



PARTNERSHIP FOR
**STRONG
FAMILIES**

Partnership Connection

OCTOBER - DECEMBER
2020

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Featured Story

ON PAGE 4, READ ABOUT
HOW WE PROVIDED
OVER 350 YOUTH WITH
SUPPLIES FOR BACK TO
SCHOOL THIS YEAR!

NORTHSTAR FAMILY RESOURCE CENTER

By Deborah Rubin, Community Relations Assistant

Our newest Resource Center, which is set to open in early 2021 in Lake City at the Richardson Community Center, will officially be named **NorthStar Family Resource Center**.

NORTHSTAR
FAMILY RESOURCE CENTER

The name was proposed by Dr. Philip Mobley, Manager of the NorthStar Family Resource Center, who shared the following inspiration for the name:

“The **North Star** is a beacon of inspiration and hope for many. The North Star is the anchor of the northern sky. It is a landmark, or sky marker, that helps those who follow it determine direction as it glows brightly to guide and lead toward a purposeful destination. Professionally, the North Star represents an agency's unwavering definition of its purpose, its service and its clients. Clarity about a company's North Star leads leaders toward their goals and helps them to envision the company's future growth.

For African Americans, the North Star is as real as it is inspirational, and as spiritual as it is celestial. Another very important aspect of the North Star for African Americans is the indication of freedom. When enslaved people in the southern United States sought freedom from those who held them as captives, they devised ways to escape toward the North. Finally, *The North Star* was the name of an anti-slavery newspaper. It was started by Frederick Douglass, also a former slave who understood the depth of the importance of light and guidance.”

The logo, pictured above, carries the color and brand of the Richardson Community Center, home to the future NorthStar Family Resource Center. This location will allow us to reach many families within walking distance of the center and provides ample space for community events and programs.

This expansion is being made possible by the five-year *Community Collaborations to Strengthen and Preserve Families* grant we received from the Children's Bureau earlier this year. We are excited about this important milestone and look forward to sharing more as our plans develop.

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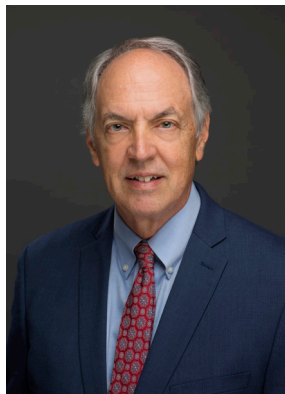
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MESSAGE FROM THE CEO



Dear esteemed community members, partners and friends,

I hope this newsletter finds you in good health and adjusting well to the many ever-changing aspects of our lives. Our team continues to do much of our work from the safety of home. I am grateful for our ability to continue providing the highest quality services in a mostly virtual setting. Of course, our case management partners and staff at our Resource Centers continue to take the necessary precautions to provide critical in-person services to the families in our care and the community at-large.

While we have continued to provide these vital services, our agency is not immune to the financial impacts that this pandemic has brought on so many. Currently, the Department of Children and Families is requiring us to reduce our use of state general revenue dollars by 3 percent during this fiscal year. We've already begun to take the necessary steps to accomplish this without impacting services to children and families. We are also taking a close look at overhead unrelated to staff as a primary source of trying to economize. We are also preparing to have critical conversations with our legislators and candidates so that they may understand our system's funding and local needs.

Our agency has also begun the process of closely examining our individual and institutionalized understanding of racial equity through our newly established Racial Equity Workgroup. Led by Casey Family Programs' Corey Best and supported by a diverse and passionate group of employees, I am hopeful about the positive changes we can bring about through this work.

Throughout these difficult times, I remain amazed at our incredible network of Partner Families and at how wonderful they have been in continuing to care for kids as they adjust to attending school in a brick and mortar or virtual setting. We are supporting them in any way we can, including by providing necessary personal protective equipment.

