

## **2013 Annual Report for Circuits 3 and 8**

**Reporting Period: January 1, 2013 – December 31, 2013**

### **Summary of Plan Activities**

C 3&8 realized a vast number of activities that advanced objectives within its five-year prevention and permanency plan. While listed under specific sections for Prevention, Promotion of Adoption, and Support of Adoptive Families, these activities yield benefits that extend well beyond those focus areas. The following represents a summary of plan activities realized, grouped according to local themes:

#### Community –based Activities Supporting Families – Universally and Directly

Parental Emotional Resilience  
Social Connections  
Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development  
Concrete Support in Times of Need

Neighborhood Resource Centers (NRCs): C 3&8 saw the continued expansion of the Library Partnership and the official opening and blossoming of the Southwest Advocacy Group (SWAG) Resource Center. Both these NRCs have dozens of stakeholder partners and thousands of visits annually. This has allowed them to make significant improvements in the lives of the individuals they serve. The success of these NRCs, with the notable impact on abuse rates in the surrounding communities, inspires leaders in C 3&8 as they pursue the establishment of additional NRCs. A Cone Park Center should open in another high risk neighborhood in Alachua County before the close of 2013. Evaluations are underway for determining the most appropriate sites in C 3 for opening additional NRCs in the coming years.

#### Expanding Services, Resources, and Partnerships throughout C 3&8 Counties

Parental Emotional Resilience  
Social Connections  
Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development  
Concrete Support in Times of Need  
Nurturing and Attachment  
Social and Emotional Competence of Children

Children’s Partnership Councils (CPCs): Formed in 2013 by Partnership for Strong Families (PSF), these councils serve as both a forum for key stakeholders to discuss contemporary local child welfare data and address priority needs defined by the councils themselves. Five CPCs were established for:

- Baker, Bradford, Union
- Columbia
- Madison, Taylor
- Suwannee, Lafayette, Hamilton
- Levy, Gilchrist, Dixie

C 3&8 additionally saw the expansion of services in its counties, to include Healthy Families services in Columbia, Bradford, and Union Counties. Similarly, the Whole Child Community was established and continues to grow in Madison and Taylor Counties.

#### Strong Support for youth in placement and caregiver families - foster and adoptive

Parental Emotional Resilience  
Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development  
Concrete Support in Times of Need

Nurturing and Attachment  
Social and Emotional Competence of Children

Much effort was dedicated to direct service to youth in care and the caregivers who provide them with temporary and permanent placement:

- Faith-based Initiatives focused primarily on the recruitment of foster and adoptive families.
- Numerous events were hosted and abundant marketing materials were developed to promote adoption.
- Important education, training, and counseling are offered to foster and adoptive families who are caregivers for youth with special needs.
- PSF has worked with agency partners including CLS to develop and implement supportive programs such as the Permanency Round Table (PRT) model, Cold Case Legal review, and the Placement Stability Workgroup. All these work to ensure the best placement and permanency for youth in care.

**Progress**

**Prevention**

**Strategy 1**

By June 30, 2015, Circuits 3 & 8 will increase collaborative efforts and coordinated resources available to strengthen families and prevent child abuse and neglect in high risk areas in both Circuits.

**Objective 1.1** By 6/30/15 have the faith based, community, government and corporate resources in place to sustain a Neighborhood Resource Center to help strengthen families and increase protective factors in at least one high risk community in both Circuits 3 & 8.

**Progress:** Partnership for Strong Families (PSF) is in the process of hiring a Resource Center Manager who will lead the expansion of the Neighborhood Resource Center concept. Presently, PSF has two Resource Centers in Alachua County and a third Resource Center will be opening in Alachua County in December at Cone Park, which is in another high risk neighborhood in the C8 service area.

