

# What a Productive Year!

## 2014 Accomplishments



Fighting for Children's Rights

### RECRUIT, TRAIN & SUPPORT LAWYERS FOR DEPENDENT CHILDREN

#### **COUNSEL FOR DEPENDENT CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS**

*Passed Law (HB 561)*

We were instrumental in obtaining Florida's first law creating a statutory right to counsel for some children in the child welfare system. The Legislature appropriated \$4.5 million (½ in recurring funding) for children who reside in/are being considered for placement in a skilled nursing facility; those prescribed a psychotropic medication (and refuse to assent); those who have a developmental disability; children being placed in/considered for placement in a residential treatment center; or those who are victims of human trafficking.

#### **ONE LAWYER, ONE LIFE-STATEWIDE PRO BONO PROJECT**

FCF organized the Florida Bar's Public Interest Law Section's statewide pro bono project "One Lawyer, One Life"-a project to provide pro bono attorneys for all 17 year olds in the child welfare system. We recruited legal aid and pro bono programs across the state to be the single designated pro bono home for each judicial circuit. FCF arranged for all the training, edited video and had all of the material placed on FloridaProBono.org.

#### **PRO BONO PROJECT DEVELOPMENT**

FCF collaborates with several pro bono projects that train and support lawyers to represent children in foster care. We do extensive work with Crossroads for Florida Kids in Tampa, helping train and mentor lawyers. We've been working with Legal Aid of Manasota as it starts up its pro bono project as well. We also provide ongoing support for the more mature pro bono projects in Jacksonville and Broward.

#### **ESTABLISHMENT OF CORE TRAINING FOR DEPENDENCY LAWYERS**

We have taken the lead to ensure that all lawyers who represent children in dependency proceedings have access to training, online and at no cost. Our online center **FLORIDA for Children and Families (www.f4cf.org)** has hundreds of topical resources as well as links to over 30 online training resources. We have developed "Dependency 101," basic training and materials designed for practicing attorneys who have the passion to help children, but have never been involved in dependency cases. We also developed specific trainings for lawyers who volunteer for "One Lawyer, One Life" to represent children in foster care who are 17 years old. We convened a training consortium to bring all interested partners together to coordinate training efforts and create a "Suggested Curriculum" for children's lawyers.

#### **ABA RIGHT TO COUNSEL STRATEGY GROUP**

This American Bar Association workgroup gives us access to assistance and expertise from other states concerning the implementation of the right to counsel. It also alerts us to the systemic issues that may be percolating but are yet unnoticed in Florida.

"FLORIDA'S CHILDREN FIRST IS THE STATE'S MOST POWERFUL VOICE for children in the child welfare system, including those transitioning into adulthood."

-TED GRAINGER  
PRESIDENT OF UNITED WAY OF FLORIDA

### CHILD WELFARE SYSTEMIC REFORM-STATE

Florida's Children First succeeded in securing passage of numerous changes to Florida statutes which improve transparency, accountability and the provision of services to children and families.

#### **REAL-TIME ONLINE REPORTING OF CHILD DEATHS**

*Key Language Incorporated into Law (SB 1666)*

Child deaths should never be kept secret. This language requires DCF to post information about ALL child deaths reported to the hotline immediately on their website.

#### **NON-RELATIVE CAREGIVER FUNDING/TUITION EXEMPTION FOR YOUTH**

*Key Language incorporated into Law (SB 1666)*

For the first time, non-relatives who take in foster children will receive financial assistance. Also, children placed with non-relatives will finally be able to get free college tuition, just like their peers in foster care or who live with relatives.

#### **KEEPING SIBLINGS TOGETHER**

*Key Language Incorporated into Law (SB 1666)*

We helped secure language to improve the likelihood of siblings remaining together and improving communication if they are separated. The law also states a preference to place sibling groups in family homes rather than group care facilities. Florida Youth SHINE testified and advocated repeatedly before and during the Session on this topic.

#### **CHILD-ON-CHILD SEXUAL ASSAULT**

*Key Language Incorporated into Law (SB 1666)*

Language was placed in the child welfare bill requiring DCF to track and serve all foster children involved in child-on-child sexual abuse instead of sending cases involving teens to law enforcement. The bill also removed the stigmatizing language of calling children with sexual behavior problems "alleged juvenile sex offenders."

#### **SERVICES PROVISION & TRACKING**

*Key Language Incorporated into Law (SB 1666)*

Language in the child welfare bill requires the Community Based Care lead agency (as well as the Child Protective Investigator) to identify, provide, and monitor services to families who have agreed to comply with a safety plan, where there is present danger as well as when there is imminent danger to the child/ren.

#### **ACCOUNTABILITY ON DELIVERY OF SERVICES**

*Key Language Incorporated into Law (SB 1666)*

FCF advocated for and got more accountability in the Community Alliances. Also, we were instrumental in obtaining the restoration of funding for some DCF Quality Assurance positions that were previously cut.

#### **MEDIA ADVOCACY ON CHILD WELFARE ISSUES**

Florida Youth SHINE is the go-to organization for news groups across Florida when it comes to having the voice of the youth on child welfare issues. They have been in printed news, radio and TV interviews far too numerous to discuss. Florida's Children First is highly sought after to comment on child welfare policy and reform efforts.