Finally, as we continue to see the number of children in out-of-home care rise, the timing for the establishment of the NorthStar Family Resource Center could not be better. Under the management of Dr. Phil Mobley, a resident of Lake City and advocate for the child welfare system, I know this center will continue the strong legacy built by its predecessors.

Stephen Pennypacker
President/CEO

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

Patty Carroll, Director of Communications and Engagement



Like many of you, our team continues to adjust to life in the times of COVID-19. For some, this hardly feels new anymore. We have rearranged our homes to accommodate an office space, helped our children adapt to a new learning environment and created innovative solutions to emerging issues as we carry out our roles in a more virtual setting. We strive to look for the positives in this unprecedented situation, but for many, the devastating impacts of this global pandemic will forever change our lives.

While times are difficult, the show must go on - and indeed it has. Our team has not missed a beat from carrying out a successful Back to School Drive to preparing for a busy holiday season through Wish Upon a Star. As you'll also see in this newsletter, we are well underway to opening our fifth Resource Center to serve the children and families of Lake City.

I am also excited to share that I have been given the opportunity to co-chair the Florida Coalition for Children's Communications Workgroup. I have been fortunate to sit on this workgroup for a number of years and most recently chaired the Awareness Campaign Subgroup. This statewide workgroup is responsible for responding to emerging child welfare crises, informing leadership of key trends and ensuring our unified voice represents community-based care and provider agencies alike. I'm looking forward to the progress this workgroup can make over the next year.

In this time of uncertainty, I'm reminded more than ever of the incredible resilience of the youth we serve, who in addition to the stress we all are feeling, are also at any given time working to adjust to a new home, grieve the loss of what once was familiar and, more than anything, keep hope alive for a bright future. I hope we never lose sight of this incredible strength and of the importance of our community's work in serving these promising youth.

WISH UPON A STAR 2020

By Deborah Rubin, Community Relations Assistant

With the fall season upon us, Partnership for Strong Families is preparing for our annual Wish Upon a Star drive, our biggest donation drive of the year! This year, we continue the tradition of coordinating with donors to grant at least two of three wishes for our children in care. With help from our incredible community, Wish Upon a Star provides over 1,300 youth in our care with the toys, treats and gifts they so deserve. If you are interested in making a child's holiday brighter, we have different options you can choose from. Our flyer, pictured right, will give you all the details you need.

This year, we are also paying close attention to the safety of our staff, volunteers and donors and taking extra precautions. For those of you who would still like the experience of donating in-person, our staff will be ready to assist with masks and sanitizer to make the process as smooth as possible. For our partners who still wish to volunteer, we will be practicing social distancing as well. While this year has thrown us many changes, our dedication to this annual tradition will not be one of them. We hope you will join us!

If you would like to be a WUAS donor or just want to learn more, please email Jacob Clore at Jacob.Clore@pfsf.org or call 352-318-1298. Donations can also be made at pfsf.org/donate.



3 Ways You Can Help:



Sponsor a child and shop for their specific wishes.



Provide a monetary donation, and we will shop for you!



Shop from a personalized Amazon Wishlist safely from home!

Every child in our care is currently submitting three wishes for Wish Upon a Star. We ask all sponsors to fulfill 2 of their wishes. Each child sponsored is an approximate \$50 commitment from the donor.

For more information or to sponsor a child, please contact Jacob Clore at Jacob.Clore@pfsf.org.

AMAZING GIVE 2020

By Jacob Clore, Community Engagement Specialist

During a year marked by unprecedented challenges and changes due to COVID-19, we anticipated that The Amazing Give 24-hour online fundraiser for nonprofits originally scheduled for April would look at the very least a bit different this year. When the fundraiser's organizers from The Community Foundation of North Central Florida announced the event would be rescheduled in August, we were grateful that this important fundraiser for our children in care would still take place this year.

By the end of the 24-hour event, we raised over \$5,000 thanks to 38 amazing donors (that's an average of \$133 per donor)! See our full list of public donors to the right. These funds are going to ensure our youth have access to the important childhood resources and experiences that bring some much-needed stability to their lives.

