



PARTNERSHIP FOR
**STRONG
FAMILIES**

Partnership Connection

JANUARY - MARCH
2021

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Featured Story

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

RECRUITMENT LAUNCHES FOR 2021

By Samantha Cowan, Recruitment Specialist

A new year is here, and our Recruitment Team is excited to work with new potential Partner and Adoptive Families! This year, we will be offering fourteen PRIDE training classes for foster and adoptive families. Every class will be conducted virtually and will continue to set our families up for successful and healthy experiences with our children in care. We're grateful to all our trainers who make PRIDE possible, and to those families willing to step forward and begin this process!

We know that every family's journey to foster care or adoption looks different. For some families, they know from the very beginning that they want to foster or adopt and are ready to jump in immediately. For others, they may not arrive at a decision until years after first considering it. Both paths are wonderful! We have recently created a Facebook group for families who are exploring the possibility of foster care and/or adoption. The group's purpose is to give direct, local information about foster care and adoption to interested families, and to encourage them to become advocates for children wherever they are on their journey. You are invited to connect with this group via the Partnership for Strong Families Facebook page, searching under "Groups." Joining this group places you under no obligation, it is just there to answer questions and provide information!

Our Recruitment Team continues to seek safe ways for us to engage with our thirteen counties and get the word out about our need for foster and adoptive families. We are grateful for organizations like Upper Room Ministries, who recently hosted us for a virtual info night, and for the Alachua County Library District, who placed PSF bookmarks in loaned books from three different libraries. We are continuing to host our virtual monthly info nights, which always feature a current Partner or Adoptive family who is ready to help answer questions from their real life experiences.

We are excited about the new families we are already working with this new year and the ways these families will positively impact children in their community. Our team would love to speak with you, and we remain committed to returning all inquiries within one business day. If you or someone you know is interested in learning more about foster care or adoption, please contact our Recruitment Specialist, Samantha Cowan, at (352) 213-7219 or Samantha.cowan@pfsf.org. If you would like to partner with us to help spread the word, please contact our Outreach Recruitment Specialist, Sara Lind, at (352) 318-7604, sara.lind@pfsf.org.



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MESSAGE FROM THE CEO



Stephen Pennypacker
President/CEO

As we proceed through the first weeks of 2021, I am encouraged by the continued efforts of our agency and other child welfare partners to safely bring services and supports to our families amid the COVID-19 pandemic. With distribution of the vaccine already underway, I am optimistic that our staff will soon be able to return to work with in-person visits between case managers, caregivers, therapists and children resuming as well. As I'm sure many of you can relate, I look forward to the opportunity where we can all gather safely and enjoy each other's company.

While steps are taking place to reopen our offices, leaders at the state level are continuing to make great strides to empower local faith and community organizations to help families that are experiencing crisis. During the An Act of Faith Events in December and January featuring leaders such as First Lady Casey DeSantis and Department of Children and Families Secretary Chad Poppel, local faith and community organizations learned how they could work closer together to move children and families out of crisis. By building strong relationships locally, we are ensuring that our children and families have easily accessed resources they need to remain strong and resilient. I am encouraged by these efforts by state leaders to recognize and mobilize the strengths of our faith-based and community partners.

The new year also brings some sad goodbyes to our staff here at PSF, as two prominent leadership figures are leaving our Headquarters Office. Director of Communications and Engagement Patty Carroll is transitioning into her a new role at InfoTech in Gainesville. Patty started at PSF in 2010 as an intern and quickly became a passionate advocate for children in our care and their caregivers. We are also bidding farewell to Placement Manager Mia Jones, who will oversee children's programs for children ages 0-3 at the Children's Trust of Alachua County. Mia started at PSF in 2004 and has worked tirelessly to ensure our children were placed in the environment that was best suited to meet their needs. While we will miss them both dearly, we wish them all the best in their future endeavors.

On a somber note, the PSF community is saddened to hear of the passing of Joan Canton, the matriarch of the Southwest Advocacy Group (SWAG) and a prominent figure of the SWAG communities. Joan advocated tirelessly for the needs of children and families in the neighborhoods surrounding our SWAG Family Resource Center and never let the size of a problem discourage her from solving it. We wish her family, friends and the SWAG community peace and healing as they navigate the loss of such an impactful advocate.