PSF will be conducting a needs assessment in C3 to determine the community with the greatest need for a continuum of services and supports that will then lead to the development of the next Resource Center. The needs assessment will include mapping the addresses of the families who have or are receiving Family Support Services, In-Home Services and Out-of-Home Services to determine which communities have the highest number of at-risk children and families. In addition, an assessment will be conducted to determine the continuum of resources available through various community partners who can help provide services and support at the next Resource Center.

**Objective 1.2** From 7/1/10-6/30/15 meet at least annually with existing committees and advisory boards to provide training or share information on family centered practice and the Protective Factors and encourage use of this information in existing community, government and faith based programs in Circuits 3 & 8.

**Progress:** The partners and key stakeholders involved with the Library Partnership: A Neighborhood Resource Center meet quarterly and the SWAG Family Resource partners meet monthly. Both Centers use the Protective Factors as the foundation of their work and also use them to guide future services and programs in the communities they serve.

**Objective 1.3** From 7/1/10-6/30/15 partner with the faith based community & other key partners in all counties to determine how a continuum of services, supports, and programs can be offered at one or more locations in each high need area or county that is not presently being served by a Neighborhood Resource Center.

**Progress:** In June, 2013, PSF developed five Children's Partnership Councils that include key stakeholders from C3 & C8. The Councils have met every 4-8 weeks to review and discuss child welfare data, service gaps, and priority needs in both Circuits and they are in the process of determining the priorities they will focus on moving forward. Several of the Councils are making the development of a Resource Center a priority area of focus.

**Objective 1.4** By 6/30/15 increase capacity & access to prevention programs.

**Progress:** PSF has six Family Service Facilitators (FSFs) on staff and each is responsible for determining the prevention resources available in each of the counties in C3 & C8. The FSF's are continually finding new formal and informal prevention resources through their extensive knowledge of the community and linkage to a variety of services that can prevent child abuse and neglect.

**Objective 1.5** By 6/30/15 increase public awareness of positive parenting techniques and parenting resources available in each Circuit.

**Progress:** Over the past few years, PSF has made a commitment to expand the evidence based parenting resources available in each Circuit and presently has more evidence based parenting resources available for families in both Circuits than in the past.

### **Strategy 2**

Circuits 3 & 8 will support the statewide efforts to increase the availability and capacity of Healthy Families Florida to provide home visitation for families at high risk of abuse and neglect and in need of parenting education and support over the five-year period from July 2010 to June 2015.

**Objective 2.1** Continue, enhance and expand Healthy Families Florida.

**Progress:** In October 2013, Partnership for Strong Families contracted with Healthy Families Alachua to expand their services to other counties in C3 & 8. Healthy Families will provide services to high risk families in Alachua (C8), Columbia (C3), Bradford (C8) and Union (C8) Counties.

### **Strategy 3**

By June 30, 2015, Circuit 3 will have developed and supported the Whole Child Community of Madison and Taylor Counties.

**Objective 3.1** Develop county-level strategies to develop and implement a Whole Child Community in Madison County by June 30, 2011.

**Progress:** Healthy Start of Jefferson, Madison, Taylor (HSJMT) Counties has served as the lead organization for addressing this objective. HSJMT undertook a listening project/community analysis that developed the preliminary list of critical issues and root causes. These have been incorporated into the HSJMT Strategic Plan and are being promoted in the community as part of the Whole Child Community.

**Objective 3.2** Attain Level 2 status of the *Madison* Whole Child Community by June 30, 2013.

**Progress:** Training on the Whole Child Connection system has been offered and continues to be offered. HSJMT has a full-time Community Health Educator and Whole Child Advisor who trains on the Whole Child Connection and builds awareness.

**Objective 3.3** Develop county-level strategies to develop and implement a Whole Child Community in Taylor County by June 30, 2011.

**Progress:** While the Whole Child Connection is advancing as a resource in Taylor County, to include the amassing of resource information of importance to families, the program is currently in a holding pattern.

**Objective 3.4** Attain Level 2 status of the Taylor Whole Child Community by June 30, 2013.

**Progress:** Taylor program is currently in a holding pattern with anticipated advancement of objectives in Taylor County in the next 12 months.

