2017-2018 Report to the Community
FINANCIALS

REVENUE (in millions)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Amount (in millions)</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DCF Contract</td>
<td>$55.64</td>
<td>97.44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grants</td>
<td>$0.92</td>
<td>1.61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donations &amp; Other</td>
<td>$0.54</td>
<td>0.95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL REVENUE</strong></td>
<td><strong>$57.10</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

EXPENSES (in millions)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Amount (in millions)</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Case Management</td>
<td>$16.89</td>
<td>28.83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Services</td>
<td>$5.93</td>
<td>10.12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prevention Services</td>
<td>$4.73</td>
<td>8.08%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff &amp; Caregiver Training</td>
<td>$1.20</td>
<td>2.05%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children’s Mental Health</td>
<td>$1.20</td>
<td>2.05%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Preservation, Support &amp; Reunification</td>
<td>$1.10</td>
<td>1.88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adoption Services &amp; Support</td>
<td>$0.99</td>
<td>1.69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative Costs</td>
<td>$1.89</td>
<td>3.23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL EXPENSES</strong></td>
<td><strong>$58.59</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ROOM & BOARD

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Amount (in millions)</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adoptive Care</td>
<td>$17.54</td>
<td>29.94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Licensed Foster Care &amp; Shelter</td>
<td>$5.54</td>
<td>9.45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Living/Extended Foster Care</td>
<td>$1.58</td>
<td>2.68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL EXPENSES</strong></td>
<td><strong>$58.59</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CHILDREN IN CARE

Total number of children served in out-of-home care* from July 1, 2017 through June 30, 2018: **1,119**

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

Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>593</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>526</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Racial Profile

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Racial Profile</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>625</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black/African American</td>
<td>477</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other/Multi-racial</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total number of children receiving “in-home” services from July 1, 2017 through June 30, 2018: **5,144**

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Mark Bridwell, Board Chair
Rayonier

Dr. Matthew Corrigan, Board Vice Chair
University of North Florida

Tiffany Holbrook, Board Vice Chair
Holbrook Law, PA

Abraham Tenah, Board Vice Chair
Macquarie Group, Ltd.

Barry Argalas, Board Vice Chair
Regency Properties

Dr. George Armstrong
Honorary Board Member

Gordon Bailey
Florida Blue

Angela Bradberry
Oak Hill Academy

Matt Brockelman
Southern Strategy Group

Dr. Pamela Davis
Duval County Public Schools

Dr. Michael DeLaHunt
Nemours Childrens Specialty Care

Asst. Chief Brian Kee
Jacksonville Sheriff's Office

Christopher Kolapo
Department of Children & Families

Dr. Dennis Lafer
Honorary Board Member

Daniel Leeper
Nassau County Commissioner

Crystal Lewis
Principal - New Berlin Elementary

Paul Madson
J&J Vision Care

Judge Virginia Norton
4th Circuit Court of Florida

Kristi Phoenix
Big Brothers Big Sisters of NE FL

Dr. Pauline Rolle
Duval County Health Department

Justin Taylor
Nassau County Commissioner

Heather VanPuyymbrouck
Donna Lynne Custom Homes
The Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF) is proud to have Family Support Services of North Florida (FSS) as the lead agency for community-based care in Duval County.

They continue to lead the state in so many areas due to the spirit of collaboration and innovation. FSS is always looking for ways to improve the services and to better our communities. FSS proved once again this year to be a top-rated CBC organization across all areas of the system of care and provided a best-practice white paper on the non-judicial services program FAS®, which has been adopted by several other CBCs across the state. DCF also evaluated the FSS service array and awarded perfect scores. Because of its exceptional performance, we are proud to have renewed their contract for another five-year term, extending through June 30, 2023.

DCF joined forces with FSS this year to create the Regional Integrated Training Alliance—RITA. FSS was awarded the contract for Pre-Service Training in the Northeast Region, where DCF Child Protective Investigators and CBC managers are trained together. This is the only model of this kind in the state, which promotes shared learning, consistent understanding of the practice, camaraderie, and most importantly, instills the Northeast Region culture of collaboration and partnership throughout all stages of training and field application. We are extremely proud of this learning collaborative.

As we look ahead in 2019, I am excited about another year of working closely with CEO Bob Miller and everyone at FSS and our partners in child well-being to continue serving our children and families in the best way possible.
Family Support Services has made tremendous strides during the past year in defining a new approach to the Quality Parenting Initiative (QPI). QPI is focused on strengthening the entire system of care for everyone involved, including child development professionals and case management. The initiative strives to ensure foster parents provide loving, consistent, effective parenting to help children grow and reach their full potential and thrive while in care. Co-parenting with the biological parents is paramount to successful reunification and it is up to everyone to be involved in that goal.

