REPORT TO OUR COMMUNITY

Family Support Services of North Florida Inc.
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.

FSS is the lead agency in Duval and Nassau counties, providing four core community-based care programs to at-risk children and struggling families: family preservation, foster care, adoption and Independent Living.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

DR. GEORGE ARMSTRONG, (honorary member) retired pediatric cardiologist; DR. DENNIS LAFER, (honorary member) retired pediatric surgeon; PAUL MADSON, Johnson & Johnson Vision Care, Inc.; JUSTIN TAYLOR, vice chairperson, Nassau County Board of Commissioners; GORDON BAILEY, Florida Blue; NAOMI McGOWAN, chairperson, CSX; MARK BRIDWELL, vice chairperson, Rayonier, Inc.; BARRY ARGALAS, Regency Centers; ABRAHAM TENAH, Macquarie Group Ltd.; TIFFANY HOLBROOK, Holbrook Law; MATTHEW NEMETH, Jacksonville Sheriff’s Office

Not pictured: MATTHEW CORRIGAN, vice chairperson, University of North Florida; NICOLE BRYANT, Florida Department of Children and Families; DR. MICHAEL De La HUNT, Nemours Children’s Hospital; DANIEL LEEPER, Nassau County Board of Commissioners; VIRGINIA NORTON, Circuit 4 Judge; NICOLE STEELE, Vertext Transport, LLC; BRAD THOBURN, Jacksonville Transportation Authority

Photo by Simeon “Tim” Tyler
As the community-based care agency for Duval and Nassau counties, the heart of Family Support Services of North Florida beats from our community collaborations. As part of our mission, we build innovative programs and partnerships that link the state’s child welfare system and the needs of our children and families with the people in our local community. These professional and personal relationships create “a true village” of opportunities for our youth in foster care, with many different paths to be successful in life. I am proud of the significant accomplishments we’ve made with many of our partners this year.

Connecting our most vulnerable infant population (ages 0-3) and their parents with the community support and services needed to promote healthy child development was achieved through our new Safe Baby Court. Families participate voluntarily through a new judicial collaboration with monthly court hearings, family meetings and specialized therapeutic programs that all provide an extra layer of support and guidance that many parents need.

Building a better network of assistance for our relative and non-relative caregivers was also a significant priority because a child removed from their home and placed with a kinship caregiver experiences less trauma and has better long-term outcomes. With the funding approved by our board of directors, we were able to enhance our kinship benefit program and help support these families with behavioral training and emergency needs that will help prevent children from coming into foster care.

We also launched our first multimedia recruitment drive in June to increase public awareness within our local community about the important need for new foster parents who are committed to our quality parenting standards. The Be a Hero to a Child campaign reminded us that we each have the ability to be champions to our children in foster care in some way—whether it is through fostering, mentoring, volunteering or donating.

I am extremely proud that FSS was acknowledged nationally this year, which is an exceptional feat for a locally-based non-profit agency. The When Work Works award showcases businesses that are being effective and flexible in their approach to helping people succeed at work. When we can create an environment where our employees are happy and can focus on being the best they can be, and they can help make our programs successful, then we create the best outcomes for our children—and that “works.”

As you read through the successes of the people, our employees, and programs of this past year, I hope it is evident that when we all support our children’s and families’ social, mental and emotional development, we can help them reach their full potential with the right resources. Whether you choose to engage through advocacy, contributions or volunteerism, all tracks lead to strengthening a system where all children can grow, thrive, and become responsible citizens who will build a stronger community.

“\[Signature\]  
Dr. Kenneth Negrete  
CEO, Family Support Services of North Florida
fam·i·ly | ‘fam(ə)lē |
Noun: a group consisting of parents and children living together in a household
Adjective: designed to be suitable for children as well as adults

pres·er·va·tion | prezərˈvaSH(ə)n |
the action of preserving something

The definition of family today can mean a lot of things. But no matter what the interpretation, many families experience challenges in life at one time or another. Our Family Preservation department creates new and strong partnerships within the community, so that children and their families can thrive from programs designed to improve parenting and family function, while keeping children safe.

There are many success stories resulting from these programs because of the innovative collaboration that stems from a family-centered approach with in-home services. Whether focused on helping parents cope with behavior management, mental or substance abuse issues, social, job or financial issues, they all share one goal: to prevent children from entering foster care, therefore reducing the trauma associated with removing them from their homes, thus strengthening the family.