Stephen Pennypacker
President/CEO

PATTY'S FAREWELL TO PARTNERSHIP



As 2021 brings a close to a year that was marked by fear, uncertainty, sadness and loss, I hope that this newsletter finds you and your loved ones safe, well and hopeful. Although our challenges ahead as a community and nation are many, I have great hope of what 2021 will bring. For me, 2021 will start by bringing a bittersweet change. After nearly ten years at Partnership for Strong Families, I will be leaving the agency in January to pursue a new opportunity for me to continue to grow my skills in communications. PSF has been home to me since I graduated from the University of Florida, and my colleagues have become more like family. I never could have dreamed when I first joined our agency the doors that would be opened to me or the profound impact that our mission would have on me. Although I will be stepping away from child welfare, I will forever remain a dedicated advocate for the children and families we serve. The entire Community

Relations team has met several times and are well prepared to ensure their important work continues during this transition. From recruitment to community engagement to preparing for our upcoming celebrations of National Child Abuse Prevention Month and National Foster Care Month, I know that they will keep things running flawlessly. As you'll see in this issue, our plans for 2021 are robust and promising.

Adding to the strength of this team, I am also excited to share that we are moving forward in our search for the next Director of Communications and Engagement position. After a competitive process, we have hired our top candidate - Stevie-Lea Doyle. To learn more about Stevie, go to page 8! I have every confidence that Stevie will bring a great passion, skillset and knowledge to the role and to our agency. I want to thank you all for your continued partnership and support. I wish you all the best and hope that 2021 brings peace, joy and fulfillment.

Patty Carroll

NATIONAL ADOPTION MONTH

By Sara Lind, Outreach Recruitment Specialist

This past November we had the opportunity to celebrate National Adoption Month – 2020 style! Our incredible PSF adoptions team held a drive through celebration for many of our families that had an adoption during the year. Every family got to drive through their very own red-carpet event with many different child welfare employees and partners there to cheer them on with dances and gift bags as they rolled through. This past year put a pause on many things, but the celebration of new families is something we will always celebrate even if it looks a little different.



Pictured above: Photos from our National Adoption Day Drive-Thru Celebration!

We also had wonderful partners in our community that helped us in celebrating National Adoption Month while advocating for children in care that are still awaiting their forever families. Our partners at Trinity United Methodist, Upper Room Ministries, and Northside church were just a few of our partners that hosted digital Heart Galleries for their congregation and handed out bookmarks with adoption information. We were grateful for the faith-based organizations that partnered alongside us to pray, advocate, and talk about our local need for adoptive families. Our need for adoptive families is a pressing issue all year long, but November reminds us of this need and celebrates our adoptions throughout the year.

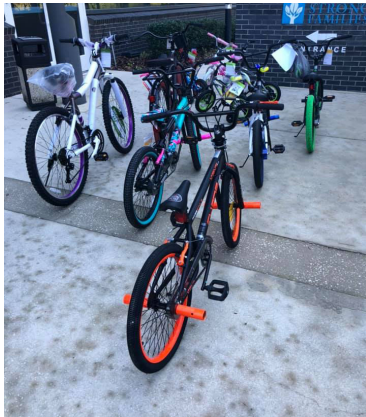
WISH UPON A STAR 2020

By Jacob Clore, Community Engagement Specialist

Even in a year as unpredictable as 2020, our Wish Upon a Star holiday toy drive had one of its most successful years yet thanks to a fantastic group of donors. During Wish Upon a Star, every child in our care asks for three specific holiday wishes and PSF's team of holiday elves seek out donors to sponsor those wishes. Over 250 donors provided over \$75,305 in gifts and an astounding \$12,345 in cash donations to provide presents for over 1,200 children.

Partnership's main office served as home base for all Wish Upon a Star operations in December. Some gifts arrived by donors dropping off in-person with staff wearing masks and enacting social distancing, while over 50 donors sent in gifts via our Amazon Wish List option, by far the most donors in any year who have utilized that option! We received all sorts of requests for gifts this year, but some of the most popular included nerf guns, Legos, arts and crafts kits, baby dolls, remote control cars, infant learning toys and bicycles. We even had a donor donate a Nintendo Switch, which typically costs around \$300!

