MISSION

The mission of Family Support Services of North Florida, Inc. is to be the leader in providing safety, stability and quality of life for all children by working with the community to strengthen the family unit.

In FY 2018-2019, Family Support Services (FSS) was an integral part of 393 adoptions, exceeding a goal of 176 set by the Florida Department of Children and Families. Thirty-nine of those adoptions were a direct result of our adoption recruitment team, with the remainder facilitated through FSS-contracted case management organizations.

FSS established the Heart Gallery of Jacksonville in 2005 as part of a national effort to showcase adoptable children in a different light. Fourteen years later, the Heart Gallery continues to help match children in Duval and Nassau counties with forever families.

ON THE COVER:

Marcaria and Erieona, as well as other children in Northeast Florida waiting to be adopted, can be found online at heartgalleryjax.org.

Photo by Rebecca Broeseker
For Jacksonville to be an economically, culturally, and socially vibrant city for everyone, we must do all that we can to ensure that our children are able to reach their full potential. We have a shared responsibility to build the health and well-being of our next generation and to secure a better future for our city.

BOB MILLER, CEO
FAMILY SUPPORT SERVICES
I'm a foster child. I say that in the present tense. Foster children are brothers and sisters for life, sharing an instant and lasting bond forged in adversity. We grow up with a pervasive sense of loss, of helplessness, abandonment and anger. It fades over time but never washes away completely. We cannot face the fact that our parents didn’t love us enough to take care of us. We believe that there is something wrong with us, that we are the problem and not them. We want someone to love us. Many of us become over-achievers in an attempt to prove we are worthy of love. Many of us spend much of our “post care” life trying to forget what happened. That was me.

I was seven, the oldest of four children, when our parents split up. Mom got custody of the baby, Dad got the rest of us. Two years later he dropped us off at a foster home, “temporarily, until the weekend” so he could work. He was supposed to pick us up on Friday afternoon. Five years later we were still waiting. We never saw him again. Our mother remarried, to a man that wanted nothing to do with her “other” kids. She was sure that his heart would change when he saw how much she loved us. That never worked out. They lived 20 miles from us. We visited one weekend every six weeks.

The foster home we lived in was on a farm. We were basically slave labor and were beaten on a regular basis. Eventually, someone turned our foster mom in for child abuse and she lost her license. No single family home would take three teenagers. The only way we could stay together was to move to a children’s home. That was a scary decision and it was a very rough place. It was the last stop for children no one wanted.

We spent our high school years there. We were kids from the “home.” Everyone knew who we were, we occupied the lowest level of the case system. I worked odd jobs: as a janitor at a barber shop, a shoe shine boy, a farm laborer, a carwash dryer, grocery stock boy and picked fruit with migrant workers.

On the day I turned 18, I aged out of the system as an emancipated minor and ward of the court. With $35 and the clothes on my back, I walked to town and found a room at a boarding house. In short order I was homeless. I lived by couch surfing and overstaying my welcome with friends and their parents.

I believed that education could be my ticket out of that life. So I enrolled at Mt. Union College as a full-time student with plans to major in economics. I showed up on campus two weeks late, with no money. The Dean found a room for me and a person I didn’t know paid my tuition. I went to school full time and worked full time at any job I could get. I graduated, but my grades left something to be desired.
Fast Forward

I joined the Navy, went through Aviation Officer Candidate School, graduated 1st in class 42-72, Distinguished Naval Graduate; flew in VP-45 for three years as a Mission Commander hunting Russian submarines; taught for three years at University of Oklahoma (OU), and served as Advisor for the NROTC unit; obtained a Master of Accountancy, Tax, from OU, Beta Gamma Sigma; worked for KPMG in tax for seven years; was part of the IPO team for Regency Centers, ultimately serving as Sr. VP of Investment Services; and founded and led Paragon Advisory Group.

While I was having a stellar professional career, my personal life was a mess. During this time I was divorced twice and had a daughter with mental health and substance abuse issues. Although I looked like other successful executives, inside I was not. I had problems with attachment and intimacy. My life as a foster child had not prepared me to be a partner to anyone.

A turning point

In December 2013, my brother, Pete, was diagnosed with an aggressive lung cancer. I went to Ohio to be with him through his last days. We spent a lot of time talking about our early life. We laughed and cried a lot. We tried to make sense of our shared experience, to apply what we’d learned as kids to our present situations. As I left him for the last time, I knew I was done working for profit and that I wanted to find a way to help children. I didn’t want any child to endure the kind of childhood we had experienced. Returning to Jacksonville, I began talking with a chain of friends. Those conversations led me to FSS’s posting for a CFO. I filled out the application and sent my resume. The rest is history.

