



PARTNERSHIP FOR
**STRONG
FAMILIES**

Partnership Connection

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2020

OFFICE LOCATION

PSF Headquarters
5950 NW 1st Place
Suite A
Gainesville, FL 32607

CONTACT US

P: 352.244.1500
F: 352.244.1647
www.pfsf.org

FOLLOW US

@PartnershipForStrongFamilies
@partnr4strngfam



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Featured Story

Over 1,160 youth in care received Christmas presents this year! Read more on page 4.

RESOURCE CENTERS AWARDED FIVE YEAR FEDERAL GRANT

By Deborah Rubin, Community Relations Assistant

We have very exciting news here at Partnership for Strong Families! Our Resource Centers were awarded a five-year federal grant from the Children's Bureau within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Administration on Children, Youth and Families to evaluate our current Resource Center Model and eventually expand the model to Lake City. The overall goal of the *Community Collaborations to Strengthen and Preserve Families* grant is to prevent child maltreatment and reduce entries into foster care.

The Administration for Children and Families will provide over \$2.7 million in funding over the five years. During this time, services provided at our Resource Centers will undergo a rigorous evaluation. After the evaluation, these findings will be used to refine our model as we work toward expansion.

In December, our staff traveled to Washington D.C. for the Community Collaborations to Strengthen and Preserve Families Kick-off meeting with our grant evaluator Dr. Robin Perry. In January, we also held our first Resource Center Advisory Committee Meeting in Lake City to begin the process of developing a new Resource Center. We met with over 30 community members of Lake City to collaborate on the future Resource Center and what would best benefit the community there. We are so excited for the opportunity to expand our mission to prevent child abuse in Lake City.



Stacy Merritt, Director of Resource Centers, presents to over 30 Lake City community members at our first Resource Center Advisory Council meeting.



Toni Spoliansky, Pebbles Edelman and Patty Carroll pictured with our grant evaluator, Dr. Robin Perry, in Washington D.C. for the federal grant kick-off meeting.

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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,

Stephen Pennypacker
President/CEO

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK: Community Relations and Recruitment Update



Patty Carroll
Director of Community
Relations & Recruitment

As I reflect on the last few months, I am in awe of how much can change in just a short time. As you saw on our front cover, we are entering a new era for our Resource Center Model. The *Community Collaborations to Strengthen and Preserve Families* grant is allowing us to grow our collaborations in unprecedented ways, both locally and nationally. At the kick-off meeting in December, our team was amazed at the brilliance and passion that surrounded us as teams from around the country outlined their prevention programs that were working to keep children safe and families together. It was an honor to be among them.

Thanks to funding from Casey Family Programs, our teams also had the opportunity to visit sites similar to our Resource Centers in New York, New Jersey and San Francisco. These

trips provided valuable insight into common elements that have proven successful in reducing rates of child maltreatment and entries into foster care. Likewise, we were able to share information about our local Resource Center Model with these sites. I was fortunate to be able to join Pebbles Edelman, Senior VP of Clinical and Community Services, and Cherie Kelly, Library Partnership Resource Center Manager, on the visit to New York and New Jersey and was incredibly motivated and encouraged by the experience.

As we embark on a new year and decade, our recruitment team is hitting the ground running as we make connections with new advocates and individuals ready to pursue the foster or adoption journey. Maybe becoming a foster or adoptive parent is on your resolutions list, or maybe you are interested in learning about how you can better support youth in care. We would love the opportunity to connect with you to join us in creating a brighter future for local children.

NATIONAL ADOPTION MONTH

By: Jacob Clore, Community Engagement Specialist

Finding permanency through adoption is an important journey for many of the children in our care. Every one of them deserve the stability and love that come with a supportive forever family. The month of November gives all of us here at Partnership for Strong Families joy as we advocate for and celebrate the adoptions that happen throughout the year. In November, we also finalized 26 adoptions, 10 of which were celebrated at the annual National Adoption Day at the University of Florida's Levin College of Law. This year's celebration included a delicious breakfast and lunch provided by the college, ice cream from DeConna Ice Cream and presents for the children.



SUPERHERO 5K

During what proved to be a chilly November morning, over 200 superheroes descended upon Westside Park in Gainesville for the 5th annual Superhero 5k. This year, participants took the superhero theme and flew with it, donning their best costumes and outfits. After warming up and stretching with help from Jeremy Watford from Watford Legend Health, runners quickly gathered around the starting line as PSF CEO Stephen Pennypacker signaled the start of the race. As runners braved the two lap course, volunteers from 'The Rock girls' basketball team provided moral support and hydration at the halfway point to ensure everyone finished happy and hydrated. With post-race refreshments provided by BJ's Brewhouse and The Bagel Bakery, the superheroes were able to relish in a job well done, and they sure had reason to celebrate! By the end of the race, supporters helped raise over \$3,500 for youth in our care awaiting their forever families!

