



EXPLORE FOSTER
MIAMI



ENGAGEMENT REPORT

*Explore, connect and mobilize
for children and families in Miami*



You are the light of the world – like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden.

Matthew 5:14¹

¹ Cover art by Meg Wallace. See Appendix D: Artist Spotlight, Meg Wallace

WHO WE ARE

ABOUT US: The Explore Foster Miami Committee is made up of local ministry and marketplace leaders.

OUR MISSION: To inspire Miami to explore, connect, and mobilize for children and families.

WE BELIEVE: The church will serve as a catalyst to help mobilize children and families through tangible expressions of love that will help transform our city for the glory of God and the good of its citizens (Jeremiah 29:7).

OUR VISION: Connecting the community so that every child and family has the support to flourish.

HOW WE GOT HERE: In February of 2020, we hosted a city-wide advertising campaign and outreach that united over 200 churches and ministries in Greater Miami. This culminated in a benefit concert that sold 7,000 tickets and had over 27,000 streams online. Over 1,000 Christians served and were equipped to share their faith. For two months, hundreds of discussion groups and sermons explored life's big questions in all 40 districts of our city. Over 600 people decided to follow Christ by living a life to love God and serve our neighbors. A long-term outcome was the creation of The Explore Foster Miami Committee. This committee is responsible for creating this foster engagement report to guide how the church, organizations and individuals can serve foster children and families while being a city-wide connector in the effort to make sure every child is loved and cared for.

CONTRIBUTIONS: This report was the result of collective research and writing² by the following board and team members who dedicated their time and effort to prayerfully seek the most transparent way to cumulatively collect these findings and create a model of hope to move forward in the next phase of development. *A special thank you to Mary Richards who stepped out for the foster children of Miami believing each one has a hope and a future. Your generosity will not be forgotten.*

James Drake, Executive Board Member

Panos Kourtesis, Executive Board Member

Chris Lane, Executive Board Member

Bertho Pino, Executive Board Member

Jerad Waggy, Executive Board Member

Georgia Downey, Director

Tresha Barrett & Danny Villegas, Researchers

² Professional copy editing done by Jodi Mailander Farrell

Dear Reader:

You, yes you, are an incredibly valuable person who can make a difference in the lives of children in our foster care community. Every day in Miami, children are removed from their homes due to neglect, abuse, or abandonment. Removing a child from their home often results in confusion, trauma, and fear. Some children reunite back with their parents, but many of these children remain in the foster care system because their parents cannot care for them.

After hundreds of hours of research and conversations with key players across Miami-Dade County, The Explore Foster Miami Committee presents this report in good faith. The report describes Miami-Dade County's foster care system in great detail, celebrating the heroic efforts of the organizations supporting the foster care system and highlighting the multi-faceted challenges collectively found in the city.

Key Findings:

- **Everyone in Miami needs a better understanding of how to get involved:** Getting involved in foster care and adoption is a mystery to many people. Did you know you can foster as a single parent? Did you know you are not too old to foster or mentor? How about taking a child to the Frost Museum or a Marlins game for a couple of hours? Do you have a building? Do you know there is a need for training sites in key areas? There is a new call in our city for everyone to step up in some way to be a part of the life of our foster children. Everyone can get involved to help a foster child from donating bunk beds, mentoring for an hour through several different programs, supporting a foster care family by being a part of their wraparound support group, taking a child to a ballgame through respite care, being a voice for children as a Guardian ad Litem, and of course taking a child or a sibling group into your home.
- **Biological parents:** There is a great need for wraparound support and services so that biological parents can achieve success in their case plan, and reunification can occur with their children (unless egregious abuse, abandonment and/or neglect has occurred).
- **Sibling groups:** There is a great need to keep foster siblings together in out-of-home care and to create housing opportunities for foster families to have the logistical and financial means to take in these sibling groups.
- **Increase in licensing locations:** There is an increased demand for licensing locations across the city, especially in designated “hot spot” areas. The ability for a person to easily drive or walk to a licensing center will increase not only the percentage of active foster parents in Miami, but also individuals interested in providing respite care for a foster

family. Local churches have a wonderful opportunity to open their doors for these licensing centers.

- **Citrus Family Care Network:** This lead Community Based Care (CBC) agency established in the southern region of Florida has positively impacted the foster care network and continues to prove itself as an effective and optimistic agency with a willingness to unite participating organizations in Miami-Dade County for the welfare of foster children.
- **Foster families:** There is a need for an increased number of high-quality, loving foster families that are committed to the long-term care of children in the system. Wraparound support and respite care are essential so that foster parents do not burn out and children are not returned to the system, only to be placed in another home – often temporarily, leading to multiple placements throughout their care.
- **Foster children aging out of the system:** Youth need proper emotional support; specifically, mentorship before they transition into adulthood so they can learn and apply necessary life skills. There are great resources, such as the Foster Care Review, Voices for Children, and Big Brothers Big Sisters, but there is an opportunity for more unity and growth to help young people mature into healthy functioning adults.
- **Active foster care models:** There are already successful foster care ministries in Miami-Dade and Broward county. Each has a desire to make a community-wide impact and collaborate with other potential organizations to build strength and expand care while showing God’s love.
- **Collaboration is possible:** Government agencies, non-profits, faith-based organizations, and the Corporate Church have a vested interest in uniting to provide more dynamic care and support for foster children.
- **Prevention is possible:** Key organizations can unite to mentor and raise up youth transitioning out of care while also combatting other core issues, such as human trafficking, homelessness, substance abuse, mental illness and delinquency among adults who have transitioned out of foster care.
- **Resources:** In addition to a lack of viable foster parents, there is a noticeable lack of resources in many areas. Food, clothing, and school supplies may be the most difficult resources to access. Community partners, such as churches, small businesses, and organizations, are helpful in meeting these needs through initiatives, such as food pantries, care closets, community classes and more.

Key outcomes we are moving forward with immediately:

- **Hire a project manager:** This has been completed. Georgia Downey (georgia@explorefoster.com) is now the Director of Explore Foster Miami and is actively overseeing implementation.
- **A centralized information hub:** This is a dynamic, comprehensive website dedicated to churches, organizations and individuals to get involved in a multi-faceted way. Please visit us at www.explorefostermiami.com.
- **Develop a strategic network plan:** We see ourselves as a bridge connecting churches to community partners and agencies.
- **Increase in licensing locations:** Churches are seen as a central resource for these additional locations.
- **Implement a city model:** This model will give participating organizations and the individual a clear and engaging opportunity to connect and unite for foster children in our community.

This committee chooses not to dwell on the challenges of foster care, but instead describes *a model of hope* that mobilizes individuals to rise up to be a city-wide partner, serving alongside community organizations including the local church, in an effort to make sure every child is loved and cared for. We want to help guide you, and countless others, in becoming champions for vulnerable children and families. We hope this report and model facilitates a community-wide conversation that seeks to answer the question, “How can a city come together to support foster children in whatever capacity an individual can help?”

We present this Foster Engagement Report as a guide to help navigate and understand the foster care system, as well as a start to that community-wide conversation. We believe gathering together in future round table discussions will provide tangible opportunities to address these key findings. Not only will some core issues within the foster care system be addressed, but we believe other challenges such as homelessness, human trafficking and delinquency will be touched on as well. We thank you for your support.

We look forward to standing with you as we “stand in the gap” for children and families in need across Greater Miami in an effort to provide a future and hope for each.

For Children,

The Explore Foster Miami Committee
James Drake, Executive Board Member
Panos Kourtesis, Executive Board Member
Chris Lane, Executive Board Member
Bertha Pino, Executive Board Member
Jerad Waggy, Executive Board Member

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. CURRENT CHALLENGES	10
1.1. FACTORS LEADING TO THE REMOVAL OF CHILDREN FROM THEIR HOMES _____	11
1.2. OBSTACLES WHILE CHILDREN ARE IN THE FOSTER SYSTEM _____	12
1.3. CIRCUMSTANCES THAT ARISE ONCE THEY EXIT THE SYSTEM _____	13
2. THE STRUCTURE OF THE SYSTEM	16
2.1. WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN FOSTER CARE AND ADOPTION? _____	17
2.2. WHAT IS A COMMUNITY-BASED CARE AGENCY (CBC)? _____	18
2.3. WHAT IS A CASE MANAGER? _____	18
2.4. WHAT IS A FLORIDA FOSTER/ADOPTIVE PARENT ASSOCIATION (FAPA)? _____	19
2.5. WHAT IS A FLORIDA GUARDIAN AD LITEM (GAL) PROGRAM? _____	19
2.6. WHAT DOES TERMINATION OF PARENTAL RIGHTS (TPR) MEAN? _____	20
2.7. WHAT IS REUNIFICATION? _____	20
2.8. WHAT IS THE PROCESS OF LICENSING? _____	21
2.9. WHAT IS PREVENTION? _____	21
2.10. WHAT IS INDEPENDENT LIVING? _____	21
2.11. LEVELS OF LICENSING IN FOSTER CARE _____	22
2.12. WHAT IS WRAPAROUND AND RESPITE CARE? _____	23
3. STAKEHOLDERS IN THE SOUTHERN REGION OF FLORIDA	25
GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES _____	26
3.1. THE DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES (DCF) _____	27
3.2. CHILDREN’S HOME SOCIETY _____	28
3.3. CENTER FOR CHILD AND FAMILY ENRICHMENT _____	29
3.4. DEPENDENCY COURT _____	30
3.5. BIOLOGICAL PARENTS ATTORNEY REPRESENTATIVE: THE OFFICE OF CRIMINAL CONFLICT AND CIVIL REGIONAL COUNSEL THIRD REGION _____	32
3.6. CITRUS FAMILY CARE NETWORK _____	33
3.7. THE C.H.A.N.C.E PROGRAM _____	35
3.8. SOUTH FLORIDA FOSTER AND ADOPTIVE PARENT ASSOCIATION _____	38
3.9. MIAMI-DADE COUNTY FOSTER AND ADOPTIVE PARENT ASSOCIATION _____	40

FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATION	41
3.10. ONE MORE CHILD	42
3.11. 4KIDS	43
3.12. ONE CHURCH ONE CHILD FLORIDA	45
3.13. HOPE 4 KIDS	46
3.14. HIS HOUSE	48
THE CHURCHES	49
3.15. VOUS CHURCH: ACTIVE FOSTER CARE MINISTRY	50
3.16. HOPE, HEART AND HOME: ACTIVE FOSTER CARE MINISTRY	52
3.17. CHRIST FELLOWSHIP CHURCH: ACTIVE FOSTER CARE MINISTRY	54
3.18. NEW LIFE BAPTIST CHURCH OF CAROL CITY: UP-AND-COMING FOSTER CARE MINISTRY	55
3.19. IGLESIA RESCATE (RESCUE CHURCH): UP-AND-COMING FOSTER CARE MINISTRY	56
NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS	58
3.20. VOICES FOR CHILDREN FOUNDATION	59
3.21. BIG BROTHERS BIG SISTERS OF MIAMI (BBBS)	60
3.22. HABITAT FOR HUMANITY	61
3.23. FLORIDA FOSTER CARE REVIEW	62
3.24. CASA VALENTINA	63
POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION PROGRAMS	65
3.25. EDUCATE TOMORROW	66
3.26. POSITIVE PATHWAYS	67
<u>4. THE CALL TO THE CORPORATE CHURCH</u>	<u>69</u>
<u>5. IMPLEMENTATION RECOMMENDATIONS</u>	<u>72</u>
5.1. RECOMMENDATION ONE: A CENTRALIZED INFORMATION HUB	73
5.2. RECOMMENDATION TWO: STRATEGIC PLAN FOR A NETWORK CONNECTING CHURCHES TO COMMUNITY PARTNERS AND AGENCIES	73
5.3. RECOMMENDATION THREE: INCREASE IN ACCESS TO LICENSING AND SUPPORT SERVICES	74
5.4. RECOMMENDATION FOUR: HIRE PROJECT MANAGER FOR IMPLEMENTATION	74
5.5. RECOMMENDATION FIVE: ONGOING COLLABORATION WITH COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS	75
5.6. CONTINUING TO EXPLORE THE COMMUNITY AND ADDING TO THE REPORT	76
<u>6. CONCLUSION</u>	<u>79</u>
<u>7. GLOSSARY</u>	<u>81</u>

8. APPENDICES	85
APPENDIX A	86
8.1. NATIONAL MODEL: PROMISE686	86
APPENDIX B	88
8.2. THE BRIDGE: CAREPORTAL	88
APPENDIX C	90
8.3. NATIONAL BRIDGE AGENCY: PROJECT 1.27	90
APPENDIX D	91
8.4. ARTIST SPOTLIGHT: MEG WALLACE	91
9. REFERENCES	93

1. CURRENT CHALLENGES

This section describes the challenges that occur for youth in the foster system before removal, while in placement, and during the transition into adulthood.



1.1. FACTORS LEADING TO THE REMOVAL OF CHILDREN FROM THEIR HOMES

During the fiscal year of 2018-2019:

- In the State of Florida, 16,149 children were removed from their homes.
- In the southern region of Florida (Miami-Dade and Monroe counties), 1,023 children were removed from their homes.
- In Miami-Dade County (Circuit 11), 969 children were removed from their homes.³

According to research from Voices for Children Foundation, Inc. (2019):

- On average, children living in foster care will have over three placement changes during their stay in the system.
- While in care, 65% of foster youth experience seven or more school changes (K -12).
- 50% of children in foster care have chronic medical problems.
- An estimated 70% of children have siblings who are in foster care, but often they are separated, removing family and support.
- On average, for every youth who ages out of the foster care system, citizens pay \$300,000 over that person's lifetime in social costs, such as public assistance and incarceration.

Recurring challenges were identified after numerous interviews with stakeholders and hours spent researching the current conditions in foster care and adoption in Miami-Dade County. One major challenge is that there are “hot spots,” areas in the judicial circuit that experience a greater number of children removed and placed in foster care. The main hot spots noted were Miami Gardens and Opa-Locka in northern Miami-Dade County and Goulds and Florida City in southern Miami-Dade County, according to a Children's Home Society Case Manager.

There are common causal factors leading to these hot spots, one of them being that biological parents in these hot spots are disadvantaged in a variety of ways. Each of these demographic areas has a median household income of under \$40,000 a year, with Opa-Locka as the poorest, at less than \$18,000 a year, according to the 2018 Statistical Atlas. A lack of sustainable housing in these hot spots is a core issue, resulting in a catch-22: If biological parents lose their housing due to outside factors then their children can be removed, but they cannot reunify with their children because they must have stable housing to get them back.⁴

³ Original Source: Office of Child Welfare Data Reporting Unit Report # 1182. N. Hincapie. & M. Rivas, personal communication, August 20, 2020.

⁴ See Section Stakeholders in the Southern Region of Florida, Governmental Agencies: Biological Parents Attorney Representative, “What They See”.

The matter of parents struggling with mental health issues is another disadvantage that often contributes to removal. Many of these homes are single-parent homes, and parents suffering from a mental health issue do not have support to remain healthy enough to take care of their children. This often leads to neglect that is not necessarily intentional, but due to mental illness and a lack of resources. It was noted that most biological parents (aside from egregious abuse, neglect or abandonment) truly love their children and sincerely want them to return once they are removed, but socioeconomic and mental health factors create a hurdle to reunification.⁵

The ideal solution to these challenges involves prevention – resolving core issues and factors that plague biological families and helping meet their needs so that causal factors do not become the primary reasons for removal. Biological parents need better services, resources, and support.

1.2. OBSTACLES WHILE CHILDREN ARE IN THE FOSTER SYSTEM

A new set of challenges arises once the child has been removed from the home and is going through the foster care system. It is very difficult to find quality families that are willing and able to foster, and these are not equally distributed throughout the county, making it more complicated to match children with foster families in their own area. While in the system, one of the most pervasive obstacles is keeping sibling groups together. Trauma is increased when siblings are separated after they have been removed from their parents, and there is an inadequate number of foster homes that are dedicated to sibling groups. Even if a foster family has the desire to take in siblings, the family often does not have space or resources to do so.

There are also fewer homes dedicated to older children, children with special or medical needs, and children who have been victims of human trafficking. These represent the most difficult children to place. Children with specialized or medical needs and victims of human trafficking require higher levels of licensing so the supply of foster families that can be matched with them is limited. Victims of human trafficking have experienced a deep level of trauma and foster families need very specific training to be eligible to foster them. Placement can be an issue as the child trafficking victim has endured significant challenges and there are restrictions needed in a foster home to keep them safe.⁶

Foster families face their own obstacles. Families take on tremendous responsibility to care for foster children and require resources and support for success. Without proper community-based care, such as wraparound services and respite, families may quickly burn out, which ultimately negatively affects the foster child. As of 2019, the number of children with licensed non-relative

⁵ See Section: Stakeholders in the Southern Region of Florida; Governmental Agencies; Biological Parents Attorney Representative – What They See

⁶ See Section: Stakeholders in the Southern Region of Florida; Governmental Agencies; The CHANCE Program—What They Do

foster families exceeded the number of children placed with an approved relative.⁷ The need to retain quality foster families is greater than ever (Florida Department of Children and Families, 2019).

1.3. CIRCUMSTANCES THAT ARISE ONCE THEY EXIT THE SYSTEM

In Miami-Dade County, approximately 300 youth age out of the foster system annually (Casa Valentina, 2020). Although there is supplemental support available to these older children through various non-profit and government programs, mentorship is a core need that was identified to prevent the children from engaging in threatening situations as adults. When youth do not receive enough support and resources to effectively transition into adulthood, they can experience homelessness, human trafficking, substance abuse, delinquency, and mental illness.

The Department of Children and Families reported 197 human trafficking cases among children in Miami-Dade County during the fiscal year of 2018-2019. Once a young person ages out of the foster care system and is without appropriate mentorship, resources and life skills, the youth is at an even greater risk of being trafficked.

Almost 10% of youth transitioning out of the foster care system met the diagnostic criteria for alcohol abuse. Case records show that more than half of adults who were discharged from foster care engaged in lifetime drug use (Braciszewski & Stout, 2012, p. 2338). Once a child has experienced abuse and/or neglect in a biological household, there is a greater chance for juvenile delinquency as a foster youth. One significant finding showed that young offenders are three times more likely to become violent offenders as adults (Florida Courts, 2020).

Mental health is identified as “the largest unmet health need for children and teens in foster care” (Hogan, 2020). Aged-out foster youth have a much higher rate of mental health disparities than the normal adult population. After foster children age out of the system, they often return to the community they were removed from in the first place. However, having spent much of their childhood away from their local community, the ability to transition back proves difficult.⁸

There is hope. If the Corporate Church can form alliances with stakeholders and become a valuable resource of support for these biological and foster families, there is a greater chance that through prevention (helping to eradicate the core issues leading to removal) and retention (maintaining and recruiting quality foster families), the Greater Miami community has the opportunity to make a significant impact in the foster system and become a model for other communities with these same challenges.