To help educate families and provide them with much-needed resources and services, our Family Preservation team, in partnership with other community organizations, develops and hosts countless seminars, events and training courses throughout the year.
Locating funding for out-of-the-box opportunities was the foundation for one of the newest grant-subsidized programs implemented: Health Care Coordination (HCC). The health care coordinators aid families in our STEPS (Strengthening Ties and Empowering Parents) program within a certain age group to:

- Provide access to and improve the quality of healthcare for parent(s) and children
- Increase the number of children receiving developmental, social-emotional screenings and follow-up assessments, and treatment services
- Increase the number of parents receiving health education/risk reduction training
- Ensure parents are demonstrating an understanding and ability to successfully implement risk-reducing behaviors

The HCC program recently helped a grandmother who began caring for her three grandchildren after their mother was incarcerated. The nurse coordinator met with her and the children, ages 13 months, 3 and 4, and after evaluation, she referred the children for mental health counseling, speech therapy and an assessment for autism. The nurse also ensured that the children were up-to-date on vaccinations, matched them with a new pediatrician, and referred the grandmother to a clinic for free dental care. During follow-up visits the family received safety kits, educational information, diapers, wipes and book bags.

In conjunction with the HCC concept, working with Edward Waters College and other partners, we established a health clinic and primary care medical practice at the Schell-Sweet Community Resource Center, referred to as the Community of Hope, which served over 700 families last year.

Another new program, STEPS in Schools (in designated schools), allows students and parents who are experiencing family issues or challenges to meet with a dedicated family counseling specialist. The specialists also provide information and referral services in coordination with school counselors.

“STEPS in Schools will help strengthen, empower and promote healthy families in targeted areas,” said Lee Kaywork, FSS chief executive officer. “Strong, healthy families reduce the likelihood of neglect and abuse and result in thriving, happy children who succeed in school and in life.”

To receive the benefits of our Family Preservation services, clients must be participants of either the STEPS or FAST (Family Assessment Support Team) programs. STEPS offers direct, in-home services, improving communication between family members and linking families to available community resources. The FAST program focuses on ensuring the safety of children while working with families to resolve the issues that may have contributed to an abuse or neglect report.

Realizing how important it is for our community’s future to become all that it can starts with caring for our children and families at home and in school. It is up to all of us working together through our shared ideas and vision to create these opportunities.

“It’s important for our services and those of our partners to continually reflect the ever-changing needs of the various family dynamics and issues affecting our community, but we’re always seeking new opportunities to continually improve this measurement for success.”

— Larry West, Jr., vice president of case management, FSS
A brighter space for foster children became a reality when FSS celebrated the opening of a Bright Spaces® visitation center in our Nassau County office. The center provides a warm and inviting environment for children to become engaged, to play and feel relaxed, while simultaneously allowing for their parents to learn new skills and techniques, and spend quality time with their children.

The concept of Bright Spaces was born from the idea of having safe, enriching places in homeless and domestic violence shelters for children and youth experiencing homelessness or other crises, so they can build caring relationships, heal from trauma through play, and experience the joy of childhood. This idea was adapted to create a center for families with a goal of reunification to interact with their children under the guidance of professional counselors. By incorporating this therapeutic approach, counselors can encourage positive behavior modification and techniques by viewing the family’s interaction through two-sided glass and playing back video of the visit.

The family featured here at the visitation center strongly believes that the center provided what they needed to learn to have a successful relationship with their children. “We made choices in our lives that we didn’t realize would affect our children and our family like they did. With the help of Bright Spaces and FSS, we were able to make changes and overcome issues to get our kids back,” said mom Ashley.

Partners on this unique concept for foster care families included Bright Horizons Foundation for Children, Casey Family Programs and project sponsors Rayonier, Inc., Sleiman Enterprises, Donna Lynne Custom Homes, Rayonier Advanced Materials Foundation, Rogers Towers and the Knights of Columbus Council 14295.
“Children must be taught how to think, not what to think.”
— Margaret Mead

A mentor can have a positive impact on a young person, especially when an adult can provide an opportunity to help a child develop valuable life skills that can build their confidence, guide them in decision-making and achieve objectives that are not always centered solely on education.

