This was my first year being part of the coordination team for the Wish Upon a Star drive. Each day of the process, I was overcome with joy because of the generosity and kindness of my fellow community members. The community came together to serve 1,244 local youth in our care this holiday season. We had over $80,000 of in-kind donations to make this all possible. Two hundred and forty-two donors took such pride in granting the wishes of the children they sponsored. Check out page 3 for a complete list of these amazing donors!

Sending off more and more gifts each day to be delivered to local youth was incredible, but the biggest treat was at the end of the drive when caseworkers shared joyful stories of the children opening the gifts. One boy received a puzzle made of his name. A young woman who was learning to sew received everything you could ever think of to get her started, and the donor even offered mentorship. The stories we were told of phenomenal gifts goes on and on and we are so thankful for the effort donors put into making the holidays special for these local youth.

At the beginning of planning we were looking for a location to host gifts for over 1,200 children, our staff and volunteers for three weeks. Campus USA graciously stepped up to offer a huge room for the better part of December. When we moved into the space, Campus USA staff volunteered daily to wrap gifts. Alongside our Campus USA volunteers, we had many community members who were either season veterans wrapping for Wish Upon a Star or just heard about the drive and wanted to lend a much needed hand. All in all, our volunteers put in over 200 hours of work to make sure all of the gifts were wrapped in time! Getting all the presents wrapped and ready for delivery was no small feat. It was a race to the finish to make sure each child got their wishes, and so many people played a part in making that happen. We had executives helping set up bikes and blowing up basketballs or footballs. We had volunteers putting new pajamas graciously donated by our local Carter’s into the little ones’ presents. It was always fun watching someone try to wrap the odd shaped gifts, knowing it is exactly what the child wished for. We had people helping spread the word of the drive to their friends to get us even more support. Local churches, schools, businesses and individuals all came together to make this drive a success and for that, we thank you all!
MESSAGE FROM THE CEO

Dear community members, partners and friends,

Another new year is upon us which gives us time to reflect on what we hope to accomplish this year. We look ahead to the rest of the year and see nothing but unlocked potential for our organization.

The election of Governor Ron DeSantis back in November brought the appointment of a new secretary to the Department of Children and Families (DCF), Chad Poppell. Secretary Poppell previously served as the Chief of Staff of Florida’s Department of Economic Opportunity and as Governor Rick Scott’s Secretary of the Department of Management Services which oversees state-government issues like human resource and real estate. We are optimistic about Secretary Poppell’s appointment and the fresh perspective he will bring to DCF.

We are pleased to report that the creation of the Regional Integrated Training Alliance for our child protective investigators (CPIs) and case managers has proven successful. The training has built comradery between case managers and investigators early in their careers and teaches them the same core content from the beginning. One of the trainers from DCF even mentioned she can already see a difference in the first two classes of CPIs that have come into the workforce. Our trainers have just started their third class and we look forward to learning about even more positive trends in the future.

After a very successful National Adoption Month back in November, we are happy to announce that our agency finalized 157 adoptions between July 1 and December 31. In November, we finalized 27 in Alachua County alone. By the end of the fiscal year on June 30, we expect to finalize at least 100 more. Numbers like these would not be possible without the tremendous effort of our recruitment and adoptions teams and the loving adoptive parents who make their homes forever homes.

Lastly, please join me in welcoming two new members to the PSF board: Amanda Cruce and Beverly Pope. Ms. Cruce goes above and beyond in her role as a foster parent and also advocates for collaboration between biological and foster parents. Ms. Pope works as an administrator at the VA in Lake City and adopted three of her children from PSF. We look forward to working with these experienced professionals and will value their input at future meetings.

Sincerely,
Stephen Pennypacker
President/CEO

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

Happy New Year from all of us here at Partnership for Strong Families! If you’re like me, those New Year’s resolutions may already be out the window, but I’m still looking forward to great things ahead!

2018 was a great year for our agency as we finalized a record number of adoptions, brought on some extraordinary new team members and worked to establish new partnerships across our 13 counties.

As we look forward to 2019, I am excited for some of the initiatives and goals that our agency is embarking on. We’ll soon begin the process of developing our new Strategic Plan, which will guide our decision making for the next three years. Be on the lookout for more information about the directions we’re heading in!

As you’ll read in this issue, this year’s legislative session is looking to be a productive one, and we have already had the chance to meet with a few legislators in Tallahassee to talk about the issues impacting Florida’s youth in care.

We have some great information for you in this issue, including plans for the 2019 Amazing Give fundraising day, a focus on one of our amazing foster families (Go Amanda and Deena!) and information about a very special donor who has focused efforts on supporting the youth in our care for a number of years.

