



Family Support Services
DUVAL · NASSAU · PASCO · PINELLAS



2024-25

REPORT TO THE COMMUNITY

TOGETHER, WE CAN

Driven By Purpose,
Defined By Outcomes

FROM THE PRESIDENT & CEO



Dear Friends and Supporters,

As we reflect on the past year, I am filled with profound gratitude for the strength, resilience, and partnership that continue to define our communities of care. Together, we have remained steadfast in our mission to ensure every child grows up safely, supported, and surrounded by opportunity. This year, we deepened our commitment to stability and innovation—advancing programs that keep families intact, expanding services that meet real needs, and strengthening the framework that allows children and youth in our care to thrive. From our preservation efforts to our foster parent recruitment and support strategies, the progress we've made represents the collective heart of communities determined to create lasting change.

Across the regions we serve, we saw the impact of collaboration come to life in remarkable ways. In Circuit 4, our partnership with VyStar Credit Union opened new doors for youth by removing barriers to financial independence and launching “foster-friendly” banking practices now being modeled statewide. Our Center of Hope continued to grow as a hub for family stability—through neighborhood-centered supports that have helped reduce removals in the 32209 community—opening a door for expansion into the Kennedy Center in 2026.

In Circuit 6, our teams led the region's first Teen Adoption Day, offered enhanced adoption education experiences, and expanded our post-adoption supports, all while strengthening partnerships that empower families and promote permanency for youth. These stories, along with countless others, remind us that meaningful change happens when our communities come together with shared purpose.

As we look ahead, we remain grounded in our belief that every child deserves safety, belonging and the chance to build a bright future. The progress we've made is a direct reflection of your support, compassion and unwavering belief in what is possible. Thank you for standing with us, for championing families and for helping create a stronger, more hopeful tomorrow for children across the communities we proudly serve.

With heartfelt gratitude,

Jenn Petion
President & CEO, Family Support Services

FSS Executive Team

Jenn Petion
President and Chief Executive Officer

Carlos Cruz
Chief of Staff

Brian Zaletel
Chief Financial Officer

Chris Compton
Vice President Technology and Operating Services

Precious Hill
Vice President Human Resources

Jennifer Pendergraph
Vice President Case Management Services

Dominic Watson
Vice President Quality, Training, and Performance Analytics

Tory Wilson
Vice President Placement Resources

Kenneth Barton
General Counsel

Jada Hunter
Executive Director of Community Reinvestment

FSS Board of Directors

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Board Chair, Future Financial Design

Rev. Ronald Cooney
Board Vice Chair, Calvary Church

Dr. Jennifer Katzenstein
Board Vice Chair, Johns Hopkins All Children's Hospital

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Board Vice Chair, Johnson + Johnson Vision

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Suzanne Legg
Dayspring Academy

Andrew Park
Park & Eleazer Construction

Dr. Akilah Pope
Florida Department of Health (Duval County)

J.D. Stronko
Jacksonville Sheriff's Office

To the community:

On behalf of the board of directors, we are honored to reflect on the remarkable achievements of FSS over the past year. The executive team and staff have worked tirelessly to fulfill our mission of providing safety, stability and quality of life for all children by strengthening the family unit.

This year, FSS has made significant strides in supporting and strengthening families, reuniting children with their biological families and creating forever homes through adoption. These accomplishments are a testament to the unwavering commitment of our team and the collaborative efforts of our community partners.

We are continually inspired by the passion and dedication demonstrated by our staff, community partners and volunteers. It is a privilege to serve alongside such an exceptional group of individuals who are making a profound difference in the lives of children and families in our community.

Thank you for your continued support and partnership in this vital work.

Sincerely,

Kisha Shabazz
Board Chair, Family Support Services



 **6,001**
FAMILIES SUPPORTED
AND STRENGTHENED

 **489**
FAMILIES REUNIFIED

 **708**
FOSTER FAMILY HOMES

 **680**
FOREVER FAMILIES CREATED

Data represents combined totals from Duval, Nassau, Pasco and Pinellas counties for FY 2024-25.

OUR WORK, OUR PURPOSE

FSS impact in child welfare

Family Support Services (FSS) works alongside communities across Circuits 4 and 6 to ensure children grow up safely, supported and connected. Our purpose is clear: strengthen families, expand stability and create pathways to better outcomes for every child in Duval, Nassau, Pasco, and Pinellas counties. By partnering with caregivers, providers, and local organizations, we move toward a future where every young person has the opportunity to thrive.