⁷ See Figure C., How Miami-Dade Children Exit the Foster Care System Once Case Plan Satisfied

⁸ See Section: Stakeholders in the Southern Region of Florida; Governmental Agencies; Center for Child and Family Enrichment — What They See

FIGURE A: TYPES OF “OUT OF HOME CARE” FOSTER CHILDREN IN MIAMI-DADE PLACED ANNUALLY
(FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES, 2020)

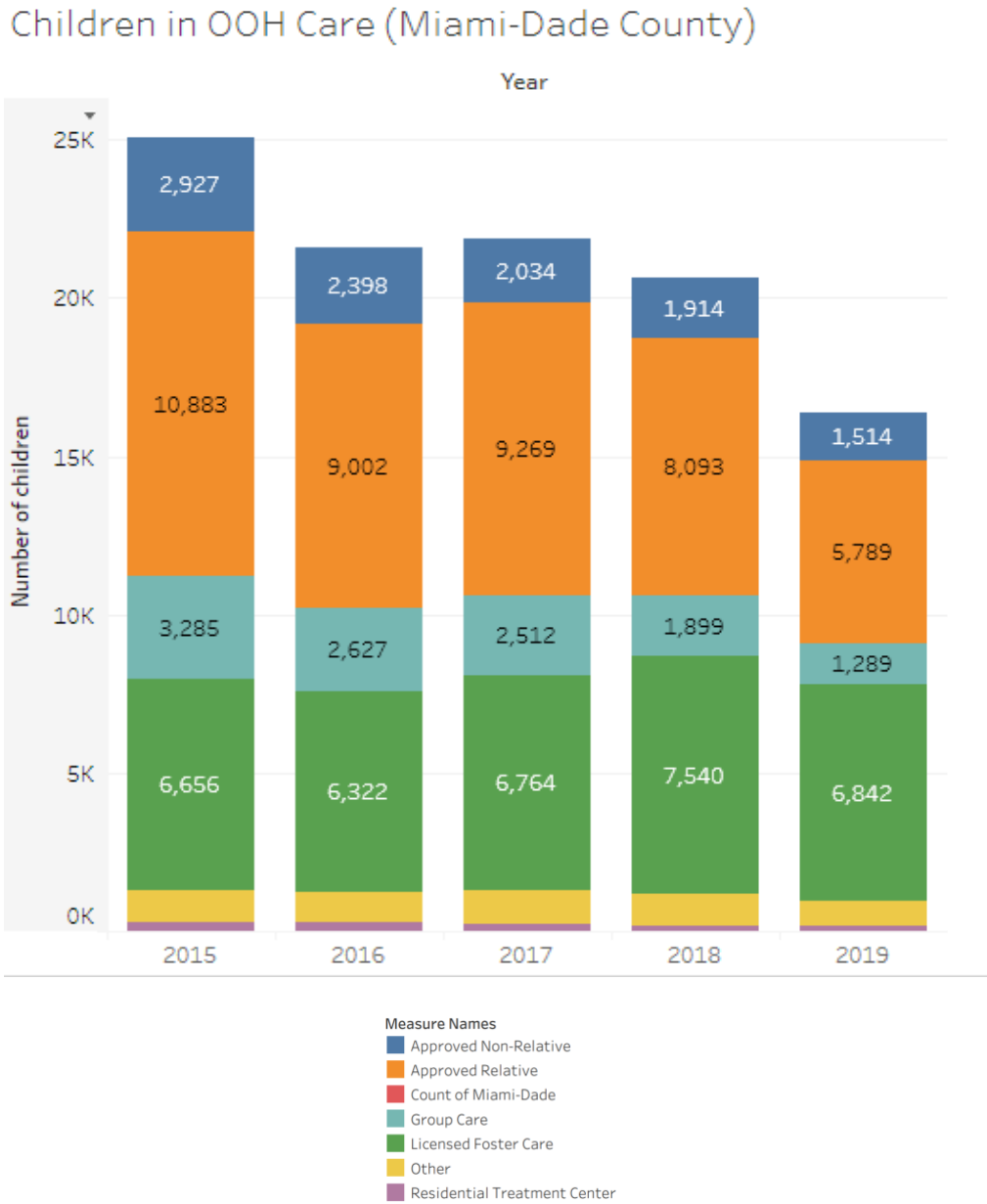
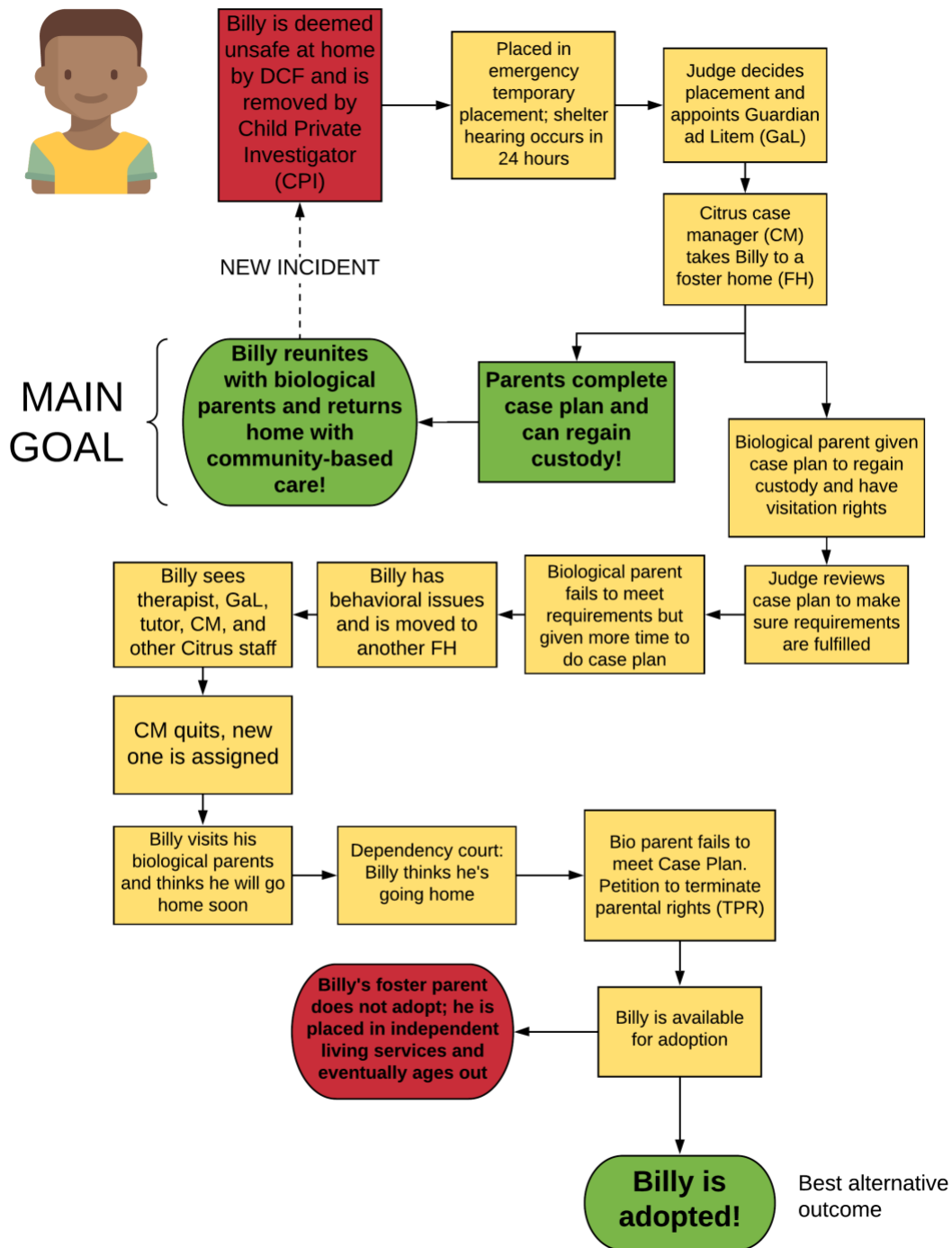


FIGURE B: AN AVERAGE “OUT OF HOME JOURNEY” OF A FOSTER CHILD
 “Billy” is going through the foster care system, from the start of removal from his biological family to permanency or aging out of the system.

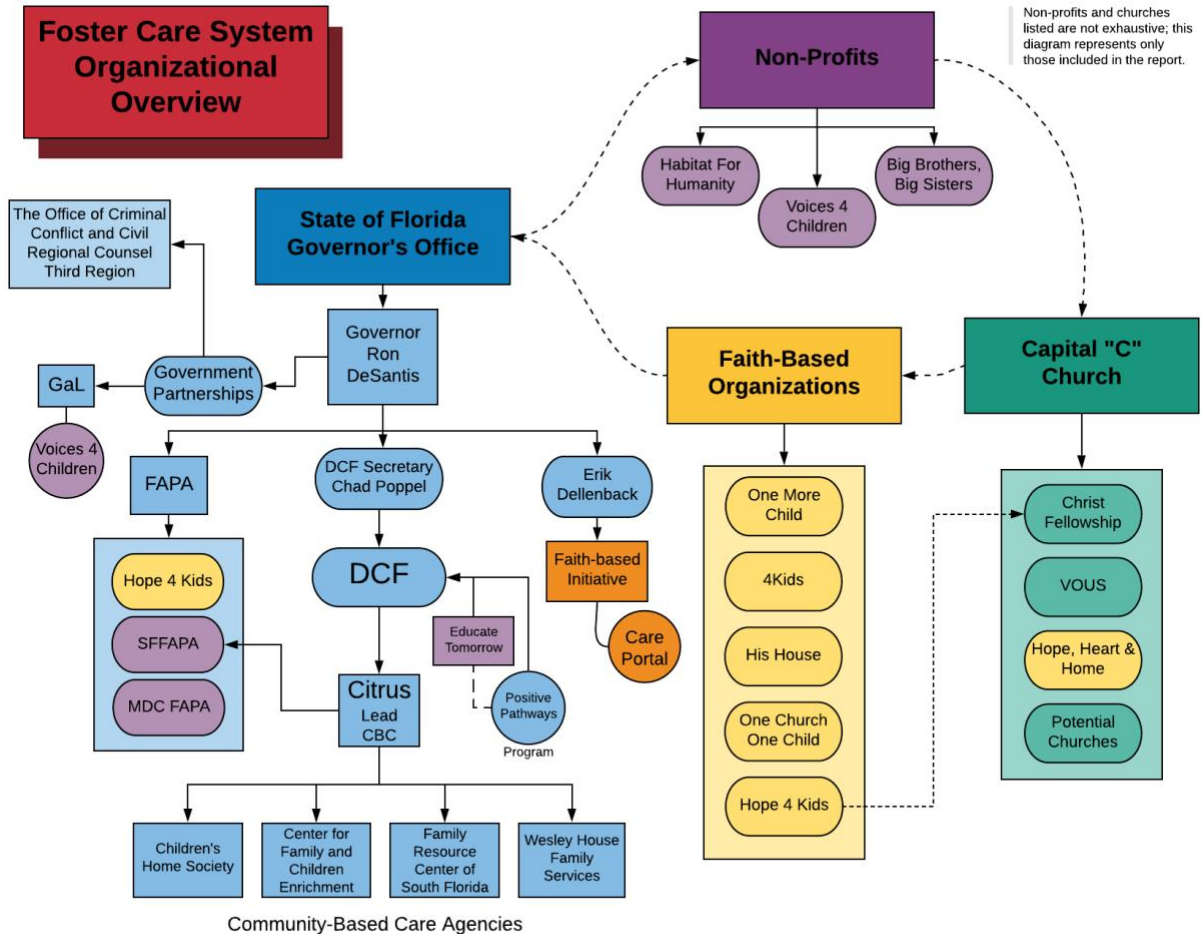


2. THE STRUCTURE OF THE SYSTEM

The following section provides an organizational overview of the foster care system, along with key words and definitions related to care.



FIGURE D: “FOSTER CARE SYSTEM ORGANIZATION OVERVIEW” incorporates Miami-Dade County key influencers, stakeholders, faith-based organizations, non-profits, and churches found in this report. The diagram is not all-inclusive, as both current and future stakeholders are sure to come, but this figure shows a relational overview of current conditions.



2.1. WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN FOSTER CARE AND ADOPTION?

The main difference between foster care and adoption is that foster care is the temporary placement of a child into a foster family with the primary goal of reunification with the biological parent or parents (M. Torres, personal communication, June 19, 2020). In adoption, each biological parent’s rights have been terminated in the best interest of the child and reunification is not the goal. During the child’s placement in foster care, the biological parent(s) must abide by that case plan and, if they fail to meet it, their parental rights can be terminated. The foster child will remain in care until

permanently placed in a home or until he or she ages out of the system. Foster parents need to enter the system with the mindset that children could be united with their biological parents if the courts deem it in their best interest. If an individual or couple decides to foster with the sole intention of adopting that foster child, and without full awareness and understanding that the number one goal is reunification with the biological parents, it can lead to heartbreak for the foster parents (M. Torres, personal communication, June 19, 2020).

2.2. WHAT IS A COMMUNITY-BASED CARE AGENCY (CBC)?

The Department of Children and Families (DCF) contracts agencies in each region to manage prevention, interventions, foster care, and adoption services. Miami-Dade County falls within DCF's Southern Region and the 11th Judicial Circuit. The Lead Community-Based Care (CBC) Agency for Miami-Dade is Citrus Family Care Network (DCF definition, 2020). DCF allocates funds to Citrus in a four-year, \$110 million annual contract, and tasks Citrus with the goal of monitoring the permanency progress of children in out-of-home care (M. Torres, personal communication, June 19, 2020).

In order to provide frontline services to children and families, Citrus subcontracts with four case management organizations (CMO) – three for Miami-Dade County and one for Monroe County – that provide ongoing follow-up and review of the safety and stability of children removed from their parents/guardians.

- North CMO: Center for Child & Family Enrichment (CFCE)
- Central CMO: Family Resource Center (FRC)
- Southern CMO: Children's Home Society (CHS)
- Monroe County CMO: Wesley House (WH, Circuit 16)

A child is assigned a Case Manager (CM) who visits monthly while working with the parents, current placement caregiver(s) and the judge to determine what is best for the child (DCF definition, 2020). The number one goal of a case is reunification. When that is not possible, the best outcome includes kinship care and adoption. Citrus and each case management organization use various community agencies to provide case-specific services for prevention, enrichment, and resources to address challenges (M. Torres, personal communication, June 19, 2020).

2.3. WHAT IS A CASE MANAGER?

The Case Manager (CM) will be assigned the case of the child once the Child Protective Investigator (CPI) transfers the case. The CM will ensure the foster parent has the resources necessary to adequately care for the child appropriately and will coordinate additional services needed for the child to complete the CM's portion of the case plan. The child's medical and dental

services are provided by the Statewide Medicaid Managed Care Program. The CM works with both the biological and the foster parent(s) for the well-being of the child (Citrus Family Care Network, 2020).

2.4. WHAT IS A FLORIDA FOSTER/ADOPTIVE PARENT ASSOCIATION (FAPA)?

A Florida Foster/Adoptive Parent Association (FAPA) supports, educates, and advocates on behalf of foster and adoptive families. “Children thrive because their foster and adoptive parents are fully empowered and recognized as expert partners in developing healthy families” (FAPA, 2018). The purpose of Florida FAPA is to: 1) provide supportive services to foster and adoptive families in the child welfare system, 2) educate foster and adoptive families, and provide tools to maximize their success as participants in Florida’s child welfare system, 3) advocate at local, state and national levels for foster and adoptive families, 4) facilitate better communication between stakeholders in the child welfare system for the benefit of foster and adoptive families, and 5) educate foster and adoptive families, and provide tools to maximize their success (FAPA, 2018).

The Florida FAPA supports the local FAPA with infrastructure, training or finding ways to attract new members in all DCF’s judicial circuits. Annual local association dues are \$50, with monthly meetings. In Miami-Dade County, the options include South Florida FAPA and Miami-Dade County FAPA (FAPA, 2018). Hope 4 Kids is an independent, faith-based FAPA available to foster parents as well.

2.5. WHAT IS A FLORIDA GUARDIAN AD LITEM (GAL) PROGRAM?

The Florida Guardian ad Litem (GAL) Program is government-run and advocates for a foster child’s welfare in the form of a court-appointed trained volunteer so that the voice of the foster child is heard during dependency court hearings. Currently, there are 21 local GAL Programs in 20 judicial circuits (Florida Department of Children and Families, 2019). Each guardian is funded by a non-profit organization that supports the needs of its children and volunteers. In Miami-Dade County (Circuit 11), Voices for Children Foundation, Inc., (under the leadership of Nelson Hincapie) supports over 1,700 children with a guardian (personal communication, July 1, 2020). A guardian becomes certified by completing a 30-hour training program and volunteers approximately 10 hours a month on an assigned case. Also, there are 12 annual hours of recertification training that must be completed (GAL FAQs, 2020).

The guardian provides an independent recommendation on what the guardian believes to be the best outcome for the child while serving as another set of eyes and ears for children in out-of-home care. Guardians monitor the safety of the child, partner with the foster parent and ensure the needs

of the child are being met during the process of finding the child a permanent home (GAL FAQs, 2020).

2.6. WHAT DOES TERMINATION OF PARENTAL RIGHTS (TPR) MEAN?

If parents do not successfully complete their portion of the case plan, the DCF attorney will file a petition to terminate parental rights (TPR). DCF must prove to the court that the parent was given every opportunity to complete the case plan and that TPR is in the best interest of the child. The judge will hear from the guardian, case manager, foster parent and sometimes the child (if the child is old enough). Parents who have a child in out-of-home care may choose to surrender their parental rights voluntarily. The judge will ensure they are not under compulsion to do so (Florida Courts, 2020). If both parents are subject to the case plan, one parent could successfully complete his or her portion and regain custody while the other parent could be unsuccessful. In this instance, the rights will be terminated to the failing parent.

If a parent abandons a child, TPR can be sought immediately to allow the child to be permanently placed. Abandonment includes leaving a child with friends or relatives without proper arrangements or resources for their care. It can also include refusal to pick a child up from a medical or mental health facility. If the parent is incarcerated and the length of the parent's sentence would surpass the age of 18 for the child, this would also elicit terminating parental rights. TPR can be expedited in the event a case plan is not offered to the parent because the abuse or offense was egregious. Florida Statutes Chapter 39 outlines those offenses and other extenuating circumstances (Florida Courts, 2020).

2.7. WHAT IS REUNIFICATION?

When a child is removed from his or her home and placed in foster care (out-of-home care), the biological parent(s) is given a case plan. The case plan is the order of the Dependency Court judge, and it outlines the conditions that must be met for the child to return to the custody of the parent or parents (Florida Courts, 2020). The case plan lists tasks for both the child and parent(s), and may include services such as individual counseling, family counseling, substance treatment and testing, and parenting classes.

Additionally, the case plan outlines the time frame for these tasks, including the visitation schedule, and is reviewed periodically by the judge (Florida Courts, 2020). Reunification is the primary goal of a family's case plan. Once a parent(s) successfully completes the case plan, the judge orders the case closed and the parent(s) can regain custody of the child. If reunification occurs, maintenance services are offered to families to continue support to strengthen the family unit (Florida Courts, 2020).

2.8. WHAT IS THE PROCESS OF LICENSING?

Potential foster parents go through a licensing application process to determine if they can provide a safe environment for children in state supervision. Requirements to become a licensed foster parent are the following (Citrus Family Care Network, 2020):

1. Take part in a Florida Foster Care Orientation
2. Complete PRIDE Training
3. Fulfill all training session requirements
4. Be financially stable to provide for current and future needs
5. Agree to a background and child abuse registry checks
6. Pass a home health inspection
7. Have enough physical space to foster a child in the home
8. Complete an in-depth home study

2.9. WHAT IS PREVENTION?

To reduce the number of children who require out-of-home services, Citrus and CMOs utilize programs and services from public and private organizations and nonprofits to strengthen at-risk families and empower care for their children. Per Florida Statute, Chapter 39, Florida is a mandated reporter state, which means anyone who suspects abuse or neglect of a child must report “such knowledge or suspicion” to the Abuse Hotline (DCF Abuse Hotline, 2019).

During a child protective investigation, a CPI may find no immediate danger to the child’s safety or well-being, but may discover several red flags that put the family at risk. The investigator can make a referral for prevention services, such as parenting classes, vocational support, and in-home therapy services. If the family has physical or financial needs, referrals can be made to the Community Action Agency (CAA) in local communities. Prevention is the best way to reduce the number of kids who require services in out-of-home care (Florida Courts, 2020).

2.10. WHAT IS INDEPENDENT LIVING?

Teens in foster care who turn 18 and were never adopted or placed with a permanent guardian have officially “aged out” of the foster care system. At this point, they may enter the Independent Living program. There are three main areas of service to young adults who are no longer in state custody: 1) Extended Foster Care, 2) Post-secondary Education Services and Support (PESS) and 3) After-Care Services. These programs and funding sources are the vehicles to drive the future of a former foster child. The aim is to lead to full-time post-secondary enrollment, full-time employment, or a combination of the two (Florida Department of Children and Families, 2019).

