



Fighting for Children's Rights

FLORIDA'S CHILDREN FIRST

2002 – 2012

The First 10 Years

adv
ad·vis·ory
advise; giving advice
role.
ad·vo·cacy ædvək
of support (to a cause)
her advocacy of women
or work of an advocate
ad·voc·ate /'ædvə



MISSION

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, ongoing training and technical assistance, and where necessary, strategic litigation.

VISION

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.

There are **20,048 children** in
out of home care*

Nearly 70% of foster children will
leave high school **without a degree**

Approximately 206 children in
state custody are **missing***

A MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



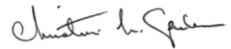
I am honored to be included in the 10-year history of the most credible, accomplished child advocacy organization in Florida. Three years ago when I joined Florida's Children First, I recognized the challenges ahead but also realized that improving the system of care for our vulnerable children would bring great personal rewards. I am grateful for the excellent groundwork laid by the former Executive Directors which helped establish the wonderful reputation enjoyed by FCF.

The commitment, dedication and hard work of the Board President, Directors and staff are the backbone of our well-established organization. Through our publications, training opportunities, legislative and executive branch advocacy and public appearances, we have shared the difficulties and have educated the public on the daily issues facing children who are at risk or in care. Most important are the many positive systemic changes that have been realized through the efforts of FCF. When we are able to impact the system, not only are we helping the individual children today but we are guaranteeing that every child who follows will enjoy the same benefits. In this way, we have helped thousands of children in Florida's child-caring systems.

The expansion of Florida Youth SHINE has been one of the most rewarding aspects of my position. I have seen FYS grow, gaining more current and former foster youth as they learn to advocate for positive changes. They are a powerful force as a group, and they are individually empowered by the knowledge that they are having an impact for all other foster children.

We remain grateful to our funders and appreciative of our faithful supporters. We look forward to continuing our good work and we remain committed to many more years of protecting the rights of defenseless children in Florida.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Christina L. Spudeas".

Christina L. Spudeas, Esq.

A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Over ten years ago, Florida's leading child advocates recognized that they were individually working on the complex legal issues facing at-risk children and children in care, but without a common voice. We realized that by joining forces we could combine and prioritize our individual efforts and work together as a strong, cohesive group of advocates to more effectively tackle the problems in the systems of care. This was the beginning of Florida's Children First.



Over the years we have gone from an all volunteer effort to a professional staff. We have also developed an active 27 member Board of Directors comprised of lawyers, business professionals and other child advocates who have the passion and expertise to make positive changes for our vulnerable children. We have included an Advisory Board of 35 professionals and also hundreds of volunteers in local communities who work together to protect the legal rights of children, especially those in the foster care system.

Our successes and our methods to effect changes to better the lives of children are many and varied. However, our highest priority remains in making sure each child in the dependency system has a qualified advocate to help navigate the child through their own dependency case. To reach our goals, we use legislative and executive branch education and advocacy, policy advocacy, publications, training, technical assistance, information through public media, recruitment, training and mentoring of volunteer lawyers, and we have the potential to conduct litigation if needed. All of our work would not be possible without our grants, sponsors and supporters. I want to thank them all for making our children a top priority. We look forward to many more years of success and to continuing our partnership with like-minded individuals and organizations as we continue to fight for the rights of our vulnerable children.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Howard M. Talenfeld".

Howard M. Talenfeld, Esq.

“EVERY STATE SHOULD HAVE AN ORGANIZATION LIKE FLORIDA'S CHILDREN FIRST. THE LEADERSHIP AND STAFF ARE BRIGHT, ENTHUSIASTIC AND ENGAGED IN ALL OF THE RELEVANT ISSUES THAT HAVE AN IMPACT ON CHILDREN AND FAMILIES. I HAVE FOUND THEM TO BE WONDERFUL PARTNERS WHO CONSISTENTLY STAND FOR FAIRNESS AND EQUALITY, USING FACTS AND DATA FROM THE HUMAN SERVICE ARENA.”

