



PARTNERSHIP CONNECTION

APRIL - JUNE 2017



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CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION MONTH

By Aldreka Everett, Community Relations Assistant

National Child Abuse Prevention Month is celebrated annually during April to recognize the need to protect local children from harm and to strengthen families by giving them the tools and resources they need to keep children safe.

To create public awareness throughout

the community, we placed blue pinwheel gardens in front of our headquarters office and at all of our Resource Centers. This year, two of PSF's newest partnering organizations, Auto-Plaza of Gainesville and My HealthCare Federal Credit Union, also placed pinwheels in front of their businesses. As an added incentive, Auto-Plaza of Gainesville is donating a portion of every car sold during April to our local prevention efforts at our three Gainesville Resource Centers.



All of our Resource Centers are also sharing prevention items throughout the month with local patrons. Items include door and cabinet locks, baby sleep sacks, swim safety tools and brochures about ways to keep children safe from common threats. Samantha Tracy, our Senior Community Relations Professional, also participated in several regional events where she shared similar prevention items and information. You can read more about her efforts in the Children's Partnership Council Update in this newsletter.

Community involvement and prevention are the best practices for creating a healthy family environment, and PSF looks forward to continuously working toward providing helpful tools to children and families throughout Child Abuse Prevention Month.

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MESSAGE FROM THE CEO



Stephen Pennypacker
President/CEO

Esteemed Community Partners and Friends,

Over the past few months, our agency has celebrated many important and exciting events. In February, we recognized our Partner Families during the first-ever Foster Family Appreciation Week. Leading our organization, it is very clear to me that the work we all do would mean nothing without these amazing individuals and families who care for and love our foster youth as their own. They are an integral part of our team and deserve our constant recognition and support. Joined by some of our board directors, I was also able to thank our staff and case management staff at our Employee Recognition Event in February. You can read more about the event on the back of this newsletter.

More recently, several children in our care attended a special “Rock the River” weekend at Camp Anderson. This weekend, designed especially for youth in our system, provided an environment where our youth were able to explore their talents for music, enjoy the beautiful Suwannee River and meet new friends from across the state. We’re grateful to Camp Anderson for providing these enriching opportunities for our youth.

On the prevention front, Casey Family Programs recently sent a team of professionals from RedJet to film the story of our Resource Centers from inception through the opening of our latest Resource Center in Chiefland. Our team spent a week with RedJet to highlight our partnerships, successes and lessons learned along the way. We are all looking forward to seeing the end result of this film.

Moving forward, we are getting ready to open the doors of our new Modular Home, which we have affectionately named the “Partner House.” I’m excited for this new ability to provide a welcoming environment to our families during visitations, a home for staff from our regional offices who often travel to Gainesville for meetings and an area where youth can engage in telemedicine with providers from across our 13 counties. After much anticipation, the doors to this new facility will officially open on April 24.

I thank you all for your continued advocacy and support of the work that we do. We could not effectively serve North Central Florida’s abused and neglected youth without your support.

Stephen Pennypacker

President/CEO

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



As I write this update, my mind is filled with thoughts of our family that is soon to grow. My husband and I are getting ready to welcome our first child, and I find myself seeing the work we do in completely new and more personal ways. April’s celebration of National Adoption Month, in particular, strikes a new chord for me. The pinwheel gardens popping up in our communities remind us of the happy, healthy childhood every kid deserves. As a community, we must work together to support those children who haven’t had such a simple guarantee.

April gives way to National Foster Care Month in May, and we are all made aware of the amazing local families who are opening their hearts and homes to foster youth for a day, a week, a month or more. Fully supporting reunification with the child’s birth parents, they then let them go when the time is right. This selfless

love is nothing short of amazing, and we need more of it in all of the counties we serve.

Many of us do not yet feel ready to welcome a child into our home. To those of us, I say with encouragement that there is still a way for you to get involved! Sponsor a child’s school supplies as they go back to school to ease the burden on our Partner Families. Offer to babysit for a local Partner Family who could use a night out. Help us advocate for youth in our care and share our need for local Partner and Adoptive Families in your community.

Yes, all of the work we do is becoming more personal to me by the day. As I think of the life I want to create for our son, I think too of the life that should be guaranteed for every child in our care. If you think you might be ready to help us make a difference, please visit PartnerFamily.org and provide your contact information. We’d love to speak with you soon!