The Extended Foster Care (EFC) program allows young people who are still in high school, working on their GED, enrolled in college, or registered in vocational education to remain under Case Management supervision. They may reside in a foster home or a shared living arrangement. The campaign “My Future, My Choice” allows young people to move at their own pace up to the age of 21 (22 if they have a disability). They will receive financial assistance, educational support, and career preparation. Former foster youths may choose not to attend an educational institution and can still qualify for the program if they work at least 80 hours per month or participate in a work and career readiness program. Continuation in the program requires meeting with a Case Manager monthly, biannual court reviews and maintenance of one of the qualifying activities.

The Post-secondary Educational Support & Services (PESS) is a state-funded program for former foster children who reached the age of 18 while in state custody, or who are 18 and were adopted from foster care after the age of 16. The former foster child must have a high school diploma or equivalent and attend a Florida public college (that is Bright Futures eligible) or vocational school. Eligible students will receive a monthly stipend of \$1,256, which is intended to assist with living expenses while in a post-secondary program. PESS funds are paid to the community-based care agency until the young adult can demonstrate responsibility to manage expenses. The student may also apply for Education and Training Voucher (ETV) funding. EVT is a federal grant program for former foster children to pay for college or postsecondary education. This program extends until the young adult is 23 years old. Aftercare Service is for the foster child who has reached the age of 18, is younger than 23 years of age, and is unsure how to move forward in life. If the child chooses not to apply for the extended foster care program or PESS, the child will still be eligible for services to create a plan of action. Services are customized on a case-by-case basis and could include mentoring, counseling, substance abuse treatment, vocational training, and temporary financial assistance. The goal of aftercare is to collaboratively develop a plan to allow the former foster child to transition from care into autonomy. All children who are still in foster care by 17 years of age will have a conversation with their Case Manager for a transition plan. The plan identifies the hopes and aspirations of the child beyond foster care. The Case Manager must document the task of the plan, identify any barriers to success and obtain judicial approval of the plan (Florida Department of Children and Families, 2019).

2.11. LEVELS OF LICENSING IN FOSTER CARE

There are five levels of prospective foster parent licensing in Florida, which determine the intensity of care the foster parent will be expected to provide, as well as the allocated amount of the stipend received from Citrus:

Level I, Child-Specific Foster Home, is designed for any relative or non-relative who has a pre-existing relationship with the foster child. Level I is the newest form of licensing.

Level II, Non-Child Specific Foster Home, is designed for people within the community and includes licensing for respite care.

Level III, Safe Foster Home for Victims of Human Trafficking, is designed for individuals interested in providing a safe and stable environment for victims of human trafficking (Florida Department of Children and Families, Levels of Foster Care Licensure 2019). DCF licenses Level III homes and partners with other child-placing agencies (M. Torres, personal communication, July 21, 2020).

Level IV, Therapeutic Foster Home, is designed for a foster home that has specialized training to foster an array of "emotional, behavioral or social needs" of a child (Florida Department of Children and Families, Levels of Foster Care Licensure 2019). DCF licenses Level IV homes and partners with other child-placing agencies (M. Torres, personal communication, July 21, 2020).

Level V, Medical Foster Home, is designed for foster parents who have received training to address chronic medical needs. "Medical foster parents" allow the children to receive specialized care in a home setting rather than in a hospital, group home or with the child's biological family that cannot meet the child's needs. Ages range from infancy to 20 years of age.

2.12. WHAT IS WRAPAROUND AND RESPITE CARE?

The CMO utilizes the wraparound service process⁹ to ensure case plans and treatments for families are individualized, strength-based, culturally competent, community-based, and outcome-focused (The Florida Children's System of Care (SOC), 2018). There are four stages in the wraparound process: engagement, planning, implementation, and transition (SOC, 2018). During prevention measures, wraparound support providers facilitate families with conversations about their strengths and develop a plan of action that includes community-based service providers. The plan is then implemented and revisited until the family finally transitions away from the plan once stable. The Case Manager meets with the family to determine what services would benefit the family and evaluates the best approach. Prior to initiating the plan, the CM will listen to the voices of the family and allow them to select their service providers. The goal of wraparound as a prevention measure is to prepare the family to meet its own needs and care for its own children at home (SOC, 2018).

Once a child is in out-of-home care, wraparound services follow the same process and include the system of care as outlined in FL Statute Chapter 39 (The Department of Families and Children,

⁹ See Section: Foster Care Implementation Model — Figure I. Examples of Wraparound Services

2019). The CM implements the services needed to accompany the foster or kinship parent. These services usually include (and are not limited to) therapy, visitation with siblings, tutoring, medical appointments, and extracurricular activities (DCF, 2019). Foster parents will also receive information for the Florida Foster/Adoptive Parent Association (FAPA) to support them. During the permanency stage, when the child is available for adoption, the CM will work with the prospective adoptive parents to keep the necessary supports intact. During the foster and adoptive stage, the goal of wraparound services is to support the family in caring for the child placed in the family's care.

Under the umbrella of wraparound services is Respite Care. Respite is defined as a short period of rest or relief from something difficult (Merriam-Webster, 2020). Respite Care is when a volunteer babysits for the foster or kinship family. To babysit in the home, the volunteer must complete a "Level Two" background check. If respite volunteers provide overnight relief outside of the foster or kinship family's home, they must complete the same pre-service licensing training as the foster or kinship parent (M. Torres, personal communication, July 7, 2020).

Respite Care is an essential need for foster families so that they can take time off as needed for personal needs or errands. Respite can take on various forms. To the biological family, a Child Protective Investigator can recommend the child stay with a family member or friend for a few days to offer respite to the parents and child while the family is assessed for safety. If a child is placed in foster or kinship care, that caregiver will benefit from having a respite caregiver step in from time to time to allow for recharge and sharing the weight of care for the foster child. Respite care can be as simple as a few hours for foster parents to have a date night or an extended time for travel, medical procedures, or emergencies. Whatever the case, respite care provides families the support they need to continue and can reduce foster parent burnout.

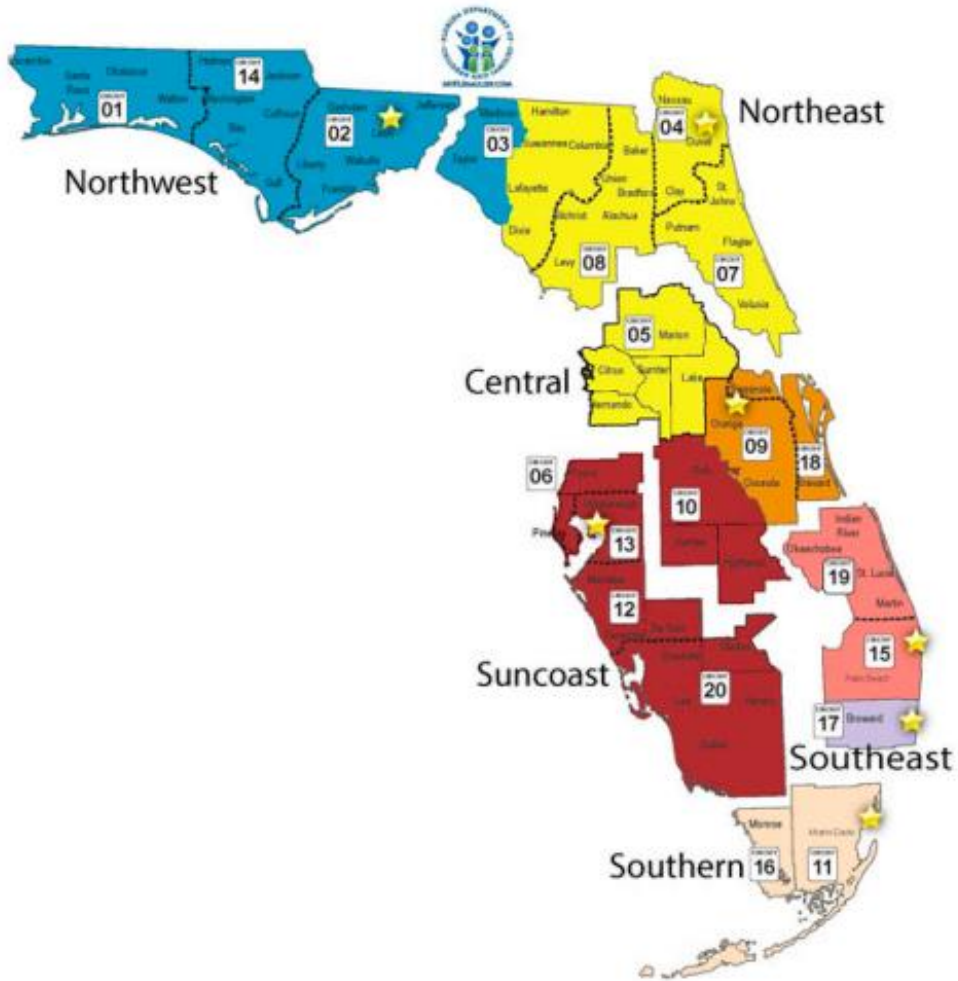
3. STAKEHOLDERS IN THE SOUTHERN REGION OF FLORIDA

This section presents key stakeholders in Miami-Dade County, along with a breakdown of who they are, what they do, their observations and what is next for their future.



GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES

Figure E: Florida Department of Children and Families Circuit



3.1. THE DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES (DCF)

DCF divides the state into six regions and 20 judicial circuits. Miami-Dade County is in the Southern Region (along with Monroe County) and in the 11th Judicial Circuit. Many programs and organizations in Florida’s child welfare system, such as the Florida Foster and Adoptive Parent Association (FAPA) and the Guardian ad Litem Program correlate with these regions and circuits. Each region has a lead Community-Based Care organization (CBC) that is contracted to oversee the permanency outcomes of children under state supervision (Department of Children and Families, 2019).

In Florida, under the leadership of Secretary Chad Poppell, DCF is the agency appointed to manage services and federal benefits to families and vulnerable adults. These services include managing child welfare cases, adult abuse and neglect, substance abuse issues, mental health treatment,

Medicaid, and food assistance (DCF definition, 2019). The main governing laws for child welfare are found in Florida Statutes, Chapter 39, which outlines the standard operating procedures and guidelines for child welfare professionals (DCF, Statutes-Rules-Operating Procedures, 2019).

DCF currently maintains the Florida Abuse Hotlines and Child Protective Investigations. CPI investigates allegations of abuse, neglect, abandonment, and parents in need of assistance, which includes a child exhibiting out of control behavior. Professionals in the child welfare field follow a specific system of care that focuses on safety, permanency and well-being of children and families. Their vision is that “every child in Florida thrives in a safe, stable and permanent home, sustained by nurturing relationships and strong community connections” (DCF Child Welfare Practice, 2019).

3.2. CHILDREN’S HOME SOCIETY

WHO THEY ARE

Children’s Home Society (CHS) of Florida is a statewide organization that provides care and support to children and families. In Miami, CHS contracts with Citrus Family Care Network to deliver dependency case management services to children and families involved in the foster care system. There are over 400 children in Citrus Family Care. Lourdes Pons is the Regional Executive Director for Children’s Home Society of Florida in Miami.

WHAT THEY DO

In addition to providing full Dependency Case Management, CHS works to prevent child abuse and neglect by proactively partnering with and supporting parents through its highly successful Healthy Families and Family Preservation (in-home parenting) programs. It also provides trauma-informed mental health counseling through its behavioral health program. CHS is the lead nonprofit and a core partner in three Community Partnership Schools in Miami (20 throughout the state) that work to address significant barriers to learning – such as poverty, hunger, violence and untreated health or mental health challenges – so children can focus on their education.

OBSERVATIONS

Ms. Pons echoed the sentiment that Citrus has provided increased support to both the CHS and the foster parents. She says, “the Foster Parent Liaison appointed by Citrus to the parents to voice their concerns is a helpful service” CHS sees a need for more specialized homes for children with varying needs and expressed that having more foster homes is “better for the system” (personal communication, July 22, 2020).

WHAT'S NEXT

Children's Home Society of Florida is growing its behavioral health department to serve the families in its case management system. This could help provide a greater continuity of care for children and families, as it allows CHS to serve the families with their own mental health counselors with high-quality, trauma-informed care (L. Pons, personal communication, July 22, 2020).

3.3. CENTER FOR CHILD AND FAMILY ENRICHMENT

WHO THEY ARE

The Center for Child and Family Enrichment (CFCE) is a full-case management agency contracted by Citrus Family Care Network that handles the cases of approximately 600 children in Miami-Dade County's child welfare system. CEO Delores Dunn and Kerry Lewis, Director of Child Welfare Programs, provided perspectives (personal communication, July 22, 2020).

WHAT THEY DO

CFCE is a private 501(c)(3) organization that provides behavioral health services and medical care. In the child welfare arena, CFCE provides full case management, a prevention-focused safety management program and a residential program.

OBSERVATIONS

In the past, CFCE was responsible for case management of 1,200 clients or more, although it reported the current total is now significantly lower. The leadership indicated that the lack of foster homes in the northern area is a continued area of concern. Children should be placed in the communities they are from, yet some are placed 40 miles away, as far as Homestead, while the CFCE is located in Miami Gardens. Although the current lead CBC has improved the recruitment and marketing relevant to the diversity of the surrounding population, that has not always been the case. Before licensing and placement was moved to the lead Agency, CFCE had 103 foster homes in its local community.

CFCE is no longer responsible for recruitment and marketing. However, because CFCE is a private organization, it can collaborate with local churches and the community to refer prospective parents back to Citrus Family Care Network. The leadership identifies teenagers with behavioral and mental health concerns as the hardest to place. Therefore, there is a great need for more foster homes specific to this population.

WHAT'S NEXT

Ms. Dunn and Ms. Lewis identified several key areas they are working on. CFCE will be working with the housing authority to identify resources for children aging out of care. CFCE has a “Freedom School” via the Children’s Defense Fund. It is a cultural literacy program to help children learn and improve their reading skills, and it is focused on building self-esteem and cultural identity by providing books by minority authors not typically read in public schools. Although this is a national program, CFCE has the only one focused specifically on foster children and has a behavioral health component allowing the children to receive therapy. Additionally, a former board member is working to provide houses for children aging out of care and seeks to work with several churches in moving forward (D. Dunn, personal communication, July 22,2020).

3.4. DEPENDENCY COURT

WHO THEY ARE

The Dependency Court presides over abuse, neglect and/or abandonment cases. The main hearings in a dependency case are required to meet state and federal statutory guidelines. Families will go through the following hearing types during their time involved in the dependency court: shelter hearings, filing of petitions, arraignments, trials, dispositions, judicial reviews, case plans and permanency hearings (Juvenile Dependency, 2020).

WHAT THEY DO

The judges of the 11th Judicial Circuit of the Juvenile Dependency Division are tasked with the mission to ensure the permanency, safety, and well-being of children in state custody. Permanency goals of the court are generally reunification with rehabilitated parents, adoption (if a petition for termination of parental rights has been filed) or permanent guardianship (Juvenile Dependency, 2020).

OBSERVATIONS

Judge Orlando A. Prescott, the administrative judge of the juvenile division, centers his thoughts on the interconnectivity within the network. “We function in silos – be it the church, secular or non-secular – and if we drop them, we can do a lot better” (Hon. O. Prescott, personal communication, July 9, 2020). He would like to continue building quality relationships among stakeholders so that when a need transpires, he can “pick up the phone” and have that direct line of communication to meet the need expeditiously in the best interest of the child (Hon. O. Prescott, personal communication, July 9, 2020). Judge Prescott believes the church could be a great asset if it is made aware of the needs of the children so that it can function within the system effectively.

There are cultural issues that must be considered when asking people to become foster parents. He expressed that the church would benefit from testimonies from families that are involved with foster care and adoption, and that church leadership can have the greatest impact in disseminating this education and awareness. He posits that the church should be a partner with the child welfare system, just as other organizations partner to provide services and that the church can have a significant impact in the areas of fostering, respite care and mentorship (Hon. O. Prescott, personal communication, July 15, 2020). He also explains a satellite problem in the public perception of the childcare system, namely that there is a capitalistic agenda motivating the system. Judge Prescott stands against this, expressing that the true motivation has always been to open your heart and home for the sake of children.

Judge Prescott noted the department made great changes since Citrus became the lead agency, and he identifies mentorship and long-term relationships as priorities. He also highlights the need for children over age 18 to receive greater assistance.

Judge Angelica D. Zayas highlights the issue of keeping sibling groups together (Hon. A. Zayas, personal communication, July 9, 2020). The trauma of the initial separation of children from their parents is exacerbated if siblings are later separated, and this is often a result of not having the space to house them. Judge Prescott agreed that providing homes is an urgent need (Hon. O. Prescott, personal communication, July 9, 2020).

Judge Marcia B. Caballero (personal communication, July 9, 2020) mentioned the shortage of volunteer Guardians (GAL's) as a pressing need in the court process. Her vision is that every child in every case has someone advocating for him or her. The judges also discussed the changes that a child faces once the child has turned 18 and is exiting the system. There is an option to apply for extended foster care, wherein they can receive support from Citrus until age 21, but this support is not the same as the kind they receive as children. They will only be eligible for this support if they work full-time or go to school full-time. Judge Caballero sees an opportunity for improvement in the way children are supported when aging out through mentoring and other tangible methods, noting that youth only receive a small package of supplies and not much else (Hon. M. Caballero, personal communication, July 9, 2020).

Judge Zayas also spoke of the dangers that face a child who ages out of the system, noting that children who age out at 18 are no more prepared to live on their own than the children who grow up in a healthy family scenario. However, those who age out of the system are at a bigger disadvantage because they have not received the family mentorship and stability compared to other young adults and are therefore at much greater risk of becoming homeless.

WHAT'S NEXT

Judge Prescott described meetings previously held at local churches with representatives from the dependency and delinquency systems. These meetings were intended to explain the process courts so that the community could learn about these systems and be prepared, rather than coming to awareness of the issues during a crisis or after the fact. Once in-person meetings resume, it will be instructive to hear from foster children and foster parents, gaining direct contact with personal stories and allowing church members to connect more genuinely with people and their testimonies. There should be special training for foster parents willing to take on teenagers to provide a relationship with children who enter adulthood without the emotional resources they need to thrive (Hon. O. Prescott, personal communication, July 9, 2020). The judges expressed their openness in participating with the outcomes of this report, and with remaining engaged and approachable to the purported model.

3.5. BIOLOGICAL PARENTS ATTORNEY REPRESENTATIVE: THE OFFICE OF CRIMINAL CONFLICT AND CIVIL REGIONAL COUNSEL THIRD REGION

WHO THEY ARE

The Office of Criminal Conflict and Civil Regional Counsel Third Region was created under Florida legislation in 2007 to provide legal representation to indigent people in criminal, dependency, delinquency and mental health cases (The Office of Criminal Conflict and Civil Regional Counsel, 2020).

WHAT THEY DO

Margaret Julien, the managing attorney for the dependency division under Eugene Zenobi (appointed by the governor of Florida), supervises 17 attorneys in the firm. Ms. Julien and her team represent the biological parents on dependency cases in the foster care system. “Our goal is to reunify our clients with their children” (M. Julien, personal communication, July 14, 2020). Each attorney in the dependency division has approximately 40 cases representing indigent parents. Many clients face mental health issues, substance abuse addiction, and a history of trauma themselves. “It is a very difficult job where we attempt to assist the parents overcome many obstacles in order to achieve reunification” (M. Julien, personal communication, July 14, 2020).