While the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic kept us from welcoming our wonderful volunteer groups, we were fortunate to have many of our staff volunteer their time to help our team sort gifts. One staff member, Merry-Jane Fairfield, even helped break down and take care of dozens of boxes and provided wrapping materials. This is all in addition to the dedicated transporters who made multiple trips to get the gifts to caseworkers who delivered the gifts to the children on their caseload. You all are amazing and we don't know what we would do without you. Every year, we are reminded how incredibly fortunate we are to have amazing supporters who help us bring holiday memories to the children in our care. All of us here at PSF are so thankful for your continued support! See photos below.



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

Aigi Adesogan
Alex and Lindsey Vlasak
Alex Oumantsev
Alexandra Hernandez
Alexis Stutt
Alicia Pfahler
Alicia Phillips
Alligator Mortgage
Allison Novak
AllState
Amanda Newman
Amy Freeman
Amy Mills
Amy Vollmer
Amy Williams
Andrea Wood
Angela Jones
Angelia Howard
Anita Zucker Center for Excellence
Anne and Scott Banks
Anne Conklin
Ashley Counts
Ashley Sharpless
Audra Moraski
Austin Forbrick
Austin Reed
Barb and Robert Plasky
Benton Pediatrics
Betsy Stephens

Beverly Sleeper
Beverly Wonders
Bobbi Lynn Hodges
Brandon Allen
Brianna Sewell
Brook Journey
Candy and Marty Birch
Caroline Lentz
Carolyn Wallace
Catherine Drake
Cathy Reedy
Cathy Shannon
Chantel McConn
Chelsea Bowlin
Chelsea Poulin
Cheryl Charles
Cheryl Goodson
Chris Sims
Christopher Purcell
Cindy Kent
Clayton and Jacqueline Tucker
Colleen Gutman
Congregation B'nai Israel
Conseulo Puccini
Cynthia and Nicholas Machupa
Danielle Difato
Danita Jacobi
DaVita Dialysis
Donald Yates

