



PARTNERSHIP FOR
**STRONG
FAMILIES**

Partnership Connection

JULY - SEPTEMBER
2020

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Featured Story

ON PAGE 8, READ ABOUT
HOW WE PROVIDED CARE
FOR OUR TEENS IN CARE
IN A UNIQUE WAY, AMID
COVID-19.

BACK TO SCHOOL DRIVE 2020

By Deborah Rubin, Community Relations Assistant

Our annual Back to School Drive works to ensure every child in our care is sent into the new school year ready for success. While COVID-19 may impact the way children across our community are learning, our goal is to prepare them for academic success in any environment, including a virtual one. This year, we have revamped our drive to allow us to safely prepare as many children as possible with everything they need. Every child will receive a set list of supplies depending on what grade they are entering. As we served nearly 500 children through our efforts last year, we are expecting that need to grow this year during the uncertainty of a global pandemic.



How to Get Involved

An effort like the Back to School Drive thrives with the generous support of the community we serve and partners like you. Our donation process allows you to safely contribute, and we have a few contactless ways for you to help out!

1. Monetary donations: Visit www.pfsf.org/donate to donate online or send a check to our office. Just \$25 helps us send a child back with everything they need for a new school year.
2. Amazon Wishlist: Purchase school supplies from the comfort of your own home by using our Amazon Wishlist and supplies will be delivered to our office. Email Patricia.Carroll@pfsf.org for a link.
3. Businesses and organizations: If you are located in North Central Florida, you may house one of our donation bins for anyone to drop off school supplies. If your organization would like to host a donation bin, email Patricia.Carroll@pfsf.org.

For more information, please contact Patricia Carroll at Patricia.Carroll@pfsf.org or 352-359-8169, or visit our website at www.pfsf.org/event/backtoschool.

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MESSAGE FROM THE CEO



Stephen Pennypacker
President/CEO

Dear esteemed community members, partners and friends,

It is hard for me to believe that we are entering our fourth full month of our new ways of living and working during a global pandemic. As our staff began working largely from home in the beginning of March, it was difficult to predict where we would be by this time. And as things change daily, it is clear that we don't know what our routines and work will look like months from now. What I can say is that no matter what the landscape is, our staff will continue to show up for our community's children and families.

Over the past few months, our staff have developed new and innovative ways to serve children and families in our care, as well as families through our network of Resource Centers. We have recruited and trained new foster and adoptive parents through Zoom and Microsoft Teams, while our case management partners have been able to conduct visits via FaceTime or in-person with the necessary personal protective equipment and social distancing in place. At our Resource Centers, we have been able to safely open our doors once again, allowing our staff to safely serve 1 - 2 patrons at a time. While the work we do is never easy, these added obstacles have been met with positivity and ingenuity.

Our partnership with the Florida Coalition for Children and the Department of Children and Families have helped us share best practices, access needed PPE equipment and learn from what others are seeing throughout the state. Our collective efforts and advocacy also led way to a successful budget being released from the Governor in late June with no major cuts to our funding despite significant economic impacts from the pandemic.

While we had good news on the budget front, our agency continues to see a rise in the number of children coming into care, coupled with a delay in getting many children to permanency due to necessary changes to court procedures. Although the current numbers put a strain on our system and caregivers, I am optimistic that positive gains will be made as we continue to seek solutions. Until then, it bears repeating that our need for quality foster and adoptive homes remains great in all of our 13 counties. To learn more about the process, visit partnerfamily.org today.

Sincerely,

Stephen Pennypacker
President/CEO

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK



I hope this edition of the Partnership Connections finds you and your loved ones safe and healthy. As our communities and nation continue to battle a global pandemic, our staff have been settling into new routines of carrying out our work - changing dining rooms into offices, getting comfortable with the feeling of a mask when outside of our homes and making sure we are never caught without hand sanitizer. But in the middle of all of this, we are also recognizing the systemic injustices and inequalities that create significant obstacles for our children, families and staff members.

