



PARTNERSHIP FOR
**STRONG
FAMILIES**

Partner Family Newsletter

JANUARY - MARCH
2020

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Join our Facebook Group

To join the group, please search for PSF's Partner Family Network on Facebook, it's that easy!

Know someone who is interested in learning more about becoming a Partner Family? Contact **Samantha** at **352-244-1684** or **Samantha.Cowan@pfsf.org**.

Don't forget - Partner Families are eligible to receive a \$125 incentive for referring families who become licensed!

THE IMPACT OF FOSTER CARE

By: Nedge Jean-Bart, Recruitment and Retention Specialist

We all know that when the courts remove a child from his or her parents due to abuse or neglect, the child welfare system seeks placement preferably with relatives. But when a safe environment can't be found among relatives, children are placed in foster homes. Our primary goal is reunification, and if reunification isn't possible then we proceed to a concurrent goal, which may be adoption or permanent guardianship.

Due to maltreatment, children often enter the foster care system with medical, behavioral and emotional problems. Children removed from their homes may feel socially isolated and depressed, and these problems can be exacerbated when children move from one foster setting to another. Children in foster care are more likely to do poorly in school and have physical and mental health problems. They are at risk for behavioral problems, drug and alcohol use, or delinquency. Our foster care system is designed to support children who have been exposed to some form of trauma. The very act of being put in foster care is traumatic for children. It means the loss of their birth family, and sometimes even their friends, schoolmates, teachers and everything that is familiar. The impact of trauma affects their brain, their behavior and their way of thinking. It disrupts the child's sense of security and safety.

We view our foster homes as healing homes. For a child who must leave everyone and everything familiar behind, entering the foster care system can be a frightening experience. However, with the love and support of a caring Partner Family, a child can not only adapt but thrive. Loving Partner Families have the power to change lives and also play a critical role in helping children. We have seen the incredible growth in the lives of children who have come from very tragic situations. We have also felt sadness, confusion, and anger of children who had been mistreated by the ones they love. But with the support of our Partner Families, we've also experienced the joy of families being reunited. One of our PRIDE competencies is "connecting children to safe, nurturing relationships that are intended to last a lifetime." Our foster homes have an opportunity to build a legacy of hope by showing the children love, structure and consistency, which for our kids in care is a big first step towards healing. When children reunify with their birth families, they have created a lifetime relationship with their Partner Family. Our Partner Families help to bridge the gap, set the child up for success and promise to be that child's cheerleader regardless of what the future may hold.

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MESSAGE FROM THE CEO



Stephen Pennypacker
President/CEO

Dear esteemed community members, partners and friends,

I hope the New Year is bringing everyone a renewed sense of purpose, motivation and inspiration. At PSF, 2020 is bringing several exciting new opportunities, many of which you'll read about in this edition of the *Partnership Connection*. 2019 was a year of many accomplishments, and as I look back on our progress, I am encouraged by the support that continues to come in from our community partners and advocates to advance the mission of supporting local youth who have experienced abuse, neglect or abandonment. It is because of you that we are able to do the work that we do. Thank you.

We start the new year now looking at a legislative session that is proving to be a monumental one. There are several pieces of legislation being considered that stand to greatly impact our system of care. We welcome legislative changes that will bring about greater accountability for every lead child welfare agency, and we will be meeting with our legislators in Tallahassee to ensure that the increase in accountability is met with funding that will continue to allow us to meet the highest standards of care.

I am also eager to finalize our agency's Strategic Plan and Action Plan that will chart our course for the next three years and beyond. Our staff and Board have worked diligently to ensure these plans are responsive to the needs and strengths of our agency. Among some of our key priorities, we will be working to enhance the satisfaction of our staff and partners, starting with an employee satisfaction survey that will help to identify ways we can better support our work family - a family that continues to grow with new opportunities.

In 2019, new staff members joined our team as we expanded our licensing unit to incorporate new Level 1 licenses for our Kin Caregivers. This program allows for enhanced support for our relative and fictive kin caregivers, increasing their monthly subsidy and allowing for more training opportunities that will help to better equip them to serve the children in their care. Our staff is also growing thanks to the new federal grant that will allow us to evaluate and expand our Resource Center Model. We are currently identifying candidates to serve as research coordinators and to staff the new Resource Center that will open in Lake City in early 2021.

I wish you all a happy and productive start to this new decade.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Stephen Pennypacker', with a long, sweeping underline.

Stephen Pennypacker
President/CEO

RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION UPDATE

By: Nedge Jean-Bart, Recruitment and Retention Specialist

The Licensing Department is excited to embark on our set goals for 2020. We are embracing both the change and growth of our licensing team. With the addition of our Level 1 Licensing Specialists, we have been able to seamlessly integrate the licensure of level 1 homes. We are optimistic about the new milestones and achievements that we have set in place for the fiscal year. It is our hope to continue to serve the families in our community while keeping our eyes fixed on PSF'S mission to enhance the community's ability to protect and nurture children by building, maintaining and constantly improving a network of family support services. With the support of our team, we hope to continue to provide safe and loving homes to children in care. We are in the business of strengthening families through innovative, evidence based practices. As the number of children in out-of-home care continues to increase, it is our top priority to continue to recruit and license homes with the support of our local community members. We are always looking to connect with people who are motivated to help strengthen our community's children and families. Word of mouth recruitment from our Partner Families is still one of the best ways to reach new potential families. If you know a family who is interested in opening their hearts and home to a child in care, please direct them to Samantha Cowan, our Recruitment Specialist at Samantha.Cowan@pfsf.org or 352-244-1684. Remember: PSF offers a \$125 incentive for referring any family ho becomes licensed!