Donna Durham	Kay Ayers	Pamela and Chip Gonzales
Douglas Maxwell	Kelsey Cruz	Paul Nickerson
EAN Services	Kelsey Weston	Rachael O'Dell
Elizabeth and Ted Braitsch	Keri	Rachel Davis
Elizabeth Hanselman	Kiarra and Chase Corless	Rachel Yoho
Emi Melker	Kim Domurat	Randa Conner
Emilie Andrade	Kim Slone and Niki Dahlem	Redline Perfusion
Emma Tardeew	Kimberly Wollard	Regenerative Biologics
Enterprise Damage Recover Unity	Kirk and Kathy Ruth	Resolutions Health Alliance
Evolve Counseling	Krista Hair	RisenStrength Cross Fit
Fabco Air	Kristi Kautz	Rosemarie Fernandez
Faydra Henry	Kristy Radeker	Sachi Pena
First Baptist Church of Lake Butler	Kyle Sharps	Salvatore Scali
Gainesville Association of Realtors	Lake City Middle School Student	Samantha and Nelson Cowan
Gainesville High School	Government	Santa Fe College
Gay Schmitt	Lauren Mizelle	Sara Adams
Gerald Donovan	Leann Campbell	Sara Lind
Geri and Ron Rubin	Leigh Wienert	Sean Johnson
Gertrude Johnson	Lemmerand Athletic Center	Shannon Walker
Gertrude O'Connell	Leslie Heffington	Shari Mack
Gianni Pena	LifeTeen	Sheriff Sadie Darnell
Gordon Green	Lindsay Hanson	Shining Star Music Academy
Grace at Fort Clarke United Methodist Church	Linsey Redding	Sidney Downing
Greater Truevine Baptist Church	Lisa Faga	Soniya Raj
Greenhouse Church	Lisa Klein	Spring Babies Playgroup
Gwyn and Charles Littell	Liz Plasky	Stacey Kirkpatrick
Hannah Hooper	Lonn McDowell	Stacey Starling
Hazel Surrency Circle	Luisa Pena	Stephanie Calo
Heart Happy Films	Lydia Brady	Stephanie Mickle
Heather Ray	Lymaris and Shawn Barger	Stephen Foster Elementary School
Heather White	Lynn McKenzie	Stevie Shultes
Helen Brown	Lynn O'Sickey	Studio 32 Orthodontics
Helen Cobb	Madison Kiwanis Club	Tamara Howard
Hilary White	Manjiri Rose	Tammy Kegley
Holly Beck	Marcia Swope	Tara Hollow
Hometown Mortgage Services	Marcia Wiesel-Leary	Tara Thompson
Inga and John Neubert	Marcia Wiesel-Leary	Taylor Hicks
Jacob Clore	Marisa Ramirez Stukey	The Alachua County Sheriff's Office
James Moore and Co.	Marite Haynes	The Best Restoration
Janice Cartwright	Marline Toussaint	The DeConna Family
Jasmine George	Marsheen Ryan	The Gainesville Vineyard
Jay Fenton	Mary Grace Curtin	The Gillette Family
Jean DeFlumer	Mary Patterson	Theresa Bradley
Jeffrey Rizzo	Matthew Schrold	Thomas Waddell
Jenifer and Vlad Petrescu	Maya Harris	Tia Ventura
Jennifer and Michael Deane	Megan Floyd	Tim Skelly
Jennifer Forrest	Megan Ohmer	Tina Arpaia-McCann
Jennifer Stickley	Melanie Blackburn	Tomi Adesogan
Jenny O'Flynn	Melissa Jones	Tracy Leibach
Jessica Kinton	Mercury	Tricia Braitsch
Jessica Nguyen	Mercury Systems	Tricia Johnston
Jessica Phillipe	Meredith Gaitanis	UBS Financial Services
Jessica Rhome	Merry-Jane Fairfield	UDV Gainesville
Jessie's Jewels	Michelle Belcher	UF College of Medicine Finance and Administration
Joeanna Santiago-Mendoza	Michelle Givens	UF Department of Emergency Medicine
Joshua and Anastasia Jones	Michelle Lundy	UF Health Pediatric Unit
Joy McQuinney	Mikaela and Brendan David-John	Unity Foster Ministries
Joyce Fuller	Montia Morris	Upper Room Ministries
Judith Caraso	Nadia Clark	Vanessa Carroll
Judy Griffin	Nancy and Craig Birkmaier	Vangie Martin
Julie McGrath/Glen Maples	Nathan and Jaimie Lambert	Village Counseling Center
Julie Moreno	Neisha Pierre	Vince Butorac
Kailey Downing	Nekeidra Rutledge	VITAS Healthcare
Karen Weinstein	Nichole Croft	Vivian Rios
Kassandra Moench	Nicole Dyson	Wayne and Julianne Browning
Kathryn McElhaney	Nicole Ruby	Will and Kimberly Powell
Kathryn Wheeler	Noelle Bulley	
Katie Dressel	Palms Medical Group	
	Pam and Tim O'Flynn	

HEART GALLERY SPOTLIGHT

Read about a local
youth awaiting his
forever home.

MEET ANTONIO, 13

Antonio has an easy-going personality with adults. He likes making friends, using social media, playing video and computer games, skating and running in his free time. He also enjoys serving in his community as a volunteer. Antonio desires to be adopted and looks forward to life with his forever family. He desires a loving, traditional two-parent home. Antonio would best thrive in a home with older children and a family that has the time to provide him with consistent one-on-one attention, especially when it comes to his educational needs. Antonio currently has a close relationship with his sibling and uncle; thus, it is essential that any family that adopts Antonio has the willingness to continue to foster these important family relationships.



SUPERHERO 5K

By Tricia Braitsch, Post-Adoption Liaison

In November, we held our 6th annual Superhero 5K to raise awareness, funding, and support for our local adoptive families and youth! With a pandemic still affecting our nation, we decided to host our first virtual 5K by encouraging runners (and walkers) to take pictures and videos of their time and send to us to celebrate with them!

It was an overall successfull time! We were able to raise \$2000 that will go toward recruitment efforts for our children awaiting their forever families.

Thank you to all of our sponsors and participants who made this year a success! We are hopeful that the Superhero 5K next year will be in person.