Healing and the reason for this story

As I began working at FSS, I discovered a whole system of people who were dedicated to helping children and families. They worked with a level of commitment I had never experienced. As I worked with families and children I felt their pain and frustration. It was my pain and frustration. I began to get more and more emotionally involved with our mission and services to families. Then a funny thing happened. The more I got involved with others, the more I started to heal and the more dedicated I became. Soon I was one of those dedicated and committed people. Today, I demand we do everything in our power to help these families back to health, to allow them to care for their children.

I tell my story so you can understand our commitment to move even further into preventing family stress and dysfunction. We are dedicated to knitting community resources together to care for families before they reach the breaking point and to trying new and innovative approaches to allowing families to help families. We want to evolve a community caring for its own.

A new emphasis on primary prevention and community involvement

As the results in this Report to the Community attest, we’re doing a great job with the resources we have—helping kids and families in trouble through no fault of their own. What we need to do better is make our case for community support and participation, succinctly and compellingly. Because if we can master that challenge, we can help more kids and families live better—without needing our services in the first place.

While our mission and goals haven’t changed, we’re taking another look at how to communicate them. We’re redefining our place in the community so our work can resonate more clearly with people who don’t know us very well—people who might be more interested in joining our cause.

We have a shared responsibility to build the health and well-being of our next generation and secure a better future for Jacksonville.

To achieve this, we need to keep three things in mind: First, it’s not about us. It’s about the kids and families we serve, its about their needs and wants. Second, this responsibility is shared by the whole community, not just the agencies working to improve conditions. Third, our reframing contains neither value judgments nor emotional reasoning—just clear descriptive language—about the problems people face and our strategy for helping them to health and financial independence.

I share all this with you because you are a key element in our success. By understanding what we do, you can help tell our story far and wide. You’ll be more involved, and so will the people who hear it.

Many are not informed about the need, as they don’t come into contact with those in need in their daily life. When they find out, they want to help. Our communications can define our needs and help the community understand how they, in turn, can help others.

I also encourage you to get involved in other work that serves the wider community. Hearing a child tell you what he or she has learned, or seeing what they have accomplished with a little encouragement from you, is an amazing and unexpected reward—one that reinforces my decision to help all I can.

As we embark on another year, please help us tell the FSS perspective as we advocate for kids and families.

On behalf of everyone we serve, thank you!
For nearly two decades, Family Support Services has been the lead community-based care agency in Duval and Nassau counties.

The idea behind community-based care was to transition child protective services to local providers under the direction of lead agencies and community alliances to ensure safety, well-being, and permanency for the children in their care. The initiative captured nationwide interest—and has experienced tremendous success since 2006.

Enter 2019. By doing a better job of living up to a shared responsibility to our community’s foster youth, Jacksonville is also on its way to living up to the potential of being a truly great city for everyone.

Research shows that traumatic experiences in childhood can create toxic levels of stress that disrupt healthy developmental growth, which results in health, mental health, and behavioral challenges later in life.

By providing supports through prevention-related services, and ensuring that all families are able to provide nurturing, supportive experiences and environments for their children, the likelihood that a child will experience toxic stress will be reduced.
Sundy Goodnight is a single mom who became a licensed foster parent through FSS two years ago. Since then, she has fostered 15 children, one of whom she adopted.

**What brought you to want to foster?**

*Sundy:* My parents instilled in me a love for other people and set an example by adopting two children after my siblings and I were grown. Having a front row view to foster care helped me ease into being a foster parent. When I felt like it was my turn to experience it first-hand, I enrolled in the training through FSS.

**How did your actual experience fostering a child differ from your expectations?**

*Sundy:* The biggest surprise was the deep emotional impact it has. People ask how I can bring myself to return a child to their family, and I’ve been amazed by the grace I’ve experienced when a transition happened. When you know the next step is the right step for the child, it is so much easier.

**What brings you the most joy?**

*Sundy:* It’s about happy endings (or, from the child’s perspective, wonderful new beginnings). I’ve had children reunited with their parents, children move to wonderful adoptive forever families, or to be with a sibling they longed for and missed, even a child struggling with major behavior issues receive a most-improved behavior award at school.

“*You may not be able to change the whole world, but you can change the world for one child. If you feel called to foster, get the training and go for it.*”

As part of the Quality Parenting Initiative to strengthen the entire system of care and fully support families by always putting the children first, Sundy, and all FSS foster parents, are key in helping spread the word to improve the lives of children and families in our community.
Workforce stability is a strategic priority at Family Support Services. By investing in groundbreaking training—for families and for the community-based care professionals who serve them—we’re strengthening the foundation of families, homes and workforce.