OBSERVATIONS

The biological parents need representation and support to help attain permanency for the child and for reunification to occur. The attorneys visit their clients in jail, in the office, at the courthouse and even in their homes, and are in constant contact with the clients addressing every facet of their

lives. There is a great need to hire social workers so the attorneys can focus on litigation for their clients. The need is also greater for support and wraparound services for these biological parents. Poverty and neglect are one of the primary reasons that children are removed. Lack of housing presents hurdles to reunification even when a parent has completed all other services. For instance, many children in foster care are not allowed back with their biological parents because the parents no longer qualify for housing because they no longer have their children living with them, essentially a catch-22 situation (M. Julien, personal communication, July 14, 2020).

WHAT'S NEXT

Ms. Julien and her team continue to represent and advocate for biological parents. They want to provide more wraparound support for biological parents so that reunification and permanency can be achieved without a return of the foster child into the system. These parents need help. “I want a holistic approach to defense, I don’t want to just fix their dependency problem, because they are going to come back in if we don’t help them with their divorce, or the family law problem, or the immigration problem, with that ticket they got in traffic court that has turned into a habitual driving record now...because they don’t have the money to fix it, or a pending eviction — all of that. We have to fix the entire person, or they are just going to keep coming back in” (M. Julien, personal communication, July 14, 2020).

One thing is certain: These attorneys have the hearts and minds to make the case for biological parents, along with a desire to advocate for true change so that this cycle is broken, and true permanency and health is reached for families.

3.6. CITRUS FAMILY CARE NETWORK

WHO THEY ARE

Citrus Family Care Network (Citrus) is the lead Community-based Care Center for DCF's southern region, which incorporates Miami-Dade and Monroe counties. Citrus has subcontracted four agencies to provide full dependency case plan management services to children in their care: Center for Family and Child Enrichment (CFCE) in Northern Miami-Dade, Family Resource Center (FRC) in central Miami-Dade, Children's Home Society (CHS) in south Miami-Dade, and Wesley House in Monroe County. These agencies are also known as Full Case Management Agencies, or FCMAAs (L. Veiga, personal communication, August 4, 2020).

WHAT THEY DO

Citrus monitors the permanency progress within the four FCMAAs, with the top goal being reunification. When that is not possible, the best outcome includes kinship care and adoption. Citrus uses various community agencies to provide case-specific services for prevention,

enrichment, and resources to address challenges and provide support, when needed (M. Torres, personal communication, June 19, 2020).

OBSERVATIONS

There are currently 1,637 children in out-of-home care in Miami-Dade County, with Black children disproportionately comprising the highest percentage (M. Torres, personal communication, June 19, 2020). Citrus leadership is eager to find common ground to stay committed and respond to the calling to create a stronger support system. Citrus recognizes the needs and benefits of a partnership with the faith-based community to increase and retain quality foster homes.

WHAT'S NEXT

The broader vision for Citrus is that more churches could join them to make a significant impact on each foster child. For example, churches in the Catholic community have “adopted” foster families by providing in-kind services and support. Per the Citrus recruitment supervisor, a church’s pastor must be “the voice” of child welfare to his congregations and he must reflect the need for a safe, stable, and loving foster home. The desire is for a foster child to stay in or near the community the child grew up in (N. Rolle, personal communications, June 19th, 2020). Citrus supports the connection between the child and their family of origin by focusing on a concept known as “co-parenting” which favors a structured and healthy communication between the biological parent(s) and the foster parent(s) for the well-being of the child (barring egregious abuse, neglect, and/or abandonment).

The Quality Training Initiative (QPI), led by Trudy Petkovich was established over a decade ago so that co-parenting can be a tangible and successful outcome during the case plan. Co-parenting might seem complicated, but QPI breaks it down into succinct milestones that happen immediately once a child has been placed in a foster home. For example, once a shelter hearing takes place, there is a “comfort call” between the foster parent and a therapist to help the foster child settle into their home. Within two weeks, a follow-up call is initiated between the foster(s) and the biological parent(s). During this call, the foster parent(s) is able to learn more about the child and their needs, even going into the child’s likes and dislikes to maintain a positive foster experience. The next communication will gear towards the biological parent(s). The foster parent(s) reaches out to the biological parent(s) to identify their needs in an effort to help them progress towards a successful case plan. Co-parenting creates an important bond and structured support between the foster and biological parent(s). The goal is for these calls to occur every three months and continue until the end of placement. QPI works diligently to establish and maintain these relationships and although not every co-parenting relationship is perfect, they have successfully constructed this wraparound support for both foster and biological parent(s). Co-parenting is an essential ingredient towards a healthy placement experience of a child. QPI continues its co-parenting efforts with these

milestone calls during the case plan with reunification considered the most advantageous outcome for the child (T. Petkovich, personal communication, October 28, 2020). Citrus has laid the foundation and extended an open invitation for the capital “C” Church to actively invest and be a resource of care for the foster community. Marta Torres, Director of Licensing and Placement at Citrus, conveyed the vision remains the same for Citrus and the Church: that each foster child develops positive relationships and is living within a family environment home where the child feels accepted, cherished, loved and adored (M. Torres, personal communication, June 2020).

3.7. THE C.H.A.N.C.E PROGRAM

WHO THEY ARE

Citrus is a non-profit federally qualified health center and community mental health center that has been serving South Florida since 1979 through a wide range of behavioral health and primary care programs. The Citrus Helping Adolescents Negatively Affected by Commercial Exploitation (CHANCE) Program was founded by Citrus as a pilot program, with funding from the Florida Department of Children and Families and the Community Based Care Lead Agency for Child Welfare in the Southern Region. The program was founded in 2013 and expanded to Broward County in 2016. Dr. Gihan Omar is the clinical supervisor for foster care at Citrus and oversees the CHANCE Program, and Maria Clara Harrington is the training and outreach coordinator for the CHANCE Program.

WHAT THEY DO

The CHANCE Program is a specialized therapeutic foster care and community response team for victims of commercial sexual exploitation and human trafficking. The CHANCE Program provides services through two tracks – CHANCE Specialized Therapeutic Foster Care and CHANCE Community Response Team – or in the Citrus Health Network Statewide Inpatient Psychiatric Program, depending on the needs of the child. As part of its Foster Care Department, Citrus currently recruits and licenses Specialized Therapeutic Foster Care (STFC) homes. In STFC, a maximum of two children can be placed in a home, and foster parents are required to obtain an additional 36 hours of specialized training beyond the regular foster home license. There are two levels of STFC homes: Level 2 is the most intensive, and children can step down to Level 1 as problematic behaviors become more positive. Children in STFC may have a mental health diagnosis, experience frequent hospitalizations, have a history of running away, and/or exhibit aggressive behaviors without success in less intensive placements. Children in STFC homes must always be supervised by the foster parent. Foster parents can have their biological child in the home, but the foster care team works diligently to match the dynamics of the home with the child being placed (G. Omar, personal communication, July 22, 2020).

Youth in the CHANCE Specialized Therapeutic Foster Care track, have additional services and requirements in place. The youth is placed in a secure, single child STFC home with a stable family that will commit to the child's care. CHANCE foster parents receive an additional 24 hours of training, beyond STFC requirements, in the unique behavioral, emotional, and social needs of this population. CHANCE foster parents are available 24/7 to respond to the needs of the child. Specialized home support staff is also available to provide enhanced services 24/7. There are 13 CHANCE foster homes, and they provide STFC services to child survivors of human trafficking (M.C. Harrington, personal communication, July 22, 2020). For youth in the CHANCE Community Response Team (CRT) track, the youth may reside in a foster home, shelter, group home or in relative and non-relative care. Some children will be in care with their parents or guardian from the onset of treatment. CHANCE services can continue once a youth moves on from a CHANCE STFC home to ensure continuity of care. The CHANCE CRT also works with survivors who reside in alternative placements to stabilize them in their current environment or to assist in the identification and transition to an appropriate living situation.

Youth in both the CHANCE STFC and CRT tracks are assigned the following upon entering the program:

- An individual therapist two to five times per week based on clinical necessity and on call 24/7
- A family therapist available when necessary
- A life coach with 24-hour support, assistance, and advocacy from a CSEC survivor
- Group therapy in psycho-educational groups for CSEC survivors (16-week manualized curriculum)
- A targeted case manager
- Certified behavioral analyst services as clinically indicated

Youth in both the CHANCE STFC and CRT tracks will receive the following wraparound services upon entering the program:

- Assessment and evaluation
- Individualized treatment and service plan development
- 24/7 On Call Clinical Staff: For CHANCE clients and foster parents
- Regular monitoring to ensure the service and treatment plans' goals and objectives are consistently pursued
- Psychiatric services
- Substance abuse treatment
- Primary care health services

OBSERVATIONS

CHANCE has been recognized nationally and is taking steps to become an evidence-based model. Ms. Harrington hosts trainings and presentations in the community and at local churches. Recruitment of STFC foster parents, and especially CHANCE STFC foster parents, is challenging. The primary tool is word of mouth and CHANCE relies on referrals from current foster parents. Most of the foster families are from faith-based communities. These foster parents work with a challenging population and burnout often happens, but the need is consistent. In the last year, three homes closed for various reasons and two opened. The available homes only make up a small percent of what is necessary for the kids being trafficked. Most of the children in the CHANCE program are between 11 and 17 years old; some of them even have babies of their own. The team's highest priority is increasing their capacity to meet the demand (M.C. Harrington, personal communication, July 22, 2020).

Since the beginning of the CHANCE Program, Citrus has been working with the University of South Florida, which was contracted by them as the research partner for the pilot program. The USF team's evaluation process examines the implementation and delivery of CHANCE services, including the types of services provided to youth, how service provision is tailored to meet youth's individualized treatment needs, fidelity to the program model and how services are experienced by participating youth and their caregivers. The outcomes of interest include youth strengths, risk behaviors, trauma response, emotional and behavioral health, and functioning at home, at school, and in the community. USF releases a quarterly report on the findings of the research project.

WHAT'S NEXT

Dr. Omar explained the upcoming projects and needs for the CHANCE program:

- A state-provided 50-year lease on 34 acres of land in the Miami Gardens area to develop a campus for inpatient, specialized foster children needing therapeutic foster care and CHANCE services. The campus would include a residence, a school, equine therapy and a step-down option to a group home or integration back to the community. Simply bringing the current building to the operational level would require an estimated \$1 million.
- More therapeutic homes to meet the current capacity, create more suitable matches and eventually provide respite care to minimize foster parent burnout.

Another reason CHANCE needs more homes is that CHANCE is aiming to become an evidence-based model by completing at least two randomized trials, and this can only be accomplished if they have more homes (G. Omar, personal communication, July 22, 2020).

3.8. SOUTH FLORIDA FOSTER AND ADOPTIVE PARENT ASSOCIATION

WHO THEY ARE

The South Florida Foster and Adoptive Parent Association (SFFAPA) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization with a mission to create triumphant outcomes for children in foster care through the support, education and empowerment of the families who care for them. SFFAPA has over 300 active foster, adoptive and kinship family members giving them a unique caregiver's perspective while providing essential services and support to families who care for Miami Dade County's most vulnerable children. Information and insights were provided by SFFAPA President Denise Beeman-Sasiain (personal communication, July 15, 2020).

WHAT THEY DO

SFFAPA's program services aim to ensure skilled, committed, and loving foster families are available to meet the diverse needs of abused and neglected children. SFFAPA provides monthly in-service training to ensure that foster and adoptive families are educated and informed to meet the needs of the children in their care. In the past year, SFFAPA awarded over 1,400 continuing education hours to foster parents. SFFAPA's monthly Saturday morning workshops averaged 70 foster parents per training, representing more than 700 foster parents who entered through their doors.

As a therapeutic support group, SFFAPA's Fostering Love and Support Group meets monthly. This invaluable therapeutic support group serves as a respectful, non-judgmental safe space for foster and adoptive parents to connect, share and support one another. The group focuses on effective coping strategies for managing stress related to fostering and adopting, healing from grief and loss, and maintaining emotional well-being and self-care. SFFAPA's peer-facilitator, Dr. Melissa Miller-Muñoz, facilitates each monthly discussion and participates as a member. She is a foster parent, as well as a conflict resolution specialist and counselor, with experience in the family system.

Peer Advocates support foster families throughout their entire fostering journey by providing ongoing mentoring, training and advocacy, which ensures their success. The Foster Parent Peer Advocate Program, which is funded by Citrus Family Care Network, provides ongoing mentoring support to over 100 foster families yearly, including short-term interventions. Foster homes that receive Peer Advocate Support provide greater placement stability, and the foster parents attend court and co-parent with biological parents at much higher rates than foster families who have not received mentoring.

Yearly, SFFAPA organizes events, such as an Annual Back to School Event (which supplies over 300 backpacks filled with school supplies to foster and adoptive children) and a Holiday Toy Drive (which made Christmas dreams come true for 300 children who submitted over 700 specific "What

I want for Christmas wishes”). Since most foster children arrive at their foster homes with only the clothes on their backs, South Florida Fosters oversees a clothing closet with new and gently used clothing, baby accessories and bedroom furniture for families in Miami-Dade County.

OBSERVATIONS

The SFFAPA recognizes the need for more community engagement. Community Based Care organizations, by definition, necessitate the involvement of a diverse community to create triumphant outcomes for children involved in a complex, overworked, and underfunded system of care. SFFAPA’s strength is also its weakness: SFFAPA is uniquely adept in identifying and meeting the needs of caregivers. As it stands, most individuals on the SFFAPA Board of Directors are foster or adoptive parents from distinct professional backgrounds. SFFAPA is actively seeking board members with diverse community perspectives to govern the organization as it evolves into an anchor child welfare organization. Any individuals with diverse professional backgrounds in business development, IT, grant writing, marketing, etc., who believe that society must do better to ensure successful outcomes for all kids in foster care and instinctively think outside of the box to make that goal a reality, are encouraged to apply to SFFAPA’s Board of Directors (D. Beeman-Sasiain, personal communication, July 15, 2020).

WHAT’S NEXT

Several ways the SFFAPA would like to effect change is by continuing to achieve unprecedented measurable outcomes through its peer advocate program and by filling the gap regarding expectations placed on foster and adoptive families by providing knowledge and support. Moreover, SFFAPA believes that experienced foster and adoptive parents are key to recruiting, training, and retaining foster and adoptive families. SFFAPA envisions a structured plan in which experienced, dynamic and successful foster and adoptive families act as co-facilitators of the PRIDE licensing training. SFFAPA also envisions a comprehensive Peer Advocate Program for adoptive families, using the peer support model, evidence-based measures and best industry practices to impart crucial knowledge and support to families considering and experiencing challenges with adoption. SFFAPA is thankful for the progress made, but remains steadfast in the hope that by coming together as a community, all children can thrive.

3.9. MIAMI-DADE COUNTY FOSTER AND ADOPTIVE PARENT ASSOCIATION

WHO THEY ARE

Miami-Dade County Foster and Adoptive Parent Association (MDC FAPA) is a 501(c)(3) organization with a 30-year history of supporting foster, adoptive and kinship families from County Line Road to Homestead. There are over 300 families served by the organization, which offers several programs and services to its membership. Information and insights were provided by President Travis Davis and CEO Shamel Jenkins (personal communication, July 17, 2020).

WHAT THEY DO

MDC FAPA meets monthly in Opa-Locka and Homestead and supports children and families in tangible ways to ensure they know they are not alone. Ms. Jenkins and Mr. Davis itemized several programs and services provided by MDC FAPA that make it the “niche makers” (S. Jenkins, personal communication, July 17, 2020):

- Jewels & Gems, a youth leadership and mentorship program offering teens college visits, scholarships, and attendance at National Youth Leadership conferences. Teens whose families are affiliated with FAPA have also created support for one another.
- Bi-weekly food distributions in Opa-Locka and Homestead.
- The provision to Citrus of 8,000 masks for children and families in care.
- Wraparound services to foster parents, including scholarships to attend conferences.
- A resource hotline for foster parents. Ms. Jenkins reports that she and Mr. Davis know the families personally and can guide them through their trials and tribulations.

OBSERVATIONS

The lack of information and understanding about foster family needs is a point of concern. MDC FAPA envisions hosting a “tell-a-thon” where stories can be told and information on how to get involved can be shared (S. Jenkins, personal communication, July 17, 2020).

WHAT’S NEXT

In summary, MDC FAPA looks forward to seeing how the Church can collaborate with local organizations like MDC FAPA to make a successful impact in the Miami-Dade foster care system and continue to engage the local community for continued support (S. Jenkins, personal communication, July 17, 2020).

FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATION

3.10. ONE MORE CHILD

WHO THEY ARE

One More Child is a Christ-centered organization founded in 1904 in the small town of Arcadia, Florida, with the vision to mobilize and support the local church by showing the love of God to children and their families while providing stable foster homes, wraparound services and other supportive measures within the foster care system. One More Child began as the Florida Baptist Orphanage. However, its core mission has remained constant (S. Robert, personal communication, July 1, 2020). The organization is led by Executive Vice President Stephen Robert, along with Dr. Pam Whitaker as Vice President of programs, Melissa Poole as the Executive Director of Foster Care and Regional Director of South Florida, Panagiotis Kourtesis (S. Robert, Personal communication, July 1, 2020).

One More Child concentrates on six key issues:

- Anti-sex trafficking
- Foster care
- Single mother residential and community programs
- Family support (all-encompassing preventive and supportive care for families in need)
- Child hunger initiatives (domestically and internationally)
- International care and ministry programs

WHAT THEY DO

One More Child transitioned away from traditional group foster homes and focused its attention on foster family homes, creating a hybrid between the traditional group home and an individual home so that foster siblings stay together, and larger groups of foster kids are accommodated. Quality foster parents licensed by One More Child move into these hybrid homes rent-free while keeping siblings together and giving more children the ability to receive quality care during placement. One More Child continues to provide emergency shelters for children in Lakeland and Leesburg, Florida (S. Robert, personal communication, July 1, 2020).

During 2019, One More Child managed approximately 600 foster homes and 1,500 children within those homes across the state, along with 22 hybrid foster homes (M. Poole, personal communication, July 1, 2020). Partnering agencies own a few of the hybrid homes, allowing One More Child to manage services and license the foster parents without upkeep of the building. Other homes are exclusively owned by One More Child after partners fundraise and deed over the property to the organization.

Every foster parent who stays in these homes must be employed or have enough financial assistance to cover the expenses of fostering as required by the state. The lack of mortgage

payments and other household utilities is an added benefit for these foster parents, giving them an increased ability to properly care for the children (S. Robert, personal communication, July 1, 2020).

OBSERVATIONS

Currently, One More Child does not have any foster family homes in Miami-Dade County, although it has seen the impact that churches can have when corporate unification occurs. Awareness of how churches can initiate their involvement without losing their identity is a critical component. The goal is to increase the number of foster care ministries within each church to support the larger vision. Executive Vice President Stephen Robert envisions a potential solution through educating church staff and congregations about Child Placement Agencies (CPAs) like One More Child. These CPAs take the lead in the partnership, so the heavy lifting is done by them and the church stays involved in the most seamless way possible without feeling intimidated (M. Poole and S. Robert, personal communication, July 1, 2020).

WHAT'S NEXT

The future is bright for One More Child as it continues to implement foster family homes, wraparound services and licensing while sustaining its growth model for Florida. One More Child is actively expanding services and programs in Miami-Dade County. One More Child is driven by the desire to provide more children with the Christ-centered services and care they wholeheartedly deserve (S. Robert, personal communication, June 2020).

3.11. 4KIDS

WHO THEY ARE

4KIDS is a faith-based foster care organization that lives out the Biblical call for the church to care for orphans in distress. With 23 years of experience as a licensed Child Placement Agency (CPA), it formed out of Calvary Chapel of Fort Lauderdale, the first church that stepped up to actively recruit foster families. Although it operates as a ministry first, 4KIDS is a separate 501 (c)(3) organization and works with over 200 churches in Broward, Palm Beach, Indian River, Martin, St. Lucie, and Okeechobee counties (T. Lukasik, personal communication, July 1, 2020).

