This fall, the nearly 1,300 youth in our care are looking to the stars, and making big wishes for holiday gifts, which means it is time for PSF’s Wish Upon a Star (WUAS) holiday drive. WUAS is our biggest donation drive of the year where we collect three holiday wishes from each child in our care. These wishes can range from clothing to electronics to stuffed animals and everything in between. Once we have collected all these wishes, we then distribute them to our community members, faith partners and friends to make the wishes come true by purchasing at least two of their three wishes.

Each donor will then get their stars with the child’s name, age, gender and their three wishes. Then, donors shop for their child and return their wishes to us. It’s that simple, and before you know it, we have received thousands of toys and gifts.

We are still looking for partners to support our efforts this year. You can help bring extra holiday cheer to local youth in a variety of ways! We are in need of donors to shop for wishes either in a store or through our Amazon Wish Lists. We will also accept financial donations, and our team will do the shopping for you. Are you part of a business or organization that might want to sponsor multiple children’s wishes? Contact Jacob Clore at jacob.clore@pfsf.org or 352-244-1626 if you are interested in donating. If you have some extra time in December come volunteer with us at our workshop as we sort wishes and wrap presents for our children. Contact Mikaela David at mikaela.david@pfsf.org or 352-244-1629 for more information on volunteering.

Wish Upon a Star would not be possible without your support. On behalf of the PSF staff and the children we serve, we thank you for making the holidays shine for the youth in our care.
MESSAGE FROM THE CEO

Stephen Pennypacker
President/CEO

Esteemed Community Partners and Friends,

Fall brings many important traditions and new opportunities for our agency. In September, several staff and I attended the Department of Children and Families’ Child Protection Summit in Orlando. Representatives from both our Circuits met for a productive breakout session where we discussed the goals of our recently established Intensive Practice Team (IPT) and the success we’ve already had with the program. We also presented ideas on foster and adoptive family recruitment, strengths of our local systems and areas that could be improved with further collaboration.

Also in September, one of our foster parents demonstrated just how far her unconditional love for her children goes by donating her kidney to her foster son, who needed this life saving surgery. I am happy to report that both Amanda Williams Cruce and her foster son had successful surgeries and are doing well.

Over the past few months, I have had the pleasure to serve as an organizer for an initiative that has really started to take shape: the Gainesville Empowerment Zone (GEZ). GEZ seeks to improve and coordinate vital support services to families living in a portion of the 32609 zip code of Northeast Gainesville. This team is making great progress and promises to create lasting change. It is an honor to be part of this endeavor.

One Church One Child is currently celebrating their 30-year anniversary. One Church One Child works in partnership with the DCF to raise awareness about the needs of youth in foster care. Their efforts are crucial in making sure that the youth in our care find loving homes with forever families.

Earlier this month, I attended the fantastic 2nd Annual Taste of the Nature Coast event hosted by Tri-County Community Resources. The event proceeds of over $4,500 were donated to the Tri-County Community Resource Center to help serve the residents of Levy, Gilchrist and Dixie counties. What a generous community.

The citizens of Alachua County voted to pass the Campaign for Children’s Trust of Alachua County! To learn how this trust will impact local children, turn to page six.

Sincerely,

Stephen Pennypacker
Adoptive Family Spotlight: The Ahlgren Family

The Ahlgren family quickly went from a family of 3 with their biological son Sterling to a family of 6. Their family was made complete after first adopting 15 year old Jared and then shortly after adopting siblings Nelson and Lauren who were 14 and 10 at the time. Adopting teens and siblings groups was important to the Ahlgren family.

*They took their first family selfie on that night the Nelson and Lauren moved in and have made it a tradition to take a family selfie every year on that anniversary.*

What would you say to a person who is interested in adopting a teen but might be hesitant?

Adopted teens are not different than any other teenager. They are in a very transitional and challenging developmental period and need steadfast support, guidance, love, modeling and a listening ear. You will need to embrace their past and maybe even their biological family to a certain extent. Adopted teens don’t necessarily want to abandon their past, but they will need your help learning how to set healthy boundaries in the context of their specific traumas.

What has been one of your favorite moments as an adoptive parent?

We have both really enjoyed watching all three of our adopted kids (ages 10, 14 and 15 when they came to us) kind of let their baggage and worries fall away and embrace their true personalities. In the first month or so after moving in, they all kind of blossomed in the reality that they were in a safe place and a forever place.

