



Family Support Services
OF NORTH FLORIDA INC.

CREATING CHANGE FOR GOOD

One Child, One Family at a Time

2020 REPORT TO THE COMMUNITY

FROM THE CEO

BOB MILLER



Florida's foster care system has received much attention recently in an extensive reporting project from the USA Today network. The gut-wrenching series was hard to read for those of us dedicating our lives to protecting the children and families we serve.

The series sheds light on critical problems in some areas of our state, but it also illustrates the importance of the local, independent nonprofit agencies that manage child welfare services in their respective areas of the state.

Our community needs in Duval and Nassau counties are different than those in Miami or rural Florida counties. FSS and its local partners here manage our resources to focus on preserving and strengthening families, keeping children safely with their parents and treating the family holistically in their homes. This model reduces the number of children in foster care. Our prevention-focused model is recognized across Florida and the nation as a best practice and we are routinely asked to share our methods with leaders from other systems.

We have shown others across the state and country how locally managed organizations can meet community needs better and be more efficient with taxpayer dollars while building community consensus, employing collaborative techniques and making good use of data to drive decisions based on unique community needs.

Florida's child welfare system is far from perfect, but it's not broken as has been suggested. It is under-resourced in many areas. Florida's community-based care model is the top performing system in the United States. *Child Trends*, the nation's leading research organization on vulnerable children, recently released its annual report on the performance of child welfare systems in the 10 most-populated states. Florida ranked No. 1 or No. 2 in eight out of the nine categories measured.

Despite this success, we are not content with our work, and we continually strive to be better. It's all about the children and families we serve.

A blue ink signature of Bob Miller, written in a cursive style.

Bob Miller

CEO,

Family Support Services of North Florida

FROM THE BOARD CHAIR

PAUL MADSON



The cover story of this report tells an amazing story of how children who suffer terrible experiences find hope, love and success through foster care. Yet, as you read this publication, a stronger storyline emerges – one about family preservation.

Indeed, the numbers presented here speak volumes: 6,653 families supported and strengthened through preservation-focused services, 8,316 families reunited following traumatic circumstances, 2,878 children and families receiving in-home services through our STEPS and FAST programs.

While Family Support Services of North Florida is known for the success we have with foster and adoptive services, it's the children who never enter the system that represent our real success. We are prevention focused. That's the true strength of community based care designed and managed locally.

It's the reason why this fall — while many media outlets published harsh criticism of Florida's child welfare system — *The Florida Times-Union* called on state leaders to use the best practices for family preservation demonstrated by FSS as a model for local systems across the state.

Our system of community based care prioritizes serving children by fostering and nurturing families. It's a strategy grounded in our family-first model. A positive outcome of that strategy is saving taxpayer money as we reduce the pressure on the system via outside services.

We're bracing for a year of potential budget cuts at a time when the need for the services we provide has never been greater.

We thank you for your continued support of the crucial work we do for children and families in our community.

A blue ink signature of Paul Madson, written in a cursive style.

Paul Madson,

Board Chair,

Family Support Services of North Florida

Stepping Up

DURING THE PANDEMIC

Family Support Services and our local community partners stepped up in unprecedented ways to meet the challenges the COVID-19 crisis presented. The collaboration and communication among numerous area organizations and stakeholders clearly demonstrated the strength of the community-based care model, said FSS’s CEO Bob Miller.

“We could not have asked for better partners during this crisis,” Miller said. “From our DCF Northeast Region

since March 2020, the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.

FSS has also licensed 131 homes since the onset of the coronavirus pandemic. And, as a result of the increase of confirmed coronavirus cases in our area, 20 of its licensed caregivers have volunteered to take placement of children who may be suspected of being positive for COVID-19.

Most FSS staff members are working remotely along with the staff of case management organizations.

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“If there is a silver lining to this crisis, it is seeing the heart and will of the people doing this work.”

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leadership and its CPIs to our case management organizations – all worked seamlessly to achieve our mission.”

Miller said the cooperation included judges, and magistrates as well as Children’s Legal Services, Guardian ad Litem and health care providers.

“These community leaders and agencies have been fantastic,” Miller said. “If there’s a silver lining to this crisis, it’s seeing the heart of people doing this work.”

FSS was concerned about the impact that court closings would have on children’s permanency and case closures. Judge David Gooding, set up virtual court hearings through Zoom to ensure cases continued to move forward.

