

# Strengthening Families

Fall 2008

## Keeping Children Safe & In Their Homes

We are redesigning foster care in Alachua County to keep children safe from maltreatment while reducing the number of children being removed from their parents. Research shows that many children who live in foster care are at greater risk of juvenile delinquency, later mental health problems, teenage pregnancy, unemployment, homelessness, and other life problems.

Unfortunately, Florida places children in foster care at a higher rate than many other large states including New York, Illinois, and Texas. In our area 6.59 children per 1,000 are removed from their parents, while the Florida state average is 3.61 children per 1,000.

### Our goals:

- 1) Remove children only when their immediate safety cannot be assured. Shift our practices to leave children safely in their homes, by assisting their parents;
- 2) Introduce preventative services to prevent removals, supporting families to solve problems;

3) Develop community support for prevention services;

4) Retool and redesign existing services and protocols;

5) Analyze results and identify "Best Practices"

The Department of Children and Families in collaboration with Partnership for

to solve the problems.

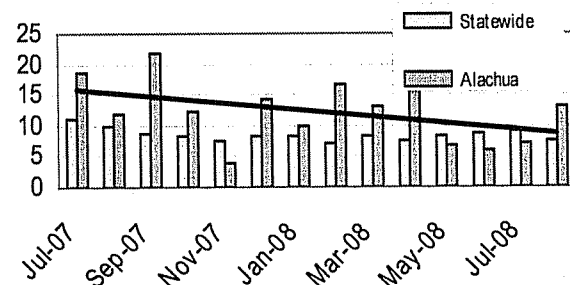
The team will insure that children and families are engaged and receive timely services and supports. Diversion staff from PSF are now co-located at the DCF Gainesville office to improve communications and insure a quick response to families.

Engaging families quickly with the right services, helps them make the lasting changes that keep children safe and their families out of the child welfare systems. When children do need to be removed from their caregivers, placement will be determined by the

Team and PSF staff will work to place the child with relatives if possible.

The Department's statewide goal is to reduce the number of kids in foster care by 50% by 2012. As Margaret Mead said "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world, indeed it's the only thing that ever has". We are that group of committed citizens and together we can improve outcomes for children

Removal Rate per 100 Reports to Hotline



Strong Families (PSF) and community partners will be using a new "Team Decision Making" process during child protective investigations. Staff will have the opportunity to work with experts in substance abuse, mental health, and domestic violence. As a team, they will assess each family's unique situation to determine if a child is safe. Next they'll make plans to engage families by building on their strengths

## Our Partner for Change - Casey Family Programs

Casey Family Programs' mission is to provide and improve—and ultimately to prevent the need for—foster care. We are honored to be in partnership with them as they help us create these new pathways of services.

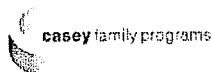
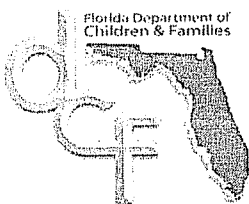
Established by United Parcel Service founder Jim Casey, Casey

Family Programs is a Seattle-based foundation that has served children, youth, and families in the child welfare system since 1966. They have developed tools, practices, and policies to nurture all youth in care and to help strengthen families at risk of needing foster care.

The training, on-going technical assistance and funds from Casey Family Programs has allowed access to national experts to inform our work. We value the assistance of Dr. Paul DiLorenzo, who is working with us to bolster the system redesign and prevention efforts, as well.

### Families Are Strengthened by Efforts That:

- ✓ Build friendships & ties to the community
  - ✓ Strengthen parenting skills
  - ✓ Respond to family crises
  - ✓ Facilitate children's social & emotional growth
- ✓ Respond to early warning signs of child maltreatment
- ✓ Value & support parents



## Preventing Child Maltreatment with a Neighborhood Based, Family Resource Center in a High-Risk Area

Imagine a neighborhood with a welcoming place where families and individuals are nurtured, encouraged, and provided quality services to build on their own strengths to help themselves and others.

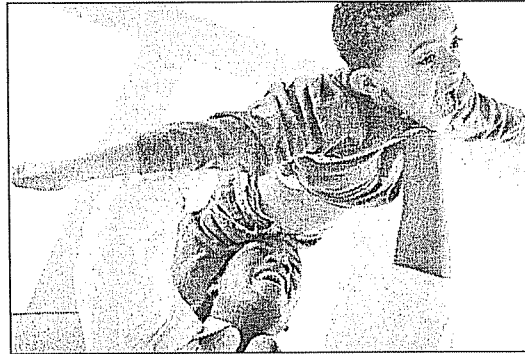
We want a centrally located place where families of all kinds can find resources and services that are of value to them -where helping agencies and programs are co-located with integrated services.

With the support of Casey Family Programs, the redesign of our systems also includes a new emphasis on the prevention of child abuse. After talking with staff in our own agencies and with partners across the county, it was decided to breathe new life into an old idea to create a neighborhood

based center where families can come for help.

About 1/2 of the cases called into Florida's child abuse hotline are closed with "no find-

help for domestic violence, substance abuse and mental illness are all important. Our community needs a way to offer help, before a family's situation worsens and a child is threatened with harm.



We have a planning team with representatives from 17 agencies who have all made commitments to make a Family Resource Center in zip code 32609 a reality. The Partnership for Strong Families is hiring a project coordinator to implement plans made by a community team.

The goals are to help area residents meet their concrete needs for food, housing, job skills, budgeting, day care, adult education, healthcare, economic benefits, as well as help with parent education resources, and early childhood education.

ings." The investigators tell us that often they meet families who are struggling to take care of their children. Issues of financial stability, parent education, healthcare and counseling

**Dr. Paul DiLorenzo, Casey Family Programs, will present a keynote on family engagement at the Child Advocacy Center Conference on November 7th.**  
[www.childadvocacycentergainesville.org](http://www.childadvocacycentergainesville.org)

## Thank You Community Partners - The List Is Still Growing!

Representatives from all these agencies have given generously of their time and talents during planning as we bring the idea of a neighborhood center to life.

Alachua Co. Housing Authority  
Alachua Co. Health Dept.  
Alachua Co. Social Services  
Alachua Co. HeadStart

Children's Home Society  
Children's Medical Services  
Early Learning Coalition  
Early Steps/CMS  
Florida Works  
Gainesville Housing Authority  
Healthy Families Alachua  
Healthy Start

HIPPY  
Meridian Behavioral Healthcare  
Peaceful Paths  
UF/Child Protection Team  
UF/CAPP – Nurturing Program  
United Way  
**And others who will help us when the doors swing open!**

**Visit the Heart Gallery—a photo introduction to Florida's children who need adoptive families today.**  
[www.chsfl.org/midHeartGallery.php](http://www.chsfl.org/midHeartGallery.php)

## Next up - Kids in Foster Care Need a Redesigned System, Too

The second phase of the entire redesign will be to limit the time any child has to spend in foster care. Foster parents work hard to provide good care, but children need permanent homes and families.

The work is to either successfully re-unify them with their parents or help them succeed in new, permanent families. Most

of the time, children in foster care who need adoptive placement end up with relatives or someone they know well. But, there are still children who need adoptive families and a faster process to permanency.



50+ children in Circuit 8 need adoptive families.

Over the next months, the staff in the Court system and all the child welfare programs will work with national consultants to implement new strategies to secure permanent families for all children in foster care. It will be based on better case reviews, tracking, and planning with the children to identify the best forever family.

**Comments? Questions? Suggestions? Email to [Becky\\_O'Brien@dcf.state.fl.us](mailto:Becky_O'Brien@dcf.state.fl.us)— Thanks!**