Partnership for Strong Families is dedicated to empowering and honoring the voices of our youth in care, our biological families and our network of Partner Families and caregivers. We recognize the injustices that are firmly rooted in our nation's history and present. As such, our agency released the following statement on June 4:

"At Partnership for Strong Families, we believe that Black Lives Matter. We grieve the murder of George Floyd and countless other Black individuals across our country. As an organization committed to building strong families, we must speak up when we see families being weakened and threatened by the effects of systemic racism and white supremacy.

We will continue to listen to those whom we serve, and then do our best to show up, speak out, and ensure that each and every family we work with is treated with respect and dignity.

To our Black staff members, children and families, Partner and Adoptive Families, friends, and neighbors, we see you and we stand with you."

Our agency is in a period of tremendous growth, and our leadership is dedicated to creating systems of equality. In the coming months, we will be rolling out opportunities for learning and input through a new workgroup and strategic training offerings. While this is just a start, it marks a renewed commitment to creating a welcoming workplace for every person.

FOSTER FAMILY SPOTLIGHT

By Sara Lind, Outreach Recruitment Specialist

Meet the Popes!

The Pope's are a transracial adoptive family who reside in Lake City, Florida. They have a total of eight children (this is including one foster child). The ages of their children range from 10-39 years old, and their two 13-year-old and two 10-year-old boys are currently living in the home. Both parents work at the Department of Veteran Affairs, and Beverly Pope currently serves on our own Board of Directors as an important voice for our Partner and Adoptive families.

FUN FACT: "WE WILL CHALLENGE ANY FAMILY IN A GAME OF UNO OR BINGO, BECAUSE WE WILL WIN!"



Q&A WITH THE POPES:

How many years have you fostered?

We've been foster parents for 8 years.

What led you to become Partner Family?

The love for children and empty nest syndrome.

Were there any fears or "What Ifs" that you had before stepping into fostering?

Fear of being heartbroken when kids left, and what if the kids didn't like our family.

What have you learned as a Partner Family?

If you have it to give, all children need love, support and structure, and they will receive it from you without bias.

What impact do you hope to leave on the kids who enter your home?

Self-love and independence is key!

What has been your most helpful tool or strategy as a Partner Family?

Love conquers all. I know that's cliché but it's true! No matter what goals you set for a child to reach, they must love and trust you in order to work and meet those goals. Love hard without reservation!

What advice would you give to someone considering fostering?

Just do it! It's rewarding and you have the Foster and Adoptive Parent Association to support to help you through any "What Ifs!"

CHILDREN'S PARTNERSHIP COUNCIL UPDATE

By Jacob Clore, Community Engagement Specialist

With July marking the beginning of PSF's fiscal year, our Children's Partnership Councils (CPCs) are looking forward to a new year serving community families. While we look to the future, we also reflect back on our successes and accomplishments during the 2019-20 fiscal year. While priorities differed during much of the year, the COVID-19 pandemic equally shaped the perspectives of each of the Councils during the last quarter of the fiscal year. Here's a look at each CPC's activities this past fiscal year:



The **Baker-Bradford-Union Council** continued to prioritize assisting families with individual needs like rent and utility assistance, pack and plays and car seats. The Council assisted 10 families through individual assistance requests and allocated funds to thermometer kits with health information cards for families who did not have access to thermometers or additional information.

The **Columbia Council** organized and ran the Fort White Back to School Bash for families in August 2019, complete with back-to-school information, free backpacks and free hair trims. Council Members also allocated over half of their budget to utility assistance for families, assisting 15 families throughout the year.

The **Gilchrist-Levy-Dixie Council** allocated funds to purchase GED test vouchers for adults, sponsor swim lesson vouchers to alleviate costs for caregivers and provide first aid kits and diapers for the Tri-County Community Resource Center. The Council also sponsored hygiene kits that were passed out at the Tri-County World's Greatest Baby Shower.