Thanks to the following race sponsors for helping us organize another successful race this year: The Tee Shop, Fun 4 Gator Kids, Law Office of Mary K. Wimsett, 4Rivers Catering, Sunshine Health, Dr. Kazimour, Fit2Run, Skate Station Funworks, Village Counseling Center, Law Office of Katy R. Bost, Farm Bureau Insurance, Alicia M. Pfahler, Capes & Tiaras, and Hutson Law Firm.



WISH UPON A STAR 2019

By Deborah Rubin, Community Relations Assistant

The end of 2019 marked Wish Upon a Star coming to a close. Wish Upon a Star is our annual Christmas toy drive that allows every child in our care to ask for three wishes for Christmas. We then take those requests and create a “star” for each child. Each child is matched to donors across the community who have committed to sponsoring a child’s wish. This year, over 1,160 children received gifts. It was an incredibly rewarding process to see each of these children’s wishes come true. We are so thankful to every donor who committed to sponsoring children. We saw children get bikes, L.O.L. dolls, tablets, many Paw Patrol toys, fishing rods, guitars and even a PlayStation 4. Donors went above and beyond to ensure each child got specifically what they wanted.



In three weeks, we sorted and wrapped over 4,000 gifts for children with the help of over 85 volunteers from the community. Our Wish Upon a Star workshop was at Campus USA's headquarters in Newberry. They generously allowed us to use their large meeting room for an entire month. Each day, we would receive donations, sort and wrap the gifts, and make sure the gifts were distributed through all of our service sites. Thank you to each individual volunteer and the volunteer groups that came to help us every day.

Each year, we are reminded through our Wish Upon a Star drive how blessed we are as an agency to be supported by such an incredible community. Just think, over 1,160 children received their Christmas wishes when they may have not gotten anything at all because our community's heart and generosity overflows! All of us at Partnership for Strong Families are so thankful for you.



THANK YOU TO ALL OF OUR WISH UPON A STAR DONORS!

Alachua County Sheriff's Office	Hamilton School Nutrition Association	Patti Gordon
Alicia Phillips	Hazel Surrency Circle	Paul Nickerson
Alligator Mortgage Company	Heart Happy Films	Pebbles Edelman
Allison Novak	Holly Beck	Rachel Yoho
All State	James and Marcia Leary	Redline Perfusion & Consulting
Amanda Cruce Class	James Moore and Co.	Renee Collins
Amanda Thomas	Janice Cartwright	Resolutions Health Alliance
Amber Curchy	Jenniger and Vlad Petrescu	Risen Strength Cross Fit
Amy Freeman	Jennifer Blades	Robert Acevedo
Andrea and Travis Wood	Jenny O'Flynn	RTI Surgical Group
Andrea McClintic	Jesse and Lesley Hersey	Sade Krind
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Anita Stephen	Kathy Bolick	Samantha and Nelson Cowan
Anita Zucker Center for Excellence in	Kathy Winburn	Santa Fe College
Early Childhood Studies	Katie Fairty	Santa Fe Ambassadors
Ann Barnett	Katie Lowell	Sara Adams
Anne and Scott Banks	Katrina Degel	Sarah Zeenberg
Anne Conklin	Kenny and Aly Brighton	Shannon Walker
Audra Moraski	Kim Slone and Niki Dahlem	Sharon Williams Ladies' Mission Group
Austin Forbrick	Kimber Greenwood	Sheriff Sadie Darnell
Barbara and Robert Plasky	Kimberly Mahoney	Sherry Brown
Benton Pediatrics	Kirk Ruth	Shira Callahan
Brooke Dickerson	Kitsy Blanc	Special Friends Care Inc.
Brooke Sutton	Kristi Kautz	St. John the Evangelistic Catholic Church
Bruce and Casey Gillingham	Lafayette Blue Springs State Park	Stacey Kirkpatrick
Charles and Gwyn Littell	Lemerand Athletic Center	Stacey Starling
Chelsea Poulin	Lesley and Jesse Hersey	Stephanie Marchman
Cheryl Madeiros	LifeTeen	Stephen Foster Elementary
Cheryl Phillips	Lindsay Hanson	Steve Mann
Cheyenne Conrad	Liz Plasky	Tara Thompson
Colleen O'Flynn	Lymaris Barger	Tara Woodington
Congregation B'Nai Israel	Lynn McKenzie	Taylor County Sheriff's Office
Cynthia and Nicholas Machupa	Marcia Swope	Teague Rental Equipment
Cynthia Kent	Marisa Ramirez Stukey	The Bartram
Debi Goesser	Mary Defner Patterson	The DeConna Family
Donovan Shaw	Matt Benge	The Kawaja Family
Donna Durham	McNeal Legal, LLC	The Vineyard
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Elizabeth and Ted Braitsch	Michelle Joins	Tracy Toms
Elizabeth Lazo	Michelle Rivers	Tricia Braitsch
Enterprise Damage Recovery Unit	Nancy and Craig Birkmaier	UBS Financial
Faydra Henry	Natalie Shrader	UDV Gainesville
Fred Johnson	Nathan and Jaime Lambert	UF College of Education, Post Awards
Gainesville High School	Naylor Publications	UF College of Medicine Finance and Administration
Galvan Acupuncture	Nicole Ruby	UF College of Veterinary Medicine
Geraldine Curry	Norton Elementary	UF Department of Emergency Medicine
Ginger Nichols	Palms Medical Group	UF Department of Surgery
Grace United Methodist Church	Pam and Tim O'Flynn	Upper Room Ministries
Greater Truevine Baptist Church	Pam Cannon	Vangie Martin
Greenhouse Church	Pamela and Chip Gonzalez	Wayne and Julianne Browning