**Mentors Matter** was created for the unique needs of FSS foster youth and focuses on a specific goal for a youth in care, such as achieving emotional stability, correcting specific behavioral issues or providing them support on navigating relationships. Often, foster youth have a significant mistrust of adults from their experiences. One of the keys to success is matching a mentee and their specific objective to the right mentor, which is important for building a great connection.

The first thing Margaret Rogero-Hastings does when she meets with Cindy is listen.

In the past year, Margaret and Cindy have done a variety of activities—they’ve gone to the movies and the zoo, they’ve made pottery, and sometimes found value in just hanging out together.

But it always comes back to listening.

“I try to find out where Cindy’s at and what her needs are,” Margaret said. “Sometimes an open ear can be the most important thing.”

Margaret, a Duval County teacher, has mentored Cindy, a 15-year-old in foster care, since December 2015, and the strong bond they have built serves as a support system for the teen.

Since they met, they have spent time with each other almost every week, and keep in touch via text when they can’t meet. As a mentor, Margaret helps Cindy achieve life goals and provides her support—as an adult friend, role model and guide.

Margaret has helped Cindy open up, which has been especially important since she began attending a new school in August. With Margaret’s help, she has navigated the trials of starting school, made new friends and joined the cheerleading squad. For the first time, Cindy is speaking about school in a positive way.

Their stable, nurturing relationship has also made Cindy more comfortable sharing her thoughts and feelings. Margaret plans on continuing to give her the encouragement to follow her dreams.

“As a mentor, I can help provide the stability that Cindy needs,” Margaret said, “and give her the confidence to know that her goals, not her circumstances, define her.”
Miranda Mitchell was working a shift at the hospital when she received a surprising phone call: did she want to take in three young siblings from foster care that day?

Although Miranda and her husband, Stephen, had only gained their foster care PRIDE certification the prior month, they decided the answer was “yes.” They quickly prepared for S’myiah, Steven and Samuel, who’ve brought a lot of joy to their home ever since.

“It seemed like a calling for us,” Miranda said, “helping our community children who have nowhere else to turn.” The Mitchells made the decision to become foster parents because they were unable to have their own children.

Bringing three siblings, all under the age of 5, into their home was a huge undertaking, but with the support of FSS as well as family and friends, the first-time parents created a supportive home.

“We treat them like they’re ours and always try to provide a fun, loving environment,” Miranda said.

The siblings have flourished under their care, especially Steven. He came to the home practically nonverbal, which led to him having temper tantrums because he couldn’t communicate. Now receiving the special care he needs, Steven’s personality has started to shine.

As a result of the Mitchells’ excellent communication skills and engagement with the children, they were named the 2016 Foster Parents of the Year by the Florida Coalition for Children (FCC), a statewide organization. FCC CEO Kurt Kelly said, “The Mitchells were chosen from many foster parents across Florida who exhibit an exceptional commitment to our state’s abused and neglected children.”

They were also named Foster Parents of the Year at the FSS annual meeting in 2015.

The Mitchells were humbled by the recognition of both awards, but the greatest reward continues to be fostering the children.

“"We didn’t think parenting would ever be a possibility. For us, it’s like a dream come true."
People often tell Katherine Rankin that her three grandchildren are blessed to have her, but she is always quick to correct, “No, I am blessed to have them.”

FSS kinship caregivers can be relatives of youth or friends who are very close to children who have been removed from their home.

Katherine took in Devyn, Daelyn and Madilyn when they were all under the age of 5 due to their parents’ substance abuse problems.

The 53-year-old, who already had four grown children, knew the transition from empty-nester to primary caregiver for three children would be challenging, but she never considered another option.

“I have a total of nine grandchildren,” she said, “and if DCF (the Florida Department of Children and Families) knocked on my door, I would take them all in.”

Over the past two years, Katherine has worked to create a nurturing home. Her three other adult children have provided a great base of support by aiding with child care and serving as positive role models.

Katherine has also become a strong advocate for her grandchildren. Six-year-old Devyn lived with his parents longer than his sisters, so he has faced more developmental challenges. However, she has ensured that he’s receiving the specialized education and speech therapy he needs to continue to grow.

The kids are thriving under her care. And, they are not the only ones. This year, Katherine became the permanent guardian of the children, saying “it was one of the happiest moments in my life.”
Independent Living programs provide opportunities for teens and young adults in foster care to thrive while on the important path to adulthood. These unique programs set FSS apart from other community-based care agencies in the state.