I want to take the time to thank you, our readers and supporters, for reading our issues of the Partnership Connection and staying informed on the people, initiatives and accomplishments that make our local system of care so great. It is because of your support that we can continue to do the work we do!

I wish you all the best in 2019 and beyond.
**Special thanks to our donors!**

**Platinum (100+ stars)**
- Alachua County Sheriff’s Office
- Greenhouse Church

**Gold (50-100 stars)**
- Grace at Fort Clark
- Upper Room Ministries
- Santa Fe College
- CROM Corporation

**Silver (20-49 stars)**
- Lemerand Athletic Center
- Spring Babies Group and Friends
- Gainesville High School
- UF College of Veterinary Medicine
- The Bartram
- Congregation B’nai Israel
- UF Department of Emergency Medicine
- Naylor
- Ignite Life Church
- The Vineyard Church
- James Moore and Company

**Bronze and Individual Donors (1-19 stars)**
- Adreana Hale
- Alice Peeler
- Alicia Phillips
- Allison Novak
- Amanda Bentley
- Amanda Elliott
- Amanda Gilleo
- Amber Curchy
- Amy Catledge
- Andrea Wood
- Andrew and Ianni Asante
- Angela Jones
- Anita Zucker Center for Excellence in Early Childhood Studies
- Ann Chronic
- Anne Banks
- Audra Moraski
- Austin Forbrick
- Baker Prevention Coalition Inc.
- Barbara Locke
- Ben and Shannon Walker
- Beth and Ted Braitsch
- Beverly Wonders
- Bradley and Jennifer Ferguson
- Bridget Bourke
- Brownie Troop #2380
- Candi Kuykendall
- Candy and Marty Birch
- Carlos and Karen Piedra
- Carol Delany
- Casey Gaouette
- Chantel McConn
- Chelsea Poulin
- Chris Perez
- Christine Boatwright
- Clayton and Jackie Tucker
- Daisy Girl Scout Troop
- Daniela Bursian
- David and Meredith Gaitanis
- Davita Dialysis
- Deborah Copeland
- Deborah Schroth
- DeConna Ice Cream/The DeConna Family
- Dr. Peter Bensen and Dr. Linda Abeles
- Dylan and Susanne Townsend
- Eric Kuraz
- Eve Pence
- Faculty 1 & 7 at Tacachale
- Faydra Henry
- Florida Coast Guard
- Francisco Garcia
- Francys Martin
- Galvan Acupuncture and Herbal Medicine
- Gator Christian Life Small Group
- Geri Abdale
- Gillette Family
- Holly Beck
- Hometown Mortgage Services
- Jade Anderson
- Jamie and Renee Collins
- Jane Pitchford
- Janice Cartwright
- Jennifer and Vlad Petrescu
- Jennifer Blades
- Jennifer Deane
- Jessica Whitcomb
- Jill Warm
- Joann Ugliano and friend
- Joe and Sandra DiBartuk
- Joseph Park
- Juan Ibarra
- Julie Daniel
- Kate and Scott Byars
- Kate Fletcher
- Katie Blackburn
- Katie DeFendeleifer
- Katrina Moseley
- Katy McCray
- Kim Slone and Niki Dahlem
- Kimber Greenwood
- Kimberly Farris
- Kimberly Mahoney
- Kristina McMican
- Kristyn and Jesus Lopez
- Laura Waxman
- Laurel Lamme
- Laurie Summer Hill
- Letitia McCrary
- Letrenna Mosley
- Lexi Beach
- Linda Henderson
- Lindsay Hanson
- Lisa Vickery
- Lisa Vickery’s Daughter
- Lorie Boyer
- Luisa Pena
- Lydia Brady
- Lyndsey Thompson
- Lynn McKenzie
- Madeleine Chewning
- Marcia Deuerling
- Marcia Swope
- Marisa Ramirez Stukey
- Mark and Jean Patray
- Mary Sheps
- Matt and Claire Kern
- McNeal Legal, LLC
- Melissa Schroeder
- Michelle Belecher
- Michelle Hall
- Nadia Clark
- Nathan and Jaime Lambert
- Nicole Dyson
- Nicole Hernandez
- Nooriel Nolan
- Norton Elementary
- Oak Hall School
- Olga Garcia
- Pamela and Chip Gonzalez
- Paul Nickerson
- Paulina Pendarvis
- Pebbles Edelman
- Rachel Yoho
- Randee Bilyou
- Randy Miller
- Resolutions Health Alliance
- Robert and Barbara Plasky
- Sade Krind
- Samuel and Taryn Rackley
- Sarah Zeenberg
- Sidney Downing
- Special Friends Care Inc.
- St. John the Evangelist Catholic Church
- Stacey Gronkpatrick
- Stacey Starling
- Stefanie Jasper
- Stephen and Devyn Taylor
- Stephen Foster Elementary
- Studio 32 Orthodontics
- Susan Kurner
- Tara Woodington
- Teague Rental Equipment
- The Barger Family
- The Huffty Family
- The Journey Family
- The Kawaja Family
- The Mayfair
- The Seraphim Center
- The Thomas Family
- The Wright Family
- Tim and Vickie Straka
- Tricia Braitsch
- Trudy O’Connell
- UBS Financial
- UDV of Florida
- UF College of Medicine, Finance and Admin
- UF Department of Surgery
- UF College of Education, Post Awards
- Valeria Hernandez
- Vanessa Zach
- Vivian Rios
- Walker Family LifeTeen Group
- Wayne and Julianne Browning
- Yolanda Wormley
Amanda and Deena Cruce have been a Partner Family for over 7 years. They have helped reunify nearly 10 families with their hard work, persistence and dedication. The couple take up to 5 children at a time, ages 0-17 years old. They are also a certified licensed medical foster home and are able to help care for children who may have medical needs. Partnership is so thankful to have Amanda and Deena a part of our professional team and can’t wait for you to get the know them more…

