

Summary of Accomplishments 2007

Legislative & Executive Advocacy:

Children's Cabinet: FCF drafted the language to create the newly enacted Children and Youth Cabinet and worked alongside other children's advocates to secure the passage and signing of the bill.

Independent Living: FCF worked to ensure several improvements in services for youth aging out of foster care: extension of Medicaid to all youth aging out of care to age 21; new means for youth to open bank accounts and obtain driver's licenses; and expanded eligibility for the Road to Independence to youth who were adopted or placed into permanent guardianship after the age of 16.

Keeping Children Safe Act: worked to revise the procedures for visitation between children in dependency and parents or caregivers accused of sexually abusing them, having committed specific crimes, or being determined by a court to be sexual predator.

DCF Reorganization: FCF was invited to be one of only two outside organizations to assist the Department of Children and Families in its internal reorganization.

Representation: FCF worked to ensure representation for each child in the foster care system by advocating for an increase in funding for Florida's Guardian ad Litem Program and continuation of the pilot project in Pinellas County for public defenders to represent children in the dependency system.

Direct Service to Youth:

FCF organized and serves as adult support for a youth advocacy organization, "Florida Youth SHINE," which stands for Striving High for Independence aNd Empowerment. The youth are trained to become their own advocates to ensure their voices are heard in the public policy debates regarding child welfare. In 2007, FCF arranged for Youth SHINE members to meet with the Governor; the Secretary of the Department of Children & Families; Legislators including the Speaker of the House; the Florida Supreme Court Committee on Families, Children and the Courts; DCF District Administrators and a conference of 150 CBC and DCF District staff to share their specific concerns about needed systemic reform.

Training and Technical Assistance

FCF provides training to child advocates and state employees. Training this year has included topics such as: Children's Rights to Medicaid; a 2007 Legislative Update; Independent Living Programs and applicable laws; Improving Education Outcomes; Transition Planning, legal requirements and best practices.

In addition to in-person training, FCF has updated and distributed its material for youth (FAQ) on Independent Living; co-authored a report on Improving Educational Outcomes for Youth in Foster Care to inform and engage policy makers; issued a white paper on mental health services; issued a white paper on improving foster care. Other publications in progress include material on Transition for Youth with Disabilities, health and finances for youth aging out of care.

Along with the National Youth Law Center, FCF is examining public records concerning the placement and movement of children in foster care in 5 CBCs. DCF has joined us in studying the deficiencies and developing solutions.

Amicus Project

FCF represents the interests of children in matters of systemic improvement by filing *amicus briefs* in Florida's Supreme Court and its lower courts to educate courts about the potential impact of their decisions on all of Florida's children and to highlight specific policy issues. Cases concluded in 2007 include:

R.C. v. Juvenile Court Judges of the Fifteenth Judicial Circuit, 4D06-4338. FCF joined the amicus brief of the University of Miami School of Law Children and Youth Law Clinic asserting the right of children in delinquency proceedings to be free from indiscriminate shackling in court.

Hadi v. A.H., 1D06-5852 (Fla. 1st DCA 2007) upheld circuit court's issuance of mandamus under Chapter 119 (public records law) requiring Department of Children and Families to provide records to dependent children and their attorney.