Family Preservation

When families face crisis, FSS mobilizes targeted, in-home support to keep children safely with the people who know them best. These interventions reduce unnecessary removals and reinforce long-term family stability.



Foster Care

When a safe home environment isn't possible, FSS coordinates foster placements that offer consistency, care and hope. We recruit, train and support foster parents who share our commitment to providing a stable foundation for children during difficult transitions.



Adoption and Post-Adoption Services

For children unable to return home, FSS guides the adoption process and connects families with the resources they need to build strong, lasting bonds. Our team continues to support adoptive families long after the adoption is finalized, ensuring continuity of care.



Extended Foster Care

Young adults aging out of care deserve the same launchpad their peers receive. FSS offers programs that build independent living skills, strengthen decision-making and support the transition to adulthood with greater confidence and stability.



Kinship Caregiver Support

Relatives and close family friends often step forward to provide a safe home when parents cannot. FSS partners with these caregivers by offering financial assistance, guidance and ongoing support so children can remain connected to familiar people and routines.

COLLABORATION THAT SAVED LIVES

Recovering missing and trafficked youth

Operation Dragon Eye shows what's possible when agencies work together: children are found, survivors are supported and exploitation is interrupted. Family Support Services (FSS) is proud to have been a key partner in this effort.

In June 2025, FSS of Suncoast teamed up again with the U.S. Marshals Service, Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE) and local law enforcement for this two-week mission across Hillsborough, Pinellas and Pasco counties. The results were significant: 60 children were safely recovered and eight individuals were arrested on charges ranging from human trafficking to child endangerment.

At the center of FSS' role was Andrew Rodriguez, Missing Child Specialist, who served as the daily liaison between law enforcement, Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF), Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ), community partners and case management teams. He ensured investigators had current information, facilitated documentation for medical care and services, and supported several pregnant survivors of trafficking. His advocacy also led to three missing Duval County youth being added to a related task force—all three were recovered, including one missing for more than two years.

FSS Placement Manager Cayse Houston played an equally critical role, securing placements in advance for children from Circuits 6 and 4 so they had immediate safety and stability upon recovery. "Cayse is always willing to jump in and help. She is, as I call her, a placement guru," Rodriguez said.

Behind the scenes, FSS quality management manager Shawna Wood praised Rodriguez's commitment: "Everyone at the command center spoke highly of Andrew's dedication and willingness to partner. It is my pleasure to supervise someone with such passion for their work."

Now in its second year of FSS involvement, Operation Dragon Eye continues to strengthen relationships with law enforcement and community providers—partnerships that accelerate responses for missing children long after the operation ends.

This work is never done alone. Deputy U.S. Marshal Mario Price, who led the effort, was recognized by the FSS team as an exceptional coordinator who united agencies around one goal: protecting vulnerable children and restoring hope.



Watch the press conference from Fox 13 Tampa Bay ▶

VYSTAR PARTNERSHIP

Together we can build financial futures



FSS and VyStar Credit Union team up to launch Fostering Financial Fitness for youth in foster care.

When young people age out of foster care, the path to adulthood can feel steep—especially without access to basic financial tools many families take for granted. In 2022, approximately 18,500 youth nationwide exited foster care without being adopted, and locally more than 1,200 were in out-of-home care (as of March 2025), including 360 youth ages 13 to 23 in foster care extended foster care, or other FSS programs.

This year, a powerful new partnership between VyStar Credit Union and Family Support Services (FSS) set out to change that. Driven by a shared purpose and tied to measurable outcomes, they launched a first-of-its-kind initiative to expand financial education and banking access for youth in foster care across Florida.

That commitment came to life on April 18 at VyStar's Jacksonville Roosevelt Branch during Financial Independence Signing Day—a college-signing-style celebration where the first cohort of youth completing VyStar's Fostering Financial Fitness program committed to their financial futures. With emancipation orders in hand, they symbolically signed for their first checking and savings accounts, marking the start of their independence.

To overcome transportation barriers, VyStar and FSS offered the training fully online, enabling youth to participate from anywhere. The result: 36 young people completed the course, gaining essential financial skills and access to banking services that had previously been out of reach.