We couldn't have achieved such a high degree of success without great partners like The Community Foundation of North Central Florida, whose efforts in organizing the Amazing Give helped bring in more than \$1 million for our local community. We would also like to thank Dick Mondell's in Gainesville for hosting us during our Amazing Give kickoff event. Altogether, they helped us raise over \$400 by donating proceeds from all drink sales and tote bags purchased during the event.



2020 Donors

Allison Novak	Linda Kallman
Amy Carson	Lynn O'Sickey
Amy Stone	Maggie Labarta
Beverly & Allen Pope	Marie Samec
Bill Arnold	Mary Grace Curtin
Carter Arnold	Michael Bowie
Chris Birkmaier	Mikaela David-John
Craig Birkmaier	Nancy Birkmaier
Declan & Patty Carroll	Patrick Allen
Dick Mondell's	Pebbles & Robert Edelman
Donna Brown	Prudence Tucker
Elizabeth Pittman	Samantha Cowan
Jacob Clore	Stephen Pennypacker
Jacqueline Stetson	Susan Arnold
Joan Suchorski	Tara Thompson
Kate Lind	The Barger Family
Kenny Brighton	The DeConna Family
Kim Baker	Vanessa Carroll
Linda Abeles	William Halvosa

THE SHOW MUST GO ON: BACK TO SCHOOL IN THE TIMES OF COVID

By Deborah Rubin, Community Relations Assistant

In the beginning of June, we were planning and preparing to host our first donation drive in a worldwide pandemic. We were unsure where to begin, but through brainstorming our team was able to plan and execute a successful drive in a smaller space, while adapting to social distancing precautions. Despite the uncertainties of the COVID-19 pandemic, we were able to meet every need this year with incredible support from our community. Our community partners and donors came out in full force, which allowed us to supply over 350 children in our care with the tools they need for a successful school year.

We are thankful for every individual and organization that participated in this year's drive. To the community partners that hosted our donation bins, ordered supplies online via our Amazon Wishlist or participated financially, thank you! Many contributions arrived at our office right as we needed them, helping the packing process run more efficiently.

Without your help, we could not have equipped over 350 youth with all the supplies they need for this school year and with excess to be able to provide for youth who came in to care after our drive ended. We are grateful for the community that supports our children and families every summer especially through the COVID-19 pandemic.



2020 Donors

Alachua County Sheriff's Office

Amy Hill

CROM Corporation

Donovan and Katy Arnold

Greenhouse Church

Gulf Coast Supply Co.

Jacqueline Stetson

Karen Weinstein

Katie Trainor

Kyle and Kimberly Farris

Lisa Roderick

Resolutions Health Alliance

Sara Cornett

Stacey Kirkpatrick

Stephen and Kiera Latta

Steve Evans

Suzanne Cockey

Tara Thompson

Trinity United Methodist Church

UBS Financial Services

UDV Gainesville

UF Shands Vista

Unity Ministries - Jason & Amanda Sweat

University City Church of Christ

RESOURCE CENTER UPDATE

By Stacy Merritt, Director of Resource Centers

As the Resource Centers strive to provide community-driven services and supports designed to build upon caregiver protective factors, we continue to seek ways to engage and involve parents with the planning and implementation of Resource Center programming and events. With this goal in mind, the Resource Center team was recently able to participate in a virtual training, Developing and Sustaining Parent Advisory Committees, facilitated by the National Family Support Network (NFSN). PSF is an active member of NFSN, and not only does membership provide a variety of free or discounted learning opportunities, but it also allows for resource sharing and collaboration among various family resource center locations within Florida and across the nation.

The Gainesville Resource Centers, in partnership with CDS Family & Behavioral Health Services, recently wrapped-up their summer programs where a limited number of students were able to come for both academic and enrichment activities. Per CDC recommendations, all staff, volunteers and students wore face masks and practiced social distancing. We're happy to say there were no reported concerns related to the spread of COVID-19 with any of our summer program participants. In addition to academic lessons, some of the many activities available included (varied by site): Capoeira, African Drum, theatre, arts & crafts, outdoor games, field trips and more. Participating students were also provided with back-to-school supplies to help them prepare for a successful school year! All academic and enrichment programs hosted at the Gainesville Resource Centers are funded, in part, by the Alachua County Community Agency Partnership Program (CAPP), through a three-year grant awarded to the PSF Resource Centers in 2018.