WHAT THEY DO

Core values of sacrifice, perseverance, integrity, compassion, and excellence (SPICE) shape how the 4KIDS operates. It has a variety of programs and services to ensure every child has a home while offering hope and healing. EPIC therapeutic approach is used with all families, especially those experiencing trauma, by 15 clinical Christian therapists. The approach is focused on the

emotional, physical, intellectual and character needs of each child. Foster Families Program includes hundreds of foster families across six counties. Family-Style Group Homes keep siblings together, offer teens who are less likely to be adopted a real family, and provide refuge for girls at risk for human trafficking. They are unique in that they have a family living in the home rather than group home staff. His Caring Place is a safe home for young women faced with unplanned pregnancies.

Spirit of Success Institute has four independent living homes in the community where young people aging out of care can share a place to live and gain life skills, such as budgeting, resume writing and interview skills. The Communication Team allows kids, families, and young people to share their stories and reclaim their voices by telling people how their lives have been impacted. 4KIDS conducts the state's 21 hours of foster care training from a Christian perspective. The process to licensing can range 45-120 days, with the average being 90 days. While the federal and state standard says it's okay for a child in care to move on average 4.12 times per 1,000 days, 4KIDS maintains placement stability, with only .73 moves per 1,000 days (for fiscal year July 1, 2019, to June 30, 2020). As far as it knows, it has never had a failed adoption (K. Enders, personal communication, July 1, 2020).

OBSERVATIONS

4KIDS expressed that improvements could be made within the foster care system. The Church is lacking in resources and education on how to create a home for every child in need. It is a constant conversation between Pastors and praying Christians as they hope more Christian families will choose to take the next step and foster (T. Lukasik, personal communication, July 1, 2020).

WHAT'S NEXT

4KIDS President Kevin Enders foresees a great future for the organization. These are highlights of that vision:

- Targeted focus on the restoration of biological families.
- Moving toward more prevention services to keep children and their families together.
- Creating a shift to encourage foster parents to become a bridge to biological families to help support their needs.
- Expansion in other areas of the state and country. It currently has an affiliate contract with churches in Austin, Texas, and helped in the startup of foster care ministries in San Antonio, Texas, and Tampa, Florida, as well as many other areas across the country.
- Commitment to expanding recruitment and duplicating its model to allow Christians to answer the call of God. The organization continues praying over Florida and gauging the placement stability of areas to plant where the need is greatest (K. Enders, personal communication, July 1, 2020).

3.12. ONE CHURCH ONE CHILD FLORIDA

WHO THEY ARE

One Church One Child (OCOC) is a statewide private, non-profit, faith-based organization that provides adoption support services in contractual partnership with the Department of Children and Families Central Office. Its board of directors and staff are a bridge between the church, state, and communities. Its goal is to find at least one family in each church to become a foster (temporary) or adoptive (permanent) placement for a child in foster care. OCOC was started in Illinois in 1980 to address the overrepresentation of Black children in foster care. This successful child welfare program was recognized by Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government as the Innovations in American Government Winner in 1986 (Dr. A. Sailor, personal communication, July 10, 2020).

WHAT THEY DO

OCOC works in partnership with the Department of Children and Families, local community-based care lead agencies (CBCs), and their provider agencies. It serves in a support capacity as part of the child welfare network by reaching out to communities to raise awareness of the needs of children in foster care and the needs for mentors and foster or adoptive families. A large part of OCOC's work involves recruiting churches as resource partners in outreach. Its recruiting efforts involve families and mentors, who are referred to community-based care agencies for preparation, training and adoption approval or foster care licensure. OCOC tracks every family referred and supports the families throughout the foster or adoption process.

OCOC is inclusive of all denominations and racial ethnicities. However, the organization maintains a focus on minorities because of the overrepresentation of minorities in the foster care system in Miami and the entire state. According to the OCOC website, "while minorities represent approximately 16% of the state's population, over 29% of the children waiting for adoption are minorities."

Currently, there are over 900 churches working in partnership with OCOC statewide. Board members across the state engage with local churches in the corresponding region to open conversations regarding the children in foster care and recruitment of mentors and families from church congregations (Dr. A. Sailor, personal communication, July 10, 2020).

OBSERVATIONS

OCOC recruits for all children in the foster care system, but it is particularly interested in helping minority children who are disproportionately overrepresented. It recognizes the serious trauma that can be inflicted on a child who is removed from his or her family, and it wants to champion the

needs of children in foster care who are older and less frequently considered for adoption, especially minority children.

When OCOC begins its work with a church, it provides an overview of the program and the urgency for church partners to get involved in helping to address the needs of children languishing in foster care. A core competency of the organization is the development of strong relationships with churches. By getting to know the vision of a church and aligning it with the needs of the community, OCOC better facilitates the work done by the church and augments it (Dr. A. Sailor, personal communication, July 10, 2020).

WHAT'S NEXT

OCOC Deputy Director Rev. Al Williams (personal communication, July 10, 2020) expressed the leadership's awareness and need to concentrate on Miami due to the current challenge of "not having feet on the ground and needing a staff liaison." OCOC leadership expressed a desire for ongoing dialogue with the churches and the community partners in its continued dedication to being one of the links to help bridge the gap for children in foster care and in efforts to help ensure that children can receive the permanent quality placement they deserve (Dr. A. Sailor, personal communication, July 10, 2020).

3.13. HOPE 4 KIDS

WHO THEY ARE

Hope 4 Kids is a faith-based Foster and Adoption Parent Association (FAPA) that was founded out of the foster and adoption ministry of Christ Fellowship (CF) Church. It is the only Christian FAPA, with the goal to find a Christian home for every child in crisis while following the Biblical definition of fostering and adoption. The team is led by Fernando "Freddie" Gonzalez as President, Natalie Rodriguez-Roy as Vice President, Lisbet Gonzalez as Secretary, Rosa de Morias as Treasurer and Rey Vega as the organization's Director. All five executive team members have either personally fostered and/or adopted children and have seen first-hand the need to incorporate faith into the system of care. Their FAPA is a separate entity from CF; they are supported, however, as an auxiliary with use of the facility and outreach measures.

WHAT THEY DO

Hope for Kids recruits quality Christian foster and adoptive parents in Miami-Dade County. As a ministry, it has licensed over 300 families, leading to 600 children fostered and 100 children adopted. Many foster families came out of the 19 licensing classes held at Christ Fellowship's Palmetto Bay campus. The leaders of the ministry decided that a separate ministry was needed for

foster care to support foster families and advocate for them so Hope4Kids was created as a separate entity.

The vision of the organization is to recruit families from local churches, advocate for legislative reform (Foster Parent Bill of Rights), license at CF in local communities and other churches, and provide spiritual mentorship to foster parents (F. Gonzalez, personal communication, June 15, 2020). The FAPA has a paid membership of \$50 annually (fees are waived for the under-resourced) and gives foster parents access to a monthly “Birthday Bash” event, a Back-to-School supply giveaway, a holiday gift event and compliance with the mandatory eight hours of continuing education credits to maintain their license. The organization holds monthly meetings at which foster parents are provided with wraparound support, as well as training by qualified professionals to aid them in the everyday issues they confront as foster parents. Foster parents have a place to receive education, tangible resources, fellowship, and Bible study. There are currently 46 family memberships since inception in October 2019, but the support group has over 136 members.

OBSERVATIONS

Hope 4 Kids identified key issues within the foster system that need improvement and support:

- A need for greater communication between case managers and foster parent(s).
- An improvement in the ability of the foster parent(s) to have a voice in the care of their foster child, especially during the dependency court process, when the judge hears from the Guardian ad Litem or DCF attorney.

Potential solutions include: 1) a Citrus plan to replace the “blue book” (physical books that include all pertinent information and the case plan for the foster child), 2) the installation of an online portal for foster and adoptive parents, allowing more communication from the child’s case, 3) a new advisory committee to cultivate and consolidate voices, and 4) a stronger push to retain quality foster parents. Hope 4 Kids also wants to establish a Foster Parent Bill of Rights so that foster parents may become a legal party in the child’s case (F. Gonzalez, personal communication, June 15, 2020).

WHAT’S NEXT

Hope 4 Kids’ leadership envisions a brighter tomorrow for foster parents, giving them a stronger voice in court for their foster children and greater connectivity between the church, case managing agencies and the community.

3.14. HIS HOUSE

WHO THEY ARE

His House Children’s Home (HHCH) is a private non-profit, faith-based organization that has served over 19,000 children over 31 years of service. It supports and cares for foster children based on the love of God and the love of children (S. Torres, personal communication, July 8, 2020).

WHAT THEY DO

His House provides residential group and shelter care services to children in out-of-home care, state-approved foster care licensing and placement through DCF and ChildNet, clinical and independent living services provided on campus and foster care placement for unaccompanied alien children. The facility has 232 beds, with 88 beds allocated to foster care youth. His House conducts licensing classes using the CARE curriculum in English. It is not a faith-based curriculum, but it adds the faith element in the training. For the last two years, His House has also provided expedited licensing that is currently available online due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

OBSERVATIONS

The greatest need impacting child welfare in Miami-Dade County is providing homes for teenagers and sibling groups. Additional needs expressed by D. Castrillon and S. Torres (personal communication, July 8, 2020) include a need for healing and church support, churches that are focused on the area of foster and adoption, and the need for educating and equipping church members for the call of foster care. Leadership expressed a renewed sense of hope with Citrus now in place as the lead CBC In Miami. New judges have contributed to a more positive atmosphere as well. Current partnerships mentioned by D. Castrillon include VOUS Church (I Love My City monthly outreach), Potential Church, Trinity Church, Christ Fellowship, and newly added King Jesus Ministries. “There are thousands of churches in Miami-Dade County and if one family in one church fostered one child, we would not have the problem we have now” (D. Castrillon and S. Torres, personal communication, July 8, 2020).

WHAT’S NEXT

Due to COVID-19, several fundraising opportunities had to be cancelled or postponed. To keep the community engaged and aware of how to give, HHCH will be making a virtual tour video to showcase how the children live. HHCH will be relocating to a more cost-effective campus and leadership is excited about opening the lines of communication and the partnerships forming. “I get goosebumps [about the potential collaborations in the future] because as Christians, we’re called to care for the orphans,” Ms. Torres said.

THE CHURCHES

3.15. VOUS CHURCH: ACTIVE FOSTER CARE MINISTRY

WHO THEY ARE

VOUS Church, formerly The Rendezvous (Meeting Place) of Miami Gardens, is pastored by Rich Wilkerson Jr., along with his wife, Dawn Cheré Wilkerson. Their desire is to pastor a diverse community with a drive to reach the next generation, including foster children (Our Pastors Rich and Dawn Cheré Wilkerson, 2020). Kat Rowse is the Director on the pastoral team and currently runs their foster care model. “At VOUS Church we recognize the compassion, dedication and strength it takes to be a foster parent in Miami. We honor and celebrate those who answer the call to foster while coming alongside them to support and encourage them along the journey” (K. Rowse, personal communication, June 25, 2020). VOUS implemented this foster care model to recruit, retain and minister to Miami-Dade foster families, showing God’s love every step of the way.

WHAT THEY DO

VOUS Church launched four foster care teams around the city of Miami with the intention to provide wraparound support and encouragement for foster families during their journey. Each Care Team includes two team leaders who oversee the volunteers, any licensing certifications, and the communication between the foster family and VOUS Team (VOUS Foster Care, 2020). Each VOUS Foster Parent Group is conducted in a group setting so that foster parents can communicate with each other for practical support and guidance (VOUS Foster Care, 2020). The meetings are held bi-weekly so that foster parents have enough time to attend other small groups or Bible studies. VOUS Foster Family Support provides wraparound services to meet the needs of the foster parents and their foster child (K. Rowse, personal communication, June 25, 2020).

Members of VOUS are matched with a family, and each volunteer must have a proper two-step background screening. Once their background is passed, they will start providing weekly support to the foster family. The intention of Foster Family Support is to walk alongside the foster families with wraparound care, including babysitting (two-stage licensing required), transportation and other needs. VOUS volunteers send out supportive weekly text messages to their foster family to assess current needs (K. Rowse, personal communication, June 25, 2020).

Foster Care Operations manages the day-to-day issues and administration of licensing classes, meal deliveries, communications and invitations to upcoming events while directly communicating with foster family groups (team members and foster families) to encourage a healthy and supportive bridge between the two. The Foster Care Resource Team is comprised of members of VOUS Church who have a professional background in the child welfare system to lend non-conflicting support and advice directly to foster parents. VOUS is currently partnered with His House Christian Ministries, which administers the licensing classes within the church

(VOUS Foster Care, 2020). Due to the COVID-19 outbreak, Citrus is offering online licensing classes and VOUS will offer these classes to upcoming foster parents during the pandemic (K. Rowse, personal communication, June 25, 2020).

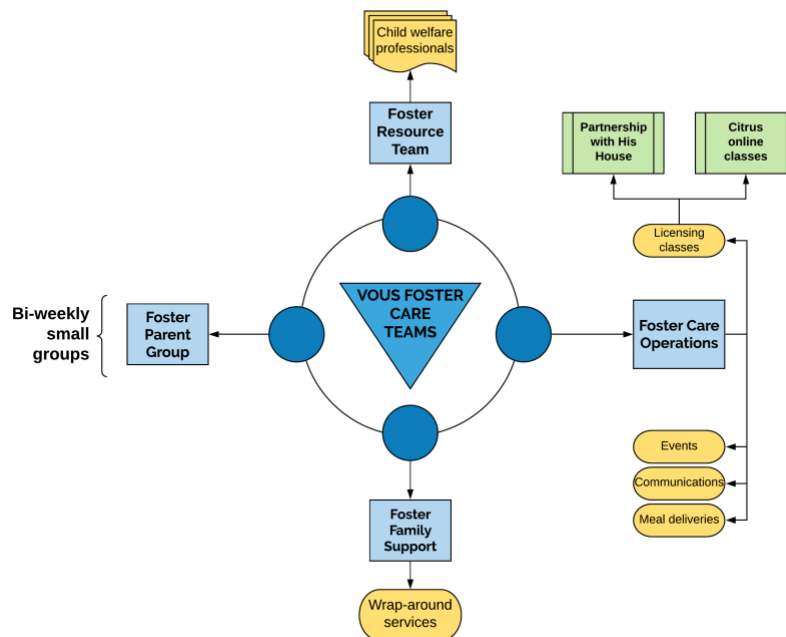
OBSERVATIONS

VOUS continues to see within the foster community that there is a lack of loving, stable foster parents retained over time, especially those that provide enough support for long-term care. VOUS’ model of supporting and walking alongside each foster family will increase the likelihood of retention and reduce the need for excessive placements for a foster child. Currently, there is a lack of male foster parents. VOUS desires to recruit more over time through its church and community (K. Rowse, personal communication, June 25, 2020).

WHAT’S NEXT

VOUS’ vision is to continue to expand its foster parent group that is receiving support. VOUS has a lot of servant leaders. If there was a higher demand, it could increase the size of its support team. Specifically, it is investing in a relationship with Citrus so that it can make more contacts with foster parents. VOUS church is adding Care Support Groups for foster parents and would love to plan a foster parent event once the pandemic is over. “Our vision is to be a healthy program. Healthy things grow” (Kat Rowse, personal communication, June 25, 2020).

Figure G: VOUS Foster Care Model



3.16. HOPE, HEART AND HOME: ACTIVE FOSTER CARE MINISTRY

WHO THEY ARE

Hope, Heart and Home is a faith-based community coalition that partners with seven child welfare agencies and the 11 parishes of the South Dade Deanery of the Archdiocese of Miami to support children in the foster care system. It is based in the South Dade Deanery of the Archdiocese of Miami. Eric Schwindeman created the coalition with three parishes (St. John Neumann, St. Louis, and St. Catherine) and it has since expanded to 11 Catholic parishes in Miami-Dade County. Mr. Schwindeman works to focus the efforts of the Catholic community towards tangible results in the children and family system.

WHAT THEY DO

Hope, Heart and Home is an initiative that began and currently acts as a clearinghouse for prospective volunteers. Volunteers are interviewed to determine which of the five areas of foster care ministry fits them best. The initiative began with the desire of one parish to be “the hands and feet of Christ,” and that desire has now expanded to include 11 parishes in Miami-Dade County. St. John Neumann recognized the brave commitment of taking a child into a home and created an exceptional model showing parishioners and congregations that there is a place for everyone to serve (E. Schwindeman, personal communication, July 7, 2020).

The model centers on providing on-campus recruitment and training for the following five service areas: 1) foster parents, 2) Guardians (GAL’s), 3) respite care, 4) a Florida Foster Care Review panel, and 5) Educate Tomorrow mentors. The five-fold model provides a variety of volunteer opportunities, which allows for greater diversity in the volunteer base since each person can find what best suits him or her. The volunteers do not have to commit to all five areas, but the program gives them sufficient knowledge and insight into the foster care system that they can later serve as effective advocates and champions for the cause. Equipped with expertise, volunteers can naturally market and promote the interests of the organization, which in turn centers on the best interest of the children and family systems of Miami-Dade (E. Schwindeman, personal communication, July 7, 2020).

In 2018-2019, three classes were held at St. John Neumann, where 47 Guardians (GAL’s) were trained. This model was deemed the best after visiting each parish, meeting with the Priest, and engaging with parish activists. After each mass, St. John set up a flyer distribution and an information booth where questions were answered. Publication in the network-wide newsletter has also seen a positive reaction. From the 2018 classes, the organization observed that the efficacy of the program was tied to the influence of leadership, and involvement of the parishes encouraged volunteers to attend and complete the program. Proximity breeds influence (E. Schwindeman, personal communication, July 7, 2020).

In addition, the organization coordinates and collaborates with the South Florida Foster and Adoptive Parent Association (SFFAPA) in assisting parents through the foster and/or adoption processes of licensing and certification. Mr. Schwindeman and the HHH Leadership Team act as the direct liaisons to the churches and the Hope, Heart and Home organization, and from there to the relevant governmental agencies. The organization can be contacted directly, and it serves to connect volunteers to a service. Though Citrus does not hold licensing classes at the church, the organization is invited to attend recruitment events. With regards to licensing, Mr. Schwindeman clarifies that the organization only serves as a clearing house to find prospective volunteers and starts them off on the process of licensing with the state. In that capacity, the work is ad hoc. The process of vetting volunteers and prospects before they contact the government agencies occurs case by case and when necessary (E. Schwindeman, personal communication, July 7, 2020).

OBSERVATIONS

Hope, Heart and Home is working to reduce the lack of communication among faith-based organizations, form a stronger team effort among faith-based networks, and create resources for churches to continue in foster care efforts. The organization has noticed a positive shift since Citrus became the lead CBC, indicating that Citrus has notably facilitated communications and improved the dynamic of the partnership. Once in-person meetings resume post-COVID-19, training for respite care, case review panelists and college mentors will move beyond virtual classes. For now, the organization has partnered with Citrus and the South Florida FAPA to provide backpacks and school supplies to children in care. Mr. Schwindeman understands the need to be patient in expanding the initiative, as not all parishes are accustomed to working with third-party providers outside of the church. He finds collaboration important and places a high emphasis on camaraderie, educating people about the system and the sharing of ideas (E. Schwindeman, personal communication, 2020).

WHAT'S NEXT

Next steps for Hope, Heart and Home will be to continue to formalize its foster care ministry into a system-based approach while continuing to improve and expand on its model. Its monthly meetings (now held virtually) bring volunteers together to create camaraderie, provide education and share "best practices." The organization wants to further develop relationships with the other parishes and agencies toward the end of making the initiatives of the organization more effective and providing greater aid to the volunteers who are being recruited. They are working diligently to show the love of God in each child's life and train quality long-term volunteers who can change the shape of the foster child's life.

3.17. CHRIST FELLOWSHIP CHURCH: ACTIVE FOSTER CARE MINISTRY

WHO THEY ARE

Christ Fellowship (CF) is a multi-site, multi-generational and multi-cultural church with a main campus in Palmetto Bay. CF has six other locations in downtown Miami, Doral, West Kendall, Coral Gables, Redlands, and Homestead. CF has a foster and adoption ministry that has impacted children and families for over eight years.