PAUL DiLORENZO, SENIOR DIRECTOR AT CASEY FAMILY PROGRAMS

“I HAVE ALWAYS APPRECIATED THAT FCF HAS KIDS AT THE FOREFRONT, NO QUESTION. THEY ARE ALWAYS WILLING TO ADVISE AND TEACH ME HOW I CAN BEST SERVE KIDS. ANYONE IN GOVERNMENT WHO IS NOT WILLING TO AT LEAST LISTEN TO THEM IS REALLY MISSING OUT. THEY HAVE A LOT TO TEACH, AND WE ALL HAVE A LOT TO LEARN.”

NICK COX, STATEWIDE PROSECUTOR

“TO HEAR FROM THESE YOUTH IN PARTICULAR, THE POWER OF A DIRECT STORY – THE POWER OF THE REAL STORY – IS FAIRLY OVERWHELMING.”

FORMER STATE SENATOR AND CURRENT CFO OF FLORIDA, JEFF ATWATER

“FLORIDA’S CHILDREN FIRST IS THE STATE’S MOST POWERFUL VOICE FOR CHILDREN IN THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM, INCLUDING THOSE TRANSITIONING INTO ADULthood.”

TED GRANGER, PRESIDENT OF UNITED WAY OF FLORIDA

INVEST IN FLORIDA'S FUTURE

FCF has accomplished much, but there is much more to do.

With your support we can advance policy and practices to enhance the quality of life and future success of Florida's foster children.

Leverage your funds not just to help one child, but to improve the system for all children.



Pictured: Kaydrin Herbert was honored at the 2009 FCF Child Advocacy Awards with his adoptive mother, Georgina. Kaydrin entered foster care as an abused baby with severe disabilities. He stole the heart of the nurse who cared and eventually was able to legally adopt Kaydrin, giving him a loving permanent home. This special needs adoption would not have been possible without the tireless efforts of their community and attorney, FCF President Howard Talenfeld.

Join us in the fight for children's rights

WHO WE ARE &

FLORIDA'S CHILDREN FIRST (FCF) is a child advocacy organization that is dedicated to fighting for the rights of Florida's at-risk children and youth. We use our skills as advocates to get the systems that serve children to do a better job.

FCF is powered by a small staff, an active board, and by collaboration with advocates in legal services, government and public interest organizations. FCF began with a cadre of lawyers who individually, and in teams, had used the legal system to try to bring about substantial change for children in state care. Our founders knew that by pooling talent and resources, and adding other forms of advocacy, we could create a powerful force for children. Our Board has expanded to include business professionals and other advocates with a passion for children's issues.

We bring the problems, concerns and interests of vulnerable children to the attention of people who can make changes.

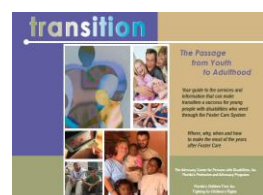
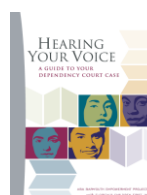
EDUCATION & PUBLIC AWARENESS

FCF brings public awareness to issues affecting Florida's children through training, publications, media outreach and by hosting awards presentations to honor the most effective child advocates in communities throughout Florida.

We've trained more than 10,000 child welfare professionals, volunteers and attorneys in more than 15 topics.

We are the media's go-to organization for public comment on child welfare issues.

We have published numerous guides that explain the legal rights of children in terms that youth and their adult supporters can understand.



EXECUTIVE BRANCH ADVOCACY

Whether working closely or at arm's length with any particular agency – FCF is always at the forefront of bringing children's rights concerns to the appropriate agency personnel. When asked, we serve on governmental committees and tasks forces that guide public policy. When gentle persuasion doesn't win the day, we are not afraid to engage agencies in formal rule-making /challenge processes.

WHAT WE DO

FCF served on Florida's "core team" for two National Governor's Association Policy Academies, the Gabriel Myers Task Force, Human Trafficking Task Force, the Independent Living Re-design Committee, and the Independent Living Services Advisory Council, among others.

FCF initiated rule-making with the Agency for Persons with Disabilities concerning the prioritization of children in foster care for the Waiver waiting list.

LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY

FCF is the most persistent and successful organization advocating on child welfare issues at the Florida Legislature. We draft new legislation, comment and revise proposed legislation, and provide concrete examples of the impact of proposed bills on Florida's foster children.