NON-JUDICIAL CASE SUCCESS

By: Alexis Rickards, Family Care Counselor

In child welfare, non-judicial cases offer interesting challenges and require creativity to have successful outcomes. Not all case managers in my office take non-judicial cases; I didn't until about a year ago. I am Alexis Rickards, a child welfare case manager with Camelot Community Care in Gainesville, FL.

In April 2019, my supervisor, Sarah Ostreicher, assigned me a non-judicial case, stating it would most likely become a judicial case. The allegations were violent. The father put the mother in the hospital after an altercation at home that occurred in front of the children. The father also has a criminal history that left us concerned for the children being in his care at all. Multiple hotline calls came in within the first three months with different allegations all from different sources, increasing our concern for the children remaining in the home.

After completing my initial assessment of the family, I realized that I was working with a mother who was raised in the foster care system and was victimized by peers and caregivers throughout her youth. Having NO supports as a teen aging out of care, she found herself on the street. She had partners who continued to victimize her into her adulthood. Her husband and father of her six children believed that he saved her from a life on the street. Following her marriage, she worked to obtain a CNA license to support her family. That was a turning point in her life. However, the level of coercive control and violence within her relationship was dangerous and often resulted in her being seriously injured, but the concept of leaving her husband and raising six children, three of which have special developmental needs, was too difficult to achieve on her own.

During my weekly visits to the home, I saw a mom who was trying desperately to keep her six children safe and cared for, while trying to meet all the expectations of DCF without the help of a spouse and without any support. She was at the end of her rope. She was triggered to use drugs, triggered to violate the safety plan just to have a little help from the father, and even jeopardize her own physical safety to make ends meet. I didn't see how we could keep this case non-judicial without any supports – especially with new reports being called in to DCF.

Judicial cases have safety built in. We have already placed the children in a safe placement. They come with a network of supports and services that the Dependency system can offer. The court is involved and we can restrict access as assessed to be appropriate by the court and case management. However, non-judicial cases don't have that safety net. Non-judicial cases also rely on the parents to ensure that the children have their service needs met. With three children with developmental needs, this mother spent most of her spare time trying to stabilize behavior or take her children to the appropriate assessments. She didn't even have time for her own services.

After several consults with my supervisor, we felt stuck. The father was not engaging in his services and behaving dangerously. The safety monitors kept leaving or were unreliable. After a routine staffing with Quality Operations Manager, Janeen Rawls, she asked my supervisor why we would consider removal if we were so supportive of this mother. My supervisor replied that we could keep the kids safe, stabilize their behaviors, and get the necessary developmental assessments while mom focuses on her emotional health and empowerment. However, no supports and no family would mean foster care. Ms. Rawls said, "Just because you aren't sheltering doesn't mean you can't use those resources." My supervisor asked me to reach out to our Partner Family Advocate, Christy VanValey.

“...but it's hard to tune out a group of Partner Families telling you how strong and valuable you are to your children; that you can do anything.”

An advocate indeed, Christy immediately sifted through her list of Partner Families to see who would be a good fit. Each Partner Family brought their own unique skills or experience with them that made them relatable to this mother. They came into this mother's home and listened to her, supported her, and helped her in a way she has never been helped before. These individuals have invested in this mother and encouraged her. As a result, she has the confidence and empowerment to obtain an injunction for protection from her husband. She is also working on filing for divorce. Her husband tried to break her newfound confidence, but it's hard to tune out a group of Partner Families telling you how strong and valuable you are to your children; that you can do anything. Christy and her group of Partner Families wrapped this family in support and encouragement so that she didn't feel like she was embarking on this journey alone.

This mother came from a broken foster care system that didn't value her and didn't listen to her when she asked for help. She walked through life feeling that she was not valued. However, a small group of Partner Families were the ones that stepped in and partnered with her to prevent the removal of her children. We hope to close this case soon. The children are so much happier, the home environment more stable, the children's behaviors have improved, and everyone is getting what they need in services. As case managers, my supervisor and I couldn't be happier. It is in no small thanks to the Partner Families who decided to open their hearts and foster this mother.



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partnerfamily.org



CHRISTY'S CORNER

By: Christy Vanvaley Conner, Partner Family Advocate

The road to reunification is difficult. All of us PRIDE trained know part of being a Partner Family is working with the birth parents of the children coming into our home. Many times it can be intimidating. It's also hard to know where to start. We will be exploring what other families have done to build a relationship with birth parents in the coming months. Here are a few of the ideas to get you started from some of our seasoned Partner Families.

Open communication between Partner Families and the birth parents is a common theme throughout many of our families. Flexibility with scheduling parent visits, birthday parties and holidays is important to help birth families. Showing parents a different way to do something and, in many cases, a safer way to work with children helps empower them. As Maya Angelou said, "Do the best you can until you know better. Then, when you know better, do better." Just as the parents are learning, so are we. We have an opportunity to learn from the children in our homes and their parents. I look forward to sharing stories of resilience in 2020. Thank you for your dedication to children and their families!



CONNECT WITH US!

JOIN OUR FACEBOOK GROUP

PSF has a Facebook Group for our amazing Partner Families! This is another way for Partner Families to share tangible needs with us and an easy way for us to post helpful information or upcoming trainings and activities that parents might want to participate in. It is also a great way for Partner Families to receive and lend support to one another when needed. To join the group, please search for PSF's Partner Family Network on Facebook, it's that easy!

KNOW SOMEONE WHO IS INTERESTED IN BECOMING A PARTNER FAMILY?

Please direct them to Samantha Cowan, our Recruitment Specialist at Samantha.Cowan@pfsf.org or 352-244-1684.