HEART GALLERY SPOTLIGHT

MEET ROBERT, 10 YEARS OLD

Robert is an energetic boy who enjoys a variety of outdoor activities. He likes using his vivid imagination to play in his outdoor fort and also likes to play in the sand box with his cars and trucks. Robert also enjoys running outside, riding his bicycle and listening to music.

Robert has a reserved personality and is very loving and affectionate toward his caregivers, and he enjoys lots of hugs. Robert enjoys being the center of attention and prefers the lead role in friendships. Due to his desire to lead, making friends can sometimes be difficult for Robert.

Robert's needs would best be met by an individual or family with no younger children in the home and the ability to offer him safety, stability, structure, boundaries and unconditional love. Robert is in need of a family who is willing and able to give him individualized attention.

Please contact Seanetta Robinson at seanetta.robinson@pfsf.org or 386-243-8812 for additional information on Robert.



RECRUITMENT UPDATE: BEING PART OF A BIGGER STORY

By Sara Lind, Outreach Recruitment Specialist



This past year has been so impactful for recruitment, and I was thrilled to join the team as the Outreach Recruitment Specialist in the summer. My desire to work in child welfare was shaped by stories, my friends' stories, my own story and my community's story. There is something so powerful in sharing a story that can change the world in its vulnerability and truth. My time in recruitment has already been transformed by our current Partner and Adoptive Families that are brave in sharing their story to foster or adopt. It reignites a passion in me when I listen to the stories from our families about the impact that they are making on generations. It is so special when an Info Night is filled with members of our community who can see themselves in our Partner Families. It is almost like something clicks in them that makes this journey seem less scary and way more possible. Our partner and adoptive families' stories are giving other families the confidence to say "yes."

I have had the opportunity to hear stories from biological parents and children in care while at PSF. Many of their stories are filled with hurt, rejection and disappointment; however, it also allowed us to connect. There is probably something in your story that connects with all of those feelings. Hearing glimpses of these stories brings the weight of what we are doing to life. Our Partner and Adoptive Families are bringing light to our community's stories. They are adding restoration to a biological mom's story that looked like addiction would continue, or adding restoration to a teen's story who did not think theirs would end with a forever family. It is incredible to look back and see that many of these stories were impacted by a Partner Family sharing their story and starting a ripple effect.

There is something in your story that can change the world as well if you would allow it. It may even look like taking the step to foster or adopt to change the lives and stories of children in our community. It can also look like leading your business or congregation to help us spread our message and need. I am looking forward to hearing more of our community's stories in 2020 and seeing the transformations that take place because of them.

COMMUNITY SUPPORT BRINGING MORE OPPORTUNITIES FOR LOCAL YOUTH

By Jacob Clore, Community Engagement Specialist

Here at Partnership for Strong Families, we work hard to make sure that the children in our care have access to typical childhood experiences they otherwise may not get. Community support through the annual Amazing Give and from our partners at Trinity United Methodist Church allow us to bring special experiences to youth in care. For one teen in our care, that experience came in the form of attending her high school's homecoming dance back in the fall. She attended the dance in style with a new pair of shoes to go along with her dress. Our amazing supports ensured that she took part in a fun rite of passage she otherwise may not have experienced.