What was the toughest lesson you had to learn as an adoptive parent?

I think this is true of all parenting: you may not see the fruits of your labor until they are grown and out of the house. We have seen our oldest, now 20 and moved out, go from a stubborn rebel without a cause to a mature, working, bill-paying, considerate young man. We’ve seen him go from wanting only to buck our authority to reaching out to us for advice and support.

How do you think your choice to adopt these children has impacted their lives?

Our three adopted kids have all come from homes where parenting was not, shall we say, “typical.” So, for our kids, seeing parents do what parents do (setting and enforcing rules, setting up daily chores for everyone, having everyone learn to cook, do laundry and even use an alarm clock or verbalize our feelings) has been a challenge. However, I have heard all three of my kids verbalize at one point or another that now they know what things are supposed to be like and they can do that now. I know my kids have a fighting chance at having a great marriage and a happy family of their own someday because now they’ve been exposed to that.

What is the best piece of advice you could give to someone considering adoption?

Be vocal and transparent with your kids. If you are angry, tell them why. If you are happy, tell them why. Kids should not have to guess what’s going on in your head. Think about the last time you encountered someone who acted passive aggressive toward you. Not knowing exactly what was going on in their head is tough for an adult, let alone a child who is likely to have emotional disability. If you are not good at talking about your feelings with your spouse, start practicing that before you get too far along on your adoption journey. It will benefit your marriage and your future family. Sometimes it’s hard ... but once you get the hang of it, it’s really rewarding.
THANK YOU TO ALL OUR SUPERHEROES!

Our annual Superhero 5K is always a great way to kick off National Adoption Month! On November 3, we had a fun morning of running, walking and raising money. We want to give a huge thank you to the 240 race participants and all of the sponsors who made this great event possible once again. All proceeds will go toward helping the youth in our care find their forever families are!

2018 SPONSORS

The Tee Shop
Alicia M. Pfahler
Dr. Kazimour
Glassman & Zissimopulous
Phalanx

Village Counseling Center
Sunshine Health
Fit 2 Run
BJ’s Restaurant

Fun 4 Gator Kids
Mary K. Wimsett
Funworks Skate Station
Superheroes for Hope

November is National Adoption Month

Alex
15 years old

Dennis
14 years old
Lazarus
11 years old

Learn about our super personalities and how to adopt us at www.ptsf.org/heartgallery

Ashley
16 years old

Khloe Cathryn
17 years old

Let’s bring them all home!
**1. SPONSOR A CHILD THROUGH OUR WISH UPON A STAR DRIVE**
You can make a child’s wishes come true this year by simply emailing Jacob.Clore@pfsf.org. We make it easy for donors - There is even an option to get the child’s wish list from Amazon!

**2. VOLUNTEER FOR OUR WISH UPON A STAR DRIVE**
PSF is always searching for elves to help wrap gifts or speak to their organizations, classes, clubs or religious institutions to help spread the word about donating gifts. Smaller organizations can even help by donating wrapping paper, tape and bows. If you are wondering how your friends or family can help volunteer or become an ambassador, please contact Mikeala David at Mikaela.David@pfsf.org.

**3. RUN IN THE ADOPTION SUPERHERO 5K**
If you are a superhero (or just super) please consider grabbing your cape to be a superhero for children in foster care. Partnership for Strong Families is hosting our 4th annual Superhero 5K on November 3! Funds raised from this event will go toward finding forever families for children awaiting their permanent homes. For more information, please visit: www.PSFSuperhero5K.org.

**4. DECORATE COOKIES OR BRING ACTIVITIES TO THE FAMILY VISITATION CENTER**
The Family Visitation Center is a safe place designed for biological families to get together while their children are in foster care. Bringing games, activities or goodies is a great conversation starter for parents and children who are enjoying their visitation.

**5. GIFT CARDS, GIFTS CARDS, GIFT CARDS**
Gift cards are a fantastic gift for children in care and foster families! It allows them to use it anytime (not just during the holidays). Providing a gift card also allows the children and foster families to use it as needed and teach responsibility.

**6. DECORATE THE FAMILY VISITATION CENTER**
Once a year, the Family Visitation Center decorates for the holidays! Allowing children to feel comfortable in their environment is a huge help to developing bonds with their family. You can help decorate the Visitation Center by contacting Beverly at 352-334-0880.