Through this partnership, VyStar's Florida branches are now designated as "Foster Friendly" locations. Member service representatives received specialized training to guide foster youth through opening accounts, understanding financial tools, and accessing trustworthy support—an important step for young adults who often lack a traditional support system.

"As a community-based credit union, VyStar is dedicated to ensuring every young adult, especially those aging out of foster care, has access to the financial tools they need to succeed," says Dana Karzan, VyStar CMO. "By offering a fully online course and making account access easier, we're removing barriers and helping youth build a strong financial future."

For FSS, the partnership represents more than a program—it's a community wrapping around youth who deserve every opportunity to succeed.

Maria Oxford, FSS Independent Living and Youth Well-Being Manager, noted that while opening a bank account is routine for most people, many youth in care don't have that support. VyStar's willingness to walk alongside these young adults—and create welcoming, supportive branches—marks a meaningful step toward their financial empowerment and reflects the strength of a true community of care.

Together, FSS and VyStar created a model that shows what is possible when purpose is shared and outcomes are aligned: young people gain the tools, confidence and access they need to step boldly into adulthood—with a community behind them every step of the way.



Watch the news story ▶

Connecting families through partnership



In January 2025, Family Support Services (FSS) in Circuit 6 partnered with Children’s Network of Hillsborough County and Old McMicky’s Farm to host a Child Adoption Education Day for the community to learn more about adoption and permanency for children in care.

Held in Odessa, FL, the event welcomed those interested in adoption to ask questions, explore the adoption process and learn about the supports available. Representatives from various agencies were on hand to share information, while experienced foster and adoptive parents offered firsthand perspectives on the journey to permanency.

“Our goal is to make the adoption process more approachable by creating space for honest conversations and clear information,” said Pam Mattice, FSS Manager of Adoption and Recruitment Activities. “When families understand the support available to them, it opens the door for more children to find permanent, loving homes.”

Through collaborative outreach events like Child Adoption Education Day, FSS continues to strengthen community awareness, reduce barriers to adoption and connect children with safe, stable and loving families.



TEEN ADOPTION DAY Forever families form bonds

For 10 youth, Teen Adoption Day marked the beginning of a new chapter—one defined by belonging, stability and the promise of a forever family. Surrounded by loved ones, these youth officially joined families committed to walking alongside them into adulthood, celebrating a moment many had waited years to experience.

The historic event, hosted by Family Support Services (FSS) at Florida Sheriffs Youth Ranch, celebrated the growing need for teen adoption and the joy of finding permanent homes for older youth—including a group of three who were adopted together, reinforcing the importance of keeping siblings connected.

“We’re so excited to do what we think is the first ever teens-only adoption event in the state,” said FSS President and CEO, Jenn Petion, highlighting both the urgency and impact of matching older youth with loving families.

The event brought energy and purpose to community partners, adoptive families and FSS staff as they worked together to uplift teens who often wait longest for permanency. FSS continues to raise awareness of the unique needs of older children in foster care and to champion permanency—ensuring more young people have the stability, love and support they deserve.



Jenn Petion, FSS CEO, announces adoptions at Teen Adoption Day.



Watch the event ▶



Adopted by Sebastian Montenegro and Anthony Marci, siblings Ari, David and Ben (center) take their first photo with their new extended family.



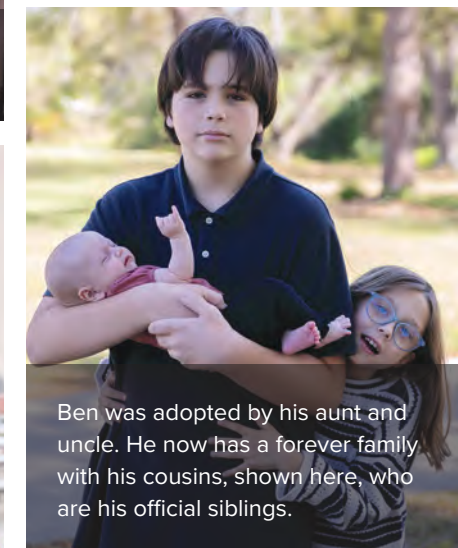
Courtney Irba adopted Ava and Sienna.



Jayden, second from right, with his new parents Stephanie and Jennifer Brady.



Alana, far right, was adopted by Claudia Hamilton and Patrick Moran.



Ben was adopted by his aunt and uncle. He now has a forever family with his cousins, shown here, who are his official siblings.