WHAT THEY DO

Christ Fellowship partners with Citrus by bringing licensing training into the community at the Palmetto Bay campus in both English and Spanish. It also provides meeting space to the Hope 4 Kids FAPA, whose leadership oversees the ministry at CF. As a ministry, it has helped get over 300 families licensed, 600 children fostered, and 100 children adopted. These feats are the result of holding 19 licensing classes at Christ Fellowship's Palmetto Bay campus. "The church was commanded by God to do this. That much is undisputed across denominational lines. We can't all do everything, but we can all do something. And if we all do something, none of us has to do everything" (Pastor T. Stipe, personal communication, July 19, 2020).

CF holds a monthly birthday bash for the children currently in care. When they come with the foster parent to the monthly FAPA meeting, CF volunteers engage the kids in play and discipleship. At the end of the afternoon, all birthdays for the month are celebrated with cake, refreshments, and fun. CF allots approximately \$10,000 in financial support of the ministry. Part of the funding sends kids to a Christian summer camp and provides backpacks and school supplies. CF also provides support to foster families through "Adopt a Family." Foster families can communicate their needs to their small group, and any campus can step in to provide support through the "Adopt a Family" program. Whether financial or tangible, the information goes out to ministry leaders who work on getting the need met. Most recently, a small group pooled its financial resources and was able to purchase everything on a shopping list provided by a foster mother to three foster children (one with special needs). When they delivered the supplies, they discovered the mother was preparing to take in two siblings who were physically abused by their father. They said, "we were blessed to meet her" (R. Vega, personal communication, April 27, 2020).

OBSERVATIONS

The Hope 4 Kids FAPA was developed by ministry leaders to live true to their faith every day. Now with Citrus as the Lead CBC, the tensions are eased, as the faith community is seen as a resource (R. Vega, personal communication, July 3, 2020). There is still a need to retain foster

parents. Although they have the support of the church and the FAPA, some still feel frustrated with case managers or the judicial process. CF holds quarterly ministry fairs to bring awareness to the need and recruit Christian foster parents by inviting them to an information session.

WHAT'S NEXT

Right now, the foster and adoption ministry operates predominately out of the Palmetto Bay campus. Staff and ministry leaders are prayerfully seeking more volunteers to replicate the model at the other campuses and other churches around the city.

“I wholeheartedly affirm that what we believe determines how we behave. Much of how we think and what we know shows itself in our values and actions. The Church being educated on this matter, both from the Biblical truth and the tangible need in our communities, is a step in the right direction” (Pastor G. Ape, personal communication, July 21, 2020).

3.18. NEW LIFE BAPTIST CHURCH OF CAROL CITY: UP-AND-COMING FOSTER CARE MINISTRY

WHO THEY ARE

New Life Baptist Church of Carol City is a vibrant 47-year-old church where lead Pastor Erik Cummings (President of the Florida Baptist Convention) is committed to sharing the gospel and taking the Biblical stance to care for orphans in Miami. New Life Church’s heart is to serve the community and to spread the Gospel of Christ through his love.

WHAT THEY DO

Pastor Erik Cummings of New Life explained that, “We have had 15 families over the last 20 or so years who have fostered. Our desire is to revive this ministry of fostering at our church and within the community” (personal communication, September 2, 2020). New Life currently has partnerships and ministry outreaches with His House Children’s Home and One More Child. Pastor Cummings’ wife, Dr. Monique Nichol, is also on the board of One More Child. New Life is actively educating and creating awareness to foster for the next generation of their congregation (E. Cummings, personal communication, July 15, 2020).

OBSERVATIONS

Pastor Cummings expressed that there must be passion in advocating for children in the child welfare system. His vision includes: 1) bringing awareness to his congregation and the community of the needs and opportunities to foster and become adoptive parents, 2) being a part of the process

of vetting potential foster and adoptive parents, and 3) helping prospective foster families navigate the process in the system. Pastor Cummings is looking forward to sitting down with his church leaders to discuss how New Life could formalize a ministry in child welfare. He also stated he would include over 300 churches that are members of the Baptist Convention and engage the President of the Miami Baptist Association in bringing more churches to the table (E. Cummings, personal communication, July 15, 2020).

WHAT'S NEXT

Pastor Cummings said that the key to creating momentum in foster care is to ensure that the “presenter” of the information to the churches has a “passion for child welfare” (E. Cummings, personal communication, July 15, 2020). He also mentioned it is vital to find the right churches and voices to communicate the information and to ensure the people involved have “a heart” for it – identifying quality over quantity to be able to say, “This is what we’re doing, and this is how we’re doing it” (E. Cummings, personal communication, July 15, 2020). Pastor Cummings’ closing remarks hit home: “New Life can’t do everything, but we can at least be a part of the collective and collaborative” (E. Cummings, personal communication, July 15, 2020).

3.19. IGLESIA RESCATE (RESCUE CHURCH): UP-AND-COMING FOSTER CARE MINISTRY

WHO THEY ARE

Iglesia Rescate (Rescue Church) is a growing Hispanic church in East Hialeah led by Senior Pastor David Monduy. They value discipleship, biblical doctrine, worship, family, service, and missions, and have a heart for people.

WHAT THEY DO

The name of the church in Spanish forms an acrostic that translates to “rescue the lost, teach the Word of God, be genuine disciples of Christ, build happy families, worship God passionately, transform the community, and send missionaries to the world.”

OBSERVATIONS

Pastor Monduy started to grow awareness of the childcare system through his involvement with jail ministry. He realized that everyone he met in jail had come from a home without a father and he understood that there are fatherless children who are at risk. He believes that “rescuing a child is healing the nation.” He notes that many of the problems that affect a person’s life in the long-term come from fatherlessness, including crime, substance abuse and the psychological effects of

promiscuity. Pastor Monduy references the clear call of scripture as laid out in James 1:27. “Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world” (James 1:27, NIV). He believes that the work of caring for children has the same value as the Great Commission in that it comes from the same heart that God has toward rescuing and caring for us. (D. Monduy, personal communication, July 23, 2020).

WHAT’S NEXT

When thinking about what churches could be involved, Pastor Monduy believes it is the matter of the heart that a church has to deal with, in that the church needs to understand and acknowledge what God says in the Word and desire to live it out — regardless of the sacrifices required. He believes the church has already done a great job of setting up ministries within the church, but that we cannot forget about those outside of the church. The church must seek to obey the will of God as it is outlined in the book of James.

His recommendation centers on raising awareness: “Start preaching about it, get people who are young and passionate involved, and start talking about it a lot more.” Engaging pastors is the first step to raising awareness. Once the pastors are engaged, they can go on to engage the church. “If the leadership of a church is not involved, it is exceedingly rare to see the members of the church involved” (D. Monduy, personal communication, 2020).

NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

3.20. VOICES FOR CHILDREN FOUNDATION

WHO THEY ARE

Founded in 1984, Voices for Children Foundation, Inc., became the bridge organization to promote advocacy for foster children within the system. CEO Nelson Hincapie reports to a board with a fiduciary primary responsibility. The board will “put on the breaks to any shift of the core mission, which is to raise money for the GAL program and for the children’s social, educational and physical needs” (N. Hincapie, personal communication, August 3, 2020). Along with its board and staff, Voices for Children supports the court-appointed GAL program for the Judicial Circuit 11th Court in DCF’s Southern Region for children in the foster care system (Who We Are, 2019). The GAL program spans a broad platform of necessary players, including, but not limited to, “volunteers, child advocate managers, program attorneys, pro bono attorneys, or staff members of the statewide or circuit offices” (Guardian ad Litem for Children Standards of Operations, 2020). The organization currently supports over 1,700 children, with a capacity for 2,000 (N. Hincapie, personal communication, June 16, 2020).

WHAT THEY DO

Voices for Children expressed that “the state can protect, but the church can love” (Who We Are, 2019). Its mission statement embodies its vision to help abused, abandoned, and neglected children in the system, and give them a voice during the extensive court process (N. Hincapie, personal communication, June 16, 2020). A Guardian ad Litem is a critical component of essential care for a foster child who is unable to see his or her way through the system.

OBSERVATIONS

Voices for Children knows the foster and adoption movements need more focus on prevention and a heavier emphasis on reunification of biological families. Government-run agencies often do not have the resources to attack the core issues that would result in a significant decrease in foster children. The organization sees the potential in opportunities to increase spiritual growth and healing by showing God’s love to the children and their families (N. Hincapie, personal communication, June 16, 2020).

WHAT’S NEXT

CEO Nelson Hincapie expressed that taking personal responsibility for our individual stories will cause the shift that the foster and adoption community needs. The foundation’s future vision includes more specialized training for the Guardians (GAL’s) who support each child, more focused work on survivors of human trafficking, and a desire to increase spiritual growth and transformation for each foster child and family. “The system is a system, and systems don’t change

people. People helping people transform their lives” (N. Hincapie, personal communication, June 16, 2020).

3.21. BIG BROTHERS BIG SISTERS OF MIAMI (BBBS)

WHO THEY ARE

Big Brothers Big Sisters of America (BBBS) has empowered youth in local communities for more than a century, giving them a future to look forward to and equipping them for success. The organization offers wraparound support not only to the child, but to the family, as well, and connects at-risk youth, ages 5-25 (Littles), to committed adult mentors (Bigs). “As a nationwide organization, we are committed to being part of the solution toward reducing the violence and victimization children and youth face and addressing the impact of trauma in children’s lives across the hundreds of communities served by our local agencies” (Big Brothers Big Sisters of America, 2020).

WHAT THEY DO

In the fiscal year 2019-2020, BBBS mentored 3,100 youth: 2,047 through their traditional one-to-one mentoring program and the rest through group and college success mentoring. From that total, about 10% are in the foster care system. Currently, there are more than 1,700 children waiting to be matched with a Big. The process to become a mentor entails: 1) an application with background screening, 2) an interview and orientation, 3) matching process and meeting, and 4) supervision of the match by a program specialist. The application process, on average, takes 60 days to complete and the commitment is a minimum of one year (G. Nelson, personal communication, July 17, 2020).

OBSERVATIONS

President and CEO Gale Nelson expressed a few of the challenges seen at BBBS, which include the difficulty for the mentor/mentee relationship that inconsistency of foster care placement poses and the disproportionate racial makeup of mentor to mentee. About 54% of mentees are Black while only 20% of mentors are Black. Overall, 98% of youth who are served come from a community of color while only 76% of mentors do. Though matching based on racial makeup is not a must, a mentor with a similar racial makeup can contribute a deeper level of understanding of the Little’s experience. The volunteer vetting is a 1 ½-hour process and a volunteer’s Christian faith does not have to be withheld from the process, as mentee families can request a mentor of faith. Another concern is the number of Black boys waiting to be paired for mentoring. About 56% of youth waiting to be matched with a mentor are boys and 50% are Black. An additional 48% come from another community of color – Hispanic, Asian, mixed-race, or other.

WHAT'S NEXT

BBBS Miami is optimistic about the newfound relationship with Citrus Family Network. Per a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for the new fiscal year, Citrus has agreed to identify and refer children ages 5-15 who need mentorship. These referrals will come directly from the agency and do not have to go through the foster placement, thereby reducing the breakdown in relations if there is a placement change. During this time of new social rules, BBBS Miami is still able to conduct mentor recruitment events in the community and can provide mobile fingerprinting while practicing social distancing. BBBS Miami expressed a desire to partner with more churches, especially in the communities where the needs are the greatest, because “Mentoring isn’t nice – it’s necessary” (G. Nelson, personal communication, July 17, 2020).

3.22. HABITAT FOR HUMANITY

WHO THEY ARE

Habitat for Humanity is a global non-profit dedicated to making home ownership a reality for families in local communities in all 50 states and in over 70 countries (Habitat for Humanity, 2020). The homes are sold to families at cost (interest free), usually around \$175,000 (M. Ruggiero, personal communication, July 16, 2020). Habitat’s vision is “building strength, stability and self-reliance in partnership with families in need of decent and affordable housing. Habitat homeowners help build their own homes alongside volunteers and pay an affordable mortgage” (Habitat for Humanity, 2020).

WHAT THEY DO

Habitat for Humanity provides families a place to call home and builds communities. Habitat builds houses on scattered lots throughout the county, but also builds communities where there are dozens of homes together. It has a “Blitz Build” each year where eight to ten homes are built in proximity to each other in approximately two weeks with the help of 1,000 volunteers. Each family that purchases a home must complete 250 hours of "sweat equity" to help build its home, as well as homes for other families in the program (Habitat for Humanity, 2020). The future homeowners become friends with their neighbors long before move-in day as they work side-by-side to complete construction of the homes, as well as participate in ten workshops to prepare them for homeownership.

Habitat partners with corporations, family foundations, individuals, and churches to fund its programs. Many corporations commit to financially sponsor the building of a home, with representatives from the corporation assisting on one or more days with the actual building of the home they sponsor. Some corporations provide incentives to their employees to encourage participation, such as a paid day to volunteer together as a team (M. Ruggiero, personal communication, July 16, 2020).

OBSERVATIONS

In relation to foster care, Habitat for Humanity sees the potential collaboration between the foster community and the Habitat community. Foster parents would need to qualify on their own for a home to be built for them. However, to receive higher consideration, children would already need to be in their care as opposed to them being a single individual (M. Ruggiero, personal communication, July 16, 2020).

WHAT'S NEXT

Habitat for Humanity desires to continue the foster care conversation. Providing a home for young people aging out of foster care and providing homes for potential foster parents both require additional investigation of all the rules and regulations. However, the outlook looks positive for this collaboration (M. Ruggiero, personal communication, July 16, 2020).

3.23. FLORIDA FOSTER CARE REVIEW

WHO THEY ARE

Florida Foster Care Review (FFCR) is a 501(c)(3) organization funded by The United Way, foundations, grants, state and local governments, and private donations to lead the Citizen Review Panel (CRP). The CRP consists of volunteers who review child welfare dependency cases. Florida Statute, Chapter 39, outlines the CRP's process of reviewing the case, discussing the case, and making recommended orders and findings to the court. In addition, FFCR administers the Permanency Roundtable (PRT) Program, which works with case managers, community partners and youth to explore all possible permanency options and assist in achieving the best permanency option for the youth (M. Leichter, personal communication August 4, 2020).

WHAT THEY DO

Citizen Review Panel volunteers serve on a monthly consistent basis and commit to a full day of reviewing cases. The panel volunteers, along with a Review Specialist who is employed by FFCR examine the judicial review report and supplemental case documentation before the review is held. Prospective volunteers participate in a screening interview, CRP hearing observations, three full days of training, a court observation, and read-through training material to become a Citizen Review Panel volunteer. Florida Foster Care Review (FFCR) recruits and trains volunteers from the community to review the case. The judge refers the case to be heard by the CRP. Under the Statute, the CRP is authorized to conduct the Judicial Review Hearing. The CRP does not hold any other hearings involved in the dependency court process. One of the main goals of the CRP is to ensure the agency is providing the child, parents and custodians with the services and tasks as outlined in the case plan. The panel makes recommendations to the court that promote the child's safety, well-being, and permanency (M. Leichter, personal communication August 4, 2020).

OBSERVATIONS

As mentioned above, the judge refers the case to the CRP for review. Each judge has discretion on which cases he or she refers to the panel. The case manager or someone from the case management agency must always be present at the review, and the CRP highly encourages the youth, relative caregivers, foster parents, therapists, Guardians (GAL's) and others involved to appear at the hearing. After the hearing, the panel deliberates and makes findings and recommendations, which are presented in a report. The report is submitted to the judge, who will then formally sign the report, which deems the included findings and recommendations which are binding orders of the court (M. Leichter, personal communication August 4, 2020).

WHAT'S NEXT

FFCR is actively recruiting new volunteers to join the program in 2021. FFCR, through its CRP and PRT programs, continues to promote best practices in all aspects of child welfare.

3.24. CASA VALENTINA

WHO THEY ARE

Casa Valentina was founded in 2006 by a group of concerned women who were troubled by the number of youths who were aging out of the foster care system without the proper networks of support. Casa Valentina led by Executive Director Janice Graham (M.S., EdL) is a non-profit that supports young adults who have aged out of the foster care system and/or at risk for homelessness (I. Gonzalez, personal communication, November 9, 2020).

WHAT THEY DO

Casa Valentina's program "focuses on safe and affordable housing and a comprehensive life skills curriculum in a supportive environment where residents can focus on achieving their education, employment and financial goals and gaining the strength and self-esteem they need to reach their full potential" (Casa Valentina, 2020). Their residential program caters to young men and women from 18-24 years of age and they have a maximum capacity to serve fourteen women and seven men. These young adults live independently and participate in the program weekly. The men live in separate apartments downtown and the women live in two-bedroom apartments in West Coconut Grove.

Life Skills are central to their residential program as most youths are employed and/or in school. There are five components to their curriculum: (1) job training/employment assistance, (2) education support, (3) money management, (4) self-care, and (5) daily life skills. Their residential program is holistic in the sense that there is no "one size fits all" approach. The Casa Valentina

staff works diligently to nurture and support the gifts and talents of each young adult to meet their individual goals. The young adults meet with the Casa Valentina staff (all master-level trained) for four hours a week while they are actively employed and/or in school. The program lasts approximately two to two and a half years. Six months before graduating the program, youth begin to work with their Aftercare Specialist who makes sure that each has stable housing, employment, and the resources to succeed on their own.

Casa Valentina focuses on education and training within the community so that there is a critical awareness of the urgent need that exists for affordable housing and added support for youth who are aging out of foster care (Casa Valentina, 2020). They offer the same life skills programming focused on middle and high school students who are at-risk. The middle/high school program is founded on the same life skills as their residential program. There are three high schools and three middle schools that are currently engaged in the program under the leadership of Education and Employment Manager, Charlotte Trawick. In addition to the school-based program, Casa Valentina's life skills are also delivered at partner organizations to youths ranging in age from 18-24 across Miami-Dade County (I. Gonzalez, personal communication, November 9, 2020).

OBSERVATIONS

Casa Valentina has a wide network of 70 community partners that they work with which helps their mission of spreading awareness and education for these children in foster care and for those at-risk of homelessness. They also have an extensive board and active volunteers that assist their cause (Casa Valentina, 2020).

WHAT'S NEXT

Casa Valentina is a wonderful dynamic non-profit organization that remains active in this city targeting the critical need to support youth who have aged out of foster care and/or who might face homelessness. Their holistic approach to mentorship allows the young adults to learn and adapt to their gifts and talents, giving them the tangible opportunity to reach their full potential.

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION
PROGRAMS

3.25. EDUCATE TOMORROW

WHO THEY ARE

Educate Tomorrow, championed by CEO Brett McNaught along with co-founder Virginia Emmons McNaught, provides individual coaching over an extensive period to disadvantaged youth “through educating, mentoring and life training” (Educate Tomorrow, 2020). One of the organization’s core beliefs is that poverty should not prevent youth from obtaining an education that leads to productive adult lives. Educate Tomorrow works to fill the void for disadvantaged youth to help them move forward to higher education goals and future employment opportunities. It is funded through several sources, including The Children’s Trust, private donors and foundations, and the Florida Department of Children and Families (Dr. Steve J. Rios, personal communication, October 1, 2020).

WHAT THEY DO

Educate Tomorrow targets disadvantaged youth (including foster youth) by providing highly individualized membership and coaching that targets “academics, economic stability, access to stable and affordable housing, and physical/emotional well-being” (Educate Tomorrow, 2020). Research conducted on students from foster care throughout the United States indicates that between 3% and 11% of students from foster care, depending on the program, complete any college education. These figures do not include the Educate Tomorrow program, which has seen 40% of its students obtain a degree since 2003. The organization’s continuum of support to disadvantaged youth begins with teens and extends to young adults well into their 20s.

McNaught explained the organization was started after she and McNaught heard incredible stories of youth who had aged out of the dependency system. “We were realizing that kids were literally being dropped off with a garbage bag, no records — we saw that there was this huge need” (Educate Tomorrow, 2020). Educate Tomorrow not only provides mentorship to youth approaching their college years, but also helps students develop educational plans and connects them with educational coaches, mentors and guides who can help them through the process. Foster youth and homeless youth can qualify for a tuition waiver from the (Educate Tomorrow, 2020).

