



Fighting for Children's Rights

Florida's Children First, Inc.

Draft Strategic Plan 2015 - 2018

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Florida's Children First, Inc.

Vision Statement

The Vision of Florida's Children First, Inc. is that Florida puts its children and youth first when making policy decisions; that all public and private agencies and programs that touch the lives of children and youth work in a coordinated, comprehensive manner maximizing public and private resources; that effective implementation of public policy will lead to healthy children, youth and families.

Mission Statement

Florida's Children First, Inc. is a non-profit organization dedicated to advancing the rights of at-risk children and youth; the organization seeks full representation of children and youth and meaningful and sustainable improvement in Florida's child-serving systems using a range of strategies including public policy development, on-going training and technical assistance, and where necessary, strategic litigation.

Goals

Florida's Children First has developed goals that will protect the rights of Florida's Children and Youth:

- Goal one: Improve the administration of justice for children and youth through full, quality representation.
- Goal two: Create systemic improvements in systems serving Florida's children and youth in the state's custody.
- Goal three: Develop board leadership and enhancing fundraising and public relations efforts to advance the mission of Florida's Children First.
- Goal four: Develop the capacity and infrastructure needed to support efficient and effective blend of volunteers and staff working together to fulfill our mission.

Goal One: Improve the administration of justice for children and youth through full, quality representation.

Objectives for Goal One:

1. Improve Children & Youth Experience in Court Proceedings by providing more of them with attorneys and improving their meaningful participation in court proceedings.

2. Provide support to the Children’s Legal Service Programs of The Florida Bar Foundation.
3. Improve the quality of representation for all legal practitioners in the child welfare system.
4. Work to ensure children and youth maintain ability to obtain redress for injuries.

Strategies for Goal One:

Objective 1

Improve Children & Youth Experience in Court Proceedings by providing more of them with attorneys and improving their meaningful participation in court proceedings.

- Advocate for legislation that will expand the categories of dependent children that are entitled to court-appointed attorneys.
 - Work with other participants in system to reach accord.
 - Build public support for representation, including with nontraditional partners.
 - Engage youth (FYS) to tell compelling stories.
- Locate attorneys for specific children in dependency proceedings, and young adults formerly in state care with unmet legal needs.
 - Locate counsel for children at the request of DCF and other entities.
 - Build pro bono resources in FLORIDA for Children & Families and market the availability of F4CF to locate counsel for children
- Expand representation of “Crossover” youth - those with open delinquency and dependency cases.
 - Support the expansion of Public Defender representation of crossover children and youth so the same counsel represents the child in delinquency and dependency proceedings.
 - Support projects where dependency attorneys work with delinquency attorneys to improve outcomes.
- Educate judges and all child welfare participants on the importance of youth participation and high quality advocacy for all participants.
 - Provide resources on ways to make participation meaningful and effective for children and youth.
 - Engage former foster youth in a campaign for youth participation.
 - Seek and support reform of laws, rules and practices concerning children and youth appearance in court.
- Initiate impact litigation and file amicus briefs and rule comments to support all goals and objectives.

Objective 2

Provide support to the Children’s Legal Service Programs of The Florida Bar Foundation.

- Serve as a Florida Bar Foundation’s statewide support entity on children and youth issues.

- Provide technical assistance, mentoring and support upon request.
- Lead and support statewide workgroups on systemic issues
- Provide training on issues of current concern to grantees.

Objective 3

Improve the quality of representation for all legal practitioners in the child welfare system.

- Provide training to all counsel participating in dependency proceedings.
 - Support the Training Consortium
 - Continue to build training resources on the internet
 - Conduct live trainings
- Support efforts to implement Florida Bar certification for Juvenile Law.
- Work to instill a quality assurance mechanism to promote high quality representation for children who have court-appointed counsel
 - Seek legislation, rulemaking or other means to establish quality assurance.

Objective 4

Work to ensure children and youth maintain ability to obtain redress for injuries.

- Oppose efforts to expand sovereign immunity to non-governmental entities via lobbying and litigation if necessary.
- Support development of case law that promotes legal standards that promote redress.

Goal Two: Create systemic improvements in systems serving Florida’s children and youth in the state’s custody.

Objectives for Goal Two:

1. Improve policy and practice for youth who are transitioning out of state care – both dependency and delinquency – including: housing, health care, education, and work.
2. Ensure that advocates for children have the training, technical assistance and support to advocate for their clients to receive all needed health and related services. (Including, mental health, substance abuse, developmental services, and sexual health care.)

