



PARTNERSHIP CONNECTION NEWSLETTER

April,
May, June
2026



SWAG Family Resource Center After School Program

Honoring National Foster Care Month: One Family's Journey

By Chelsea Bowlin, Outreach Recruitment Specialist

My husband and I became foster parents two years after we got married. We did not have any biological children but felt ready to step into the ministry of foster care. I will never forget the day our children walked into our home, I was so nervous but looking back on that day now, I imagine our kids were much more nervous and scared than I was. Those first two kids that walked through our door never left. Their story needed a permanent adoptive family and although we had not started fostering with the idea of adopting so quickly, the "yes" was easy and made complete sense for us.

We finalized adoption almost a year later when our kids were 8 and 5 years old. Fostering and adoption are not easy for anyone; the children, foster and adoptive parents, or biological family members. There was so much loss and pain and brokenness that happened to lead to the moment of adoption finalization. But at the same time, there is so much beauty and joy that can come through fostering and adoption. Our children were excited to all share the same last name and feel the finality of true permanent belonging. Adoption is about stepping in the gap for children who need a family, it cannot be about fulfilling our own personal desires to create a family or have children. Walking into adoption with these desires and expectations will only set everyone up for disappointment.

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A Message from Our CEO: *Preventing Abuse and Supporting Foster Families*

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Dear Partners,

Each April, during Child Abuse Prevention Month, we are reminded of part of our mission to protect children from abuse, neglect and abandonment. Preventing child abuse is not only our mission, but also the most effective way to keep families together and to reduce the need for foster care. When parents have access to support, education, and community resources, they are better equipped to provide the stable, nurturing homes every child deserves.

Our prevention efforts through our network of family resource centers, in-home supports and early intervention services are designed with one clear goal of helping children remain safe with their families whenever possible. Every time we reach a family before a crisis escalates, we are protecting a child from trauma and paving the way for healthier futures. While this is always the goal, we recognize that sometimes foster care is the best option for the child.

The second part of our mission is to establish safe and permanent homes with their own families, partner families or adoptive parents. May is National Foster Care Month. During this time, we pause to honor the extraordinary individuals who step forward when children cannot remain at home. Foster parents open their hearts and homes during moments of profound uncertainty, offering stability, compassion, and healing. Their dedication is nothing short of life changing.

We deeply appreciate the 198 foster families who partner with us every day. They are mentors, caregivers, advocates, and champions for children's well-being. Their role in the child welfare system is indispensable, and our gratitude for them extends far beyond a single month of recognition.

With prevention at the forefront and a strong network of foster families supporting children when needed, we are building safer communities and brighter futures for all families. Thank you for your commitment to supporting the families we serve where they are now. Your partnership makes all the difference.

With gratitude

Ginger Griffith
President and CEO
Partnership for Strong Families

Ms. Elizabeth Mitchell,
Chair

Ms. Kay Ayers,
Chair Emeritus

Mr. Guy Jopling,
Treasurer

Mr. Denny George,
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Jackson

Ms. Lisa Lee

Ms. Lashone
Surrency

Rev. Sharon Surrency

HONORING NATIONAL FOSTER CARE MONTH: ONE FAMILY'S JOURNEY CONTINUED

My husband and I have now been married 7 years and still do not have biological children. While that has been a hard road to walk at times, I am so thankful that God called us down the path of fostering and adoption early on in our marriage. It was never a second choice or back up plan, it was something we always wanted to do. I am thankful for the way God is building our family and for the lessons we have learned and will continue to learn along the way.

Fostering and Adoption is a beautiful, complicated journey full of restoration and heartbreak. Our car rides and dinner conversations are often full of questions and comments that may shock someone who doesn't know our story. If you're considering fostering or adoption, don't be afraid of hard conversations. Our kids need us to put words and a voice to the curious questions and emotions floating around inside their heads.

Watching my kids grow and reach milestones and accomplishments is incredible. Every small thing feels huge. I tried not to tear up the first time I watched my daughter serve in a volleyball game, when she made safety patrols and graduated 5th grade. The miracles I see in my son are being able to attend a summer camp without having a meltdown, making a friend, and doing something he doesn't feel like doing.

I wish my kids didn't have to go through the pain that brought them to my home, but I am so thankful for the opportunity to be their mom. I have the privilege of being mom to a beautiful 12-year-old girl and incredible 9-year-old boy who have both already overcome so much in their short lives. They work hard to do their best every day all while giving us grace as we are still learning how to be the best parents for them. The past 5 years have taught me so much about my faith, my marriage, my children, and what it means to be a mom. I am forever grateful and looking forward to the years ahead.