At Miami Dade College (MDC), Wendy Joseph is the dedicated college coach for students using the tuition and fee exemption. MDC partners with Educate Tomorrow and Single Stop (led by Director Janet Mapp), which acts as a resource hub for foster students and their immediate families, providing free benefit screening for cash benefits, food stamps and Medicaid; free financial coaching; free legal referrals; free tax preparation services; a free food pantry, and mentorship services (Miami Dade College, n.d.).

OBSERVATIONS

Educate Tomorrow runs a contract for the Florida Department of Children and Families called Positive Pathways. Educate Tomorrow also sees itself as a connector and will continue to identify other organizations impactful for disadvantaged youth so that all organizations can work together with the goal of creating successful outcomes for them to lead professional and purposeful lives.

WHAT'S NEXT

Educate Tomorrow is an extremely valuable organization dedicated to the mission of providing higher education opportunities for disadvantaged youth. In Miami-Dade County, youth aging out of foster care now have the chance to learn about and use the DCF tuition exemption. They can receive mentorship and one-on-one coaching through Educate Tomorrow, a campus-based program or AOK Scholars Foundation, an Educate Tomorrow partner. Educate Tomorrow is meeting a vital need to help provide the future these children rightly deserve.

3.26. POSITIVE PATHWAYS

WHO THEY ARE

The Florida Department of Children and Families contracts with Educate Tomorrow to be the lead agency operating a program called Positive Pathways. The goal of Positive Pathways is to provide focused on-campus resources for foster youth by working with on-campus “foster care liaisons” at public colleges and universities throughout Florida. Liaisons are appointed at 28 state schools and ten universities (Positive Pathways, n.d.). The program is spearheaded by the dedicated Senior Director, Dr. Steve J. Rios, who has extensive background and training in foster care. (His doctoral degree is in adult education and human resource development and his dissertation focused on foster youth aging out of the system.) Since 2006, Dr. Rios has worked in the field of foster care, specifically with transitioning youth (Dr. Rios, personal communication, September 27, 2020).

Positive Pathways offers the following services for its members (Positive Pathways, n.d.):

- Technical assistance
- Monthly conference calls
- Professional development
- Networking opportunities
- Connections to funding

WHAT THEY DO

Once foster youth become eligible for tuition exemption, their journey begins. There are so many decisions to be made: choosing a school within Florida, registration, books and supplies, housing

and food, among others. Foster care liaisons provide valuable expertise and help them along the way so a foster youth can make the best decision for their post-secondary education. The program's mission statement is to "connect, unite and act" on behalf of foster youth and give them the highest chance at success. Miami Dade College and Florida International University (FIU) are both active within the Positive Pathways network.

FIU also has its own campus program for foster and homeless youth called Fostering Panther Pride (FPP), directed by Anna Ramos. FPP provides the same tailored support to homeless and foster youth and helps them attain campus housing. It also offers "Success Coaches," who mentor students, as well as a free food pantry, a laptop loan program, access to books, supplies and stipends, and other community resources (FIU, 2020). The program gives these students hope for a completely new future by providing the tools needed to focus on their education rather than their circumstances.

OBSERVATIONS

Dr. Rios expressed that there needs to be more focused research on foster youth attending colleges and universities, and that researchers need to "gather current data to ensure we all know what is happening with students in higher education." He also mentioned that he hopes that Positive Pathways can start to "target vocational educational programs and help the adults working with these students get into these valuable programs" (Dr. Rios, personal communication, September 29, 2020).

WHAT'S NEXT

Positive Pathways is an exceptional program to assist foster youth and demystify the complicated maze of the higher education system. The liaisons, along with wonderful college programs like FIU's Fostering Panther Pride and Educate Tomorrow and Single Stop at MDC, give students from foster care tangible opportunities to make their way through school to a successful career and life of their choosing. Positive Pathways recently launched a pilot program with the Florida Guardian ad Litem Program for youth past the age of 18 so they can continue to receive mentorship, personalized help and resources as they make their way into adulthood (Dr. Rios, personal communication, September 27, 2020).

4. THE CALL TO THE CORPORATE CHURCH



The call to the corporate church is louder than ever and echoes scripture. “Religion that God our father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress” (James 1:27, NIV). The Corporate Church has been given the wonderful call to show God’s love to foster children while providing hope for their future by being the “hands and feet” of Christ through active foster care ministries. Foster care is at the heart of God because his heart is for children.

“Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it. And He took the children in his arms, placed His hands on them and blessed them” (Matthew 10:14-16, NIV).

We are called to be a light in the darkness (John 1:4, NIV) and through His love we can unite to make a substantive shift in the child welfare system so that children can move forward toward their God-given future, filled with goodness and hope (Jeremiah 29:11, NIV). The Corporate Church must be wholly and fiercely involved in protecting, loving, guiding, and equipping God’s children. The concept of a “forever home” is at the very center of God's being. Sin separated us from God, but through his son, who took it upon himself to pay the ultimate sacrifice for our redemption, we are set free and given new life (John 3:16, NIV). Jesus Christ gave us the promise of new life as his children – for we have not received a spirit of fear to go back into slavery, but we have received the spirit of adoption as sons. Through Him, we are adopted children of God, forever given a home in his kingdom (Romans 8:15, NIV).

In response to this calling as His child, a firm understanding of the Gospel makes every believer an adopted image-bearer of the Heavenly Father and leads them to a clear message: We are in the greatest position to care for and change the lives of foster children in our community. While not every believer is called to adopt or foster a child, every believer is called to live out Christ’s love and represent that love on earth.

There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good (1 Corinthians 12:5-7, NIV). The Holy Spirit imparts different gifts to all his children, but "the same Spirit distributes them" (I Corinthians 12:4, NIV).

He has called some to be foster parents: Someone willing to support a biological family with prayer and love and care for a foster child with the intention of restoring the family unit.

He has called some to be in respite care: Licensed individuals willing to support those doing the heavy lifting. Respite caregivers allow children to stay in their homes when the foster and adoptive

parent needs time away for personal reasons. Respite caregivers help lighten the load and "share one another's burdens" (Galatians 6:2, NIV).

He has called some to be mentors: Children at-risk and those already in care need support and guidance in this pivotal moment in childhood. Society might categorize them as a hopeless statistic, but a Christian can express God's love and hope through everyday interaction.

He has called some to be advocates: A volunteer Guardian ad Litem is someone willing to stand for the best interest of the child in court, taking the time to get to know the child and prayerfully seek God's wisdom in making recommendations on the child's behalf.

He has called some to provide in-kind support: This volunteer wraps around the family, as a "doer of the word" (James 1:22, NIV), and can provide the family helpful, free services like a meal on a Friday night, a mowed lawn on Saturday morning or the transport of a foster child to school or to and from activities. "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35, NIV).

AM I REALLY EQUIPPED TO HELP?

When Jesus fed the 5,000 in John 6, He tested Philip. Jesus knew that Philip and the disciples doubted they could provide for such a large crowd. Jesus taught them a lesson in faith that day. The disciples were paralyzed by their incredulity and their infinitesimal expectations of what their infinite God could do. They faithlessly questioned Jesus, wondering how they would ever feed so many. The disciples could not provide for the thousands, but Jesus could. Though His disciples were faithless, Jesus showed His faithfulness and invited His disciples to exercise their faith in Him by serving the fish and bread to the thousands before the miraculous multiplication even occurred. Jesus could have immediately fed the masses himself, but He chose to work through the agency of His disciples. Just as Jesus chose to use his followers that day, He desires to have us join Him in serving people today. Like the disciples, we may be prone to believing that the crisis in childcare is too big to solve, too much to handle — but we must remember that nothing is too much for Jesus, whose love is endless and whose power is exceedingly great. The Corporate Church must stand up in faith to serve foster children, believing that God's power will show up in more ways than we can think, ask or imagine (Ephesians 3:20, NIV).

5. IMPLEMENTATION RECOMMENDATIONS

The following section provides key observations and recommendations, culminating in an implementation model of hope for churches to consider in developing foster care ministries.



This “model of hope” was developed to include recommendations and insights based upon collective communications from stakeholders. The goal of each recommendation is to make the highest physical, emotional, economical and spiritual impact in Miami-Dade County for foster care and adoption.

5.1. RECOMMENDATION ONE: A CENTRALIZED INFORMATION HUB

The committee believes that the fastest and most effective way to get churches, and the Miami community involved in foster care is to launch a centralized information hub. This would be a comprehensive website that aids in navigating the foster system, showcases the great work of community organizations, and allows for people to sign up for specific ways to get involved. People would be able to sign up for opportunities, such as becoming a mentor or Guardian ad Litem, registering to get one's family licensed, delivering a hot meal to a family in need of support, or volunteering to host a collection drive for school supplies.

This information hub will have a strong focus on supporting foster care families. The hub will also have a strong focus on preventive and reunification efforts. Providing support for families in need of assistance will be the preventive efforts that help keep families together instead of seeing children separated and entering foster care. Examples of preventive efforts include hot meals for families, assistance with yard work, or mentors for parents. For families with separated children, reunification support efforts would assist the biological parents and households in becoming stable, safe, and self-supporting so that children can return home. Reunification efforts would include employment assistance, financial coaching, and/or counseling services. The information hub is currently in progress and can be accessed via www.explorefostermiami.com.

5.2. RECOMMENDATION TWO: STRATEGIC PLAN FOR A NETWORK CONNECTING CHURCHES TO COMMUNITY PARTNERS AND AGENCIES

Recommendation two is developing a strategic plan that connects churches to each other and to key stakeholders in the foster system. The plan will encourage churches across the city to get involved. A strong focus will be placed on empowering churches in key hot spot areas of Greater Miami known to need additional foster support services.

The information hub will lay groundwork for showing how churches can support children and families in need in their areas. Churches can choose to lead any call to action for members to be involved, such as becoming mentors, licensing families to take in children, or small groups adopting families to support.

A practical way for churches to tangibly meet the physical needs of families would be to set up and operate their own “care closet.” This closet can be an area in the church that houses items that families may need, such as clothing, non-perishable foods, toys, car seats, strollers, and school supplies. Churches can choose to open to the community on certain days and/or work directly with foster agencies to allow case workers and registered families to come and pick-up needed supplies.

This recommendation includes supporting the implementation and usage of CarePortal in Miami Dade County. CarePortal is a geographic tool that allows foster care agencies and community partners to list geographic pinpoints on a map showing the specific needs and locations of families in areas across the county. They have already begun rolling out implementation of CarePortal in other areas of the state. The committee encourages and supports the implementation of this tool to allow churches and community partners to respond to families in need.

5.3. RECOMMENDATION THREE: INCREASE IN ACCESS TO LICENSING AND SUPPORT SERVICES

The committee recommends increasing access to faith-based family licensing throughout Miami Dade County. The way to increase access to licensing would be to add additional faith-based providers that can offer licensing classes, recruitment, and family support services. His House Children's Home, VOUS Church and Hope4Kids have been doing great work providing services to license families in Miami for years. However, we do see Miami as a very big city in need of more than three faith-based providers.

There needs to be additional support to recruit and license more families across this city, especially in hot spot areas in great need of family support. One More Child and 4Kids have proven track records of licensing families through faith-based perspectives in multiple counties in Florida. The committee encourages these organizations to expand services to Miami to dramatically increase access to licensing for churches, Christian families, and the Greater Miami community.

5.4. RECOMMENDATION FOUR: HIRE PROJECT MANAGER FOR IMPLEMENTATION

The committee recommends that a project manager be hired and tasked with implementing the recommendations of this report. This project manager will be tasked with implementing the information hub and church network while assisting in increasing access to licensing. The project manager must be motivated and have a strong passion for helping children and families. This person must be able to clearly communicate the findings and outcomes of this report to churches, local non-profits, and government agencies. The project manager will work alongside the committee to carry out the implementation of these recommendations, as well as help in

preliminary conversations for a community-wide collaborative effort to make sure all children have a home.¹⁰

5.5. RECOMMENDATION FIVE: ONGOING COLLABORATION WITH COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

The committee is excited to think of the churches of Miami working together to care for the needs of children and families across Miami. In the process of creating this report, the committee realized that a much larger community-wide conversation can take place among many, if not all, of the foster care and stakeholders in Miami-Dade County. The committee has been greatly interested in collaborative city-wide models, one of them being the SAFE (Strategic Alliance to Fight Exploitation) in Seattle. The core design of this collaborative community-wide effort to combat human trafficking is built upon a framework known as the “Rising Tide Community Giving Model” by the National Christian Foundation. The model is an alliance that seats givers, leaders, non-profits, and influencers at the same table. The “Rising Tide” name comes from a quote from John F. Kennedy: “No American is ever made better off by pulling a fellow American down, and every American is made better off whenever any one of us is made better off. A rising tide raises all boats.” The committee recognizes the Rising Tide model as a great proven strategy for communities that want to move the needle and end a heartbreaking local problem. In light of this, we believe a similar model, focused on collaboration, *A Model of Hope*, can be created and contextualized to Miami. This Model of Hope focuses on the Corporate Church rising to be a strategic partner in the collaborative effort, and playing an active part in the city-wide conversation, to help alleviate the heartbreaking local foster care problem of children in need of families.

The great Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. once said, “Faith is taking the first step even when you don’t see the whole staircase.” We are a committee built on a faith in Christ and we are stepping forward, alongside churches, onto a staircase. We may not be able to see the entire staircase, but we do see this report and recommendations as the first steps to equip and resource the churches and community to get more involved in foster care and family support services. The implementation of these recommendations will lead to the next steps in serving in great ways to love and care for children and families. We believe that the local church can rise to the occasion. We believe the church can come alongside partner organizations to take an even greater next step to be part of a community-wide collaborative effort that makes sure that every child is loved and cared for in a permanent loving home.

Let’s join together as we climb these steps towards a more caring and loving Miami.

¹⁰ This step has been completed. Georgia Downey is now the Director of Explore Foster Miami and is actively overseeing implementation.

5.6. CONTINUING TO EXPLORE THE COMMUNITY AND ADDING TO THE REPORT

In the nature and spirit of true collaboration, we acknowledge that this report will never truly be “complete.” We are committed to continue to explore and meet with key players in our community. If you are reading this report, and believe that your organization should be included, we would love to connect with you as soon as possible. Our goal is to bring as many partners to the table as possible to continue collaborative conversations. There is always room at the table. We look forward to connecting with any organizations that serve children and families in the foster care arena. Kindly reach out to Georgia Downey (georgia@explorefoster.com) so that we can continue the conversation with you.

Figure H: shows the recommended model of development for Miami-Dade foster care.

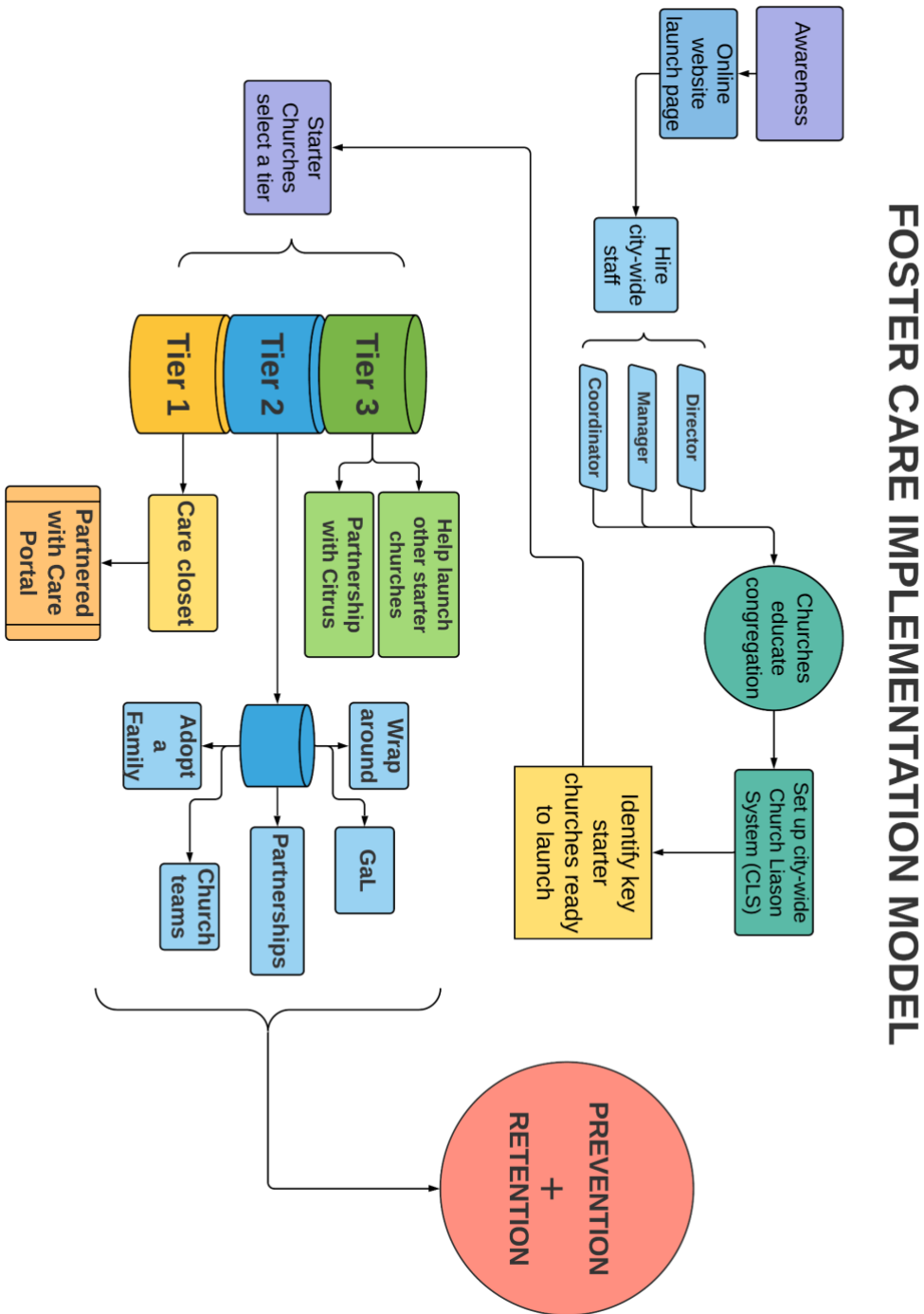
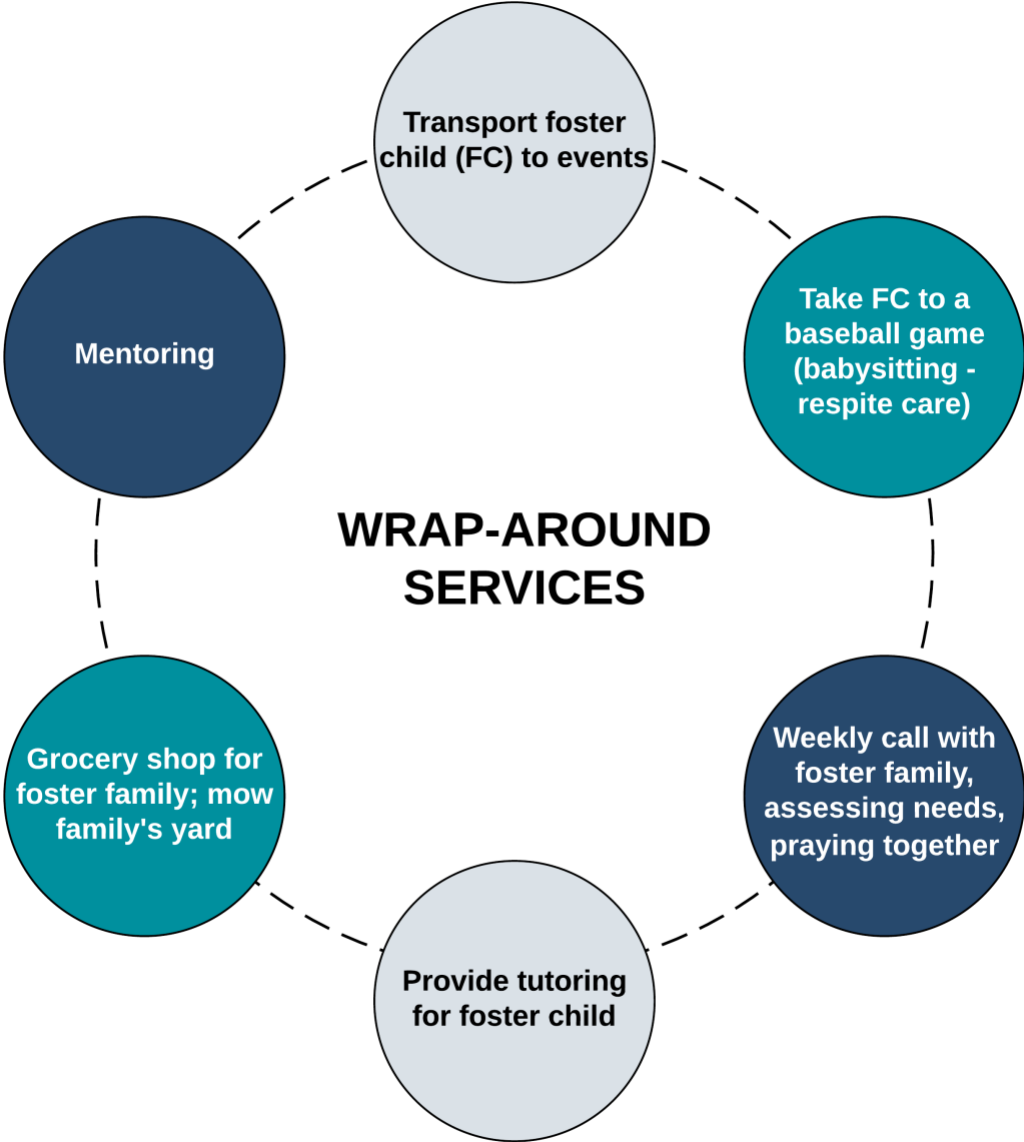


Figure I: Examples of wraparound services



6. CONCLUSION



The foster care system in Miami-Dade County has seen a positive change with Citrus Family Health Network as the lead CBC. Increased communication and unity between government organizations, non-profits and faith-based organizations have formed. The faith-based initiative executed by Florida Governor, Ron DeSantis has opened more opportunities for the Corporate Church to align its mission with foster care in the hopes of creating a movement with enough momentum to see tangible change.