Because of Gooding’s leadership and passion for children and families, FSS has been able to finalize 161 adoptions

Case managers are conducting many home visits via video conferencing and phone. FSS is working with all resources and organizations available such as FCC, DCF and other outlets to secure gloves, goggles, masks, and wipes for case managers and others.

FSS staff responded to identified needs by conducting webinars and tutoring to help caregivers and children. The agency coordinated telehealth services for basic medical and mental health services.

FSS staff members also networked with community providers and other foster parents when emergency or daytime respite care was needed and worked through its caregiver support unit to ensure all families have appropriate food and supplies.



212 Virtual adoptions finalized since March 16



199 Homes licensed since start of Covid quarantine



21 licensed caregivers volunteered to take children with Covid-19



34,232 units of PPE donated from four local agencies



10 local agencies within the system of care received PPE from FSS



7 counties have benefitted from help at FSS



Weekly calls with key stakeholders



150 voices heard in 20 focus groups to express impact of COVID on children & families



Majority of FSS staff are working remotely

CHOOSING YOUR LIFE’S PATHS

How Derrick Frazier Found His Purpose in Foster Care

Fourteen-year-old Derrick Frazier already knew life on the street as a runaway. He’d also experienced time in an abusive family home, a juvenile detention center and a group foster home.

When kids began threatening him at the new school where his foster parents sent him, returning to the streets seemed his best option.

“I got scared and ran away again, back to Cassett Avenue,” recalls Fraizer, now a 31-year-old foster care alumnus. “I was hanging out there, moving around, staying in different apartments, and the lady from DCF came for me again.”

after about two others, I realized how good I had it with her. I begged Ms. Joyce to let me come back.”

Living with Andrews, Frazier says he “figured out his purpose” in life.

Frazier recently published his second book. He also serves as a motivational speaker talking to teens about his tough but successful journey while giving much credit to God and his strong faith that has always carried him through.

“People choose the paths of their lives,” Frazier wrote in his 2019 book, *Victim to Victor*. “You claim your role by the choices you make along the way.”

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“I got scared and ran away again, back to Cassett Avenue.”

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He expected to be taken back to the juvenile detention center, but instead was brought to the home of Joyce Andrews, a child abuse investigator who had recently begun taking foster teens into her home.

“When I walked into that house, there was a different vibe,” Frazier said. “I remember she was just looking at me, trying to figure out what I needed.”

Andrews maintained strict rules for the foster teens living in her home. Initially, Frazier had trouble with those rules.

“I stayed there about six months; then I started disrespecting her,” he said. “She had me go to another foster home, and

Frazier is one of thousands who’ve aged out of local foster care and now look back realizing the system of care saved their lives. “In foster care, I figured out what I was good at, and what I was here to do,” he said. “I got connected with good people, and I found my gift for writing and telling stories.”

When he aged out of foster care, Frazier completed his high school diploma and began reading his poetry live at the Ritz Theatre’s weekly Open Mic Night events.

His friend and mentor Fernando McGhee, an assistant principal, suggested his powerful messages of perseverance could help other students in local schools.

McGhee introduced Fraizer to leaders in the school system who asked him to speak to students in local schools. That’s when his life’s path took a distinct turn. “I was going in, talking to kids who were right where I was,” he said.

Today, Frazier says he’s “living his purpose.” That purpose includes sharing with young people about his journey from abandonment to hope and forgiveness.

“There are a lot of youth who have been told their dreams won’t come true, or that they’ll end up just like their mother or father,” Frazier writes in his new book, *Affirmations to the Game of Life*. “My goal is to help youth to understand the power of words, and to speak more positive affirmations over their own lives.”



ANDREWS FOUND HER LIFE’S PURPOSE IN FOSTER PARENTING

Nurturing and caring for hundreds of hard-to-place foster teens has been a ministry and passion for her

As a child abuse investigator for decades, Joyce Andrews watched many teens placed in group homes or taken to the Duval County Juvenile Detention Center because foster homes could not be found for them.

It upset her so much that she offered to take kids into her own home, but state policies prevented abuse investigators from serving as foster parents.

So, she challenged and ultimately changed the policy.

Almost two decades later, Andrews looks back on hundreds of foster children who came through her home on their journey to successful, independent adulthood.

“Not many homes wanted to take in the kids who were

Frazier, now a successful author and motivational speaker, says initially he didn’t appreciate what Andrews offered him. Within months of moving in with her he left her home, but eventually begged her to come back.