SUMMER PROGRAMS IN ACTION



SWAG Family Resource Center's summer program.



Bowling field trip for Library Partnership Resource Center's summer program.

AS ALWAYS, THANKS TO OUR MANY PARTNERS WHO MAKE IT POSSIBLE TO CONTINUE SAFELY PROVIDING SERVICES AND SUPPORTS FOR THE LOCAL COMMUNITY!

- United Way of North Central Florida for providing grant funding to support families with emergency needs related to COVID-19, facilitating referrals to the Resource Centers through their 2-1-1 system and helping with registration for tri-county's Annual Back to School Bash.
- CDS Family & Behavioral Health Services for assisting with our summer programming.
- Working Food Group for providing free family-style meals during the summer.
- The Southwest Advocacy Group for financial, in-kind and advisory support in the SWAG communities.
- The Star Center Theater for participating with LP's summer program.
- First United Methodist Church of Chiefland for helping lead the Back to School Bash (drive-thru) in Chiefland.
- Tri-County Community Resources, Inc. for financial and in-kind support.

NOVEMBER IS NATIONAL ADOPTION MONTH

By Sara Lind, Outreach Recruitment Specialist

Although we celebrate our adoptive families every day here at Partnership for Strong Families, we are looking forward to National Adoption Month in November. This year our National Adoption Month celebration may look a little different, but the heart of everything that we do has stayed the same. Adoption is something that the entire community can support as we celebrate the beautiful families that have formed through an adoption. National Adoption Month is also a time where we recognize that there is still a need for more adoptive families, as there are local children who are currently waiting for their forever family. We are asking our community to partner alongside us in celebrating our adoptive families and showing support but also advocating for the children who are awaiting adoption. Pictured to the right is a spotlight of our Heart Gallery, which features youth awaiting their forever home. You can learn more at www.pfsf.org/adoption/heart-gallery.

There are many ways that our community can celebrate National Adoption Month. Partnership for Strong Families is hosting a virtual 5k (see details below) to directly support our adoptions program. If you are involved in a group, business, faith based or community organization, connect with Partnership for Strong Families to show your support in November. You can contact Sara, our Outreach Recruitment Specialist, to learn more. We are also asking our local community partners to sponsor a child on our Heart Gallery by sharing their picture and short biography whether it be virtually or on a Heart Gallery Board that we can bring to you. If you are a part of an organization or group that could benefit by hearing more about our need for adoptive families and the process to adopt, National Adoption Month is the perfect time to invite us to come speak about that message.

For more information, please email Sara at Sara.Lind@pfsf.org or call 352-318-7604.

Heart Gallery Spotlight



Meet Antonio,
13 years old



Meet Alexis, 14 years
old and Alyssa, 13 years
old

SUPERHERO 5K

By Deborah Rubin, Community Relations Assistant

Join us in November for our first-ever virtual Superhero 5K! Lace up your running shoes and run with us from anywhere you would like on November 14 (or any day in November) to celebrate National Adoption Month. For more information or to register, visit www.pfsf.org/events/superhero5k.

14
NOV

PARTNERSHIP FOR
STRONG
FAMILIES

RUN WITH US
ON SATURDAY,
NOVEMBER 14
OR ANY DAY
IN NOVEMBER
TO CELEBRATE
NATIONAL
ADOPTION
MONTH!

JOIN US FOR A VIRTUAL 5K!