A steering committee was created in 2017-18 with the mission of aligning policy and practice in the system and communicating to caregivers, staff and partners the expectations to fully support families by always putting the children first.

Our local initiatives have resulted in:

- increased and improved trauma-informed training opportunities for current and prospective foster parents.
- a series of workshops entitled “Bridging the Gap” aimed at engaging all of the parties involved in the child’s life to improve interactions and cross functions in transportation, co-parenting and court participation.
- new means and opportunities to increase communications between foster and biological parents, case managers and licensing counselors.

Licensing Director, Brandy Leo, leads the group comprised of FSS team members from licensing, training and community development, as well as foster parents, case management agency and residential home staff, Duval County Court Magistrate Strawbridge, members of the Florida Youth Law Center, and various community partners. Together, the committee works toward supporting caregivers in the best way possible, in order to achieve excellent outcomes for children and families, to get closer to the goals of co-parenting and creating a supportive network for the children.

Leading with love and acceptance

James Ladson is just a few months shy of his five-year anniversary as a licensed foster parent with FSS. He has seen a lot of positive change in the system with the FSS commitment to foster parent support, and he is a shining example of what being a star Quality Parent is all about.

In one year he was named the FSS Foster Parent of the Year, recognized on a state level by a leading children’s organization, cut an umbilical cord, became a father and a grandfather and received dozens of other recognitions.

As he reflects, he admits, “I’m not the same foster parent I was five years ago. So much has changed and I’m still learning all the time.” It’s a simple and humble acknowledgement that says so much.

Even in brevity, it’s clear that James is a man of conviction. As a new adoptive father of a sibling group of three, he is tender, brave and relentless, and committed to helping his children tap into their unbridled potential and achieve success. That isn’t the end of his impact though. Even now, he continues to serve Jacksonville’s most vulnerable teens in care.

Ladson and foster youth Desiree at awards ceremony.

Star-Quality Love: James Ladson

Ladson (center) accepting the award for Foster Parent of the Year with Pattie Medlock, DCF, and Bob Miller, FSS.

Being there for the important moments: Ladson with Myah, a former foster youth in his home during the birth of her child, Mi’kel.
The key to QPI is being flexible and firm in my parenting.

— James Ladson

While guiding with the type of poise that is the principle of QPI, James has fought his way into the hearts of some of our most challenging cases, and has turned lives around. He is relentless in his love and patience. “The key is being flexible and firm in my parenting. I love them all the same, but by changing the style based on their needs, I can help mold them to become great people.”

He finds a common ground with each youth and listens before he responds. He explains that the children that have come into his home have contrasting personalities and come from diverse backgrounds. He has found that adapting his parenting style to tailor to each child’s needs is the best approach. Brandy confirms, “The children that come into his home, are truly transformed by his open-minded attitude, love, patience and grace. He is kind, but also firm in steering them in the right direction.”

When the relationships are positive, he’s quick to encourage any teen or child to maintain a healthy relationship with their biological families. He, too, is able to preserve many of these connections.

“Everything and everyone is different. You have to mold yourself to fit the situation with a child or their biological family,” James said. “Even if the child has been through the worst, you can’t rip them away from their family completely. They know who their families are and I encourage relationships with aunts, uncles, cousins—all of them—including their parents who want to be a part of their lives through their struggles.”

All of us at FSS know that James Ladson is a star, and we hope he will continue to shine his special love on our children for many years to come.
Matt Winship and James Norman are assertive individuals. They make bold, brave decisions—the way most people might decide that they want eggs for breakfast or state that the sky is blue.

According to the whole family, James and Matt are often 110 percent certain, and they have no issue saying just that. Being entirely sure (plus some) is a staple in their home. In fact, it was their most commonly used phrase during Ian’s adoption process. They were 110 percent sure of adoption, FSS and Ian.

James and Matt also encourage anyone who enters their home to stay a while. And now, Ian, a 16-year-old former foster teen, is confident he is home—110 percent.

As soon as you enter their home, you’re immersed in their world. Buddha statues peer from the bookshelves, lined with a collection of novels, cultural art, pictures from wanderlust travels and old Polaroids. Their home is warm, artistic and inviting. A home suitable for all those who love to read, travel and learn. The couple, together nearly a decade, have been married since 2016. “I don’t want to be cheesy about it, but it was as close to love at first sight as I think you can get,” Matt said gingerly. We were certain of each other and that we wanted children within the first few years.”