What first led you to become a foster parent?
This answer has honestly changed over the years. At first I think our reasons were a bit selfish, we wanted to singlehandedly help a child in crisis. Now we get a lot more excited about putting families back together, community building and real long term relationships

As foster parent, how do you handle parenting abused or neglected children?
Kids are kids. They need to know that they are loved, accepted and cherished. Sometimes even more so when they come from hard places. But also that you aren’t judging them or parenting them just based on their past. Embrace them, embrace their family and have as much fun as possible.

What has been the biggest transformation you have seen in your life since you became a foster parent?
Our circle of support has changed so much over the years. We are surrounded by like minded people who also set out to help and build up our community. It is amazing what having one small thing in common can do.

What has been one of your favorite moments as a foster parent?
When we stay connected to kids and families who have reunified. Having dinner, play dates etc. and getting to see the beautiful children who we helped raise be successful.

What would you say to a person who is interested in fostering a teen but might be hesitant?
Be patient. A teen is not their history. They are amazing individuals with capacity to change and grow. Help them see different options and enjoy the journey. We all make mistakes as teens, don’t hold them accountable for developmentally appropriate mistakes. Say yes when you can and no when you have to.

What advice would you give to someone who is considering starting the fostering journey?
Join your local Foster and Adoptive Parent Association!!! You will find helpful advice, people and support. DO NOT do this on your own, it is hard. It will test every part of you. It is worth it, and like minded people are here and ready to help support you.

How do you gain the trust of children in your care?
It’s like any relationship, you give it time and have to be true to your word. If you say you are going to do something, you should do it. It sounds simple but many of these children have not experienced adults holding up their end. I have had kids remind me of simple things I said I would do and forgot. I now only commit to things I know I will be able to do in the next 48 hours, or I tell them to ask me again later.

What is your favorite about reunification?
We LOVE when we see families work through their crisis and get to be together again. We also love when we get to stay connected and spend time together afterwards, just a bigger extended family.

Foster Family Spotlight: The Williams-Cruce Family

partners. foster. adopt.
**NINE ADOPTED CELEBRITIES**

By Nicole Hernandez, Foster Care & Adoption Recruitment Specialist

1. **STEVE JOBS**
The founder and prime engineer of Apple was adopted as an infant. His biological mother, who was a college student, was forced by her parents to create an adoption plan for her child. Steve had one failed adoption before finding his forever family, Paul and Clara.

2. **BO DIDDLEY**
Bo was a musician and a resident of Archer, Florida in his later years. He was adopted by his mother’s cousin and her partner.

3. **MARILYN MONROE**
Marilyn lived in over 9 foster homes until she was adopted by her mother’s best friend.

4. **DAVE THOMAS**
The Wendy’s founder was adopted at six weeks old. Dave was a well-known advocate for adoption.

5. **SIMONE BILES**
Simone was placed in foster care at 3 and then adopted by her grandparents.

6. **JOHN LENNON**
Lennon’s biological father went AWOL while serving on a naval ship. His biological mother was unable to take care of him so he was adopted by his aunt. Lennon also had a half-sister who was adopted by a Norwegian family.