Programs such as The Challenge, SPLASH (Scuba Promotes Life goals And Supports Healthy living), Just Like Me and Tour de TRAILS (Teaching, Riding And Interpersonal Life Skills) offer many activities from scuba to horseback riding, and dance to legislative sessions, which provide life skills training and enrichment opportunities to our community’s foster teens.

Every day we work with inspiring youth, who often overcome some of the worst situations, to rise above and succeed. Through experiences they otherwise would not be exposed to, these programs provide them with encouragement and the power to realize that there’s no substitute for hard work and a sense of determination to achieve their goals as individuals or as a team.
The fourth of nine children, Hafez came from a troubled home. He had to drop out of school and work to support his family—and his resulting resentment caused him to act out. After he was in trouble with the law several times, his mother turned custody over to the state and he entered foster care at age 17.

“With the background I have, it was easy to make excuses,” he said, “and to wallow in my past instead of taking action.”

Coming into care at the late age of 17, he also had a short turnaround time before “aging out” at 18. For foster kids with few resources like Hafez, the transition to adulthood can be especially difficult.

“The support from the right people at critical times can be the key in turning a life around, especially with youth that may not believe that success is achievable,” said FSS vice president of operating services, Sarah Markman Sayar.

Hafez returned to school and earned his high school diploma. With some encouragement, he began to take advantage of the FSS extended foster care programs through the Independent Living department, which has provided him with life skills training and enrichment opportunities for a better future. One of these programs was the six-month FSS Passport to Leadership that focuses on education, enhancing critical thinking and public speaking skills.

Hafez now attends Florida State College at Jacksonville with the help of educational services and continued support from his Independent Living counselor. He goes to class during the day to study medical billing and emergency medical services, and works a full-time job at night to support himself and his 4-year-old daughter, Emiliana.

His ultimate goal is to have a career in the medical field. Although juggling school and work is difficult, Hafez is certain it will pay off.

“I have the strength of a fighter, and I won’t let my downfalls get in the way of my success. FSS has taught me that I am better and that I can be better than I ever imagined.”

Hafez McDonald won’t let his past get in the way of his future.
The model airplane was the first thing that caught Darlene Bullard’s eye. She had been looking at the Heart Gallery, an FSS-sponsored website with images of foster children available for adoption, when she saw 12-year-old James holding a miniature airplane that he had built himself.

For Darlene, it seemed like fate. Her father was also named James and he had worked in the aircraft industry.

“I knew this child was meant for us,” she said, “that he was meant to be in our home.” Darlene and her husband, Rick, began pursuing adoption, and James joined their family in February 2015.

FSS has been very successful with matching the right kids with the right families and the adoption program has been consistently ranked in the top 5 in the state year after year.

Rick and Darlene knew there would be obstacles, as James had a learning disability and had been in and out of several homes throughout his life. With love, patience and consistency, James has made significant strides.

One of the biggest areas of growth has been school. Darlene has served as an advocate for James’s education, ensuring he has the accommodations he needs for his learning disability. As a result, James has gone from hating school to being an honor roll student involved in a variety of extracurricular activities, including youth group, chorus and volunteering.

Most importantly, James enjoys being part of a family, one where he is listened to and his unique gifts are cherished.

“We’re all still learning what it means to be a family,” Darlene said, “but, right now, I believe James is exactly where he’s meant to be.”
KIDS IN CARE

Children in care (includes kinship) as of June 30

- 2015: 1,604
- 2016: 1,529
- Decrease: 4.68%

Children in out-of-home care (with licensed foster parents) as of June 30

- 2015: 786
- 2016: 904
- Increase: 15.01%

Children in care on June 30, 2016 by:

- Age
  - Age 0-4: 720
  - Age 5-11: 540
  - Age 12-17: 269
- Racial Profile
  - African American: 732
  - Caucasian: 765
  - Asian: 6
  - American Indian: 8
  - Hawaiian: 15
  - Unknown: 13

GET INVOLVED!