CELEBRATE NATIONAL FOSTER CARE MONTH WITH US

By Michelle Giordano, Recruitment Specialist

May is annually recognized as National Foster Care Month. During this month, PSF recognizes the more than 110 Partner Families who open their hearts and homes to the children in our care. In addition, it is also a time to recognize the more than 850 children and teens in out-of-home care who are thriving in homes provided by Partner Families and getting closer to being reunified with their birth parents or being matched with their forever families.

As the number of children in out-of-home care continues to rise across the state, PSF relies on our amazing Partner Families to provide safe, loving and nurturing homes to the children in our care. These children have been removed from their home at no fault of their own. While being welcomed into a new home can be a scary journey, our Partner Families give hope and security to children when it's needed the most. They open their homes regardless of whether the child lives with them for a week, a month or for more than a year.

Doing the "job" of a Partner Family is hard, and PSF honors these families each May. This year, PSF is hosting "A Night on the Red Carpet" at the Best Western Gateway Grande in Gainesville as a special treat for our families. Partner Families will enjoy a night in the spotlight with dinner, entertainment and the opportunity to network with other families in attendance. At the end of the banquet, each family will go home with a themed appreciation basket donated by community members and PSF staff. The banquet will be held on May 17 from 6 - 8 p.m.

PSF believes our community can come together to help ensure every child has the support of a Partner Family. The first step is making our community aware of our needs. Would you consider having a member of our recruitment staff share with your church, book club, business or civic group about the children in our care and the urgent need for additional Partner Families? Please contact Michelle Giordano at Michelle.Giordano@pfsf.org. We recognize that not everyone is able to be a Partner Family, but everyone is able to be a voice for the vulnerable children in our community.

As always, PSF will be utilizing our social media platforms to dispel some of the myths associated with foster parenting, thank our current Partner Families for the work they do and feature some of the children currently hoping to be adopted into a loving forever family every #FosterCareFriday. Follow us on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram to stay updated!



EMPOWERING FOSTER KIDS THROUGH ART

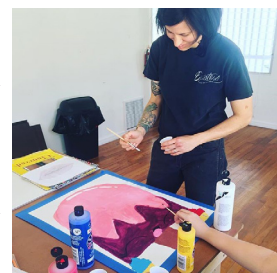
By Hannah Green, Adoption Recruitment Specialist



"The focus of these classes is to help empower these kids through community support and the creative arts as they are given the opportunity to connect with each other and other professional local artists." Hilary White

Recently, I had the incredible opportunity to visit the Made New Arts Class at the Ignite Life Center. Hilary White is the heartbeat for this initiative. She is passionate about working with our children and giving them a creative outlet. Hilary came to PSF with a vision, and it was not an easy task but she persevered. Hilary is not just an art instructor, she is a mentor. She is pushing our kids to go outside of their comfort zones and find their voices through art. I was overcome with emotion when I walked into the classroom because every single child has a story, and they were simply free to express themselves in an art classroom that is a safe place for them.

Hilary has planned a busy schedule and itinerary for our kids. The classes are focusing on portraits, water color techniques, book making/design, stencils, clay, collages and much more. A provisional project that Hilary is orchestrating is the design of a collaborative mural on one of Ignite Life Center's walls. Local artist Evan Poirer will be part of this project as well. Evan Poirer has worked on large-scale paintings and murals for Shands Children's Hospital. Two other local artists will also be leading demos. Jessi Hamilton will be the guest instructor for the paper making workshop, and Josh Hobson, a local photographer, will be doing a quick presentation and lead a workshop on the art of photography.



On June 9, there will be an event at Gallery Protocol that will showcase our youth's art work. It is open to the public and is a great way to meet some of our youth especially those awaiting adoption.

If you want to see more of the children's artwork and stay up to date, you can visit Hilary's website at madenewartsinitiative.com.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Child Abuse Prevention Month

April 2017

PSF is celebrating Child Abuse Prevention Month with a large social media campaign, by giving out informational and safety materials at our Resource Centers and by participating in events throughout the community.

National Foster Care Month

May 2017

May is annually celebrated as National Foster Care Month. Make sure to celebrate by thanking a Partner Family for the work they do!

Back to School Drive

June - August 2017

PSF's Back to School Drive ensures every child in our care has the tools they need for academic success. Email Aldreka.Everett@pfsf.org for more information.

GAL VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

By Paul Crawford, Guardian ad Litem Northwest Regional Director



Recently, the Guardian ad Litem Program (GALP) received an extensive review by the North Highland Consulting Group. The project was conducted to provide recommendations on how the Guardian ad Litem Program can improve its volunteer recruitment and retention. It was a very thorough process including surveys, interviews with volunteers and staff and an

analysis of data from the program. As a result of the findings and recommendations, some changes are under way.