FCF had a substantial part in obtaining passage of laws: requiring Interagency Agreements for Education and Child Welfare; creating the Children & Youth Cabinet; providing Youth Access to their Records; expanding Independent Living Services; promoting significant reforms to the educational rights and services for children in state care; and fought for millions of dollars for the Guardian Ad Litem program.

FCF has also successfully spearheaded efforts to stop the Legislature from reducing funding for Independent Living Services; dropping the age for Independent Living Services; and limiting the liability of privatized providers who are responsible for injuries to children in state care.

LITIGATION & JUDICIAL BRANCH ADVOCACY

FCF has never initiated civil litigation, though we stand ready to sue if the need arises. We have always supported attorneys engaged in litigation on behalf of their child clients, in part by filing dozens of amicus briefs asserting children's rights. We have participated in the drafting of and commenting on the Juvenile Rules of Procedure. We facilitate the appointment of attorneys for children in dependency proceedings and obtain lawyers for former foster youth with civil legal needs.

Our amicus briefs have been accepted in every District Court of Appeal, the Florida Supreme Court, the Eleventh Circuit Court of Appeals, and some trial courts. We've obtained counsel for numerous children referred by DCF, the GAL and other concerned persons.

“FCF’S WORK HAS LED THE WAY FOR YOUTH AGING OUT OF FOSTER CARE. FLORIDA HAS NO BETTER ADVOCACY GROUP WORKING ON CHILDREN’S ISSUES.”

STATE SENATOR NAN RICH

“WITHOUT THE LOVE AND SUPPORT OF FCF I TRULY WOULD NOT BE THE ADVOCATE AND LEADER I AM TODAY. THEY HELPED ME DISCOVER THE TALENT AND THE POTENTIAL THAT WAS WITHIN ME.”

**DERRICK RIGGINS
FYS ALUMNI AND CURRENT LAW STUDENT**



Pictured: children of foster-adoptive family and Florida Youth SHINE Alumni, Linsey Brewster-Jenkins

BY THE NUMBERS

\$4,000,000 donated in professional services

10,000 people trained statewide

7,000 pro bono hours donated

1,553 dedicated donors & supporters

50,000 hours of youth advocacy and training

15 educational publications on children's rights

20 amicus briefs filed

13 bills drafted, supported or passed

\$100,000 litigation fund but...

0 law suits needed

"ALL PARTS OF FLORIDA'S CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM HAVE TO TALK TO ONE ANOTHER. FLORIDA'S CHILDREN FIRST MAKES SURE THAT HAPPENS. THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS ARE INVALUABLE."

FCF MAKES A DIFFERENCE IN THE TOP HIGHLIGHTS OVER

YOUTH IN COURT

SUBSTANTIALLY MORE YOUTH ATTEND THEIR COURT PROCEEDINGS. In 2008, FCF began focusing on the need to have youth participate in their dependency court proceedings. We have trained thousands of child welfare professionals on the importance of involving youth in court as well on how to prepare and support youth to make their experiences successful. We co-authored **“Hearing Your Voice” a Guide to Your Dependency Court Case** with the American Bar Association. And we support the “Model Court” initiatives which are promoting youth involvement in court. We supported an amendment to the rules of procedure that presumes children should be in court. It was adopted by Florida Supreme Court effective June, 2012.

RIGHT TO RECORDS

YOUTH FINALLY HAVE ACCESS TO THEIR CHILD WELFARE RECORDS. After years of legal wrangling in the state courts, FCF with the strong advocacy of the youth in FYS convinced the Legislature to strengthen the laws that provide youth with access to their child welfare records.



LIVES OF CHILDREN IN STATE CARE THE PAST TEN YEARS

A NORMAL LIFE

A NORMAL LIFE IS A PRIORITY. Working with FYS to highlight the importance of being able to engage in the "normal" activities of childhood, FCF's advocacy has ensured that kids get their allowance, or can sleep over at a friend's house without a background check. More importantly, our consistent advocacy has resulted in "normalcy" becoming a priority for DCF.