The **Madison-Taylor Council** prioritized meeting the individual needs of families including rent and utility assistance, diapers and pack and plays. Overall, the Council assisted 14 families through individual assistance requests. In May, Council members also spent funds on medical thermometer kits for families.

The **Suwannee-Lafayette-Hamilton Council** allocated funding to a variety of initiatives, like supporting clothing for homeless school-aged youth, car seats, pack and plays, hygiene items, utility payments and child safety items.

THE AMAZING GIVE: BE A MEMORY MAKER FOR KIDS IN CARE

By Jacob Clore, Community Engagement Specialist

For many of us, the words "rescheduled" or "postponed" have echoed across our newsfeeds and emails since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Our previously scheduled participation in The Amazing Give fundraiser, originally scheduled for April 2020, was no exception. We are excited to announce that The Amazing Give has officially received a new date, scheduled for August 19-20, 2020. The organizer of this regional 24-hour fundraiser, The Community Foundation of North Central Florida, deserves praise for their swift action and support of nonprofits and the community at large since the beginning of COVID-19. We are thrilled to partner with them and take part in this fundraiser to benefit the children in our care.

Picture this: you are a child in our care who has lived in an out-of-home placement since the beginning of the year. After already experiencing the challenges of adjusting to a new home and surroundings, the COVID-19 pandemic leads to the closing of your school and cancels all extracurricular activities. For many of our children, any resemblance of "normal" or stability that they had left vanished within a few short weeks. As communities slowly reopen and extracurricular activities resume safely, our children will also want to take part in the fun and familiar typical experiences of childhood. Fun activities and resources like recreational sports, new clothes for school and participating in a class field trip will be some of the potential memories on their minds. However, due to economic barriers only amplified by COVID-19, many of our children will not have access to these experiences. Now more than ever before, YOU have the great opportunity to Be A Memory Maker and support childhood resources and experiences during The Amazing Give.

Taking part in The Amazing Give is not a one size fits all approach. There are several ways you can have an impact during this year's fundraiser, including:

- Making a financial contribution to our Amazing Give profile found at <https://www.theamazinggive.org/organizations/partnership-for-strong-families>.
- Fundraising for Partnership for Strong Families as a Peer-to-Peer fundraiser. Each Peer-to-Peer fundraiser receives their own Amazing Give profile to help encourage their family and friends to donate.
- Sharing our social media posts to your friends and family. Just one share can lead to donations for our children in care.

Each contribution will help us ensure that our children experience a sense of normalcy through the uncertainty of a global pandemic. Please join us August 19-20 from 6 p.m. – 6 p.m. as we participate in this year's Amazing Give campaign. For more information, please contact our Community Engagement Specialist Jacob Clore at jacob.clore@pfsf.org or (352) 318-1298.

CONTINUING TO REACH OUR COMMUNITIES DURING COVID-19

By Stacy Merritt, Director of Resource Centers

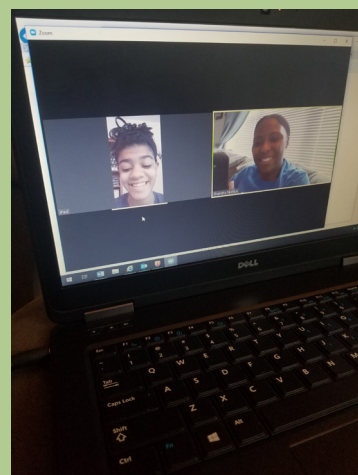
With social distancing and virtual meetings becoming a part of our daily routines, Resource Center staff have been finding creative ways to stay engaged with the local community while also meeting the emerging needs of those we serve. In addition to providing on-site services and supports, the Resource Centers have increased community outreach opportunities including sharing resources with neighboring communities, providing “care packages” for families and meeting the educational needs of children and youth.