Jacob, with his former teacher, was adopted by Jack Payne.



Located at the Emmett Reed Community Center, Family Support Services' Center of Hope provides critical, early support for families in Jacksonville's 32209 community—helping prevent crises before they occur.

In FY 2024–25, the Center of Hope met concrete needs for 715 families and 1,352 children, addressing everyday challenges that can impact family stability.

A cornerstone of this work is the Labor of Love Community Garden, which offers hands-on education to help families grow their own fruits and vegetables, improving access to fresh food while building confidence and self-sufficiency. The garden works alongside Parenting Cafés and other programs to strengthen families early, contributing to improved stability and fewer child removals in the 32209 community.

“Families don't just need resources—they need places where they feel supported and empowered,” said Jada Hunter, Executive Director. “The Community Garden brings people together, builds confidence and helps parents better meet their families' needs.”

Beyond direct services, the Center of Hope serves as a community hub with 2,742 residents who participated in 66 community events, including Jolly Jamboree, Summer Hope Fest, neighborhood clean-ups and diaper distributions—building connection and trust across the neighborhood.

Through programs like Threads of Resilience, leadership councils and workforce-focused opportunities, Center of Hope reflects FSS' upstream approach—supporting families and strengthening neighborhoods.

STRONGER TOGETHER

Community partners unite to support families after Hurricane Milton

In October 2024, Hurricane Milton made landfall in Florida impacting the Tampa Bay region with widespread power outages, flooding and disruptions to essential services. Thousands of residents were affected, including families with children, seniors, foster youth and individuals with unique abilities—many of whom were already navigating economic or housing instability.

Family Support Services of Suncoast responded quickly, working with state and community partners to support families in the storm's aftermath. As a recognized Hope Florida partner, FSS was selected to receive funding through the Florida Disaster Fund, enabling coordinated relief efforts focused on immediate stabilization and access to essential resources.

FSS helped distribute food and critical supplies to disaster-affected households as part of a broader statewide response that deployed Hope Buses, navigators and volunteers to reach impacted residents at points of distribution and resource centers throughout the area.

Just one week after Hurricane Milton made landfall, schools across affected counties had reopened and communities were well on the path to recovery—an outcome made possible through strong partnerships and rapid coordination. For FSS, the response to Hurricane Milton reinforced the organization's commitment to standing alongside families during times of crisis and the vital role collaboration plays in helping families recover and rebuild.



“Recovery doesn't happen in isolation. What made our response possible was the strength of our partnerships—state leaders, nonprofit partners, volunteers and neighbors working side by side,” said Kenneth Barton, FSS General Council. “Together, we were able to move quickly to meet urgent needs.”





Top left: FSS staff in Circuit 6 show their spirit celebrating teamwork and a shared commitment to children and families.

Top right: Gerry Cachia of Seminole Lake Rotary Club presents a \$27,000 donation to FSS' Christina Needham.

Center left: Farron Hipp, host of the lifestyle show *Daytime* on WFLA-TV in Tampa Bay, hosts Jenn Petion, FSS CEO, to highlight FSS programs and services.

Center right: Berkshire Hathaway HomeServices Florida Network Realty team members support FSS' Be an Angel program through their generous holiday donations.

Bottom left: A Suncoast Voices for Children partner shares a moment of connection during Volunteer Day.

Bottom right: Rayonier employees and FSS staff come together for the annual Load the Truck event, collecting gifts and essentials to support children and families.



When community shows up

Family Support Services (FSS) is built on a simple truth: protecting children and strengthening families takes a community that shows up—consistently and together. Through trusted partnerships with businesses, civic organizations, nonprofits and volunteers, FSS extends its reach and impact far beyond what any one organization could achieve alone.

These partnerships come to life through hands-on programs that meet families where they are. Seasonal and holiday initiatives are especially powerful examples. Through Be an Angel, volunteers from Berkshire Hathaway HomeServices, Church of Eleven22, Seminole Lake Rotary Club and community partners step in each year to provide gifts and joy for children and families navigating foster care and reunification. What makes this program endure is not just generosity, but commitment—partners returning year after year to support the same mission.

That spirit is also reflected in events like Rayonier's annual Load the Truck, where employees rally to collect clothing, supplies and necessities for children and caregivers served by FSS. These efforts reinforce stability, dignity and the message that families are not facing challenges alone.