Children and families in our community need your support. Here’s how you can help make a difference:

**FOSTER A CHILD**
- provide a stable and loving home
- provide for the physical and emotional safety of children
- apply for foster licensing

Visit foster-now.org for details

**MENTOR**
- be a role model and a friend
- help our foster children know there is someone who cares
- share experiences

Get information at mentor@fssnf.org

**VOLUNTEER**
- donate your time at one of our special events
- advocate for our foster children
- help us recruit foster homes

Get information at volunteer@fssnf.org

**DONATE**
- make a monetary donation
- contribute services such as after-school activities, art or music lessons
- donate gifts for holidays, or goods for Independent Living youth

fssjacksonville.org/portal/donate-now
In partnership with the Florida State Foster and Adoptive Parent Association and Duffels4Kids, FSS’s first Duffels4Kids Walk at the Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens raised more than $12,000 to provide foster youth with their own duffel bags—because trash bags should not be a substitute for luggage.

The Florida Coalition for Children named Mark Bridwell, FSS board member and vice chairperson, Board Member of the Year, for his active volunteerism and tireless fundraising for the FSS Bright Spaces visitation center, Duffel4Kids Walk and his participation in The Challenge scavenger hunt.

FSS mentor Vince Smyth has been named Volunteer of the Year by the Florida Coalition for Children for mentoring a dozen foster children since 2010, and spending more than 600 hours mentoring foster youth.

Bob Miller, FSS chief financial officer, was named one of Jacksonville’s Ultimate CFO’s for 2016 by the Jacksonville Business Journal. He was chosen for his outstanding work in large-scale project management, strategic planning and business restructuring. Miller was also commended for his analytical skills, leadership and volunteer work with youth in foster care.

Chuck Young, FSS executive operating officer, was named Administrator of the Year by the Florida Coalition for Children for his leadership, critical thinking, and reasoning. His vast business experience brings new perspectives to child welfare and contributes to the successful operation of FSS as a community-based care agency.

The FSS Training Academy was launched to provide tools, resources and expertise to enhance the skills and knowledge of those in the child welfare system. Enrollees receive training and learning solutions for a variety of curriculums and customized programs utilizing modern technology and proven teaching techniques.

Shatavia Bowman, former foster youth, earned the Outstanding Youth award from the Florida Coalition for Children for her significant work in supporting other foster youth throughout the year.

Holley Torres, FSS licensing counselor, received the Partner in Caring Award from the Florida State Foster and Adoptive Parent Association. She was recognized for her exemplary skills in crisis intervention and problem-solving, along with her dedication to going above and beyond while focusing on the issues, concerns and solutions of the foster parents she serves.
DONORS

We’d like to extend our special thanks and appreciation to all those who donated time, money and services to FSS. During the 2015-2016 fiscal year, these supporters made contributions in various forms valued at more than $5,000:

Brightway Insurance, Inc.
CarMax, Inc.
Casey Family Programs
Chartwells Dining Service
City of Jacksonville
Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption
Florida Blue
Johnson & Johnson Vision Care, Inc.
Rayonier, Inc.
Toys for Tots Foundation

FINANCIALS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service Type</th>
<th>Amount</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Casework Services &amp; Related Support</td>
<td>$18.67 million</td>
<td>34.19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adoption Promotion &amp; Support</td>
<td>$1.19 million</td>
<td>2.18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prevention Services</td>
<td>$5.30 million</td>
<td>9.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff &amp; Parent Training</td>
<td>$0.64 million</td>
<td>1.17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Support, Preservation &amp; Reunification</td>
<td>$1.91 million</td>
<td>3.49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Health for Child Welfare</td>
<td>$0.60 million</td>
<td>1.09%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Services</td>
<td>$3.92 million</td>
<td>7.18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subtotal</strong></td>
<td><strong>$32.23 million</strong></td>
<td><strong>59.00%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ROOM & BOARD

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service Type</th>
<th>Amount</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adoptive Care</td>
<td>$16.32 million</td>
<td>29.87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Licensed Care – Foster Home &amp; Shelter</td>
<td>$4.45 million</td>
<td>8.15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Living/Extended Foster Care*</td>
<td>$1.63 million</td>
<td>2.98%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subtotal</strong></td>
<td><strong>$22.40 million</strong></td>
<td><strong>41.00%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TOTAL EXPENDITURES | $54.63 million | 100%

ANNUAL COMMUNITY DONATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cash Donations &amp; Grants</td>
<td>$366,726</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-Kind Gifts</td>
<td>$869,716</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>$1,236,442</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Donations may be eligible for an IRS tax credit. Please contact your tax consultant for a determination of tax deductibility.