalizing their adoption that day.

Heart Gallery photos are another major part of National Adoption Month. It is how we highlight our children and their true selves. If you want to see our current children available for adoption, you can visit our Heart Gallery at www.PartnerFamily.org. We will also be continuing our "30 Days of Amazing Local Kids" social media campaign throughout November. If you do not follow us on Facebook, Twitter or Instagram, now is the time to do so! Be sure to help us spread the word by "liking" and sharing our posts.

Finally, I want to share a story that happened last year during National Adoption Month. While taking Heart Gallery photos of a sibling group, I was humbled to hear their story. They shared their memories of growing up without a supportive family, their struggles and successes in school and about their strong desire to be adopted together. That afternoon, I realized that children desire to be heard; they crave investment and unconditional love. It is with immense joy that I share that these siblings have been adopted and are doing exceedingly well. It is my passion to spread awareness and advocate for children in care. Currently, there are 48 children available for adoption and more than 95% are teens. It is such an honor to spend time with our teens. I get chills thinking about their potential and their purpose in life. They are our future world changers.

I want to say a huge thank you to all the families who have provided forever, loving homes for our children. It is exciting to think about all the prospective adoptive families that will do the same this next year. If you are interested in learning more about adoptions, you can give me a call at 352-244-1608.



ADVOCACY UPDATE

By Patty Carroll, Director of Community Relations and Recruitment

The start of the next legislative session is right around the corner, beginning early this year in January as opposed to March. Our team has been working with our friends at the Florida Coalition for Children to build our priorities so that we may stand as one united front for Florida's child welfare system.

The upcoming expiration of the Title IV-E Waiver is of particular concern to us, especially in our local community. This Waiver has allowed us to use funds previously only available to children after they enter the child welfare system to increase our community prevention efforts. This shift of funds currently supports, among other important programs, our four Resource Centers that are serving Alachua, Dixie, Gilchrist and Levy Counties. These centers are providing critical resources and services to families in need on the front-end and have proven effective in reducing the rates of verified child maltreatment in the communities they serve. It is imperative that we inform our legislators of the vital role these centers play in our local community.

Stay tuned for updates throughout this legislative session. Your continued advocacy will be critical as we work to strengthen this community of care.

If you would like to become involved in advocating on behalf of our community's children, please contact the Community and Government Relations Department at 352-244-1561 to learn more.

FIVE PROTECTIVE FACTORS SERIES: FAMILY FUNCTIONING AND RESILIENCY

By Stacy Merritt, Director of Resource Centers



As the final segment of our series related to the Protective Factors Framework, this quarter's focus is on the significance of promoting Family Functioning & Resiliency as a means

of strengthening local families and communities.

Families who are resilient have developed the appropriate skills and strategies needed to adapt and move forward during times of crisis. In the field of social services, we often work with individuals who have been exposed to generational situations, such as poverty, chronic neglect and trauma. For some of these families, existing coping mechanisms may not be effective. As such, various crisis situations or sudden changes in the family's situation can negatively impact the overall functioning of the family.

Through various programs and special events held at the Resource Centers, our goal is to assist parents, caregivers and children to build a skill set that promotes resiliency so they can better manage, overcome and learn from the many challenges that life brings.



The Resource Centers often use fun and family-friendly events to educate the community about local resources while also removing some of the stigma related to seeking support for problems or issues faced by an individual or family. Some great examples of this include the Library Partnership's annual Health Fair and SWAG Family Resource Center's (SWAG FRC) Mind Your Health Fair, which was a kick-off event for a county-funded program related to promoting youth mental health education and resources in the SWAG communities. Some similar events at our other locations include Tri-County Community Resource Center's (TCCRC) Birthday Celebration

and Cone Park Library Resource Center's (CPLRC) Fall Festival. While each of these events clearly have a different focus, they all include tabling by community organizations who provide a range of information related to topics including: health and medical care, nutrition, behavioral health and general supports, such as parenting education, child care and access to legal services.

Some popular on-site programming also includes financial literacy and job readiness programs provided at each location in partnership with local experts, along with informal coaching related to budgeting, resume preparation and interview skills provided by Resource Center staff. Library Partnership also saw a great deal of success with their Re-Entry Partnership Initiative, a program held in partnership with agencies such as the Alachua County Library District and Career Source, with a focus on assisting individuals with challenging backgrounds seeking gainful employment.

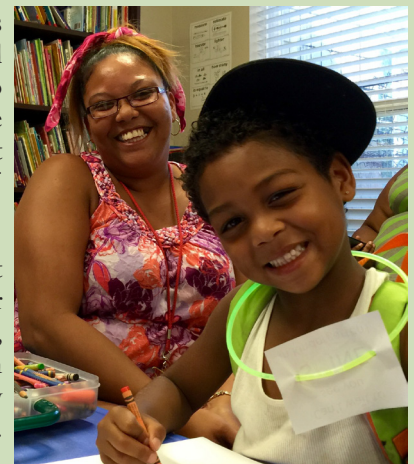


TCCRC's legal workshops, with topics including grandparents as caregivers and tenant law, have also been very successful. Additionally, SWAG FRC and LP have also incorporated the Why Try Program into existing after-school and summer programming to increase the resiliency of the children and youth served through these activities.