One of the first steps we have taken is a renewed recruitment and training initiative with the aim of focusing on diversity and an increased understanding of poverty's impact on the children and families we work with each day. In order to accommodate these resource needs, the organizational structure has been realigned. The program has transitioned from four regions down to three.

On a different topic, the GALP has also implemented a statewide initiative to review the dependency cases that have been open for more than 24 months. The focus is to identify any obstacles and search for creative solutions that can bring permanency for these children.

With the attention on Volunteer Appreciation and Child Abuse Prevention Month, Guardian ad Litem is a great example of how we can bring the two together to help better meet the needs of the abused and neglected children in our communities. These are some exciting and active times! I'm honored to continue to work with the greatest child welfare professionals and volunteers. I hear amazing things every day about how children's lives are improved for the better and how they are thriving in safe and loving homes as a result of the work all of you do.

As always, I express my greatest appreciation and admiration for each of you. Feel free to reach out to me at any time if I can provide any support.

THE AMAZING GIVE RECAP

By Samantha Tracy, Senior Community Relations Professional

On March 29-30, PSF participated for the second time in the Amazing Give, an annual online giving day sponsored by the Community Foundation of North Central Florida. This 24-hour long opportunity allowed us to share our mission and the critical work we do with our community. Utilizing social media, our staff, board directors and other stakeholders helped us share our message and raise money to support the children in our care.

Across the region, 75 non-profits participated in the 2017 Amazing Give. This event allowed 3,551 donors to give more than \$854,000 to various charitable causes through an online donation platform.

This year, our giving focus was directed toward providing personal items, such as clothing and luggage for children entering care, sustainable living opportunities for youth exiting care into independent living, recruitment of new Partner and Adoptive families and participation in extra-curricular activities for our foster youth. PSF had a total of 40 donors who gave \$2,045 to support these critical needs. We are truly grateful to each donor for the impact they made on local children. Our donors stepped up to be the hope our children need. Thank you!



ADVOCACY UPDATE

By Patty Carroll, Community and Government Relations Manager

This Legislative session, my first in the role of Community and Government Relations Manager, is shaping up to be a very exciting one. While the House and Senate continue to struggle to come to an agreement on their budgets, PSF has seen great support of our allocation request to support self-sufficiency programs at our Resource Centers. The allocation made it into the first draft of the House's budget, something that all of our Representatives were very impressed with. While this doesn't mean the allocation will be approved, it does show the support of and belief in our Resource Center Model on the state level.

To begin this session, the Florida Coalition for Children came in with an appropriations request of \$49 million to include support for out-of-home care, case management, prevention programs and a \$10 million risk pool. Although it does not look like we will receive this full amount, the House was supportive of our ask, allocating \$20 million in recurring funds for community-based care. We continue to advocate for this great need as the number of children entering out-of-home care throughout Florida continues to rise.

We also received the incredible news that SB 60, the Keys to Independence Act, passed the House and is currently on its way to the Governor for approval. This bill assists youth with getting a learner's permit or driver's license, a crucial step in their journey toward independence. The program has so far served more than 1,200 youth, and this legislation would serve to make the program permanent and will expand the program to youth whose placements change while enrolled in the program.

Finally, as you can see to the right, our staff, board members and Partner and Adoptive Families once again had a very successful day at the 2017 Children's Day event in Tallahassee. We are grateful to all of our legislators who were able to take the time to hear from our agency's representatives!

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.

CHILDREN'S DAY RECAP

By Aldreka Everett, Community Relations Assistant

On March 28, PSF staff joined several of our case management partners, Partner and Adoptive families and board members to travel to Tallahassee to attend this year's Children's Day at the Capitol. With much passion and commitment to the children in our care, the team of 25 set out to advocate on behalf of the children and families we serve.

This year, the state capitol was busy with roughly 4,000 children, parents and advocates. There were many informative sessions for all in attendance including the interactive "Storybook Village" guided tour, a "Teens Only" town hall meeting and a "Young Lives Matter" workshop to name a few. All of these events were aimed at improving the lives and futures of children across Florida.

PSF was fortunate again this year to serve as a Capitol Partner for Children's Day as we parked our van on the courtyard. We also provided interested families with information regarding our mission and values and how they can help foster youth in their own communities while we played games with children at our booth. We also met with several of our legislators to thank them for all of their hard work and voice specific needs that directly impact our community.

We are grateful for the opportunity to be a part of this important day for the state of Florida. It is vital to us and the children and families we serve to be able speak about our needs and share our goals as an organization. Thank you to everyone who attended Children's Day. We look forward to your support again next year!



