



**L I B R A R Y**  
**PARTNERSHIP**  
www.librarypartnership.org

*“We truly feel that the Library Partnership is becoming a centerpiece of our community’s efforts to positively impact the welfare of children.” - Carressa Hutchinson, Resource Center Manager*

### What is the Library Partnership?

The Library Partnership is a place where families can go to obtain the services they need to increase their strength and independence. It is both a fully functional branch of the Alachua County Library and a neighborhood resource center where families can receive a myriad of services from any of our 40+ partnering agencies. And it is all for free.

In 2007, Partnership for Strong Families (PSF), the Department of Children and Families (DCF) and Casey Family Programs teamed up to develop a concept to reduce the number of children entering the foster care system by targeting vulnerable communities. “Hotspots” were identified by zip code and a list of potential social service providers was developed. The zip code where the Library Partnership is located had the highest rate of child abuse calls to the abuse hotline.

In June 2008, PSF met with community partners, including the Alachua County Library District (ACLD), to identify a place to open the resource center. Since the library was also looking to open a branch in Northeast Gainesville, collaboration was born between the two. The idea was that being collocated with a library would reduce the stigma people may feel about going into a social services center. Many in this community still had a fear or discontent with DCF held over from the days of Health and Rehabilitation Services (HRS), and PSF was still seen by many as an extension of the state. To encourage community members to seek out resources before abuse occurs, the stigma of asking for help and the fear of negative repercussions had to be dealt with. The library was the perfect solution.

In July 2009 the Library Partnership opened its doors to the community.

### What is available?

Patrons have access to more than 40 community providers when they come into the resource center. The Library Partnership, with the assistance of community partners, assists families with services in the following areas:

- Family Support & Child Development – Family activities and services requested by the families, which may include but are not limited to: mentoring, parenting classes, tutoring, Girl Scouts and peer support.
- Health & Safety – Referral links to health services, resources for children and adults, Prevention and wellness education efforts.
- Self-Sufficiency – Concrete help for immediate needs with a view to long term solutions: GED, job skills training, employability, housing, transportation, managing a household budget and a clothing closet.

In addition, the Library Partnership has developed several regular programs to meet community needs.

- Fight for Your Money is the financial literacy course offered that teaches participants how to budget and manage limited resources. Graduates are eligible for \$100 off of their energy bill through Gainesville Regional Utilities.
- Job Fair and Career Day is a newer program developed in response to one of the most frequently requested services by patrons: assistance with employability. Job fairs are held at the center and are open to the community. There is a job board posted in the facility with available positions and the Library Partnership staff provides resume building, job search skills and interview technique assistance.



- F.I.R.S.T. (Families Involved in Reaching Success Together) is the parenting support and peer connection program the Library Partnership piloted in 2011. After successfully completing the 6 week course, parents were eligible to receive various incentives for their families such as a car seat for a pregnant mother-to-be and age-appropriate toys for children.

### Who runs the resource center?

The bulk of the start-up and building renovation costs came from the Alachua County Library District and Casey Family Programs. The rent and utilities are split between PSF and the Alachua County Library District. Casey Family Programs has generously provided an annual lump sum to cover a portion of the staff salaries and operating costs. The rest of PSF's portion is made possible using prevention dollars through the state contract with PSF as a community-based care organization.

The Library Partnership is staffed by a full-time center manager and a full-time Family Support Facilitator who work in the Clinical and Community Services Department at PSF. The library side of the facility is completed operating by county library staff. Much of the day-to-day work, such as answering phones and greeting visitors, is completed by a team of volunteers.

### Is it a success?

In short, yes. Of the more than 11,000 patrons who visited the Library Partnership in the 2010-2011 fiscal year, 97% reported they were "very pleased" with the services they received. And 98% of these patrons said they would "most likely" return again for additional services.

It is interesting to note that 47% of patrons indicated a family member or friend told them about the Library Partnership. In short, they heard it from their community. And we know that the community wants to be stronger. The most requested category of services (44%) were those geared toward self-sufficiency, such as job searching and money management.