Chelsea is the Circuit 8 Outreach Recruitment Specialist at PSF. She continues to open her home to children in foster care in need of a safe place to call home. She is committed to working with the biological family and believes reunification, when possible, is the best option.



Foster Care & Adoption

Virtual Info Session

Join us to learn more about how to become a foster or adoptive parent.



HopePartner@pfsf.org 352-244-1615

FOSTER & ADOPTIVE PARENT RECRUITMENT - HARD TO PLACE KIDS

May is National Foster Care Month! Each year, we express our gratitude to all of our foster families, but we also aim to raise awareness of the ever-present need for more homes. Many people don't realize that there isn't a standard list of needs that a child enters foster care with, which can make finding the best placement for them even more of a challenge. This means we are always looking for every type of foster home. We need the family who can take the four siblings. We need the family who will be a stable placement for one teenager. We need the family who is willing to care for a child with chronic medical conditions or on the autism spectrum.

Foster care is hard. It's why we support and celebrate our foster parents. But it's even harder for the kids who have no say in their circumstances. If you want to be a place to land for a teen, a large sibling group, or a child with more complex needs, contact our Recruitment Team. Even if you just have questions, we'll talk with you and can have you join one of our Info Sessions to learn more.

HopePartner@pfsf.org or (352) 244-1615.

Scan here to sign up
for an info session!



NORMALCY AND AMAZING GIVE

The 2026 Amazing Give is approaching! This powerful day of giving brings together local nonprofits in a shared effort to amplify one another's missions. We are fortunate to be part of a community that shows up in such meaningful ways. Last year, our incredible supporters donated over \$20,000! Those funds allowed us to create new opportunities and meaningful experiences for youth and children in care. These gifts directly supported moments of growth, connection, and joy.

Here are just a few examples of the 170 meaningful supports and opportunities that 2025 Amazing Give contributions helped provide:

- a spring break trip to Seaworld so that siblings could bond with their foster family
- cheerleading fees so a teen in care could make friends and feel connected at a new school
- a special birthday celebration for twin siblings, creating joyful memories at the skating rink
- contemporary dance classes that gave a foster teen a creative outlet for self-expression
- academic workbooks to help build the confidence of a youth entering school for the first time

We're excited for another impactful Amazing Give! This year's fundraiser takes place April 30 from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Follow us on social media and stay tuned to learn how, together, we can create even more opportunities for our youth to make positive and lasting childhood memories.



“I AM NOT WHERE I STARTED”

By Kimora Kennedy

Let me tell you about a girl who learned how to be soft.

A girl, who memorized the sound of pain through bedroom walls instead of lullabies. She didn't grow up, she armored up. Moving from house to house, carrying trash bags full of clothes. And a heart full of questions like “Is this what love is supposed to look like?” Nobody handed her a blueprint. Nobody showed her how to build a future. So, she built defenses instead. She fought. Not because she was bad, but because she was tired of feeling small. Every argument was a scream that said, “see me”.

Every fight was a prayer that said, “protect me”.

But nobody heard the prayer. So, she tried to drown the noise with smoke in her lungs, nights outside the house; “Fun” that felt like freedom until it didn't. She thought she was running wild. Truth is, she was running wounded. Here's the part nobody talks about. You can be left and still be chosen. You can mess up and still be called.

Because somewhere between rebellion and regret, God whispered “you are not finished”. Water didn't just touch her skin; it touched her spirit.

And when she came up for air, she wasn't perfect, but she was aware.

Aware that she didn't want to live reacting to the pain anymore. Aware that anger was heavy. Aware that survival is not the same thing as purpose.

Now look at her. Graduating early.

Doors opening.

An envelope from Miami like a glimpse of a life she once thought belonged to somebody else. She used to prove she mattered. Now she moves like someone who knows she does matter. She dreams of designing spaces that feel safe because she knows what hurt feels like.

Do you see it?

The little girl who wanted everything is now building something.

The teenager who made mistakes is now making moves.

The story that could've ended in statistics is rewriting itself in faith.

Say it with me:

I am NOT where I started.

I am NOT what I did.

I am NOT the chaos I survived.

I am becoming.

and will be his Holy Work.



Kimora Kennedy is 16 years old and in the 10th grade. She is on track to graduate early as a junior. She is passionate about helping others and has set clear goals for her future. After high school, Kimora plans to attend Florida A&M University or the University of Miami, with the goal of becoming a Nurse Practitioner. Kimora shared that having a bright future, being successful, and having the ability to travel motivates her to stay focused, remain on track, and continue working hard toward her goals. In her free time, Kimora enjoys designing, doing nails, and shopping.