KEEPING SIBLINGS TOGETHER THROUGH ADOPTION

By Deborah Rubin, Community Relations Assistant

Our focus in recruitment is to always take part in conversations with families about our need for foster and adoptive parents. In August, we honed in on the urgent need for families willing to welcome and adopt siblings, which helps to preserve the close bond shared between family. We hosted a Facebook Live Q&A with the Ahlgrens, a local adoptive family, to gain their perspective on their decision to adopt siblings and how that looks in everyday life. Even though August is over, there is still an urgent need for local families to adopt sibling groups.

Please check out the Moody Family story below and contact us today to learn more!



Pictured: The Ahlgren Family

Hear from Joslyn Ahlgren PSF Adoptive Family

"When you adopt children you quickly recognize that there is this deep-seeded need for them to have an identity. They need to cling to something that gives them a sense of belonging and identity and sometimes that is a very strongly linked biological connection. Having that biological link physically present is a very special and unique thing that they can lean in on when they're happy or struggling."



MEET THE MOODYS!

"I knew my friend had adopted both of her kids, but I had never considered it for me. I started to think about adoption and decided to go for it. **On November 9, 2012, my life changed forever.** It was a Friday afternoon and my phone rang. My caseworker began to tell me about three little girls who need an emergency placement. They had called everyone and everywhere but no one could take all three girls together. They didn't want to split up the sisters, and I was their last option. The more she told me about the girls, the more at peace I felt. I said, "YES, I WILL TAKE THEM!"

"As a single mother, the road hasn't always been easy or smooth. We have faced many obstacles and roadblocks, but we have overcome them as a family. My girls are the best thing that has happened in my life."

"People keep telling me what a blessing I have been to my girls, but I keep saying, "No! You have that backwards, what a blessing my girls are to me."



If you would like to adopt or simply want more information on what that can specifically look like for you, please reach out to Sara Lind, Outreach Recruitment Specialist, at Sara.Lind@pfsf.org or 352-318-7604. You can also visit our website at www.pfsf.org to learn more.



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CHILDREN'S PARTNERSHIP COUNCILS: BRINGING A COLLABORATIVE COMMUNITY-BASED RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

By Jacob Clore, Community Engagement Specialist

When the COVID-19 pandemic first started to impact daily life in our community, Partnership for Strong Families' (PSF) Children's Partnership Councils (CPCs) came face-to-face with the question many of us had to ask in our endeavors: how do we continue to do the work we do in a now largely virtual setting? In order to continue working together to strengthen and protect children and families during a pandemic, our localized community-based councils had to make necessary changes in order to safely meet the needs of families impacted by COVID-19. Through the past six months of the pandemic, our CPCs have demonstrated the resiliency and flexibility of a community-based council group and its importance in helping prevent child abuse and neglect.

At their core, PSF's CPCs bring together professionals and advocates from across our service area that collaborate to see how they can further protect children and families. Often meeting in groups of two or three counties, these Councils help us ensure we can have a positive impact across our geographically and culturally diverse 13-counties. With a budget provided by PSF, each Council votes to decide how they would like to specifically impact children and families. These priorities include individual assistance for families like rent and utilities, child safety items like pack and plays and car seats, GED assistance for caregivers and swim lessons for children to prevent accidental drowning, which in Florida is one of the most common causes of child fatality.

When COVID-19 quickly shutdown many aspects of our day-to-day life, the CPCs adapted to face the new challenges brought by the pandemic. To start, each Council quickly transferred to virtual ways of meeting, like conference calls and Zoom meetings. Council members also began sharing updates on their agency's operations and the most pressing needs of their clients. Two Councils purchased thermometers to be distributed to families when they recognized they were in short supply at stores. Two other Councils invested in items like diapers and wipes when those were in short supply as well. When Council-sponsored events like the annual Fort White Back to School Bash came around the corner, Council members quickly pivoted to a drive-thru style event to continue meeting the needs of families in Fort White during an unpredictable back-to-school season.

PSF is lucky to have such resilient, flexible and determined agencies sitting on our Children's Partnership Councils. With their participation, we have been able to meet the needs of children and families as they navigate the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. Collaborations like these are incredibly powerful, especially during a worldwide crisis.