Here are just a few stories from the people who've benefited from the center:

- A single parent whose house burned had been living in a motel for three weeks when she came to the Library Partnership. There she received assistance in obtaining funding to move into an affordable, safe apartment. With the support of several partnering agencies, she also received food, clothing and the household and personal hygiene items she needed.
- A young woman, enrolled in college, was providing non-relative placement for a child who otherwise would have entered foster care with little chance at reunification. This young lady could provide basic needs, but lacked resources to provide the child with toys, sufficient clothing and other necessary household items. The Library Partnership provided this for her, strengthening the placement for this two-year-old child and preventing removal.
- A woman came to the Library Partnership seeking help with her resume. She said, "I can't get a job, I have a learning disability. Nobody wants me. Everybody takes advantage of me because I can't fully understand what others want me to do." She participated in a career reinvention program of eight sessions that help patrons identify their dreams, skills, strengths and how to get where they want to be. After her second session, she said, "I believe in me. I believe I can do thing regardless of what doctors have said of my learning disability."

The facility has also earned national attention. In 2010, the Library Partnership was recognized as a *Bright Idea* program by Harvard University's School of Government. The Library Partnership was also instrumental in Alachua County being chosen as a *100 Best Communities for Young People* by America's Promise Alliance two years in a row. This was an honor, as the Alliance is the nation's largest partnership organization dedicated to children.



# Summary of the Development of the SWAG Family Resource Center



SWAG developed through the ideas and commitment of area residents, advocates, service providers and community leaders. Concerned by health disparities identified in maps provided by the University of Florida College of Medicine, advocates reached out to the residents of the SWAG area. Those residents welcomed support and expressed their concerns regarding crime, housing, transportation, recreation and more. The groups joined forces and invited area service providers and community leaders to assist with developing and reaching the goal of bringing resources to the SWAG area. Thanks to numerous partnerships and donations, a resource center will open this summer to serve the SWAG community.



SWAG's neighborhood residents and advocates are the pillars that determine and uphold SWAG's main goal of bringing resources to the SWAG area. Service providers and community leaders (SWAG's partners) reinforce that goal and give it guidance and direction.

- 2012
  - Feb 2012: Renovations begin after SWAG secures donations from SWAG members, Skinner, Vignola, McLean Architects, Oelrich Construction, Watson Construction, Comfort Temp, Teal Tile Carpet One, CH2M Hill and United Way for needed supplies
  - SWAG receives Gainesville Links grant to **fund outdoor exercise equipment for seniors** at SWAG's park
  - Nov. 2011: SWAG receives Friends of the Library mini grant to purchase **\$2,000 worth of culturally sensitive books**
  - Oct. 2011: SWAG is recipient of Altrusa International's Make a Difference Day – receives more than **900 books**
  - Sept. 2011: SWAG receives Kiwanis grant of **\$1,900 to paint the interior of the resource center**
- 2011
  - Jan. 2011: SWAG requests to leverage building funding to purchase 2 buildings in foreclosure, one to be the resource center, the other to become a health clinic – request granted, **health clinic goal created**
  - Tower Hill Insurance Company donates **\$15,000 for playground equipment**
  - Sept. 2010: SWAG is chosen as recipient of Rotary grant – **\$57,000 funding for furnishings secured**
  - Aug. 2010: SWAG becomes a non-profit organization and combines resident data with agency data to present to County Commission to ask for funding – **\$225,000 funding for building granted**
  - Partnership for Strong Families agrees to **staff and operate the resource center**
  - Partners for a Productive Community donates a **vacant lot to be developed into a playground**
  - June 2010: SWAG goes door-to-door to collect resident data – **the goal of a resource center is born**
- 2010
  - Feb. 2010: concerned residents and advocates partner with agencies to develop a plan for the community – **SWAG is born**
- 2009
  - Nov. 2009: Sheriff's afterschool program closes, leading to action of concerned residents and area advocates familiar with the health disparities and crime issues
- 2008
  - 2008: UF College of Medicine health disparity maps shared with community, raising awareness and sparking action to address surprising disparities in southwest Gainesville

# SWAG Description

The SW Advocacy Group is a grassroots, community-based organization made up of area residents, advocates and service providers, that strives to improve the health, well-being and success of residents in the Tower Road area, just west of I-75 in the 32607 zip code in southwest, unincorporated Gainesville. Through access to community resources, health services and educational opportunities SWAG aims to improve the overall quality of life in its seven neighborhoods, including Majestic Oaks, Linton Oaks, Tower Oaks, Holly Heights/Gordon Manor, Pine Meadow, Harbor Cove and Hidden Oaks.

SWAG is currently accomplishing its goal by securing the necessary funding and community partnerships to bring a resource center and playground to the SWAG area, with future dreams of bringing a health clinic as well. One of their major partners is Partnership for Strong Families, the local Community-Based Care agency providing child welfare services ranging from prevention to intervention. Thanks to their commitment to covering staffing and operation costs, the SWAG Family Resource Center is scheduled to open in June of 2012, providing services to all ages right in the neighborhoods that need it most.