Ian snickers like any teenager might from across the room.

Initially considering surrogacy, James and Matt had a few friends who had volunteered to help. When the idea fell through, the couple began investigating other options. With various friends and families members who’ve had experience with adoption, including Matt’s sister who adopted locally, it felt like the right fit for them too.

The two admit that the initial process was a lot of telephone tag and “hoping we got the answers right”. They were able to jump into an adoption PRIDE class about a month later. They were eager learners, ready to soak up whatever knowledge they could.

“A big part of it for us was just education,” James said. “The reality of the situation is a lot different than we expected.” The couple had a lot of ideas about the type of child they thought they wanted. By the time they’d finished class, everything had changed. Originally, Matt and James thought kids ages 4 to 12 would be the best fit, but the two turned that idea on its head. They began seriously considering teenagers and siblings.
They patiently, but enthusiastically, navigated the steps, until they found themselves at their first Pop In for Permanency.

“We still talk about that popcorn,” Matt chuckled. “Best popcorn ever.”

As they flipped through page after page of faces, they felt overwhelmed. Then, they met FSS Adoption Recruitment Specialists Jessica Phoenix and Melissa Swim.Originally, the couple showed interest in a sibling group.

“We asked the ladies about these two boys and we were told that it probably wouldn’t be a good fit,” James said. “They told us in PRIDE that if we were told “no,” we’d likely never know why, but my first instinct was, what’s wrong with them? Then I got upset with myself because I realized that isn’t an acceptable idea. It isn’t anyone’s fault—and it doesn’t really matter. It could be something as simple as wanting a mom, and that’s perfectly reasonable.”

Then, they found Ian, smiling out from the pages. They read about his love for Xbox and anime, and felt an instant connection. Matt admits, “We’re really just big nerds.”

The rest is history. Ian’s entire team embraced the idea, even after Matt and James pummeled them with three hours of questions like “Does he like horror movies?” and “Will he be okay with two dads?” After the inquiry, reading 500 pages from Ian’s story (overnight) and final disclosure, they were certain—110 percent.

FSS had another record year of completing adoptions for foster youth and landed the honor of ranking second best in the state. Matt and James found FSS, and FSS found Ian for Matt and James.

“We didn’t say anything to each other the entire weekend, but we’d both made up our minds in the meeting, and even before,” James said. “The email was written Sunday night that it was a go for us, but we knew that now it was up to Ian. There was no guarantee that he would want to be adopted by us.”

Ian wasn’t informed until after Matt and James were all in. He and his therapist, had talked a lot about adoption beforehand.

“With a mom and dad, I could restart my life,” Ian said. “When she told me it was a gay couple, I wasn’t against it or for it. I don’t think their sexuality matters. What really mattered was whether they were capable of being good parents. After so much time for my thoughts and feelings to stew, a kid like me just needed someone who was responsible enough and was really into this thing. I was very nervous at first. I wanted to sell the idea that I wanted to be adopted.”

It’s clear. Matt, James and Ian fit like puzzle pieces.

Together, seated among family photos, they gush about future family trips to Japan, their family’s first Brazilian Steakhouse experience, their trip to Atlanta after the adoption was finalized, Ian’s new school and extracurricular activities, and most importantly, the proper pronunciation of “fu.” A hearty laugh escapes Matt as he makes Ian promise to correct James every time he gets it wrong.

It’s safe to say that Matt and James are 110 percent sure, and now Ian is too.

---

Prospective adoptive parents must attend 27 hours of training entitled Parent Resources for Information, Development and Education (PRIDE).

To learn more about the requirements of becoming an adoptive parent, please call (904) 421-5839.

Pop In for Permanency is an FSS program that allows prospective parents to “pop in” to FSS and meet adoption recruiters, see the children available and talk openly about options.

Judge David Gooding in the courtroom with Ian, James and Matt, makes the adoption official.
After extensive surveys of foster parents both new and experienced, we remodeled our triannual caregiver training to create more impactful sessions on trauma-informed care topics based on their requests for the challenges they were having in behavior management, parenting techniques and navigating a complicated system of care. Our trainings now feature subject matter experts in these areas, such as a Clinical Social Worker and certified Play Therapist who also provide the necessary time for questions and answers and individual discussion. New opportunities are presented for online quality parenting initiative training, and guest speakers from the system of care to offer more information on the multi-layered child well-being network and providers, so we can provide the very best support for our caregiver families.