“I realized how good I had it there,” Frazier said. “Ms. Joyce encouraged me. She would speak a lot of positivity to me. I think she understands her purpose in life – being a mom to kids. She just has a love for helping kids and people.”

Andrews, who has been honored as 2010 Best Foster Parent in Florida and the 2013 Best Foster Parent in America, says doing what she’s done takes patience and understanding.

“Not many homes wanted to take in the kids who were at the Detention Center – especially the teens.”

at the Detention Center – especially the teens,” Andrews said. “I saw they needed more help than what they were receiving.”

As a child, Andrews dreamed of traveling to Africa so she could help children suffering there. Her mother told her that she could help children right here in Jacksonville. So, she studied sociology in college, took a job at The Jacksonville Urban League and worked to help kids experiencing trauma in Northeast Florida homes.

As an abuse investigator, she saw kids enduring unthinkable experiences. Removing these children from their homes and into detention centers, even if they had juvenile criminal records, seemed to her like adding insult to injury. Kids with juvenile criminal records, or those on probation, were the hardest to place in foster homes. Those were the ones Andrews invited into her home.

Andrews asked all of those kids in her home to call her “auntie.” She knew that some children were embarrassed telling people that they had a foster parent.

One of the first teens she brought into her home was Derrick Frazier. He was a 14-year-old runaway who had already experienced life on the street, incarceration in the detention center, drug abuse and suicidal thoughts.

“I saw something in Derrick,” Andrews said. “And I never gave up on him.”

Foster parenting to her, is a passion and a ministry — not a job.

“You really have to want to do it,” she said. “You have to like the kids and understand that each one is different.”



OUR MISSION & VISION

Our mission 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.

Our vision is that children grow up connected to their own families, supported by families and embraced by the community; that children have the opportunity to achieve in school and to learn to be productive citizens; and that citizens of Duval and Nassau counties, organizations and agencies recognize that child protection is a community responsibility and represents the best interests of all county residents.

OUR VALUES

Child-focused: The safety, permanency and well-being of children are the leading criteria in all child welfare decisions.

Family-centered: Children, parents and extended family members are involved as partners in all phases of engagement, assessment, planning and implementation of case plans.

Strength-based: Practices emphasize the strengths and resources of children, biological and extended families, and their communities.

Individualized: Case plans are individualized to address the unique needs of the child and family to appropriately address needs for safety and permanency.

Culturally competent: Problems and solutions are defined within the context of the family's culture and ethnicity.

Comprehensive: Services address a broad range of family conditions, needs and contexts.

Community partnership-oriented: Planning and implementation of case plans are undertaken in partnership with caregivers, staff and agencies from different systems that together make a formal commitment to provide the services and supports the child and family need.

Outcome-based: There are measurable outcomes for services regarding the safety, permanency and well-being of children.