Now more than 200 members, SWAG will serve as the advisory group for the SWAG Family Resource Center. Through their partnerships at the resource center, they will focus on building community and providing services and support that address the expressed needs of the area and the various concerns that led to action.

## The Data the Led to Our Action

Top 10 SWAG area concerns, as identified by residents, advocates and service providers and community leaders:

1. Crime
  - The SWAG area is the smallest patrol zone, just over 1 square mile, and experiences more crime per capita than any other zone in the unincorporated area of the county, making it the Sheriff's Office's primary concern.
2. Gangs
  - The SWAG area is home to a number of local and national gangs, including the Bloods, Gangster Disciples and Latin Kings.
3. Limited transportation and access to resources
  - The SWAG area is served by one public bus that runs every 30-60 minutes Monday through Saturday from 7am-7pm. There are very few sidewalks and bike lanes and the area is separated from many of the county's services, which are located on the east side.
4. Health disparities
  - The SWAG area experiences high numbers of Medicaid births, has few Medicaid providers, is home to health disparity hotspots demonstrating unhealthy pre-pregnancy body mass index, low birth weight babies, high infant mortality and high rates of Chlamydia and Gonorrhea.
5. Housing issues
  - The SWAG area has a variety of housing options from project-based/income-based housing and Section 8 to rentals and home ownership opportunities; however, the SWAG area is experiencing a number of code violations and recently lost 12 affordable housing units to a fire.
6. High percentage of youth without constructive recreation
  - One of the main concerns of SWAG area residents is the lack of low/no cost recreation and afterschool/summer programming for their youth.
7. Child maltreatment
  - The SWAG area experiences one of the highest rates of child maltreatment reports in the county, mostly due to family violence issues.
8. Domestic violence
  - The SWAG area is the second highest source of domestic violence shelter clients, both adults and children, and domestic abuse hotline calls. This is also the main type of call for service to the Sheriff's Office.
9. Education disparities
  - Children from the SWAG area attend schools where 50-70% of the Black students are below grade level in reading and math, compared to 10-25% of White students.
10. Dense poverty
  - Children from the SWAG area attend schools where 50-80% of the students are on free or reduced lunch.
  - The SWAG area is located in the 5<sup>th</sup> most impoverished zip code in Alachua County, which ranks 15<sup>th</sup> in the State of Florida.



## What is a Heart Gallery?

The first Heart Gallery opened in Santa Fe, N.M., in March 2001. It was designed as a recruitment tool for “hard to place” children available for adoption. This event was so successful that the idea took off, catching the attention of major television networks and magazines and other Heart Galleries started to emerge. The Heart Gallery of Mid-Florida was created when the Professional Photographers of North Central Florida (PPNCF) heard about these displays and partnered to create one for the Mid-Florida area.

Essentially, a Heart Gallery is a traveling art gallery that is created with professional photographs of our children available for adoption. Viewers can not only see the children’s pictures, but they can also read their stories and take a card home with them about any children that they might be interested in.

The goal of the Heart Gallery is to create community awareness about adoption and children in foster care. Also, the Heart Gallery is used to recruit possible adoptive homes for these children.



The Heart Gallery is prepared for a viewing event!

## **Innovation working for our Children:**

In 2011, the adoption program in Circuits 3 & 8 took on improving the local Heart Gallery as one of the most important projects of the year. The following have been some of our greatest strides at this time:

1. Children's Home Society took time to seek out photographers who specialize in children's photography. We discussed the importance of taking a photo that captures the child's personality and interests. As a result, the photos have a child friendly flair and the children have thoroughly enjoyed their photo sessions and the props provided.



Photo by Powers Photography



Photo by Powers Photography

2. A digital photo frame was added to allow for multiple display venues. This was identified as a possible improvement due to the difficulty and the weight of the existing display.
3. A "Smart Phone" code was added to the large display to allow people with the smart phone to scan the Heart Gallery and go directly to the page describing the history and link to the Mid-Florida Heart Gallery children.

In 2012 and beyond, the Adoption Recruitment Team has identified a possible area of improvement as resources become available:

1. The adoption unit has attempted to work with interns from Public Relations and Journalistic backgrounds to improve the quality of the Heart Gallery biographies that represent each child.