"I HAD THE PLEASURE OF SERVING THIS GROUP AS THE FIRST EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF FLORIDA'S CHILDREN FIRST. AS A CLINICAL PROFESSOR WHO HAD SERVED CHILDREN ON AN INDIVIDUAL BASIS, IT WAS GREAT TO SEE THE IMPACT SUCH A GROUP COULD HAVE ON THE LEGISLATIVE AND EXECUTIVE BRANCHES. WE LEARNED THAT WE COULD SUCCEED ON INDIVIDUAL CASES BUT THOSE SUCCESSES WERE USUALLY REVERSED THROUGH ADMINISTRATIVE REGULATIONS OR LEGISLATIVE ACTION — **WITHOUT FLORIDA'S CHILDREN FIRST, CHILDREN MIGHT CONTINUE TO WIN INDIVIDUAL BATTLES BUT LOSE IN THE END.**"

GERRY GLYNN, FORMER FCF EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
AND CURRENT LAW PROFESSOR AT BARRY UNIVERSITY

PSYCHOTROPIC MEDICATION

FEWER FOSTER CHILDREN ARE INAPPROPRIATELY PROVIDED PSYCHOTROPIC medication because of FCFs sustained efforts in raising red flags, documenting abuses, and participating in DCF's review of administration of medication; participating in rule drafting; and training hundreds of individuals on the rights of children in state care.

1,270 children = **28% of kids in out of home care are prescribed psychotropic medication***

FCF MAKES A DIFFERENCE IN THE TOP HIGHLIGHTS OVER

DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

CHILDREN WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES in the child welfare system are far more likely to obtain needed services under the Medicaid Waiver. At its inception, the Agency for Persons with Disabilities declined to provide developmental services under the Medicaid Waiver for children who were in the child welfare system. Because of FCF's continual advocacy, APD reversed its position, the Legislature made foster children the number 2 priority for getting off the waiting list, and now each month, children who need waiver services to obtain permanency are moved off the waiting list and on to the Waiver.

INDEPENDENT LIVING

FLORIDA FOCUSES ON THE TRANSITION NEEDS of young people who "age out" of the child welfare system. Thanks to FCF's work, Florida's laws and regulations are among the most advanced in the country in recognizing the needs of youth exiting state care. Our **Frequently Asked Questions** is the go-to guide for youth and adults seeking to understand the law. Older teens no longer have to choose between a future and a family, and young adults have access to services, health care and funding for living needs while completing their education.

YOUTH EMPOWERMENT

YOUTH ARE EMPOWERED TO SPEAK FOR THEMSELVES on issues that affect the lives of children in state care with the creation of **Florida Youth SHINE** – the first state-wide advocacy organization of current and former foster youth. What started with a handful of members in 2006 has grown to 11 chapters with over 150 members in 2012.



10 YEARS FIGHTING FOR CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

LIVES OF CHILDREN IN STATE CARE

THE PAST TEN YEARS

REPRESENTATION

MORE CHILDREN IN STATE CARE HAVE THEIR OWN ATTORNEYS who are better trained to represent them. Through our **Counsel for Kids** agreement with DCF, the **Tracey McPharlin Initiative**, **Justice For Foster Youth**, and community outreach, FCF continues to recruit and train lawyers to represent children in dependency proceedings as well as related civil proceedings. We have and will continue to advocate for systemic reform so that all children in state care have access to high quality representation.

PROTECTING THE ABUSED

VICTIMS OF SEXUAL ABUSE HAVE MORE PROTECTIONS. FCF's advocacy has highlighted the systemic problem of child on child sexual abuse in the child welfare system. By working with DCF and training hundreds of child welfare workers we have raised awareness of the problems and community based resources. We also took the voice of the youth who were re-abused by adult caregivers in visitation to the Legislature which amended visitation laws in the Keeping Children Safe Act.

EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS

FLORIDA'S FOSTER CHILDREN have a better chance at educational success. FCF promoted legislation that requires state and local child welfare and education systems to create interagency agreements on serving children; legislation that strengthens the laws to improve school stability and ensure that foster youth with disabilities are appropriately served in school; and FCF has educated legislators, administrators and trained hundreds of child welfare front line workers on the importance of education to youth in state care.



Pictured: Florida Youth SHINE advocating at the Capitol 2012

FLORIDA YOUTH S.H.I.N.E.

