

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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CONTACT: Jenn Petion

Director, Community & Govt. Relations, PSF
Jenn.Petion@pfsf.org
352.359.8169

FOSTER YOUTH PREPARED FOR START OF SCHOOL WITH SUPPLIES, PERMANENCY

Gainesville, Fla – Partnership for Strong Families (PSF), the lead child welfare agency for Florida Judicial Circuits 3 and 8, announced today the completion of their “Back to School Drive,” preparing youth who have experienced abuse or neglect for the first day of school with the supplies they need for academic success. The agency also completed their first ever “Home for School” initiative, during which 21 children were reunified with their families of origin and pre-adoptive placements were secured for four children in time for the start of school.

PSF’s Back to School Drive is the agency’s second largest donation drive of the year, and this year’s drive has been the most successful to date thanks to the rising support of the community. While in the past three years the agency was able to provide supplies for an average of 250 children, this year more than 430 children in their care will go back to school equipped for success.

By the end of the drive, more than \$10,500 worth of supplies and backpacks had been donated by a growing list of community partners and advocates. Greenhouse Church, Walmart and James Moore & Co. were some of the agency’s largest donors, joining more than 35 community individuals who supported this year’s drive.

“The success and reach of this year’s drive was achieved largely due to the community responding to a last minute plea for support,” stated Jenn Petion, director of community and government relations for Partnership for Strong Families. “We had an unprecedented need this year, and the community responded with unprecedented support. We also thought outside of the box to make it easier for donors, like creating an Amazon Wish List where donors could see our needs and have supplies shipped directly to our office.”

For the first time, the agency also launched a “Home for School” campaign that targeted youth who were nearing permanency through reunification with their biological family or adoption with their new forever family. Through the initiative, the agency assessed cases on an individual basis and provided wraparound services to ensure reunification or adoption success. For 25 children, this meant achieving the stability of permanency in time for their first day of school. The families will continue to receive case management services, monitoring, safety assessments and support for several months. Making these placement changes in time for school eliminated the need to change schools mid-year, which causes added trauma and academic hardship.

“We did not start this initiative with a goal number in mind, but rather we assessed cases on an individualized basis to see which children and families were ready for permanency with the correct supports,” said Stephen Pennypacker, President/CEO of PSF. “Switching schools during the school year can be traumatic for students. We knew that we wanted to set our youth up for academic success in every way possible, and that includes stability in both their home and school environments.”

In addition to the agency’s initiatives for the children in their care, the four resource centers PSF operates - the Library Partnership, SWAG Family Resource Center, Cone Park Library Resource Center and Tri-County Community Resource Center - also held school supply drives of their own to support community youth.

For more information about Partnership for Strong Families, please visit www.pfsf.org.

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About Partnership for Strong Families:

Partnership for Strong Families is the lead community-based care agency for Florida Judicial Circuits Three and Eight, including Alachua County. PSF is contracted by the Florida Department of Children and Families to deliver comprehensive child welfare services to children who are victims of abuse and neglect. Partnership for Strong Families also works with at-risk families to prevent child abuse and to decrease the risk of children entering the foster care system. PSF serves more than 5,000 children in 13 counties annually.