### **Adoption Promotion**

#### **Strategy 1**

By June 30, 2015, Circuit 3 will identify and successfully reduce the number of recruit children legally free for adoption by 50%.

**Objective 1.1**-Implement Concurrent Planning Pilot Project that integrates permanency planning efforts with foster parent/permanency planning family recruitment to meet emerging needs of specific populations of children awaiting adoption: teens, African-American children, sibling groups and those “acting out with others.”

**Progress:** The Concurrent Planning Pilot concluded in 2010 with various components of the methodology now woven into our system of care. Among these, as of 10/15/13 PRIDE classes (which have now replaced MAPP) continue to incorporate a section on permanency planning families.

As of 9/30/13, PSF has 84 licensed homes in C3 & C8. Many licensed families have adopted children who were in foster placement with them, some as permanency planning placements. It is recognized that the number of licensed homes can be negatively impacted by the successful attainment of permanency through adoption. Efforts continue to recruit new families so that these positive outcomes can continue to be achieved without detriment to the needs for new foster placements.

**Objective 1.2**-Create faith-based initiative for recruiting foster/permanency planning and/or adoptive families.

**Progress:** As of 10/15/13 the Faith-Based Partners meeting continues quarterly. PSF and CHS regularly participate in these quarterly meetings and the ensuing outreach events at local churches. Outcomes of these meetings have included displays of our Heart Gallery and electronic images of children at area churches.

Adoption staff also attend the Faith-Based Meetings quarterly and share information on the needs of our waiting children and adoptive families.

**Objective 1.3**-Utilize Explore Adoption marketing materials to increase inquiries.

**Progress:** As of 10/1/13 all TPR'd waiting children have photos for use in recruitment.

CHS has held and continues to hold photo days to get groups of waiting children's photos updated and posted on the various web sites. Continuing challenges include children placed out of area and/or in DJJ facilities. We are working with our other CHS divisions to assist us with these photos.

Photos on waiting children are displayed at recruitment events and PRIDE classes. They are featured in printed media, agency web-sites, TV and biographies are read on a local radio station.

Local media markets are canvassed on a quarterly basis for willing outlets for articles, stories, and photos.

PSF now hosts an electronic Heart Gallery of all waiting local children to supplement the appearance of these children on the Explore Adoption, AdoptUSKids, and CHS websites. We are also utilizing social media to broadcast photos and biographies of four children per month from among our waiting children.

DCF Circuit Administration participates on the Leadership Team of the Faith Based Initiative formed by PSF. This group is heavily involved, and assisted by, the State-wide initiative of One Church, One Child and its administration. There have been two local events in outlying counties that have been orchestrated in conjunction with One Church, One Child. The agency continues to host one event in each Circuit. DCF additionally promotes National Adoption Month events held every November by CHS.

The following events are planned to celebrate 2013 National Adoption Month:

- Celebrate Adoptions Lake City Event will be held on November 23<sup>rd</sup> from 6 pm to 8 pm at the Skate Palace.
- Celebrate Adoptions Gainesville Event will be held on November 17<sup>th</sup> from 1pm to 4 pm at Westside Park.
- Dine-In at Piesano's (both locations Archer and 43<sup>rd</sup> Street) will be held on November 4<sup>th</sup> from 4pm to close. If customer's mention the Children's Home Society then 10% of their bill will be donated to the agency.
- Dine-In at Wahoo's on 39<sup>th</sup> Avenue will be held on November 14<sup>th</sup> from 4 pm to close. If customer's mention the Children's Home Society then 10% of their bill will be donated to the agency.
- November 10<sup>th</sup> from 12pm to 5 pm a booth will be up during the Alachua City Fall Festival.
- On November 22<sup>nd</sup> from 6pm-10pm a booth will be up during the United Downtown event.
- There will be a speaking engagement by a member of the adoption staff at a church in Greenville at 11 a.m. on November 10<sup>th</sup>.