Thanks to the support of local service organizations such as the Working Food Group and the generosity of many local restaurants, each of the Resource Centers were able to provide weekly, prepared meals for families during the early-phases of the pandemic (this continues at select sites). We were also able to share these meals and/or other food items with some Gainesville communities not traditionally served by the Resource Centers including Pine Ridge, Pine Meadow and Sunshine Park, along with residents of Inglis and Trenton, who are served by the Tri-County Community Resource Center.

While concrete supports have continued to present as an on-going community need, Resource Center staff quickly recognized the need to also support the emotional well-being of families. Between increased household stressors (e.g., loss of employment, decreased work hours, children home full-time, home-schooling requirements) and fewer opportunities for social supports, families are at higher risk of unsafe situations that may lead to abuse or neglect. To help alleviate some of this household stress, the Resource Centers are not only helping caregivers to apply for appropriate benefits, connecting them to community resources and assisting with employment related tasks, but are also providing care packages designed to encourage parent-child interactions and promote positive coping skills for both the adults and children. These care packages (pictured below) have been provided through both our Resource Centers and as part of the Healthy Social and Emotional Development & Family Support Program.



Over the past several months, the Resource Centers have worked diligently to maintain relationships with school personnel, children and their caregivers to help promote the academic success of the students. At Library Partnership, this consisted of virtual meetings with students who had previously attended Homework Help at this site. The children engaged in virtual conversations with Family Support Facilitator (FSF) Shandra Nichols (pictured right) who helped them to set goals and maintain a positive attitude about the many changes they were facing as students. At SWAG Family Resource Center, students and caregivers were engaged through opportunities to pick up both student and adult lunches, availability of educational packets, continuation of the School Board’s backpack feeding program and guidance regarding virtual learning opportunities. With summer now here, each of the Gainesville Resource Centers are also offering limited summer programming for students with both academic and enrichment activities planned. For more information about PSF’s Resource Centers please visit: www.psf.org/resourcecenters.



HEART GALLERY SPOTLIGHT

TYLER - 13 YEARS OLD

Tyler is a super sweet and polite youth with a laid-back and friendly personality. Tyler enjoys being outside and staying active. He does best with people who are patient and structured yet can be flexible toward his needs. Tyler likes to play video games and participate in activities where he can keep his hands busy and his mind active. Tyler will thrive in a family who is physically active and can provide him with outlets to channel his energy in a positive way. He will do well with people who will offer to let him try again after making mistake or engaging in negative behaviors, rather than immediately resorting to consequences. Tyler needs a family who will support contact with his biological siblings.



Please contact Sarah Aikin at Sarah.Aikin@pfsf.org or 352.244.1655 for additional information on this youth. His adoption ID is 105425838.

RECRUITMENT GOES DIGITAL

By Sara Lind, Outreach Recruitment Specialist

Recruiting families has definitely presented its challenges over the past few months, but it's also given us new opportunities to connect with our community. We have held seven virtual Foster Care and Adoption Info Sessions and connected with local partners through their social media audience. These virtual info sessions have allowed for our current foster families to connect with perspective families and encourage them. Recruitment has continued to take phone calls to answer any questions that families may have and screen families as they begin the process to become a foster or adoptive parent. Although the situation is not ideal, we are still able to connect with our community and recruit incredible foster and adoptive homes. The recruitment team is grateful for our partners that continue to help us reach the community virtually. Our means of recruiting has changed but our need is the same to find safe and loving families. To learn more about taking the next steps, please visit www.partnerfamily.org. If you are interested in becoming a foster or adoptive parent, the upcoming PRIDE classes are listed below. PRIDE is the orientation class our future foster and adoptive parents take to fully equip and prepare them for their new journey!

UPCOMING PRIDE CLASSES

Gainesville - September (Foster Care and Adoption)

- Enrollment Closure: August 6
- Classes: September 1 - October 27
- Every Tuesday from 6:30 p.m. - 9:30 p.m.