FIVE PROTECTIVE FACTORS SERIES: SOCIAL SUPPORTS

By Stacy Merritt, Director of Resource Centers



2017 is already promising to be an outstanding year for the Resource Centers, with opportunities for national recognition and a focused effort on engaging local faith-based partners.

As you may be aware, in January 2017 Casey Family Programs (CFP) released a chronicle highlighting PSF's Resource Center Model from the inception of our first Resource Center, the Library Partnership, in 2009 to the opening of our newest location, the Tri-County Community Resource Center, in 2015. CFP has now begun production of a video and formal report detailing the progress of PSF's three Gainesville Resource Centers and their impact on local communities. The ultimate goal of this project is to promote replication of PSF's model on a state and national level. PSF was one of only two locations selected for this project nationwide.

Senior Vice President of Clinical and Community Services, Pebbles Edelman, and Director of Resource Centers, Stacy Merritt, were able to present at the Child Welfare League of America's National Conference on March 30 in Washington D.C. The presentation focused on PSF's Resource Center Model and involvement as one of CFP's Communities of Hope sites. Representatives from Brooklyn, New York's Center for Family Life were co-presenters for the workshop titled: Communities of Hope.

On April 19, national speaker, Reverend Dr. Darrell Armstrong came to Gainesville to share about his journey from foster care to pastoral care. He also shared practical tools about how faith-based partners in our community can work to strengthen families through our Resource Center Model. A number of local faith-based leaders participated in this learning collaborative. The Resource Center team hopes this is an impactful first step in their efforts to further engage and recognize our faith-based partners.

In continuation of our series related to the Protective Factors framework, we would like to share more about activities related to Social Supports and how they are used to improve outcomes for families. While these social activities and events are popular among patrons, it is often hard for others (funders, leadership, partner agencies, etc.) to understand how an activity such as an outdoor festival or a community dinner is tied to reducing



the risk of child abuse and neglect. However, these activities allow opportunities for local community members to meet one another in low-stress situations with

the goal of creating a natural support system.

In turn, this opens up the possibility of sharing a meal once a week, asking someone for a ride or finding an appropriate babysitter so they can go to a job interview. It also allows opportunities to share about similar struggles and accomplishments – all activities that promote family stability and success.



Some recent examples of activities designed to build social connections include a February 14 "Love Celebration" at the Cone Park Library Resource Center. This event allowed parents and children to participate with various arts and crafts and enjoy a special treat while interacting with others from the community.



The Tri-County Community Resource Center (TCCRC) also hosted two, 6 week sessions of UF IFAS's Cooking Matters, which not only allowed participants to make affordable and healthy meals, but also provided opportunities for meeting and talking with other local community members. TCCRC is also planning their second year birthday celebration which is a community-wide event that will be held on April 22.

Zumba and Yoga are health-minded activities offered at the Library Partnership (LP) that have the added advantage of providing socialization opportunities for parents.

Monthly community dinners are an on-going and well-attended activity at the SWAG Family Resource Center.

The LP's Community Advisory Council is an example of a more formalized forum that allows community members, who all volunteer to participate, to come together and have a voice related to their community's needs.



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. We hope you will also read next quarter's newsletter article, which will focus on the significance of promoting Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development and Nurturing and Attachment as a means of strengthening local families!

CHILDREN'S PARTNERSHIP COUNCIL UPDATE

By Samantha Tracy, Senior Community Relations Professional



PSF's Children's Partnership Councils (CPCs) have been busy celebrating Child Abuse Prevention Month in their respective communities. Each allotted funds to purchase safety items including swaddling sleep sacks, water wings, outlet and door knob covers, car and water thermometers, cabinet locks, first aid kits and door alarms to distribute at local community events to families in need. These events not only allowed us an opportunity to provide these safety items, but to also have critical conversations with families about how to keep their children safe from some common household dangers. On behalf of the CPCs, PSF attended the Bradford County Fair, Children's Day in Lake City sponsored by the Early Learning Coalition of Florida's Gateway, Early Learning Matters' Kids Day

in Live Oak, the Early Childhood Children's Fun Festival in Perry sponsored by Healthy Start Jefferson, Madison and Taylor and the Tri-County Community Resource Center's Second Annual Birthday Bash.

The Baker, Bradford, Union CPC and the Columbia CPC have both allocated funds to purchase Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten (VPK) literacy backpacks through the Early Learning Coalition (ELC) of Florida's Gateway. Both of these CPCs have also provided utility and rent assistance to multiple families who, due to emergency circumstances, were at-risk of having their power cut off or being evicted.