**7. BRING A FOSTER FAMILY A MEAL**
Imagine the normal hustle and bustle of the holidays and add visitation, mandatory doctor check ups and court dates. Foster families sacrifice a lot of love, time, and energy to help children in care. By simply providing a meal to a family, you save them the time of creating a shopping list, shopping and cooking.

**8. GIVE FAMILIES THE GIFT OF SERVICE**
Offer to do dishes for a Partner Family or offer to mow their lawn or help wash their car. Helping with simple tasks frees up time for foster families to spend extra time with their children. Babysitting their children while they prepare for the holidays by shopping or wrapping is a tremendous help!

**9. BECOME A FOSTER FAMILY!**
The biggest help to foster families? More foster families! If now is the time for your family to explore fostering or adoption, contact Nicole Hernandez at 352-213-7219.

Happy Holidays!
Volunteer with TCCRC Toys for Tots Events
November 26 - December 2
Help bag toys for the holidays with TCCRC at the Oaks Mall in Gainesville or distribute toys in Alachua County and the Tri-County area from December 14-16.

National Adoption Month
November 2018
This month is focused on the adoption of children in foster care. PSF will celebrate our wonderful adoptive families all month long!

Superhero 5K
November 3, 2018
PSF will host our annual Superhero 5K in support of National Adoption Month. To register or learn more please email Patricia.Braitsch@pfsf.org. The race begins at 8:30 a.m.

Wish Upon A Star Drive
Now until Christmas!
PSF will be collecting wishes from all of the kids in our care and seeking donors to fill those wishes. We will also be seeking volunteers to wrap all of the gifts!

CHILDREN’S PARTNERSHIP COUNCIL UPDATE
By Jacob Clore, Community Engagement Specialist

I joined Partnership for Strong Families in July as the new Community Engagement Specialist and so far, one of my favorite aspects of the job is working with our Children’s Partnership Councils (CPC). I enjoy going to different corners of our coverage area, working with our partners who serve their communities and having a hand in meeting the needs of the families who need assistance. It’s a lot of fun to work with such dynamic individuals who are passionate about serving their community.

Each of the five CPCs were allocated $5,000 for their fiscal year budget. For our Columbia and Suwannee-Lafayette-Hamilton CPCs, our recent focus has been pouring some of those resources into the Columbia-Hamilton World’s Greatest Baby Shower which was held on October 6. The Council Members are passionate about making sure that the parents and soon-to-be mothers in attendance are ready to safely raise their children, so they’ve allocated funds to make sure they are given child safety items at the shower.

The Bradford-Baker-Union and Madison-Taylor CPCs are invested in making sure the individual needs of residents in their communities are met. In this fiscal year so far, most of their funding has been spent on rent and utility assistance for residents. Without their drive to protect their clients, the families in those homes could be left without a place to stay or power to keep their homes lit and cool in the warm summer and fall months. The assistance they receive helps ensure children in those homes live in a safe environment.

Our Gilchrist-Dixie-Levy CPC hit the ground running this fiscal year, allocating most of their funds to areas like GED assistance, swim lesson vouchers, child safety items and diapers for the Tri-County Community Resource Center. They are individuals dedicated to keeping children safe and helping their caregivers reach their fullest potential.

I am truly honored to be a part of the five CPCs we have here at PSF. I cannot wait to see what the rest of the year holds.

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE
By: Patricia Carroll, Director of Community Relations and Recruitment

On November 6, voters in Alachua County made a difference in the lives of local kids – in a major way! The Children’s Trust of Alachua County, which was approved by voters, will bring together local agencies, individuals and resources to meet the needs of children during the time when they are not in school. It will be a hub of child advocacy in Alachua County to make sure that money is being spent wisely and invested in programs that will provide the best outcomes for children and families. The Children’s Trust will be made up of an independent board of 10 members who will oversee the development and implementation of evidence-based programs for local youth.

The Children’s Trust will create the funding needed to support these programs for children from birth to 18. Programs will focus on things such as improving access and quality of early childhood education and care, tutoring and literacy programs, quality afterschool programs and preparation for technical school or college.

This investment will cost the median homeowner in Alachua County an additional $3.06/month – providing over $7 million per year for local children. Partnership for Strong Families proudly endorses the Campaign for Children’s Trust of Alachua County and is so proud of Alachua County for making this investment into our future!
FALL BRINGS PLENTY OF CHANGES TO THE RESOURCE CENTERS!