Existing partnerships with local mental and behavioral health organizations, medical providers, parenting educators and domestic violence experts have also allowed on-site access to supports for caregivers and families through outreach efforts and training sessions (e.g., specialized parenting classes, Mental Health First Aid). These same partnerships allow opportunities for on-site health screenings and counseling and group sessions for children and adults.

The Resource Centers continue to build these partnerships to help ensure a diverse resource base to meet the specific needs of the local community.

To see more of what is happening at our Resource Centers, please check out each location's monthly calendar at www.pfsf.org/resource-centers.



CHILDREN'S PARTNERSHIP COUNCIL UPDATE

By Samantha Tracy, Senior Community Relations Professional

PSF's Children's Partnership Councils (CPCs) have kicked off the new fiscal year with enthusiasm, each seeing an influx of new members.

In August, the Columbia County Council hosted its annual Back to School Bash in Fort White. The Columbia County School District provided 350 backpacks for students in this historically underserved area and other local agencies offered information to parents on services available to them and their families. Children also received free haircuts, vaccinations and school supplies.

The Madison, Taylor Shared Services Council has allocated the bulk of its budget toward individual assistance, a program that allows families to receive one-time help during times of sudden need. They are also actively seeking ways to overcome the transportation barrier that many clients face in these rural areas when trying to access health services.

The Council in the Suwannee, Lafayette, Hamilton region has identified its greatest need early on: clothing for students identified as homeless. These counties currently have elevated levels of migrant and homeless families in need of tangible supports. The homeless liaisons within the school districts are active participants in this Council and offer a great deal of insight into the needs of local families.

The Baker, Bradford, Union Council has already helped two families through their individual assistance program. They have also employed a rotating meeting schedule to better engage service providers in all three counties. While Hurricane Irma delayed the latest meeting, this group is excited to continue improving the lives of local parents and children. They also welcomed a new co-chair over the summer who brings a wealth of knowledge and vitality to the Council, Jim Freeman of the Baker Prevention Coalition.

To begin their year, the Dixie, Gilchrist, Levy Council purchased more than 60 GED segment vouchers to allow caregivers, and in some cases minors, achieve greater financial stability through improved employment capabilities. They also allocated funds for additional car seat vouchers through the Early Learning Coalition of the Nature Coast, which provides training and installation of reduced-cost car seats for low-income caregivers. This allocation was supplemented by a donation from a Council member. One mother said the car seat was the first brand new item her baby ever received. She was thrilled to have this vital safety tool.

To learn more about participating in your community's Children's Partnership Council, please email Samantha.Tracy@pfsf.org.



PSF PRESENTS AT 20TH DCF SUMMIT

By Samantha Tracy, Senior Community Relations Professional

DCF's annual Child Protection Summit celebrated its 20th anniversary at the JW Marriot in Orlando from August 29 to 31. The Summit is the largest child welfare event in Florida. Case managers, community-based care staff, attorneys, advocates, caregivers, law enforcement, educators and service providers all come together to learn from one another and celebrate the best practices being established by Florida's innovative system of care.

PSF once again had the opportunity for staff to present on topics of their expertise. This year, the focus was on the success of PSF's Resource Center Model, also noted in Casey Family Program's annual report. Pebbles Edelman, Sr. Vice President of Clinical and Community Services, Patty Carroll, Director of Community Relations and Recruitment, and Beverly Goodman, Tri-County Community Resource Center Manager, delivered a presentation titled "Building Communities of Hope: A Model for Child Abuse Prevention at the Community Level." PSF's model is drawing attention statewide and nationally for its successes in child abuse prevention and overall family strengthening.

Congratulations to our staff members who earned the honor of presenting to other leaders in child welfare! PSF is fortunate to have a team that is so committed to serving the children in our care and the communities around them. It is thanks to their efforts that we can continue to build upon the services and supports we provide to North Central Florida.



Pictured above are the conference presenters Pebbles Edelman, Beverly Goodman and Patty Carroll.



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PARTNER PAL INITIATIVE

By Aldreka Everett, Community Relations Assistant



This October, PSF is launching a new program to better serve our Partner Families: our Partner Pal Initiative. The Partner Pal Initiative will serve as a lifeline to our Partner Families who are in need of an extra hand. There are many individuals who have a passion for foster care but are currently unable to become foster parents themselves. By becoming a Partner Pal, you get the opportunity to invest in foster youth by supporting their caregivers and providing additional support that will directly benefit the child's current state and future.

Based on a survey given to our current Partner Families, there are many ways a Partner Pal can help, including: donating tangible items like diapers, clothing and furniture, babysitting, cooking a hot meal, helping to run errands and dropping children off at after school activities. PSF is also welcoming committed volunteers to help at our special events

and donate toward PSF's annual drives, such as the Superhero 5k Run/Walk, Wish Upon a Star and Back to School Drive, all of which directly benefit the children in our care.

Partner Pals will be a group of stakeholders who are ready to get involved and spread awareness about PSF and our local children in foster care. Individuals, businesses and faith-based organizations are encouraged to sign up to make a commitment to help foster youth by helping the families who care for them. Individuals need not have any background in fostering to participate, simply a commitment and passion to care for our community's vulnerable youth.

Individuals who are interested in becoming a Partner Pal or who would like more information can sign up by emailing the Partner Pal Ambassadors at partnerpal@pfsf.org.