**Objective 1.4**-Implement Customer Service and Customer Support Protocol for Adoption Services.

**Progress:** This is an ongoing process that is implemented as Children's Home Society (CHS) works to meet all contractual requirements with PSF for customer feedback on services. In addition, CHS and PSF review recommendations annually from the Adoption Information Center for implementation. There are annual training sessions conducted for staff and all new hires during the year on Customer Service

**Strategy 2-** Specific children need targeted recruitment for adoptive placement

**Progress:** PSF has been able to encourage an increased number of therapeutic foster parents to adopt (supported by enhanced subsidies and post-adoption services), and Children's Home Society is pursuing both training and a grant from the Dave Thomas Foundation and Wendy's Wonderful Kids toward

developing and increasing targeted recruitment methodologies utilized by CHS's two full-time adoptions recruiters.

**Objectives 2.1 through 2.4 are the same as for Priority Need #1- (see preceding section)**

**Objective 2.1** (same as 1.1)

Implement Concurrent Planning Pilot Project that integrates permanency planning efforts with permanency planning family/foster parent recruitment to meet emerging needs of population: teens, African-American children and those "acting out with others." (see Progress made described above)

**Objective 2.2** (same as 1.2)

Create faith-based initiative for recruiting foster/adoptive families. (see Progress made described above)

**Objective 2.3** (same as 1.3)

Utilize Explore Adoption marketing materials to increase inquiries. (see Progress made described above)

**Objective 2.4** (same as 1.4)

Implement Customer Service and Customer Support Protocol for Adoption Services. (see Progress made described above)

**Objective 2.5** Create "step-down" placements for children exiting therapeutic placements.

**Progress:** Over the past 3 years, CHS has significantly reduced the number of waiting children, including those in therapeutic foster placements. Many of these successes have implemented the measures referenced in order to support therapeutic foster providers to be able to provide their homes as adoptive homes for therapeutic children placed with and bonded to them. Adoption competent services are also available in our circuits to assist families of therapeutic children with therapeutic needs transitioning to adoption.

One of the features of our adoption program in Circuits 3 and 8 that helps to encourage and support adoption of children with therapeutic needs is the availability of Village Counseling Center's "Adoption Success Program". Licensed, adoption-competent clinicians are available through this program to support foster families and match families with education, training and counseling to help equip them to meet the needs of this unique population.

Our foster and adoptive parents have also been offered training on the specialized needs of children who are victims of sexual abuse or who have had sexualized acting out behaviors to promote families' understanding of these needs and support consideration of adoption of children with these needs.

**Strategy 3- Children awaiting permanent placements need placement stability.**

**Objectives: 3.1 is the same as for Priority Need #1- Objective 1.1 Refer to preceding section**

**Objective 3.1** Implement Concurrent Planning Pilot Project that integrates permanency planning efforts with recruitment of permanency planning families to meet emerging needs of population: teens, African-American children and those "acting out with others." (see Progress made described above)

**Objective 3.2** Help improve processes to insure more timely permanency for the longest waiting youth.  
**Progress:** PSF has fully implemented the Permanency Round Table (PRT) model. Various staff have been trained and serve as resources to conduct the PRTs. Additionally, PSF has teamed with Children’s Legal Services to include a Cold Case Legal review and CLS participates in the PRTs. We find this partnership beneficial in terms of permanency planning for youth. The PSF PRT initiative started primarily with older youth, but has been expanded to include younger children as well who may have a less than an optimistic permanency outcome and could benefit from some intensive review and planning.

In addition, PSF hired a full time “Youth Permanency Specialist” to focus on youth lingering in out of home care without permanency. This has increased our capacity to conduct PRT’s. The position also focuses on follow up from the PRT tasks to ensure cases are moving toward permanency and as mentioned above works closely with CLS to ensure appropriate cases also have a Cold Case Review conducted and this becomes a part of the PRT discussion and planning.