Last fall, a trip to Disney World also became a reality for an 8-year-old boy in foster care. His Partner Family had already planned to take a trip to the theme park and wanted to make sure he could take part in the fun as well. Thanks to funds set aside for memories like these, he spent two days in Disney with his Partner Family, giving him time to bond and share special moments together.

Memories and experiences like these are all thanks to the generosity of our supporters who give during fundraisers like The Amazing Give and Trinity United Methodist Church. Trinity United Methodist Church generously donated to us their Christmas Day offerings, totaling more than \$28,000! The Amazing Give is a 24-hour online day of giving that will return in April. Every dollar raised gives children in our care resources they may not otherwise have. Stick with us over the next few months as we share more details concerning the give and how you can sponsor childhood memories like these.

TASTE OF THE NATURE COAST

By Jacob Clore, Community Engagement Specialist

The third annual Taste of the Nature Coast event continued the trend of featuring incredible chefs and dishes all while benefiting our Tri-County Community Resource Center. This year, chefs presented guests with their best appetizers, entrees and desserts and guests in turn voted for their favorite dishes in four different categories. The Suwannee River Fair Pavilion in Fanning Springs proved to be the perfect venue for the event as guests had plenty of room to walk around and try the different selections of food. A big thank you to Trenton Floral for helping us transform the space for the occasion!

Throughout the evening, the Messina Brothers contributed incredible music on their fiddles as guests tried the dishes submitted for the competition. Levy and Gilchrist County Sheriffs Bobby McCallum and Bobby Schulz also spoke to the Resource Center's success and the impact it continues to have on their communities. As the night drew to a close and after guests cast their final votes, Taste emcee and Gilchrist County Tax Collector Michael McElroy announced the winners in each category. The Suwannee Belle took home the prize for Best Dessert and Best Entrée, while Cherry's Steak and Seafood won Best Presentation and Best Appetizer. Altogether, donors and supporters helped us raise \$10,500 for the center. Thanks to the following restaurants for donating their time and best food for a great evening: Bell's Catering, Bubbaque's BBQ, Cherry's Steaks and Seafood, Chef Laura Fowler Goss from The Filling Fork, Top Hog, Elle Cocina Mexican, Beef O' Brady's of Chiefland, Cilantro Tacos and The Suwannee Belle.





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EDUCATION ADVOCACY PROGRAM

By Tara Ferland, Education Advocate

In 2019, PSF was awarded a grant from the United Way of North Central Florida to implement a new Education Advocacy program with the goal of better supporting the educational needs of youth in out-of-home care. The target population served by the grant is youth in high school residing within Alachua, Dixie, Gilchrist and Levy Counties. Recently, the program has been expanded to include youth in middle school and also those residing in Bradford and Union Counties.

Teens enrolled in the program have been working hard to set goals, identify action steps, and plan self-advocacy strategies if they need additional supports. Most recently the program has been working on breaking down the digital divide to ensure students have access to electronic devices for educational purposes. Nationally, 17% of high school students are not able to complete homework assignments due to lack of internet service. A recent study reports and highlights the need to connect students to eliminate the information gap. When teens are connected to supervised digital resources, they can frequently check their grades, access a plethora of study materials, and advance in their studies through online classes. Technology can be such an important tool in the distribution of information and advancement opportunities!

Another program success has been the connection of youth to local academic resources. There are many tutoring resources available for teens throughout our region, although finding the right fit can be a hurdle. Schools and afterschool programs have an abundance of resources with teachers who are willing to stay for an extended day to ensure student success. Local tutoring centers, such as Mathnasium, also offer intensive supports to our youth who could benefit from focusing on misconceptions and concept mastery. By being connected to these local academic resources, it is our goal that all students graduate from high school and move on to college or career readiness.

A recent highlight of the Education Advocate has been observing the four-month progression of goals in a student, as well as the subsequent growth that has occurred. From setting academic goals to uncovering content misconceptions, to motivational goals regarding the completion of homework, and now process oriented goals to turn that (correct and completed) homework in; this teen is learning to break large tasks into smaller, actionable steps to see progress and grow in critical thinking and problem solving skills. The Education Advocacy Program continues to grow and assist teens, such as this student, to break down barriers to success in education and encourage youth in their academic goals.