Kinship (relative and non–relative) caregivers have an extremely important role in our system of care. We increased the funding for the team dedicated to respond and serve these caregivers in a greater capacity, including in-home visits with needs assessments; created a monthly support group; and re-aligned Kinship Specialists under the same department as our licensed caregivers. This enabled us to offer kinship caregivers the same programs available to licensed foster parents. These services include the Acute Intervention Team, professional caregiver training, and specialty programs for crossover youth.

Supporting our caregivers has always been a priority, and many of the new and increased behavioral concerns of children coming into foster and relative care resulted in a greater need for stabilizing our children in new homes. Our placement personnel found immediate support with the Acute Intervention Team at Children’s Home Society. This collaboration provides FSS youth with therapeutic wraparound services, including clinicians who can provide in-home crisis stabilization to children after hours (3 p.m.–3 a.m.) in a one-hour timeframe, along with a behavior analysis, psychiatric and medication management services, and targeted case management after the crisis, which has resulted in a significant decrease in placement moves for children.

We’ve engaged in new behavioral health partnerships and training to provide more attention to the mental health concerns in our community, and to particularly address the needs of our foster children. As part of the implementation plan, FSS in conjunction with local partners such as DCF, Lutheran Services of Florida, Children’s Home Society, Hubbard House, and Children’s Legal Services, developed a curriculum to cross-train providers in child welfare and behavioral health as to how each organization operates, and to enhance knowledge and skill levels. A more integrated system of care benefits the work in the field, and increases the safety within our child welfare families.

Our Case Management Organization Services team also created a new position, the Case Management Facilitator, to further the partnership with DCF and improve collaboration with our partner agencies. This new functional role has greatly improved the transition process of new cases from investigations to ongoing services and allowed for more in-depth discussion for parents to understand how the dependency system works. Positive outcomes continue to progress with service providers now included in staffing discussions, the advantage of monthly data for review, and a workgroup that specifically focuses on enhancing the process for case transfers—all of which ultimately smooths communication and creates best practices between all agencies.
Our Nassau County team embarked on a workforce enterprise mobile technology pilot project for Family Services Counselors in the field to use iPads with specialized software while conducting case visits. We contracted with our partner, Dionia, to implement the Dionia Mobile Visits platform in Nassau County. The goal was to streamline the information reported for each client visit while the counselor is in the home. The result was timelier input of data, faster uploading of information, and because the counselor did not have to duplicate efforts, it helped to improve employee satisfaction. It has also improved the counselor’s ability to engage with clients and spend more time with them because it reduces the time spent on administrative work.

Our Nassau County staff was also instrumental in piloting the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Universal Release. This now allows for one form with standard formatted language for the release of information between providers, empowering multiple providers to move forward with services and supporting our families in a timelier manner.

Due to ongoing challenges across the state in retaining caseworkers, FSS embarked on one of the most innovative Workforce Stabilization initiatives in the industry, by engaging some of the best partners in the nation. We were awarded a grant from Casey Family Programs designed to meet professional development and training needs to better prepare our contracted agency partner case workers in the field. Transitions from protective cases to complex ones, and a disconnect between training and agency practice/field work, demanded a strategic long-term action plan to create more stability and better outcomes for our families. FSSNF also partnered with the Florida Institute for Child Welfare and Florida State University’s Dr. Dina Wilke, a key collaborator for this project to focus on these objectives:

- Examine the organizational culture from the perspective of case managers.
- Gather a sample of information from current members that focuses on reasons for departure and aids for retention.
- Obtain new data from supervisors to determine their training needs and how to support their staff better in our system of care.

We are making positive progress with improving the numbers in staff retention, a better quality of training and case managers feeling better prepared in the field.

Technology and adoption are highlighted more than ever with the new Family-Match program. Created by Adoption-Share, it utilizes a platform that combines data and predictive models to pair children and parents, similar to the concept of the popular online match service, eHarmony. It works by looking for key components in parenting and personality styles that are compatible for our potential adoptive youth. Presented to us by our partners at the Selfless Love Foundation, the digital tool is building new opportunities and ways for our children in recruitment to live happily “in harmony” with their forever adoptive families.

The impact of opioid misuse plaguing our system of care led to the introduction of the Shared Family Care concept with our array of prevention services, to support the parents of substance-exposed newborns. The usual challenges associated with a new baby can be daunting for any new parent, but often the mom and/or dad are also recovering themselves from the substance abuse that is risking the removal of their children. The work in this area is geared toward the same philosophy that has driven the success of our Family Preservation programs: enhancing the parents’ ability to create a stable and nurturing home environment, developing positive parent-child interactions, managing stress, and enhancing their protective capabilities to keep children safe and healthy.