7. **DAUNTE CULPEPPER**
Former Minnesota Vikings quarterback was adopted at one day old by a worker in the correctional facility where his mother was being held at his birth in Ocala, Florida.

8. **BABE RUTH**
Babe spent time living on the streets until his parents signed over rights to an orphanage/reform school. He was adopted from the school by a talent scout.

9. **MICHAEL OHER**
Michael’s story inspired the movie *The Blind Side*. Michael was adopted from foster care at age 17 by a family who supported him in getting an education and his love for football. He is now an offensive tackle in the NFL.

*This list of individuals was obtained from Rankers.*

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**LEGISLATIVE UPDATE**

By: Patricia Carroll, Director of Community Relations and Recruitment

Legislative Session is almost upon us, and staff at PSF are busy forming our priorities for 2019 and beyond. Our partners at the Florida Coalition for Children host another informative and interactive Rally in Tally on February 4-5 that welcome CEOs, executives, foster parents and advocates from across the state to meet with their local legislators to talk about issues impacting child welfare this session. Our CEO, Stephen Pennypacker, and I enjoyed attending this event with Amanda Williams Cruce, Deeana Cruce and their children. It was a great two days to network and learn from leaders across the state as we all advocate on behalf of Florida’s youth.

There are several key initiatives and bills that we are excited to share with you. Under the Path Forward initiative, we support policy changes that will enhance Florida’s capacity to implement the new Guardianship Assistance Program that passed into law last year. We are also supporting a new bill, Jordan’s Law (HB 315 and SB 634) that will significantly expand the services available to children in care, allowing for screening of developmental, mental health, and medical issues. Jordan’s Law would also allow law enforcement to receive any active child protective investigation about a home before entering it. Finally, we support the security of all foster families and staff by fixing a statute glitch that currently makes their information available as public record.

*Pictured above: Partnership for Strong Families CEO, Stephen Pennypacker, and Patty Carroll at Rally in Tally.*
It is an exciting time here at Partnership for Strong Families (PSF) - we are gearing up to participate in the Amazing Give for the fourth time! The Amazing Give, sponsored by our partners at the Community Foundation of North Central Florida, is 24 hours of online giving from March 20-21 benefiting non-profits across Alachua County. It is our privilege to advocate and raise money for the needs of the youth in our care. You can play a part in making sure this year’s campaign is our best yet.

How The Amazing Give Benefits Our Youth
Here at PSF, we are dedicated to ensuring that the physical, emotional and mental needs of our youth in care are met. During the Amazing Give, we’re focused on raising funds for normalcy efforts - activities that will help them enjoy being a kid and provide stability while working through a time of change and difficulty in their lives. The youth in our care are no different than their peers in that they have basic needs and enjoy having fun. Unfortunately, the financial burden of extracurriculars can be hard to overcome.

How YOU can help
This is where our amazing donors like you come into play. Your support helps us give children opportunities to be a kid - sports, art programs, class trips, school dances and more. Last year, we raised over $8,000 in just 24 hours during the Amazing Give. Those donations went to some great initiatives, like sending 12 kids to camp around Christmas and sponsoring a trip to Disney for a girl and her forever family. This year, we are raising the stakes and setting our goal at over $10,000. Even a $5 donation plays a big part in making sure we get to that number. Spreading the word also helps immensely, so make sure you share our social media posts and tell your friends about our campaign. Just make sure you log onto www.theamazinggive.org and select Partnership for Strong Families starting at 6 p.m. on March 20!

The Bottom Line
The Bottom Line is, our kids need supporters like you! You can make a difference in making sure they have the opportunity to thrive. Mark your calendars for March 20 at 6 p.m. for 24 hours of The Amazing Give. And keep an eye out for information on our Amazing Give Kickoff Party the evening of March 20!

SUPERHERO 5K RECAP
By Jacob Clore, Community Engagement Specialist
Back in November, 240 heroes laced up their running shoes and raced around Westside Park in Gainesville for our 4th annual Superhero 5K. The race is one of the highlights of National Adoption Month; bringing together Partnership for Strong Families, community members and partners to spread the word about adoption and raise funds for recruitment efforts. Even on a crisp, early Saturday morning, the positive energy and drive for the cause were undeniable.

Our dedicated race organizers and volunteers made their way to Westside Park as early as 6 a.m. to set up water stations, tents, decorations and our heart gallery wall with photos of kids awaiting adoption. As the sun rose, racers and their supporters arrived in a wide variety of outfits and costumes, from the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles to the Powerpuff Girls. Participants stretched and warmed up while learning more about the need for adoption and the resources available for adoptive parents and their families.