Youth Champion Jasma Neal and Kimora at the Circuit 4 Pinwheel Planting. Kimora presented her poem as part of the Child Abuse Prevention Month Event.

NORTHSTAR FAMILY RESOURCE CENTER HIGHLIGHTS

On March 5th, our NorthStar Family Resource Center hosted a Visioning Session with faith and community leaders from across Columbia County. Leaders came together for meaningful conversations about substance abuse, misuse, and mental health. They explored how faith-based organizations and community partners can work together to address root causes. The insights learned and shared are helping to shape how we, as a community, work together to address the causes of child abuse and neglect.



CELEBRATING 10 YEARS OF THE RE-ENTRY PARTNERSHIP INITIATIVE, BY SHANDRA NICHOLS

This year marks the 10th anniversary of the Re Entry Partnership Initiative, which includes both the Re-Entry Conference and Re-Entry Job and Resource Fair—an effort that began right here at the Library Partnership Family Resource Center. The program was originally created by former Resource Center Manager, Cherie Kelly and Library Manager, Linda Cue, who recognized a critical need in our community: supporting individuals returning from incarceration and helping them rebuild stable, healthy, and connected lives.

What began as a small, collaborative effort has grown into a cornerstone community event that brings together service providers, employers, educators, and individuals with lived experience. Each year, the conference creates space for meaningful conversations about re-entry, resilience, and community responsibility while connecting participants to practical resources such as employment opportunities, housing support, education pathways, and wellness services.

As we celebrate a decade of impact, we honor the vision that sparked this work and the partners who have helped sustain it. Most importantly, we celebrate the individuals and families who continue to show strength, determination, and hope throughout their re-entry journeys. This year's conference will continue that legacy by expanding youth engagement and deepening community collaboration to support second chances and long-term success.

This year's events are as follows:

Re Entry Conference: April 21–24, 2026,

Re Entry Job and Resource Fair: May 19, 2026





Abuse, Trauma, and the Importance of Connection

By Kelsey Burnette, Chief Legal Officer

I reread an old favorite recently and was reminded why I love this book so much. Gail Honeyman's novel, *Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine*, is a story about what happens to a child when the people meant to protect her fail catastrophically, and what it takes, years later, to begin to heal.

Eleanor is a survivor of severe childhood abuse and neglect. Though the full horror of her past is revealed gradually, the psychological fingerprints are visible from the first page: her rigid routines, her social awkwardness, her inability to read or reciprocate ordinary human warmth. These are not quirks of personality but adaptive strategies of a child who learned that the world was dangerous and unpredictable. Eleanor exhibits hallmarks of PTSD and Reactive Attachment Disorder—dissociation, emotional dysregulation, distorted self-worth, and a profound inability to trust; all consistent with prolonged childhood trauma.

Eleanor moved through foster care after being removed from her mother, yet she arrived in adulthood profoundly alone, her deeper wounds unaddressed. The child welfare system can remove a child from physical danger but sometimes is not successful in addressing a child's unique psychological damage. Safety is not the same as healing. Eleanor was housed and fed, but nobody connected with her closely enough to help her process what she had endured.

Into this isolation steps Raymond; ordinary, unglamorous, kind. What makes Raymond's friendship so powerful is precisely its contrast. He comes from a family that is warm, messy, and present. His mother, Mrs. Gibbons, instinctively folds Eleanor into her home with the casual generosity of someone for whom love is not a finite resource. For Eleanor, who has never known a functional family, small gestures of kindness are almost incomprehensible.

Raymond never tries to fix Eleanor. He simply stays. And that consistency, that quiet reliability, is exactly what trauma-informed care identifies as central to recovery: the experience of a relationship that is safe, predictable, and not contingent on performance. Raymond offers Eleanor what the system did not: sustained, unconditional love and human connection.

This book reminds me of our goals as child welfare professionals, safety, yes, but also, love, acceptance, and a sense of belonging. You don't have to be a superhero, just a regular person like Raymond, who is patient, generous, and caring.

PSF AROUND THE AREA



Taste of the Nature Coast to benefit Tri-County Community Resource Center



Ginger Griffeth, Pebbles Edelman, and Children's Trust of Alachua County Executive Director Marsha Kiner on the Tu Fiesta Morning show



PARTNERSHIP FOR STRONG FAMILIES

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Learn more about how our innovative services are keeping our community's children safe.
Visit us at www.pfsf.org



Partnership for Strong Families is a community-based care lead agency contracted with the Department of Children and Families.

THE AMAZING GIVE

April 30, 2026

8 a.m. to 8 p.m.
www.TheAmazingGive.org



**SCAN HERE TO LEARN
ABOUT THE AMAZING GIVE!**