Perry - August (Foster Care and Adoption)

- Enrollment Closure: July 21
- Classes: August 15 - October 10
- Biweekly Saturdays from 10 a.m. - 4 p.m.

Gainesville - October (Foster Care ONLY)

- Enrollment Closure: September 15
- Classes: October 10 - November 7
- Every Saturday from 10 a.m. - 3 p.m.



If you are interested, please contact Samantha Cowan at Samantha.Cowan@pfsf.org or call 352-213-7219.

“AND THE AWARD GOES TO...” PSF’s (Virtual) Annual Employee Recognition Event

By Samantha Cowan, Recruitment Specialist

Every year, our staff gathers for a special Employee Recognition event, which is generously sponsored by the Partnership for Strong Families Board of Directors. This year, our standard in-person gathering shifted to a virtual one, but not even Covid-19 could stop us from honoring our incredible employees! On June 8, we hosted a virtual Employee Recognition celebration with 195 people in attendance from across Partnership for Strong Families and our contracted case management organizations (Devereux and Camelot). PSF President and CEO Stephen Pennypacker kicked off the event by thanking all our employees for creatively persevering through the past few months. Amid great challenge, our teams continue to work smartly and tirelessly for our families and children in care.

Two employee awards were presented for each department: an internal departmental award for Outstanding Employee, and a Most Valuable Partner award for an individual outside of that department. In total, 22 outstanding employees were recognized for their above-and-beyond contributions! All the announcements were met with a round of applause and heartfelt messages of “congratulations!” from fellow colleagues in the chat feature on our virtual platform. Please join us in celebrating not only our award winners (listed below) but all of our outstanding staff members!

LIST OF AWARD WINNERS

Administration, Quality Assurance & Contracts

- Outstanding Employee: Linda Means
- Most Valuable Partner: Jean Bacon

Adoptions

- Outstanding Employee: Seanetta Robinson
- Most Valuable Partner: Matt Stewart

Camelot - Gainesville

- Outstanding Employee: Alexis Rickards
- Most Valuable Partner: Merry Jane Fairfield

Camelot - Live Oak/Starke

- Outstanding Employee: Tyuanna McCall
- Most Valuable Partner: Casey Gaouette

Clinical Services & Utilization Management

- Outstanding Employee: Sharon Surrency
- Most Valuable Partner: Jessica Morrison

Community Relations & Resource Centers

- Outstanding Employee: Shandra Nichols
- Most Valuable Partner: Kaitlyn Morris



Devereux - Lake City and Trenton

- Outstanding Employee: Jean Bacon
- Most Valuable Partner: Tricia Westland

Finance

- Outstanding Employee: Yvette Spencer
- Most Valuable Partner: Laura Waxman

Human Resources and Staff Development

- Outstanding Employee: Lamesha Smith
- Most Valuable Partner: Timothy Bergman

Information Technology

- Outstanding Employee: Trina Ratliff
- Most Valuable Partner: Jason Weigel

Operations, Licensing & Placements

- Outstanding Employee: Janeen Rawls
- Most Valuable Partner: Jessica Eickstedt



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CARING FOR OUR TEENS DURING COVID-19

By Deborah Rubin, Community Relations Assistant

During a global pandemic, it is easy for us to feel forgotten or unseen when we don't get to physically go to work, school or out to see our friends. At Partnership for Strong Families, we realized this time may be increasingly more difficult for our youth in care who no longer get to see their friends or teachers at school every day. We decided to send each of our teens in foster care (over 60 youth) a care package to remind them that we are still here for them even when we cannot always physically be present. Each care package was filled with a \$25 Amazon gift card, journal, a yo-yo and deck of cards for the boys, face masks and chapstick for the girls, and snacks! Our case workers from our five service sites were then able to deliver them to our youth. We are thankful for our donors in this time who have created the opportunity for this to happen!