The Suwannee, Lafayette, Hamilton CPC has provided clothing for children and youth identified as homeless and utility assistance through the United Way of the Suwannee Valley for families in need. They along with the Madison Taylor CPC, purchased pack and plays for families lacking safe sleep environments for their infants. The Madison Taylor CPC also allocated funds for car seat vouchers through the Madison County Healthy Start program so that families needing to purchase car seats can do so at a reduced cost.

The Dixie, Gilchrist, Levy CPC purchased additional GED vouchers for minors and adults with children seeking to advance their career goals, diapers to keep on hand at the TCCRC for caregivers and car seat vouchers for families with a need for these items. The vouchers will allow families with limited resources to purchase a car seat from the ELC of the Nature Coast at a reduced cost and have it installed by a licensed car seat technician.

Thanks to the dedicated Council members in each community, children and families across North Central Florida have received crucial assistance during their times of need. We are thankful for their continued collaboration, creative thinking and passion for serving our shared communities.

FOSTER AND ADOPTIVE RECRUITMENT

By Hannah Green, Adoption Recruitment Specialist

We kicked off this year with speaking engagements at Chiles Elementary and Jonesville Baptist Church. In February, we were part of recruitment efforts at Stomp the Swamp and spoke at Temple Shir Shalom. In March, PSF started connecting with several day cares in Alachua County and sent out a total of 400 flyers about adopting and fostering to these targeted audiences. At the Sidney Lanier Spring Festival, we focused on child-specific recruitment for children currently on our Heart Gallery. Children's Medical Services is also showcasing Anthony, one of our recruit kids, in their lobby. We are also partnering with Congregation B'nai Israel and their day school to join in our upcoming events.

One of the goals for the recruitment team this year was to partner more with the University of Florida. Recently, the foster and adoption recruitment specialists were able to connect with the Family, Youth and Community Sciences (FYCS) department at UF. Our first public speaking engagement was to an introductory class, and the presenters walked the students through the child welfare system. Jason Katz, a Family Care Supervisor with Devereux, was one of the presenters and talked about case management. In addition, the Adoption Recruitment Specialist spoke to the FYCS club about the great need for homes for our youth and ways they can advocate for the children in our care. We are looking forward to more connections at UF in the future.

On April 27, PSF will be hosting our very first Info Night at Jonesville Baptist Church (JBC). We are incredibly grateful for JBC's generosity in opening up their space for us. Throughout the evening, we will have staff presenting, answering questions and highlighting local successes. We also hope to provide similar opportunities in the future throughout our 13 counties. Our goal with the Info Night is to shed light on our current need and to plant the seed for any families who are considering to foster or adopt. There is no pressure to commit, but families will gain more knowledge on how the system works and the many other ways families can get involved.

PSF is extremely appreciative for those who have helped us spread our message. For more information please contact Hannah Green at Hannah.Green@pfsf.org.





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Learn more
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STAFF RECOGNITION EVENT

By Samantha Tracy, Senior Community Relations Professional

In collaboration with our board of directors, the PSF Employee Representation Committee hosted its first Staff Recognition Event on February 17 at First Baptist Church of High Springs. This event, featuring a breakfast catered by Chef Brothers, celebrated the achievements and team spirit of exceptional PSF and Case Management staff.

Recognition came in the form of Outstanding Employee Awards for staff offering exemplary service to clients and the organization and Most Valuable Partner (MVP) Awards for employees exhibiting great cooperation and assistance to staff in other departments. Each department and case management agency played a role in electing award recipients.

Outstanding Employee Awards went to Family Care Counselors Stacy Barb, Marilyn Tillis-Padgett, Trey Yeoman and John Jones, Staff Development Specialist Kim Sherrod, Placement Specialist Daphne Gainey, Post Adoption Liaison Tricia Braitsch, Quality Assurance Monitor Jenna Edwards, Eligibility Specialist Denisha Valentine, SWAG Family Resource Center Manager Amanda Elliott and Senior Database Architect Vlad Petrescu.



Most Valuable Partner (MVP) Awards were given to Human Resource Specialist Chastidy Starling, Pathways Program Director Tara Thompson, Family Service Facilitator Maggie Wise, Placement Specialist Amy Mills, Adoption Program Director Kim Johnson and Family Care Counselor Cherie Brown. Director of Utilization Management Justen Ostreicher and Placement Specialist Amy Mills both received two MVP awards.

Thank you again to all of the hard-working staff who earned these awards with their diligent and faithful service to the children and families in PSF's care and to all of the board members and volunteers who helped make this event a success.