By the end of the event, participants and sponsors raised over $4,400 for adoption recruitment efforts at PSF. We cannot thank the participants, volunteers, sponsors and our partners enough who came together to make the event such a success. A special shout-out is in order for the following organizations:

- The Bagel Baker
- Sunshine Health
- Village Counseling Center
- Dr. Kim Kazimour
- Alicia Pfahler Counseling
- Florida Adoption Attorney, Mary K. Wimsett
- Skate Station Funworks Gainesville
- Fun 4 Gator Kids
- Fit2Run
- Publix
- OurTown Group – Keller Williams Realty
- Glassman & Zissimopoulos Law
- BJ’s Restaurant and Brewhouse
- Village Counseling Center
- Fun 4 Gator Kids
- The Tee Shop

By Jacob Clore, Community Engagement Specialist
ANOTHER MEANINGFUL YEAR FOR THE RESOURCE CENTERS
By Stacy Merritt, Director of Resource Centers

We are happy to share a preview of our 2018 Annual Report (above). These numbers and statistics help illustrate the continued growth and success of the Resource Centers, including increases in the number of visitors and services provided through our four locations. We are also excited and grateful for the increase in community support and grants, which more than tripled from 2017 allowing for new and expanded programming, along with a unique training opportunity for staff, volunteers, and partner agencies.

• As the recipient of an Alachua County Community Agency Partnership Program grant, PSF’s Gainesville Resource Centers have been able to expand and formalize after-school academic and enrichment programming for school-aged children and youth.

• An anonymous charitable grant also allowed for the purchase of a 15-passenger van for use by the Resource Centers. The van will be used to transport children and/or adults to various off-site activities, including field trips, cultural events, and relevant community events.

• This same anonymous grant has allowed our Gainesville locations to offer a Community Scholarship program designed to support the education and employment needs of qualifying individuals aged 16 and older.

• Grant funding awarded through Wells Fargo allowed expansion of the Fight for Your Money (FFYM) financial literacy program to all three of our Gainesville locations. This program is catered to the needs of each site and includes topics such as budgeting, basic banking, financial resources, emotional spending, eating healthy on a budget and more. Library Partnership hosted this program in the Fall of 2018 and SWAG FRC and CPLRC will host in the Spring of 2019.

• Other Community grants, sponsorships and donations (Davis Chevrolet, State Farm, United Healthcare and Aldi’s, among others) further supported programming needs related to employability, youth resiliency and healthy living, along with providing “baby baskets” designed to meet basic needs and provide educational materials to new parents.

We ❤️ Our Volunteers!

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<th>At the Resource Centers</th>
<th>Volunteers Logged</th>
<th>That equals the staff support of</th>
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<td>35,441 visits to the Resource Centers</td>
<td>46,607 services provided to patrons</td>
<td>$118,653 received in in-kind donations</td>
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<td>$118,653 received in in-kind donations</td>
<td>$78,500 received in community support and grants</td>
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Living the Protective Factors Training Series
The Resource Centers hosted a two day “Living the Protective Factors” training series sponsored by Casey Family Programs and facilitated by Be Strong Families, a national organization specializing in community-driven prevention models. In addition to Resource Center staff, representatives from 13 partner agencies and 2 partner/adoptive parents were in attendance. The training allowed not only an opportunity for staff development, but also a unique chance for various partners and caregivers to network and develop personal relationships that will enhance our work with the community.

“Enjoyed interactive activities- doing is much more beneficial than just listening.”
-Training Series Attendee

Pictured above: Attendees of the Living the Protective Factors Training Series
Terri Williams is an employee at CROM who is dedicated to serving her community. Each year since 2013, Terri has connected CROM with Partnership for Strong Families during our Back to School and Wish Upon a Star drives to ensure local youth in our care are remembered. This year, she expanded her efforts to provide $2,613 from the staff of CROM for our Wish Upon a Star efforts.

How did you first get involved with PSF?
I saw a box full of school supplies in the lobby at my gym. I did a little research and decided that PSF was an organization that I could get behind.

Why is PSF important to you?
PSF recognizes that simply removing children from abusive homes is not enough. PSF works toward preventing abuse and neglect by providing resources to communities and families alike.

What is your best memory of partnering with PSF?
My best memory of partnering with PSF is being overwhelmed by the generosity of my coworkers and our Management Team during our drives.

What do you wish others knew about PSF?
I wish others knew the depth of the need that PSF works to meet.

If you have a heart for local youth and want to learn how to become a donor for one of our annual drives, please contact Mikaela David at 352-244-1629 or Mikaela.David@pfsf.org.