Data supports that the principles that are now standard in our system of care to promote more timely permanency for the longest waiting youth are effectuating change. The number of children in out of home care who need child specific adoption promotion efforts has decreased from 50 on 6/30/09 to 32 on 10/15/13 The number of APPLA goal children has decreased from 87 on 6/30/09 to approximately 5 as of 9/30/13.

In 2012, based on the needs of our therapeutic population, the C3/8 Placement Stability Workgroup became specialized in their focus as a “Workgroup on Children with Intensive Behavioral Needs” and they are meeting on a quarterly basis. As children with these needs represent the greatest area of need for both placement stability, as well as recruitment, this has been a natural and helpful progression.

The Placement Stability Workgroup was reestablished on June 28, 2013. In addition to various PSF staff participation, Children’s Legal Services, PSF Partner Families, Community Providers, and Case Management Directors are a part of the workgroup. The team meets the first Friday of each month at Partnership for Strong Families’ Gainesville location. One of the key goals is to assist with ensuring the first placement change is the only and best placement, the team is currently focusing on trends within out of home care which include separated siblings and children residing outside of their home county. There is also focus on transition for children and recruitment and retention of Partner Parents. A Partner Family Advocate was hired to focus on retention and support of Partner Parents, and stabilization of the children in the home. In addition, training will be provided on ensuring comprehensive interpretation of Accurint reports for relative searches.

### **Support of Adoptive Families**

#### **Strategy 1**

By June 30, 2015, Circuits 3 & 8 will support successful adoptions with improved help from adoption competent counselors and group supports.

(Note: CHS administered a survey to a sample of adoptive families to assess their needs and based on the survey results is providing various types of services. It is also important to note that CHS has found that many adoptive families are not interested in services and they just want to resume a normal family life after the adoption is finalized)

**Objective 1.1** Maintain trained workforce and increase number of professionals trained by Rutgers program for Adoption Competency Certification Training.

**Progress:** As of 10/15/13, 7 current licensed therapists in Circuits 3 & 8 have completed the training and are serving our children. An additional therapist needs only one more class for certification. In addition, PSF has providers interested in the next training when it becomes available locally.

Adoption competent clinicians serve the majority of our local adoption goal children and families receiving counseling. As of June 2013, 86% of post adoption families were working with adoption competent clinicians.

**Strategy 2:** Provide Adoptive parent and teen adoptee support groups/services

**Progress:** A quarterly post-adoption support newsletter is now distributed to encourage contact for any arising needs. Each quarterly newsletter has promoted our adoption support group and additional outreach continues to encourage participation at foster parent association meetings.

In addition, all adoptive parents receive a letter upon finalization with the contact information for PSF's Post-Adoption Support Specialist (PASS.) Our PASS coordinates with case managers preparing to finalize adoptions of children receiving services and therapeutic services not funded by Medicaid so that the parent can obtain continued services without a break following finalization.

Finally, the PASS sends letters to families upon the close of post-adoptive investigations to once again extend support to prevent a future need or crisis. In addition to all of the above, contact information for the PASS is readily available on the PSF website.

**Please identify the percentage of achievement of the five-year prevention plan you think your circuit has achieved, and describe why.**

Based on the whole of the plan, C 3&8 has achieved approximately 65% of the five-year prevention plan.

We are on target to achieve 100% success with Strategy 1. We have created two Resource Centers in C8 (with a third one scheduled to open in December 2013). In addition, PSF is planning to open at least one Resource Center in C3 before 2015. We have created five Children's Partnership Councils which meet regularly to discuss how to increase protective factors for families in both Circuits. PSF has six Family Service Facilitators on staff who access both informal and formal prevention services throughout both Circuits.

We have achieved great success with Strategy 2 by bringing additional Healthy Families services to three counties in C3 & C8 that weren't being served (Columbia, Bradford, and Union).