Together, these partnerships strengthen the safety net for children, reinforce families and demonstrate what's possible when a community leads with purpose—and follows through with action.

Building permanency, one outcome at a time

At Family Support Services (FSS), every program has a common theme—to move children toward safety, stability and permanency—faster and with fewer disruptions. In Circuit 4, coordinated efforts across licensing, Road to 75, family preservation and the Guardianship Assistance Program (GAP) are delivering measurable results.

Expanding safe homes through licensing and Road to 75



Stable placements begin with available, well-supported foster and kinship homes. In FY 2024–25, Circuit 4 exceeded the statewide goal for Level I licensure, reaching 64.89%—the highest rate in Florida, well above the 40% target. A total of 184 Level I homes were licensed, providing safe placements for 245 children, representing meaningful growth over the prior year. Average time to licensure remained within internal targets, helping reduce placement delays and system strain.

FSS aims to increase the number of kinship and foster homes and sustain placement capacity. Placement capacity increased by adding 118 new beds across 55 Level II homes, licensing 13 new teen homes, and expanding access to medical foster care through new Level V homes. Monthly coordination between licensing, placement and recruitment ensures capacity growth aligns with real-time child needs—supporting placement stability and better outcomes.

Preserving families and preventing removals

When children can safely remain with their families, long-term outcomes improve. Circuit 4’s preservation programs delivered over 9,000 family touchpoints, supporting families through FAST, Safety Management and STEPS services. More than 2,300 children received intensive in-home supports, while nearly 900 families accessed parental needs assistance.

Targeted strategies, such as high-risk newborn services, integrated practice teams and over 1,000 housing referrals, addressed root causes of instability, helping families remain safely together and reducing unnecessary removals.

A continuum focused on results

Together, these programs form a connected continuum—expanding placement options, strengthening families and accelerating permanency. These outcomes reflect FSS’ commitment to being driven by purpose and tied to results, ensuring children experience fewer disruptions and families receive the support they need to succeed.

64.89%
Level I licensing rate—*highest in Florida*
(Statewide goal: 40%)

184
Level I homes licensed supporting 245 children

118
New foster care beds added through Level II licensing

13
New teen foster homes licensed (31 new teen beds)

9,000+
Family preservation touchpoints helping prevent unnecessary removal

1,000+
Housing referrals and supports addressing family instability

63
Children currently supported through Guardianship Assistance Program (GAP)

16
Children achieved permanent guardianship through GAP

Data represents totals from Duval and Nassau counties for FY 2024-25.

Advancing permanency through GAP

For children who cannot reunify but can remain with relatives or caregivers, GAP provides a vital path to permanency. GAP allows licensed foster caregivers to transition to permanent guardianship while continuing to receive critical financial and community supports after case closure.

Since transitioning under Kinship in January 2025, **63 children** are currently supported through GAP, with **16** achieving permanent guardianship during the fiscal year.

“GAP removes one of the biggest barriers to permanency—fear of losing support,” said Tiffany Ball, FSS Manager, Guardianship Assistance Program. “When caregivers know stability is sustainable, they’re more confident committing to permanent guardianship.”

Eligible guardians may continue receiving the standard foster care board rate, Medicaid coverage through age 18, access to a college tuition exemption waiver and ongoing community supports. Caregivers of youth over age 14 may also qualify for an extension of benefits up to age 21 when young adults participate in approved activities.

By supporting caregivers beyond case closure, GAP helps children remain with people they already know and trust—reducing disruptions and strengthening long-term stability.



Family Support Services

DUVAL • NASSAU • PASCO • PINELLAS



COMMUNITY-BASED CARE

A proven model for success

Community-based care, implemented following Florida's child welfare system overhaul by Governor Jeb Bush in 1996, focuses on abuse prevention, family preservation and reunification to keep children out of foster care and enhance community prosperity. Managed locally with oversight from the Florida Department of Children and Families, this model has been adopted statewide with 16 lead agencies serving all 67 counties. Benefits include faster localized responses, optimized resource use, and greater innovation and flexibility. Local management also shows higher commitment and longevity. The decline in foster care numbers underscores the model's success, as it continues to strengthen family bonds and improve community well-being through Family Support Services.

Front cover: Shanaya Duncan, volunteer, and Johnny White, FSS Human Resources Specialist, participate in a foster parent appreciation event hosted by FSS Suncoast.