3. Work to ensure that the legal right to a high quality education is asserted for at-risk children.
4. Improve policy and practice relating to the children and youth's experience while in Care (normalcy, stability, trauma informed, barriers to permanency, sibling relationships, safe and affirming care for LGBTQ youth).
5. Improve the child welfare system's response to families caring for unaccompanied immigrant children.

Overarching Strategies

- Author technical expertise documents and provide technical assistance to others writing documents
- Advocate on legislation and participate in rule-making regarding policy positions
- Participate in policy-making workgroups and collaborations with other child welfare participants.
- Conduct training to facilitate implementation of policy reforms
- Initiate impact litigation and file amicus briefs to support all goals and objectives.
- Advocate for revisions to public records and privacy laws to maximize information sharing between agencies while protecting privacy.
- Employ the expertise of Florida Youth SHINE to identify issues and solutions and to assist in advocating for reforms.

Objective 1

Improve policy and practice for youth who are transitioning out of state care – both dependency and delinquency – including: housing, health care, education, and work.

- Advocate for a system for children leaving delinquency that is similar to Transitional Independent Living program for those in foster care.
- Advocate for rights of children and youth to access to records.
- Advocate for rights of youth who transition out of foster care at age 18; who remain in extended foster care after age 18; who enter into Post-Secondary Education Services and Supports (PESS), and those who remain on RTI or receive Aftercare Services.
- Train and support advocates assisting youth with disabilities in transition

Objective 2

Ensure that advocates for children have the training, technical assistance and support to advocate for their clients to receive all needed health and related services. (Including, mental health, substance abuse, developmental services, and sexual health care.)

- Lead workgroup of Bar Foundation grantees in systemic work on health related issues
- Train and support advocates assisting youth with health issues

Objective 3

Work to ensure that the legal right to a high quality education is asserted for at-risk children.

- Facilitate implementation of revisions to education laws applicable to children in state care.

- Advocate for rule and policy changes that promote access to high quality early education and appropriate educational services for school age children.
- Support advocates working on education issues for youth in delinquency

Objective 4

Improve policy and practice relating to the children and youth’s experience while in Care (normalcy, stability, trauma informed, and barriers to permanency).

- Advocate for rule and policy changes to strengthen normalcy opportunities
- Continue to monitor implementation of the Normalcy legislation
- Advocate for right of siblings to maintain relationships
- Participate in statewide efforts to address the needs of LGBTQ youth in state care.

Objective 5

Improve the child welfare system’s response to families caring for immigrant children.

- Facilitate local and statewide endeavors to bring child welfare prevention services to the families of immigrant children.

Goal Three: Developing board leadership and enhancing fundraising and public relations efforts to advance the mission of Florida’s Children First.

Objectives for Goal Three

1. Developing Board Leadership: We will strive to maintain a board with engaged and enthusiastic members who are committed to moving the mission forward on a path to excellence by sharing their skills, knowledge, connections and resources.
2. Increasing funding and expanding our donor base: We will continue to maintain/expand our current sources of support and look for new sources of funding.
3. Growing Industry Leadership: FCF is a leading child advocate organization in the State of Florida and nationally. We will continue to develop ways to ensure that FCF is a recognized name in the child welfare community and that every person in the State of Florida who cares about the rights of at-risk children and youth knows about the important work of FCF.

Objective 1

Developing Board Leadership: We will strive to maintain a board with engaged and enthusiastic members who are committed to moving the mission forward on a path to excellence by sharing their skills, knowledge, connections and resources.

- Continue to identify and select board members who are committed to the work of the organization using the following criteria as a guide:
 - Commitment to children’s issues and the mission of FCF;
 - Diverse geographic board covering major metro areas across the State of Florida;
 - Variety of skills and experience among board members to ensure a well-rounded board. We should have at least one board member who is willing and qualified to lead each committee listed below;
 - Committed to making a financial donation and participate in fundraising for FCF;
 - Available to participate in board meetings (one annual “in person” board meeting and the rest by conference call) and take on other responsibilities as needed. Board meetings to be set one year in advance.
- Each Director will commit to one of the following committees which are called upon as needed and participate in a basic self-assessment survey to determine strengths that match our needs:
 - Public Policy/Legislation
 - Litigation
 - Fund Development
 - Public Relations/Marketing
 - Operations/Finance
 - Board Governance/Nominating
- Developing Board Fundraising Efforts in the following ways:
 - Directors will make a meaningful annual financial contribution based on your financial ability (personally or through their business) to support the work of FCF;
 - Directors will be expected to participate in planning and hosting one of the local/regional fundraising events so that we can expand our network of supporters across the state;
 - Directors will work with the fund development committee and staff to create their own customized plan to help raise funds for the organization and will continue to make introductions to prospective supporters.
- Develop a clear succession plan for future board leadership which will be led by the Board Governance/Nominating committee.
- Keep our Advisory Board informed about the work of FCF and child advocacy issues and engage them for support as necessary;
- Develop an “Ambassadors Council” in key communities to further enhance our fundraising and advocacy efforts (See separate chart and description of the proposed Ambassadors Council).