By Stacy Merritt, Director of Resource Centers

The Library Partnership Resource Center Relocates!

On August 11, 2018 Library Partnership opened their doors to the community at a newly built location thanks to a long-standing partnership with the Alachua County Library District. Library Partnership originally opened in 2009 as the first of four Resource Centers operated by Partnership for Strong Families along with the additional support of Casey Family Programs (CFP), the Department of Children and Families and other partner agencies. The new location (912 NE 16th Avenue, Gainesville) is within walking distance of the original site and continues to serve individuals and families residing within the 32601 and 32609 zip codes, along with surrounding communities.

Now, with more than 30 active community partnerships, Library Partnership provides a wide range of community-driven programs, services and supports - all designed to positively impact caregiver protective factors; and reduce the risk of child abuse and neglect. Some of the most accessed supports provided include: a clothing closet that is generously supported through community donations and operated with the support of volunteers; food distribution days that are made possible through a partnership with Bread of the Mighty; and health-related services provided on-site through the University of Florida’s Mobile Health Clinic. Recognizing disproportionate rates of unemployment and under-employment in the communities served by Library Partnership, the Resource Center Manager and staff have placed a focus on meeting this need. Collaborative programs such as the highly successful Re-Entry Partnership Initiative (to be held again in April 2019), provision of on-site resources including a Job Board, resume/application assistance and access to professional clothing, along with participation at existing events such as the Gainesville Job Fair are all ways Library Partnership seeks to provide community members with the resources needed to succeed.

As an additional program highlight, Library Partnership has strengthened children’s programming at their location through the creation and expansion of various programs designed to promote social and emotional well-being of children and youth. For example, Homework Help is provided regularly throughout the school year in partnership with ACLD and America Reads. As a compliment to this program, Alachua County Schools’ Mobile Learning Lab also provides on-site services once per week. In addition, the Strong Kids’ Summer Program (now with two sessions to serve more children), facilitated in partnership with CDS Family & Behavioral Health Services, gives children access to summer learning activities designed to prevent “summer slide.” Other programs designed to promote self-esteem and build resiliency include: It’s a Girls’ Thang provided in partnership with PACE Center for Girls and implementation of the WhyTry Youth resiliency curriculum by our staff.

Expansion of the Academic Success and Enrichment Program

Based upon identified need and the success of existing children’s programming at Library Partnership, Cone Park Library Resource Center and SWAG Family Resource Center, beginning October 1, 2018 each of these three locations will be facilitating year-round services and supports for children through the Academic Success and Enrichment Program. This program is supported by the Alachua County Board of County Commission’s Community Agency Partnership Program (CAPP).

Casey Family Programs (CFP) Offers Support and Learning Opportunities

After their initial support in the development of Library Partnership, CFP has continued to offer technical support and peer learning opportunities through PSF’s Resource Centers. Most recently, in September 2018 at the request of CFP, PSF hosted a peer group from Maryland and Pennsylvania to share about our Resource Center Model for replication in their own communities. CFP representative Paul DiLorenzo also attended as well as representatives from the Alachua County Library District (pictured below).

Casey Family Programs Awards PSF Grant Funding

PSF has also been awarded grant funding from CFP to support staff and community training on the Protective Factors. The two-day “Living the Protective Factors” training series, scheduled for December 5 and 6, will be facilitated by Be Strong Families, a national organization specializing in various community-driven prevention models. As a unique opportunity, the first day of the training will include not only PSF staff, but also families and partner organizations. The goal of the training is to improve our knowledge of the Protective Factors and to build our capacity to most effectively partner with local families.

For more information about the Resource Centers, please visit www.pfsf.org/resourcecenters.
This September, our staff got a check-up in health and wellness at the Partnership for Strong Families’ Health Fair. The team got free flu shots, a healthy meal, chair massages and learned about the importance of having a primary health care physician as well as a nutritious diet. Event sponsors include UF HealthStreet, UF Health, Florida Blue, Chef Ami, Aligning Ergonomics, Allied Capoeira League Gainesville, Caring Pharmacy, Mike & Megan’s Mobile Massage Service and The Hyppo. We want to make sure that our team knows that their physical and mental health is a priority for us. It will help us be ready to serve the youth in our care.