Striving High for Independence aNd Empowerment

FLORIDA YOUTH SHINE (FYS) IS A STATEWIDE YOUTH DRIVEN, PEER LED ORGANIZATION THAT EMPOWERS CURRENT AND FORMER FOSTER YOUTH TO BECOME ADVOCATES FOR ALL YOUTH IN CARE. FYS was founded in 2005 by Florida's Children First with the help of many key stakeholders within the child welfare community. Since then FYS has quickly become Florida's leading youth advocacy organization who participate in public policy advocacy to improve child protection and foster care services on both a state and local level. Chapters meet once a month to engage in advocacy, discuss current welfare issues, and raise awareness in their community. Throughout the year, they travel across the state to educate legislators and those working directly in the system of care about the issues they face that many take for granted.

"TO SEE THAT THEY HAVE PERSEVERED SO MUCH AND STILL HAVE THE BELIEF THAT THEY CAN ACCOMPLISH ANYTHING REALLY GIVES ME A LOT OF PRIDE."

LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR JENNIFER CARROLL



FYS ALUMNI DERRICK RIGGINS, JESSE WILSON, STATEWIDE COORDINATOR LINDSAY BAACH AND FCF EXEC. DIR. CHRISTINA SPUDEAS



FYS WITH LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR JENNIFER CARROLL



Page | 14 FYS WITH FORMER DCF SECRETARY GEORGE SHELDON AT DCF SUMMIT



FYS WITH STATE SENATOR RONDA STORMS



**FYS WITH DCF SECRETARY DAVID WILKINS
& MRS. WILKINS**



FYS WITH SENATE PRESIDENT MIKE HARIDOPOLOS



"INSTEAD OF STANDING AROUND WATCHING AND WISHING FOR CHANGE, NOW I AM A PART OF THE PROCESS. FCF AND FYS HAVE CHANGED MY LIFE AND FOR THAT I AM HONORED."

TAMMY WORKMAN, FORMER FYS STATEWIDE COORDINATOR

GROWTH OF FYS CHAPTERS AND MEMBERSHIP STATEWIDE IS OFF THE CHARTS!

With 11 chapters and over 150 members, FYS is in need of chapter mentors in all areas of the state to help our members continue to excel. Currently we have chapters in Broward, Hillsborough, Jacksonville, Miami, Orlando, Palm Beach, Pensacola, Pinellas/Pasco, Sarasota/Manatee/DeSoto, Tallahassee and Vero Beach.

**TO GET INVOLVED, PLEASE CONTACT THE
STATEWIDE COORDINATOR, LINDSAY BAACH**



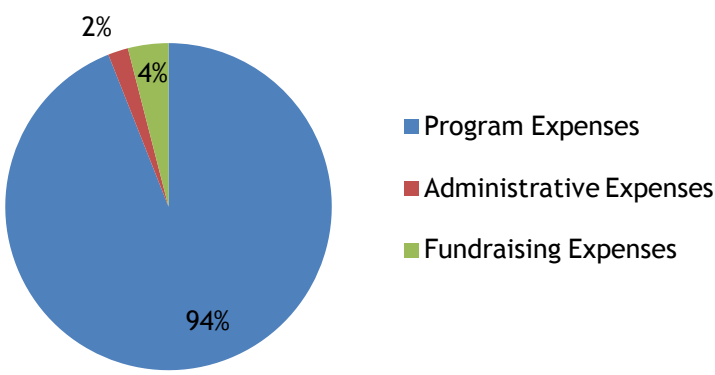
<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Florida-Youth-Shine/173308249384965>

<http://twitter.com/#!/flyouthshine>

OUR RESOURCES

Florida’s Children First is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit and we rely on the generous support of individuals, corporations and private foundations. Donations of volunteer, professional services, pro bono time and money help continue the work of FCF as we remain a diligent watchdog and fight for the rights of Florida’s at-risk children.

How We Spend Our Money



LEVERAGING COMMUNITY RESOURCES

More than 150 lawyers have performed over 7,000 hours of legal services to FCF and the children we serve. Below are some of our top supporters who have made significant efforts on behalf of Florida’s Children First.