# What a Productive Year!

## 2014 Accomplishments



### CHILD WELFARE SYSTEMIC REFORM-LOCAL

#### **Thirteenth Judicial Circuit Safe Reduction Workgroup**

FCF plays an integral role in this local workgroup, supported by Casey Family Programs, which is intended as a model for other communities. It is geared toward safely reducing the number of children in out-of-home care in Hillsborough County. FCF Deputy Director, Robin Rosenberg, chairs the "culture change" committee which is working on a comprehensive strategy to change how the system of care treats patients. The premise of this work is that when parents are respected and valued as participants in the dependency process, they will be more engaged and successful with their children. The consequence will be that children will be less likely to re-enter care after reunification.

### CHILD WELFARE SYSTEMIC REFORM-NATIONAL

#### **State Policy Advocacy Reform Center (SPARC)**

We are Florida's participant in the SPARC - a national organization supported by First Focus, the leading child welfare policy advocacy organization in Washington DC. SPARC offers the opportunity for states to share resources and experiences to help advocates improve their work locally and to bring local perspective to national issues.

#### **Presidential Commission to Eliminate Child Abuse & Neglect Fatalities**

FCF & FYS testified about additional systemic reforms needed to improve child safety at the second meeting of this national commission held in Tampa, Florida.

### IMPROVING OUTCOMES FOR

### CURRENT AND FORMER FOSTER YOUTH

#### **Outreach to Inform Former Foster Youth of Medicaid Eligibility**

Florida Youth SHINE worked with FCF and Florida Legal Services to investigate problems with the application process and to conduct outreach to inform over 4,000 former foster youth of their new ability to obtain Medicaid until age 26.

#### **Keys to Independence-Providing Funding for Driver's Licenses & Insurance**

*Passed Law (HB 977)*

FYS youth traveled to the Capitol to testify at every committee meeting and worked with the Guardian ad Litem Program to promote the GAL bill for funding for foster children to obtain their driver's permit, driver's license and automobile insurance, as well as to give them priority to attend driver's education training in high school.

#### **Keeping ID's Safe (K.I.D.S. Act)**

*Passed Law (HB 242)*

Florida Youth SHINE worked with the Guardian ad Litem Program to promote legislation that protects all children from identity theft by allowing caregivers to place a security freeze on credit report of children younger than 16.

#### **Juvenile Sentencing**

*Passed Law (HB 7035)*

Through a coalition of advocates working together, this legislation will allow for juvenile non-homicide and homicide offenders sentenced to life without parole to have a review of their sentence at various intervals depending on the crime, as well as providing sentencing alternatives for juvenile homicide offenders.



### FLORIDA YOUTH SHINE (FYS)

### ACCOMPLISHMENTS

#### **2014 Children's Week at the Florida Capitol**

Spring Quarterly Meetings are held during the legislative session during Children's Week at the Capitol. FYS holds their 3-day meeting, extending their stay until Wednesday evening to allow youth to meet with key legislators and testify at legislative committee meetings. FYS testified extensively on Non-Relative Care Support, Keys to Independence, & Sibling Relationships. Also, during Children's Week, FYS members give an annual training session on how to be effective advocates to other children and youth from across Florida at Tallahassee City Hall.

#### **FYS Quarterly Meetings**

At least 2 representatives from each of the 12 Chapters, along with Chapter Mentors, attend a 3-day training/workshop/board meeting every 3 months in various parts of Florida. Starting on Friday for dinner and ending after lunch on Sunday, FYS members hold a board meeting, have leadership and advocacy skills training and process issues and formulate calls to action on problems in foster care.

#### **Dependency Summit Panels**

Each year the Florida Department of Children and Families holds a 3-day summit on child welfare, gathering over 2,000 professionals and others who have an interest in the topic. Each year, FYS has been given to opportunity to present various panel discussions as one of the offered sessions.

#### **Florida Juvenile Justice Association Conference**

FYS was asked to present a panel at this statewide conference of all juvenile justice professionals. They presented "Call for Help-Just not 911!" about how children in care are far too often arrested for behavior problems that exist to the trauma the child has experienced in their lives.

#### **NACCAC Webinar "Effective Legislative Strategies"**

FYS & FCF presented a national webinar for the North American Council on Adoptable Children, discussing how FCF works with FYS and how they effectively change laws in Florida.

#### **Training Videos**

FYS members from many chapters also participated in various training sessions/panel discussions that were recorded for future training by various organizations.

- **Guardian ad Litem (GAL) Program**- "We Are Family-Even if my Brothers & Sisters Aren't With Me"
- **Casey Foundation**-Quality Parenting Initiative with Casey Foundation

#### **Committees & Involvement**

FYS members from many chapters have been asked to be the voice of the youth and serve on various committees/work groups.

- Independent Living Task Force
- DCF Rule 65C 41 Special Issue Workshop
- Transitional Planning Committee
- Florida Reach
- Fostering Florida's Future
- Quality Parenting Initiative Task Force
- Pro Bono Recruitment
- GAL trainings