The Children’s Connection (TCC) is a new initiative that helps existing family members prepare to welcome and integrate foster children into their lives. As a component of FSS foster care training, TCC provides insights into the emotional trauma and abuse many foster children endure prior to placement. The program is designed for biological children, ages 8 to 17, to help make them part of the process.

Regional Integrated Training Alliance (RITA) Pre-Service Training Program is an innovative collaboration across Northeast Florida to align child protective investigators and case managers with best-practice knowledge to help transition from the classroom into the field. Through relationship building and knowledge sharing, the families and children served by FSS will experience more successful outcomes.

Training House, a dwelling established by FSS, has been constructed to enable real-life situation pre-service training for child protective investigators and case management professionals.

A 2017 study on child welfare retention in Florida revealed that “workers felt unprepared, experienced quick transitions into complex caseloads, and expressed concern about a disconnect between training content and agency procedures and protocol.” In addition, case managers leaving their positions noted that pre-service training did not adequately prepare them for the realities of the job.

Training House is dedicated and decorated for training purposes—including local actors who participate in role playing involving home visits, substance misuse concerns and domestic violence.

Feedback from trainees has been wildly positive, says Chris Compton, FSS’s vice president of technology and operating services. “Not only do these exercises teach skills beyond the classroom, they expose participants to the realities of the job to ensure this job is the right fit.”

1Published by the Florida Institute for Child Welfare (FiCW)
### REVENUE

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<th>Source</th>
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<td>DCF Contract</td>
<td>$57,614,538</td>
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<td>Grants</td>
<td>$1,934,679</td>
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<tr>
<td>Donations/Others</td>
<td>$483,436</td>
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**Total Revenue:** $60,032,652

### EXPENSES

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<td>Case Management</td>
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<td>Other Services</td>
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<td>Prevention Services</td>
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<td>Adoption Services &amp; Support</td>
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<td>Administrative Costs</td>
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**Room & Board**

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<td>Adoptive Care</td>
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<td>Licensed Foster Care &amp; Shelter</td>
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<td>Independent Living/Extended Foster Care</td>
<td>$1,394,047</td>
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**Total Expenses:** $56,330,902
NEW GUIDELINES IMPACT LOCAL CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Family Support Services has long been a leader and innovator of prevention-related activities. Since 2006, Title IV-E, a waiver from the federal government, has allowed Florida to direct federal funding usually reserved for foster care, to services and supports designed to prevent the need for children to be removed from their homes and families.

The recent expiration of the Title IV-E waiver, along with the Family First Prevention and Services Act (FFPSA), are causing changes that significantly impact how Florida funds and supports prevention and family services.

“The flexible funding we use for prevention services is now subject to rigid guidelines,” explains Naomi Jackson, FSS’s chief financial officer. “One of which is directed toward children who are at imminent risk of removal or who have already been removed from their homes.”

Until recently, FSS’s commitment has been to work with families well before the point of removal. As a result of the federal changes, only one of the six services in the prevention service array will meet FFPSA guidelines—directly impacting program funding for the majority of children and families currently being served. “Waiting until a child has been removed from their home to provide support is like waiting for a crack in a foundation to become so severe that it impacts a building’s structural integrity before taking action,” states Bob Miller, FSS’s chief executive officer.

For Florida, the stringent guidelines mean a step back from the state’s longtime commitment to prevention.

For many states, FFPSA marks the first time that Title IV-E funding can be used for services to prevent a child’s removal from their family. But for Florida, the stringent guidelines mean a step back from the state’s longtime commitment to prevention.

According to Miller, “The changing policy landscape means that we need to take action in order to maintain and build upon our successes in supporting the health and development of Jacksonville’s next generation.”

CHILDREN IN CARE
July 1, 2018 – June 30, 2019

Children Receiving In-Home Services 5,406
Children in Out-of-Home Care* 1,562
Children in care July 1, 2018 – June 30, 2019
Total Children Adopted 393

*Children in out-of-home care includes children in licensed care and with kinship caregivers

FAST 1,874 (Family Assessment Support Team clients)
STEPS 2,951 (Strengthening Ties and Empowering Parents clients)

High-Risk Newborns 581
GET INVOLVED

For more information on supporting FSS programs or donating, visit fssjax.org or email:
Foster Inquiries: recruiter@fssnf.org • Volunteer: volunteer@fssnf.org • Donations: donate@fssnf.org

OUR PARTNERS