Our efforts successfully led to a new national Regional Partnership Grant that now provides the funding for creating trauma-informed, evidence-based practices and strategies to increase our understanding of the approach and supports we provide for families dealing with addiction. This funding is intended to deliver us with a demonstrated knowledge of the services and interventions we need to employ to achieve the most successful outcomes for these children and families to thrive.

It’s a simple concept: When our employees are happy and productive, our children and families are well-cared for. Human Resources plays a key role in ensuring our employees have what they need to be successful. Our leadership team began a subtle transformation to the more traditional HR department support functions—with a fresh approach on tackling challenges, employee development, more inspirational communications, and creating new perceptions of what the “resource” truly means in HR—with a desire to be more positive and consultative.

These initiatives introduced an annual performance evaluation based more on the shared goals between employees and managers, along with regular motivational messaging, redesigning our health and wellness program committee with a rewards system, and coordinating more “partnerships” for incentives for employees and their families.
Early Childhood Court (ECC) is a voluntary program and family support system comprised of child well-being professionals, the court, and community service providers committed to reuniting parents involved with the system who have children under the age of three.

Since its inception in late 2015, ECC has helped over 60 families and created 14 reunifications. This year, ECC was awarded the Quality Improvement Center’s Collaborative Community Court Team grant (QIC-CCCT), a three-year federal grant from the Children’s Bureau Administration. This funding has allowed ECC to implement and enhance a plan of safe care in Duval County.

One participant, Stephanie H., explains why she succeeded. “Unfortunately, I have had two open cases with the Department of Children and Families. My first case was easy to get through mainly because no one was there to check on my every move. However, I eventually failed as a parent because I didn’t follow through with my sobriety. I found with ECC, I am held more accountable and I have tons of resources who help me. It’s more of a family and personal setting when we meet every month for updates. Everyone gathers together, and when there is something I need help with, it gets done. I really feel like they genuinely care about the children as well as the parents.

“I was facing prison time for the child neglect charges that I had. Even though it was a tragic event, thankfully my children were not harmed. They wrote letters to the judge of the progress that I was making, and the judge had mercy on me and I was sentenced to probation. The ECC team stressed the fact that it would be detrimental if my children were removed. They were right. I know how important it is for me to be in my children’s lives.

“I was able to complete inpatient treatment, parenting courses, and lots of visitation with my little ones. I just reached six months of sobriety and full reunification with my children in June. I owe a lot of that to ECC for believing I could be the best parent I could. I am forever grateful for this program—for they truly care—and are not just there because it’s their job. Thank you for letting me share.”

The QIC-CCCT grant has allowed a unique collaboration between the courts and FSS, and the opportunity to expand the sphere of influence beyond the children and families in the system of care, and begin to consider how the knowledge we have can help children and families in our community. Since receiving the grant, we have looked at the long-term goals for ECC; identified stakeholders; added attorneys to our treatment court hearings; hosted Child Parent Psychotherapy training; sent some of our partners to Circle of Security training; and attended the Trauma Think Tank hosted by Dr. Mimi Graham, along with many other opportunities we would not have had.

Magistrate Kimber Strawbridge says of the program, “I am so proud of the work and the adaptability of this team. I am thankful daily for FSS and their support of this and other projects that meet gaps and overcome barriers for children. There are few families in Duval County that have not been touched by the opioid crisis, and while the effects are heartbreaking, I remain hopeful knowing that if children have a need, FSS will respond. ECC’s implementation in Duval County was a vision of Judge David Gooding, and I am honored to continue to be entrusted with the project as it grows in 2019.”

Duval County Magistrate, Kimber Strawbridge with FSS Early Childhood staff: Sarah Smith and Alexis LaTouche in the Early Childhood Court Children’s Room.
Adopted new families on Mother’s day
Partied like it was the 80s
Reached new heights
Advocated at the Capital
Got FRESH (air) at camp
Surfed with new friends

Supporters

All donations made to FSS are greatly appreciated. During the 2017-2018 fiscal year, these supporters made contributions in various forms valued at more than $5,000:

RAYONIER
TIAA BANK
FLORIDA BLUE
BRIGHTWAY INSURANCE
DAVE THOMAS FOUNDATION
TIFFANY HADDISH - SHE READY PRODUCTIONS
THE 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.

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 • donate@fssnf.org