6,653

**Families
supported and
strengthened**

8,316

**Families
reunified**

879

**Foster family
homes**

5,187

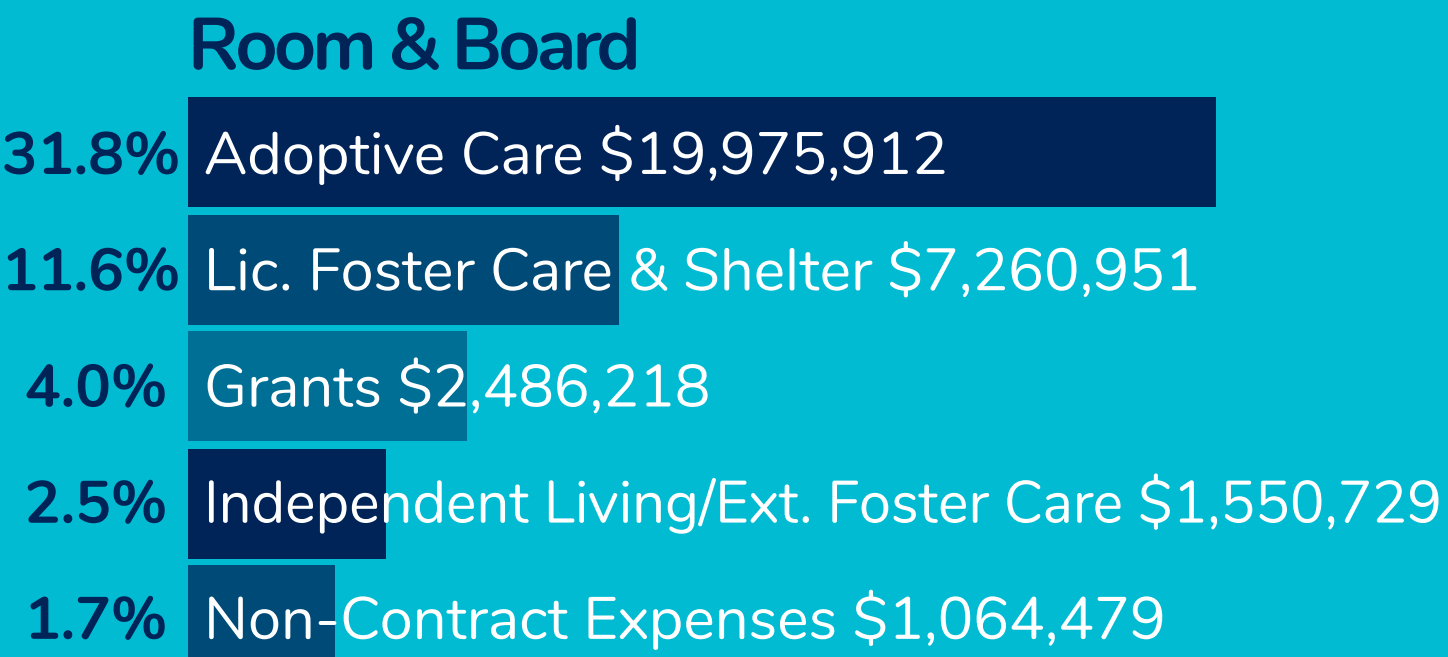
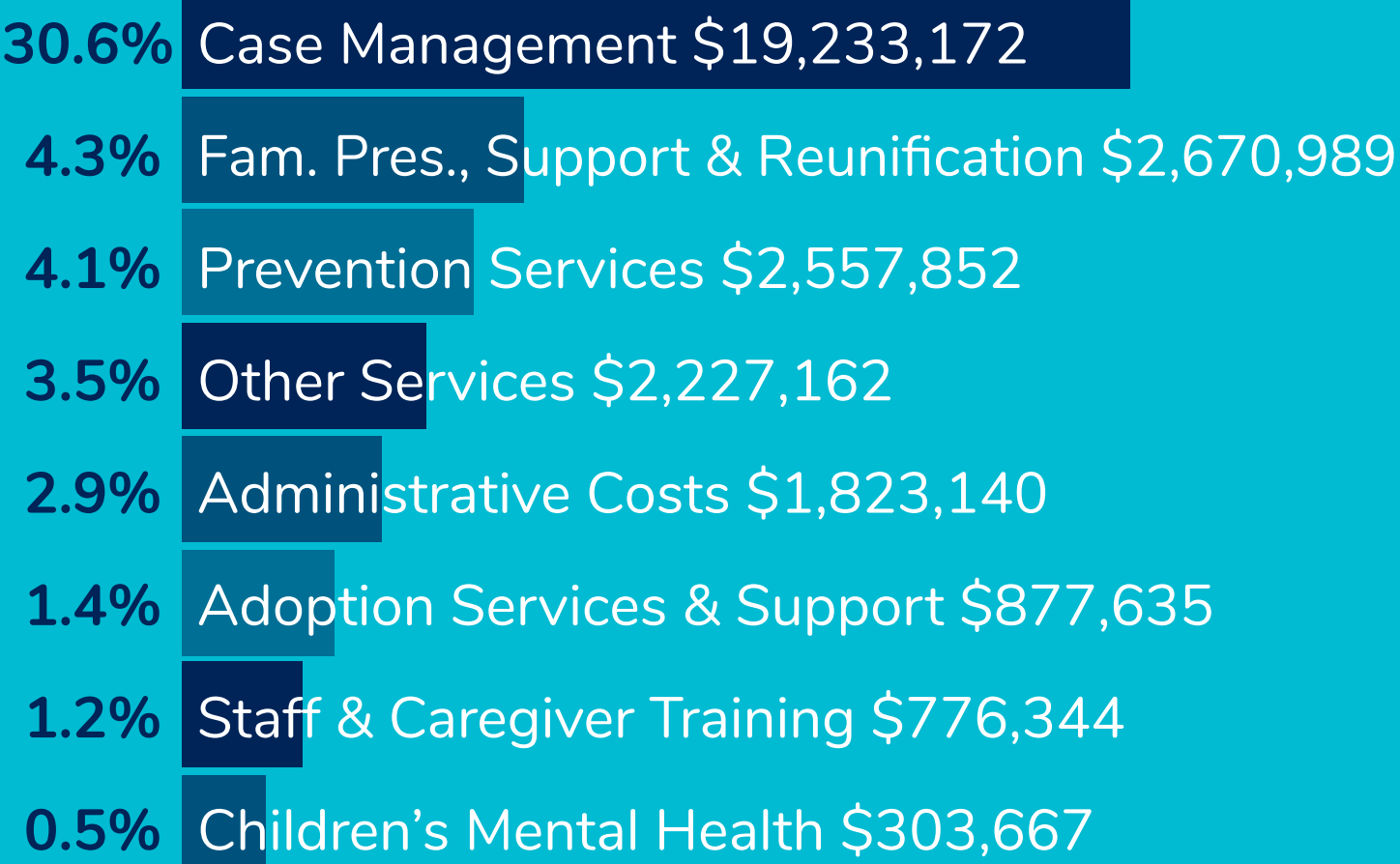
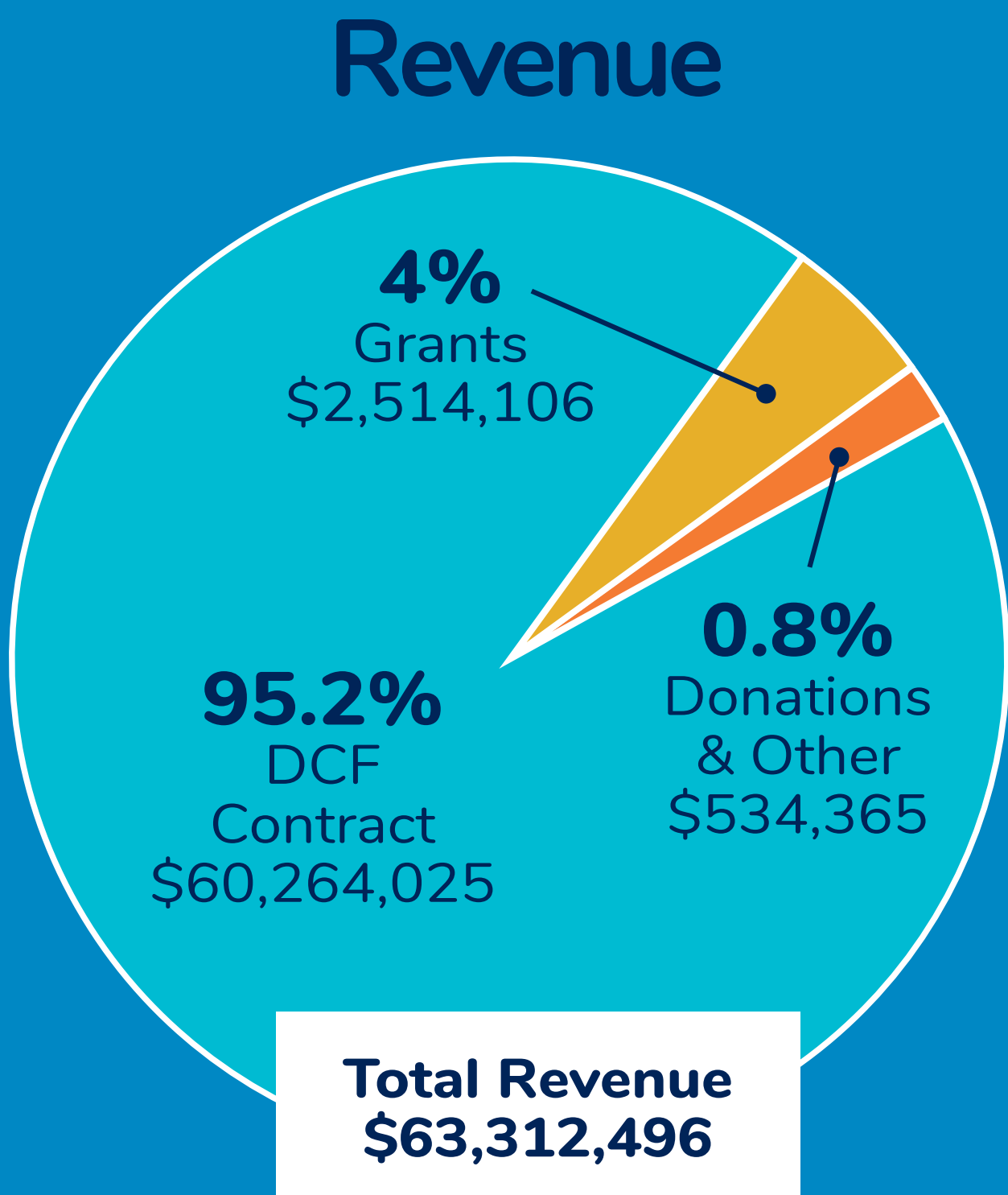
**Forever
families created**