Objective 2

Increasing funding and expanding our donor base: We will continue to maintain/expand our current sources of support and look for new sources of funding.

- Create and share our fundraising plan with the Board which will include these sources of funding:
 - Development of major donors (\$1,000 and up donors) across the state through individual contacts and relationship development;
 - Marketing/mail campaign to reach mass/mid-level donors;
 - Events/receptions in key metro areas annually to expand our donor base;
 - Seek grants from foundations and businesses;
- Expand our active donor base
 - Solicit names from board members of prospective donors;
 - Research foundations that would support child advocacy organizations;
 - Engage in an email marketing campaign;
 - Create the “Ambassadors Council” and engage them in local fundraising.
- Increase donations from current donors
 - Keep our donors informed and connected to FCF;
 - Develop relationships with each major donor (\$1,000 and up donors);
 - Ask donors to increase their gifts.
- Enhance Board members’ involvement with the above methods of fundraising as much as possible (see *Developing Board Leadership* above)
- Review staffing to ensure that every member of our staff has opportunities to engage meaningfully in our fundraising efforts to meet our goals.

Objective 3

Growing Industry Leadership: FCF is a leading child advocate organization in the State of Florida and nationally. We will continue to develop ways to ensure that FCF is a recognized name in the child welfare community and that every person in the State of Florida who cares about the rights of at-risk children and youth knows about the important work of FCF.

- Communicating with donors/prospective donors:
 - Maintain a vibrant website with relevant and timely information about our work and activities;
 - Develop an email campaign which directs our supporters to our website for updates about our work. Continually add names and contact information to our database so that we can include these people in our emailing campaigns;
 - Use social media to communicate to our donors and anyone interested in the welfare of children in the State of Florida.
- Maintain a strong public image:
 - Seek speaking engagements and training opportunities around the state which incorporates information about our need for funding;
 - Look for opportunities to write editorials and articles in newspapers and other publications;
 - Maintain/develop strong relationships with:
 - Legislators and their staff;

- Organizations in the child welfare community.
- Florida Bar Foundation and other legal organizations such as Legal Aid.

Goal Four: Develop the capacity and infrastructure needed to support efficient and effective blend of volunteers and staff working together to fulfill our mission.

Objectives for Goal Four:

1. Support existing staff and add new staff to increase ability to advocate for reform, as well as to provide information, training, technical support services.
2. Engage board, advisory board and volunteers to contribute their talent to the success of the organization.
3. As the “go-to” entity for promotion of the rights of at-risk children and youth in Florida attract public support for our work.

Objective 1

Support existing staff and add new staff to increase ability to advocate for reform, as well as to provide information, training, technical support services.

- Add a full-time employee in Tallahassee to serve as a continuous presence in support of our advocacy efforts
- Provide staff development opportunities for each staff to grow and improve performance
- Develop a succession plan for each key position.
- Retain additional support staff to handle administrative functions.
- Obtain volunteer, part-time, or contract staff to enhance capacity for fundraising, grant-writing and communications.
- Add regional youth organizers to support the expansion of Florida Youth SHINE.

Objective 2

Engage board, advisory board and volunteers to contribute their talent to the success of the organization.

- Identify Board and Advisory Board “volunteer experts” in areas of education, health, disability, immigration, child welfare, juvenile justice.
- Engage “volunteer experts” in policy discussions, research review, publication editing, public speaking and training.
- Create opportunities for volunteers to contribute to the organization

Objective 3

As the “go-to” entity for promotion of the rights of at-risk children and youth in Florida attract public support for our work.

- Author articles and editorials for newspaper, magazine, law review and online publication.
- Participate in Statewide and National television and radio programs
- Serve as resource for media outlets seeking information and quotable sources.
- Promote visibility with legislators, executive branch decision-makers, and others