Pictured right: group participating in Superhero 5K!



ANOTHER MEANINGFUL YEAR FOR THE RESOURCE CENTERS

By Stacy Merritt, Director of Resource Centers

25,106
VISITS TO THE
RESOURCE CENTERS

26,095
SERVICES PROVIDED TO
PATRONS

AT THE RESOURCE CENTERS
64
INDIVIDUALS VOLUNTEERED

A special thanks to our amazing Resource Center team who consistently put local families and communities first as they creatively and safely serve those with the greatest need. These are some of the pandemic's many unsung heroes and they should be proud of the work they are doing every day!

After a difficult and unprecedented year, we are pleased to share a preview of our 2020 Resource Center Annual Report (above). These numbers and statistics help illustrate the positive impact of the Resource Centers throughout the pandemic, as our team worked diligently to modify service provision, allowing us to safely meet the needs of local communities. The many services and supports provided through our Resource Centers would not be possible without extraordinary community support received through grants, donations and volunteer time.

As often seen during challenging times, in 2020, our local communities rallied together to help those in need. Below are a few highlights from this past year!

- The Working Food Group, in partnership with Gainesville area restaurants, helped to provide more than 1600 prepared meals for families and individuals served by each of our locations.
- Local businesses and partner agencies, including Wal-Mart, Save-A-Lot, Tri-County Community Resources and the SW Advocacy Group, provided funds and/or in-kind donations to ensure our emergency food pantries were stocked and to allow access to food for those residing in communities outside of our normal catchment area.
- The Department of Children & Families, Department of Health, United Way and other local partners helped provide much needed PPE for staff and local residents.
- As an Impact Partner with the United Way of North Central Florida, PSF received United We Care and Alachua County Cares funding to assist families and individuals financially impacted by COVID-19.
- Additional funds were received as part of the 2020 Amazing Give hosted by the Community Foundation of North Central Florida, along with various individual supporters who donated through PSF's website.
- The Gainesville Resource Centers were able to safely host children's summer programming to include an academic component along with various enrichment activities, including Capoeira, African Drum, drama lessons and outdoor activities (funding provided by Alachua County/CAPP).
- The Resource Centers were also able to resume Homework Help and other after-school enrichment programs beginning in August 2021 (funding provided by Alachua County/CAPP). Prior to children being able to return on-site, Resource Center staff worked with teachers and students to help promote academic success using virtual platforms.
- With families spending more time at home, positive parent-child interactions were promoted through the provision of take-home activity baskets, resource sharing and more.
- Cone Park Library Resource Center was the first to host our Fight for Your Money financial literacy program using a completely virtual format in November and December. This program is funded through the Women's Giving Circle and partner agencies including, Catholic Charities, Gainesville Regional Utilities, Community Action Agency and UF-IFAS.
- Library Partnership, in collaboration with the Alachua County Library District and Bread of the Mighty, hosted their annual Health Expo (Holiday Edition) outdoors with social distancing in place. This fun and engaging event included free health screenings, health information from partnering agencies, raffle prizes and more!
- Holiday assistance was provided to more than 1300 Resource Center patrons through partnerships with agencies such as the SW Advocacy Group, Trinity United Methodist Church, First United Methodist Church of Chiefland, Toys for Tots, and more.



Pictured: Family Baskets at Library Partnership Resource Center.



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MEET THE NEW DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT

By Stevie Doyle, Director of Communications and Engagement

Hello, my name is Stevie Doyle and I am the new Director of Community Engagement. I will be overseeing the team responsible for recruiting partner and adoptive families, as well as heading up media relations, government relations, development efforts and community outreach!

I have most recently worked for The American Cancer Society for over five years as a Senior Community Development Manager where I recruited, trained, and managed volunteers, exceeded fundraising goals, raised awareness for the fight against cancer, and developed strong relationships with both internal customers and external stakeholders.

As someone who was adopted as a baby, and a mom to two little boys, Partnership For Strong Families has a special place in my heart and I look forward to helping make a difference in the lives of children and families in our area. I hope you will see my excitement for this position and my passion for all that I do.

Please feel free to reach out to me at any time at stevie.doyle@pfsf.org