We have also achieved success with Strategy 3 as the Whole Child program has been implemented in Madison and is being implemented in Taylor County. There is still additional work that needs to be done to ensure more families access the support and linkages available through this program, but it is anticipated that an increase in usage will be achieved by 2015.

**Please identify the percentage of achievement of the five-year permanency plan you think your circuit has achieved, and describe why.**

Based on the whole of the plan, C 3&8 has achieved approximately 80% of the five-year permanency plan.

Over the past 3 years, CHS has significantly reduced the number of waiting children, including those in therapeutic foster placements. In addition, PSF has fully implemented the Permanency Round Table (PRT) model and the Cold Case Review process. Both of these system changes have helped reduce the number of “longest waiting” children in care and helped more children achieve permanency.

The number of children in out of home care who need child specific adoption promotion efforts has decreased from 50 on 6/30/09 to 32 on 10/15/13. The number of APPLA goal children has decreased from 87 on 6/30/09 to approximately 5 as of 9/30/13. In addition, adoption competent clinicians serve the majority of our local adoption goal children and families receiving counseling. As of June 2013, 86% of post adoption families were working with adoption competent clinicians.

Do you think your circuit is on target to accomplishing your four target goals by June 2015? Why or why not?

***We think we are on target to achieve the Circuit 3 Prevention Goal #1:***

Children and teenagers are free from abuse, abandonment, and neglect and have safe, loving and permanent homes as measured by a reduction in the circuit-level child abuse rate from the fiscal year 2008-09 of 15.2 to a rate of 12.0 per 1,000 children by 30 June 2015 (a 20% reduction).

***We think we are on target to achieve the Circuit 8 Prevention Goal #1:***

Children and teenagers are free from abuse, abandonment, and neglect and have safe, loving and permanent homes as measured by a reduction in the circuit-level child abuse rate from the fiscal year 2008-09 of 24.16 to a rate of 19.0 per 1,000 children by 30 June 2015 (a 20% reduction).

***We think we are on target to achieve Goal 1 for the Promotion of Adoption:***

The percent of children adopted within 12 months of becoming legally free for adoption will increase from the fiscal year 2008-09 rate of 53.7% to 75% percent by 30 June 2015.

***We think we are on target to achieve Goal 2 for the Promotion of Adoption***

The percent of children legally free for adoption who have been waiting for adoption since the date of termination of parental rights (TPR) for more than 12 months will be reduced from the June 2009 rate of 46.3% percent to 25% percent by 30 June 2015.

***We think we are on target to achieve Goal 1 for Support of Adoptive Families:***

All families in need of support will be linked to or provided appropriate services and support to accommodate their needs. By 2015, of post-adoptive families referred for counseling, at least 90% will be referred to adoption-competent providers.

### **Highlights and Accomplishments**

The establishment of five Children’s Partnership Councils by Partnership for Strong Families in C 3&8 is both a highlight and accomplishment. Comprised of 13 counties and covering over 8,400 sq. miles, C 3&8 is an area greater than the size of New Jersey and Massachusetts. County populations range in size

from 8,000 to over 250,000. Grouping multiple counties to form four of the five CPCs allowed for greater participation as each council examined their areas strengths, needs, and opportunities for enhancing child welfare at the local level. The provision of contemporary and trend data gives greater insight to the councils. Invested stakeholders participating include representatives from child welfare agencies and contractors, public health, law enforcement, schools, Extension services, Early Learning Coalitions, private citizens, and others.

### **Next Steps**

We will continue to expand our prevention efforts by conducting a needs assessment to determine which communities/counties in C3 would benefit most from a Neighborhood Resource Center. PSF will continue to expand the recruitment and retention process and offer the supports needed to foster and adoptive parents to maintain placement stability. In addition, we will continue to expand our targeted recruitment efforts for youth with specialized needs. Lastly, we will continue to use the Permanency Round Table and Cold Case Review process to help increase permanency for the youth who have been in care for a long period of time and have more serious challenges that require ongoing services, support, and assistance from an adoptive family.