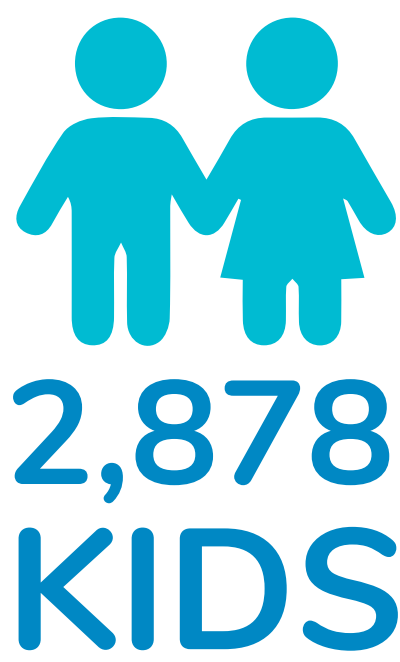
Family Support Services of North Florida

Fiscal Year 2019-2020

Expenses

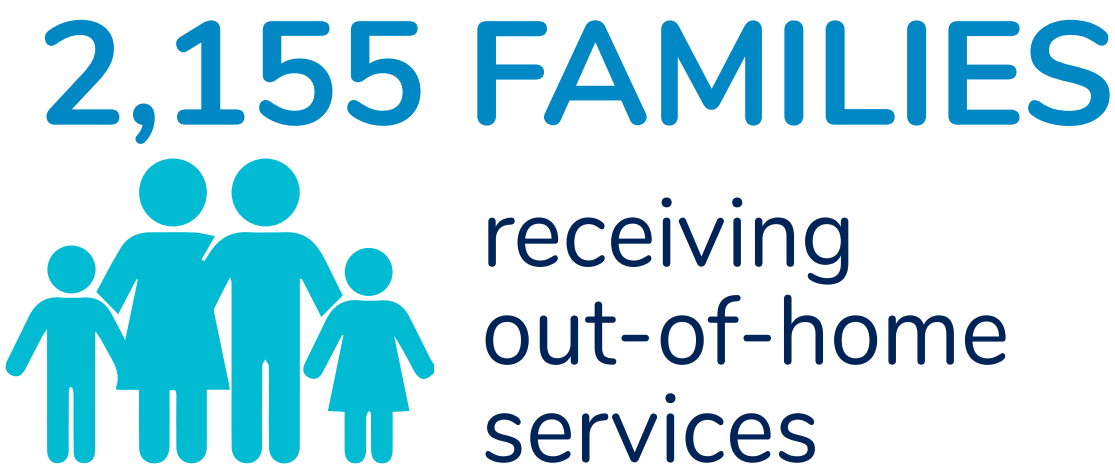


Total Expenses
\$62,808,250



receiving in-home FAST
and STEPS program services
to keep families together

1,225 in STEPS • 1,653 in FAST



1,657 by Community Resource Specialists
498 by Parents Need Assistance

2,333 CASES

from the DCF hotline that receive
prevention services support

1,612 high-risk newborns
150 kids served through our Regional Partnership Grant
571 kids served by Integrated Practice Team



415 ADOPTIONS

COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Florida Department of Children and Families	Community Based Care Integrated Health	Sunshine Method
Daniel	CogniTutor	The Healing Playroom
Jewish Family and Community Services	Factory Mattress Outlet	The Performer's Academy
National Youth Advocate Program	Family First Solution	Tutoring by City
Children's Home Society	Foster Closet	Delores Barr Weaver Policy Center
Child Guidance Center	Hearts & Hands Family Services	Micah's Place
Lutheran Services Florida	Hubbard House	Northeast Florida Healthy Start Coalition
Partnership for Child Health	Salvation Army	Starting Point Behavioral Healthcare
StrongWell	Sulzbacher Center	Inspire to Rise

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