THANK YOU

- HOLLAND & KNIGHT – DONATED OVER \$550,000 IN LEGAL SERVICES
- WHITE & CASE – DONATED OVER \$350,000 IN LEGAL SERVICES
- COLODNY, FASS, TALENFELD, KARLINSKY & ABATE – DONATED OVER \$175,000 IN LEGAL SERVICES
- L. JAMES DICKSON OF TRENAM KEMKER – 10 YEARS OF SERVICE AS OUR CORPORATE COUNSEL
- BOARDROOM COMMUNICATIONS – OVER 5 YEARS OF SERVICE AS OUR PUBLIC RELATIONS SPECIALIST

CHARITY NAVIGATOR

Florida’s Children First is one of only 4% of evaluated charities to receive the highest rating possible by Charity Navigator 5 years in a row. Our 4 star rating reflects the fact that FCF consistently executes its mission in a fiscally responsible way and outperforms most other charities in America.



AND SUPPORTERS

THE FLORIDA BAR FOUNDATION – OVER \$1.8 MILLION DONATED

The Florida Bar Foundation’s Legal Assistance for the Poor and the Children’s Legal Services Grant allows Florida’s Children First to continue and expand its work. The Children’s Systematic Initiative (CSI) focuses on the legal rights and needs of Florida’s children who are at risk and/or in the state system of care, concentrating on those in the child welfare system.



The Florida Bar
Foundation

Leadership and Funding for Justice in Florida

KEY SUPPORTERS – OVER \$100,000

Eckerd Family Foundation
United Automobile Insurance Group

The Holden Charitable Foundation
Colodny, Fass, Talenfeld, Karlinsky &
Abate, P.A.

KEY SUPPORTERS – OVER \$50,000

White & Case, LLP

Doug & Amy Halsey

KEY SUPPORTERS – OVER \$25,000

Babbitt, Johnson, Osborne & Le
Clainche, P.A.
Moore, Ellrich & Neal, P.A.

Grossman Roth, P.A.
Zisser, Robison, Brown, Nowlis,
Maciejewski & Cabrey, P.A.

KEY SUPPORTERS – OVER \$10,000

Terrell Hogan
Adrienne Mittagtag
Guarantee Insurance Company
AmeriGroup Charitable Foundation
Searcy, Denney, Scarola, Barnhardt &
Shipley, P.A.
Wells Fargo
Reynolds Family Foundation

Regions Bank
Stephen & Michele Jackman, Seitlin
Insurance & Advisory
Fidelity Federal Bank and Trust
WalMart Stores
American National Bank
Guardian Trust
The Haskell Company

***We couldn’t continue our work
without your support***

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Jodi Siegel

Holly Skonick

Helen Spohrer

Susan Stockham

Kathleen Thomsen

Jim Walsh

Kele Stewart Williams

Melissa Zelniker-Presser

FLORIDA'S CHILDREN FIRST STAFF



EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Christina L. Spudeas, Esq.

Email: christina.spudeas@floridaschildrenfirst.org

For the past two decades, Christina has worked tirelessly to defend the rights of children in the custody or supervision of the state. She joined FCF in the fall of 2009.



DEPUTY DIRECTOR

Robin L. Rosenberg, Esq.

Email: robin.rosenberg@floridaschildrenfirst.org

Robin was a founding Board Member of FCF and served as Secretary and Litigation Committee Chair prior to becoming the Deputy Director in the spring of 2007.



DEVELOPMENT COORDINATOR

Deborah Beck

Email: debby.beck@floridaschildrenfirst.org

Debby joined FCF in the summer of 2007 after years of community philanthropy and leadership, including serving as Vice Mayor of the City Commission for the City of Parkland.



FLORIDA YOUTH SHINE STATEWIDE COORDINATOR

Lindsay Baach

Email: lindsay.baach@floridaschildrenfirst.org

After years of youth organizing, Lindsay joined our team in the fall of 2009. Since her start, she has more than tripled the presence and membership of Florida Youth SHINE.



ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT

Tiffany McDonough

Email: tiffany.mcdonough@floridaschildrenfirst.org

Tiffany joined the FCF staff in the summer of 2010 after graduating from the University of Florida.

General inquiries please email: fcf@floridaschildrenfirst.org

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Find us on Facebook and YouTube!

www.facebook.com/FloridasChildrenFirst

<http://www.youtube.com/user/FloridasChildrnFirst>



Fighting for Children's Rights

Florida's Children First is the premier independent nonprofit advocacy organization fighting to obtain meaningful and sustainable improvement in Florida's child serving systems. Help us fight for their rights.

For more information, please contact:

fcf@floridaschildrenfirst.org
or visit our website at:
www.floridaschildrenfirst.org

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