The pressing issues in Miami-Dade County are:

- The shortage of quality long-term foster parents
- The separation of siblings
- The lack of resources and wraparound support for foster and biological families
- The cycle of trauma a child must endure while in placement
- Lack of mentorship for older youth

These issues can be overcome through a structured model with a city committed to ending the cycle for these children. Biological parents must be given the opportunity to thrive and succeed in their case plans, and the lack of support and stigma around them must be abolished. Greater Miami is a vibrant force with the ability and commitment to change its community for the good. There is an opportunity to support the health of children and families while becoming a duplicable model for future cities in the foster care arena. We believe child deserves a hope and future and our local community can unite to support this vision.

“For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

-Jeremiah 29:11

7. GLOSSARY



The following key words are defined by the Department of Children and Families (2020).

Adoption: If the parents' rights are terminated, a child will be available for adoption. Foster parents are able to adopt foster children in some circumstances. Relatives are also able to adopt the children whose parents' rights are permanently terminated.

Case management organization (CMO): A CMO contracts with the community-based care agency (CBC) to provide frontline services to children and families under state supervision.

Case management: The ongoing follow-up and review of the safety and well-being of a child who has been removed from parents or caregivers. A child who is in out-of-home care will see a case manager at least once a month, and the case manager will work with the parents, the child and the child's current caregivers to determine the best interests of the child.

Case plan: The court document that all parents or caregivers of dependent children must follow. Case plans have goals for the parents and the child so that the parents can reunify with the child and safely care for the child.

Child protective investigation: These investigations are handled by DCF child protective investigators whenever an allegation of abuse, neglect or abandonment is made to the Florida Abuse Hotline. The investigations typically last up to 60 days.

Child Welfare Professional: An individual who is primarily responsible for case activities who has met the criteria for Florida certification as a child protective investigator, case manager or a licensing counselor.

Child protective investigator (CPI): A child protective investigator checks into allegations of abuse, neglect, and abandonment of children by their caregiver. The investigator will interview the child, caregivers, and other contacts to determine if a child is safe or not. If a child is not safe, the CPI can remove the child from the home.

Community-based care lead agency (CBC): These agencies contract with DCF to manage prevention, intervention, foster care, and adoption services. There are 20 CBCs across the state.

Dependency court: The court system in Florida that makes decisions regarding the best interests and welfare of children who must be removed from their home.

Dependent child: A child who has been removed from the home and needs to be under state supervision. This child could live with a relative, non-relative or in foster care.

Fictive kin: An individual who is unrelated to the child by either birth or marriage, but has such a close, emotional relationship with the child that he or she may be considered part of the family (e.g. godparents, close family friends).

Florida Abuse Hotline: Any person in Florida who suspects a child is being abused, neglected or abandoned by a caregiver, or who suspects a child has been a victim of any crime, must report that information to the Florida Abuse Hotline. The hotline number is 1-800-962-2873.

Foster & Adoptive Parent Association (FAPA): This is an association that supports, educates, and advocates for foster and adoptive families (Florida FAPA, 2018).

Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF): The state agency that manages services to families, including investigating child abuse, managing child welfare cases, substance abuse and mental health treatment, and provides federal benefits like Medicaid and food assistance.

Group home: A group home is a home for several foster children that is licensed by the state. Group homes are run either by house parents, who live with the children, or by shift staff, who transfer in and out every 24 hours.

Guardian ad Litem: A volunteer advocate for a dependent child in court. This advocate is represented by an attorney and speaks to the judge on behalf of the child they represent.

Human trafficking: Florida Statute 787.06(2)(d) states that human trafficking is “the transporting, soliciting, recruiting, harboring, providing, enticing, maintaining or obtaining another person for the purpose of exploitation of that person” (Miami-Dade State Attorney, 2020).

Independent Living: Program for teens in foster care that prepares them for adult life.

Non-relative placement: A child who has been removed from the parent or guardian and placed with a family friend. Non-relatives are not eligible for additional funding.

Out-of-home care: This term includes all children who have been removed from their home and are living with a relative, non-relative or in foster care.

Permanent guardianship: Many children will be placed in permanent guardianship, usually with appropriate relatives, if the parents' rights have not been terminated but the child cannot safely return home.

Relative placement: A child who has been removed from their parent or guardian and placed with a relative. Relatives can get some funding to help with the child's expenses through Temporary Assistance for Needy Families.

Glossary

Reunification: The process of returning a child who has been removed from the home to the parents or guardians and ensuring that the child will remain safe. The majority of children who are removed from their home have reunification as their case plan goal.

Termination of parental rights: This is a court decision made if the parents have committed an egregious act against a child or refuse to complete the case plan to show they will be able to safely care for their child.

8. APPENDICES



Appendix A

8.1. NATIONAL MODEL: PROMISE686

WHO THEY ARE

The origins of Promise686 began at Perimeter Church in Atlanta. The organization is built on bringing to life God's promise in Psalm 68:6, which says that God “sets the lonely in families” (Psalm 68:6, NIV). Promise686 takes its competency in child welfare and export it to other areas. Its mission is to mobilize church communities to care for vulnerable children (A. Cook, personal communication, July 10, 2020). It is a faith-based organization with a simple, duplicable model that churches, and organizations can follow.

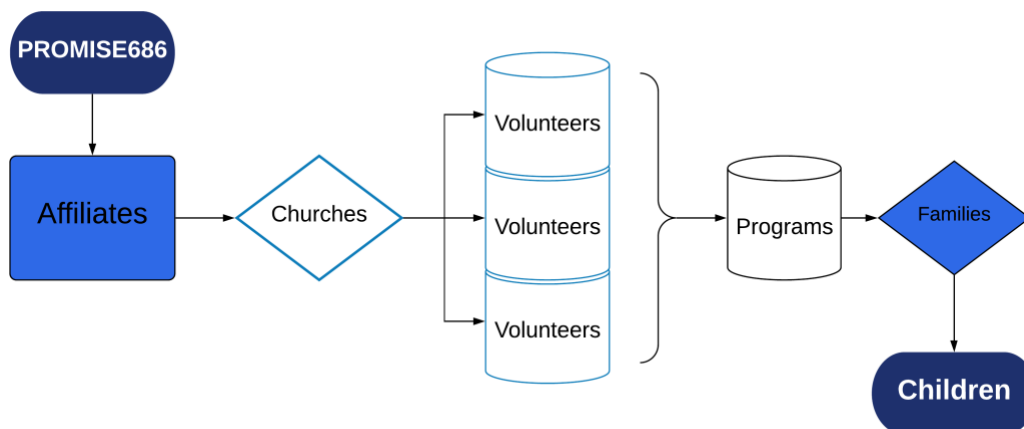
WHAT THEY DO

The leading strategies of the model are “prevention, intervention and connection” (A. Cook, personal communication, July 10, 2020). Promise686 provides resources and wants the church to “go to the needs of the children directly” (A. Cook, personal communication, July 10, 2020). When it has a church ready to act, it offers the church the selection of one or all three of the strategies and key programs in each area. The basic model is referred to as Family Advocacy Ministry (FAM), which is a “container” or framework for local engagement in child welfare flexible enough to accommodate different types of programs.

The typical FAM will achieve the following annually: 1) serve 10 children, 2) recruit one new foster or adoptive family, and 3) sustain three families with teams of five to six volunteers per family. The estimated economic impact of a FAM is \$10,000 in cost avoidance, in-kind gifts, etc. (A. Cook, personal communication, July 10, 2020). The organization currently has 289 FAMs in Georgia. Another 609 FAMs are supported around the country through 27 affiliates (some are child placement agencies) in 21 states. The affiliates are non-profit, community partners that bridge organizations and churches.

The leading strategies of the model are “prevention, intervention and connection” (A. Cook, personal communication, July 10, 2020). Promise686 provides the resources and wants the church to “go to the needs of the children directly” (A. Cook, personal communication, July 10, 2020). When it has a church ready to act, it offers the church the selection of one or all three of the strategies and key programs in each area. The basic model is referred to as Family Advocacy Ministry (FAM), which is a “container” or framework for local engagement in child welfare flexible enough to accommodate different types of programs.

Figure A1: Promises686 Model



Promise686’s top program, deployed through a FAM, is Care Communities. Nationally, 50% of foster families quit the first year, with bad outcomes for children. In comparison, data shows 92% of foster families are retained after the first year when served by a Care Community. Care Communities also serve adoptive families and are beginning to serve biological/primary families through a new pilot program (A. Cook, personal communication, July 10, 2020).

Promise686 maintains a Volunteer Coordination platform, named Promise Serves, used by all affiliates, allowing affiliates to customize branding and materials for their churches/FAMs. Promise686 prefers to equip other nonprofits that are local and grasp the lay of the land to impact the children and families in their own communities, instead of launching corporately in a new state. It wants to give local affiliates “something they can choose from and make their own – aligned with their own culture and equipped by Promise686 — to mobilize the church” (A. Cook, personal communication, July 10, 2020). Miami is a potential partner city preferably through an affiliation with a partner Miami-based organization. Finding an organization is worth consideration. Promise686 wants to know the vision and growth of organizations for potential alignments. Usually, \$2,500-\$5,000 is the upfront cost paid for a new affiliate in the first year. In year two, it is \$105 per FAM (A. Cook, personal communication, July 10, 2020).

OBSERVATIONS

Promise686 introduced a particular program to FAMs in Georgia named CarePortal in 2017 and the resource has been very helpful in activating churches to serve. There are 103 active churches in Georgia using CarePortal. The CarePortal platform is implemented in Georgia by Promise686, as well as three other Promise affiliates, yet the platform is owned by the Global Orphan Project (based in Kansas City, Missouri) and is available in approximately 30 states. People can connect with real families, real children, and real needs. CarePortal is also used as a prevention tool, and it is the only resource of its kind that Promise686 views as truly scalable. Each request is tied to the story of a real person.

WHAT'S NEXT

President and CEO Andy Cook highlighted outcomes for Promise686 and recommendations for the work needed for Miami-Dade. As stated above, there is currently a pilot conversation underway with how to provide prevention services and create care communities around biological families. Referencing Atlanta, Cook stated that, "Getting strong churches in the city involved, including predominantly Black churches, is critical; otherwise we run the risk of simply moving kids from the city into the burbs for a while, potentially removing them from important existing relationships and causing additional trauma." Having 10% of churches in every county in America engaged in child welfare is Promise686's goal as a partner in the More Than Enough Movement. Presently, it takes about two years to get an affiliate organization running. Accelerating the process of mobilizing partners to serve children through the church is crucial. Many partners will have overlapping programs and it is best to compartmentalize. They may have other ministries, but it is ideal to focus on only doing and talking about specific things regarding the collaboration relationship. "Collaboration without sacrifice is just talk." Answering two questions – What is the best for children? What is best for churches? – can create a guideline to generate collective impact (A. Cook, personal communication, July 10, 2020). CarePortal should be considered for the Miami area and is already being deployed in other parts of Florida.

Appendix B

8.2. THE BRIDGE: CAREPORTAL

WHO THEY ARE

CarePortal is an initiative of the Global Orphan Project and provides a tangible opportunity for the church to connect and care for vulnerable children and families in crisis. It is a web-based platform where needs can be requested and responded to via an app or web browser. CarePortal employs a grassroots approach to directly help children and families, case managers and churches (CarePortal, 2019).

WHAT THEY DO

Children and families can be assisted preventatively before state involvement. When families in need are provided with resources, they can be strengthened to take care of themselves and their children in their own homes. If state involvement has already occurred, CarePortal provides case managers with a real-time tool that helps them efficiently meet the needs of the children and families on their caseload. Lastly, churches and faith-based organizations can engage the local community by either starting a foster and adoption ministry or strengthening a current one (C. Artis, personal communication, June 19, 2020). CarePortal's model targets four areas of need:

- **Prevention** (helping intact families with tangible support)
- **Foster Care** (temporary placement with the goal of reunification)
- **Adoption** (a new, permanent family)
- **Transition** (children who age out of foster care)

OBSERVATIONS

Areas of need are mapped on a grid with three tiers highlighting target areas (CarePortal, 2019):

- **Tier 1** focuses on meeting the physical needs and using tangible resources to stabilize kids and their families.
- **Tier 2** involves time and relationships. This includes babysitting, respite care and mentorship (requires background check).
- **Tier 3** is opening a home to children or families, whether temporarily or permanently (requires licensing). Each church and agency would follow its internal protocols for how each tier would impact the target areas. For the model to be successful, each county needs to have an implementing church partner.

This is the faith-based component and organization that will lead the charge, develop relationships and be the face of the movement in Miami-Dade County. This includes the two-by-two approach Jesus used when sending out his disciples (Luke 10:1). One point-person would connect with the portal and the other person would communicate the needs to the congregation. Each county has one implementing partner and, as relationships are built, several network partners will organically take place. CarePortal’s staff trains the implementing partner and network churches on how to use, run and operate the system (C. Artis, personal communication, June 19, 2020).

WHAT’S NEXT

CarePortal has a proven system that currently works in 25 states, with 2,395 churches and 50 implementing partners. The economic impact on the child welfare system is felt in cost savings for time saved by case managers, the amount of money that it takes to keep a child in foster care, the number of funds required each time a child changes placement, and the value of volunteer hours (CarePortal, 2019).

CarePortal is currently saving the U.S. child welfare system \$22 million (CarePortal, 2019). Highlights of the CarePortal project currently in Florida include:

- Receiving DCF approval on May 1, 2020.
- Florida 1.27 (faith-based organization) is the implementing partner in Hillsborough County.

- Florida's Faith-Based and Community Advisory Council is hopeful for implementing CarePortal throughout the state, including Miami-Dade County (C. Artis, personal communication, June 19, 2020).

Appendix C

8.3. NATIONAL BRIDGE AGENCY: PROJECT 1.27

WHO THEY ARE

Project 1.27 Network is a network of ministries that share the common goal of having a home for every child in the foster care system. The mission of the 1.27 network is to engage the church in fostering and adopting kids in their own backyard. Ministries in the 1.27 network meet six criteria:

1. Believe in a church-based, holistic approach to safety, well-being, and permanence for children, which includes family preservation, reunification, foster care, kinship care and adoption.
2. Serve as a bridge (not an agency) for multi-church collaboration within the local foster care system.
3. Recruit foster/adoptive families through local churches.
4. Promote support for foster and adoptive families through local churches.
5. Resource churches, families, and individuals to respond to the verse in the Bible, James 1:27.
6. Believe in The Apostle's Creed as a common statement of faith.

Project 1:27's funding comes from individual donors and grants. It does not accept federal dollars to minimize compliance with regulations that would impede the faith initiative (project127.org, 2020).

WHAT THEY DO

Project 1:27 has a unique model. It recruits and supports churches that want to start a foster care ministry, and recruits and supports foster parents. Each foster parent must find at least four people to be a part of his or her support team. The support team members do the last four-hour segment of the training and are background screened to provide the much-needed respite and wraparound service.

Additionally, all foster parents attend trauma training, which is essential in helping a child heal from trauma (J. Rowland, personal communication, June 29, 2020). This model of trauma training, along with a well-developed support team, saw a decrease in the disruption rate (the number of times a child must be placed in a different home) from 23% to 6% after the first five years. Some members of the 1.27 Network use 1.27 in their name, but it is not required. For

example, in Florida, members use the name “Florida 1.27.” The Colorado model uses a state-approved faith-based curriculum for licensing classes and will guide anyone interested in duplicating the model and customizing it for a state or region. Although the organization does not financially support groups within the network, it does offer a “train-the-trainer” to strengthen ministry leaders. It offers a tool kit to help individuals and churches develop bridge organizations and encourage a mix of models. Florida 1.27 uses resources from the 1.27, as well as Project 686 (J. Rowland, personal communication, June 29, 2020).

OBSERVATIONS

The greatest areas of concern include retention of quality foster parents (those who understand that the situation is most likely temporary, and that reunification is the No. 1 goal) and the securing of enough homes for older children. As a positive, a third of the ministries in the network use the CarePortal platform as a tool for both prevention and wraparound support (J. Rowland, personal communication, June 29, 2020).

WHAT’S NEXT

Project 1.27 seeks to connect with anyone willing and ready to help children and families in distress. It will continue to bridge the gap for foster families and grow in its desire to recruit and retain quality foster parents.

Appendix D

8.4. ARTIST SPOTLIGHT: MEG WALLACE



“Miami,” by Meg Wallace, mixed media

Meg Wallace is a contemporary surrealist and abstract artist who resides in Palmetto Bay, Florida. The native South Floridian's paintings reflect the vibrant spirit and unique environment of her hometown. She intentionally creates versatile images to engage imaginative dialogue. The visceral nature of Wallace's work is meant to form connection, spark imagination and challenge perception. Wallace interweaves her passion to empower humanity with her penchant to preserve nature through her artwork. She has volunteered and advocated for over 20 years with various organizations in Miami that provide help and resources to abused children and women. As an empath who is easily affected by the trauma surrounding her, she finds solace in expressing her deep emotions with art and spending time in nature. Wallace works across various mediums, including painting, photography, abstract installations, plaster, and masonry. She is an avid learner and embraces the challenge of mastering new mediums. Wallace's art has shown in various solo and collective exhibits, including Coral Gables Museum, Lowe Art Museum, Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden, Wynwood Art District, The Artisan Lounge, Downtown Art Walk, Miami Beach Convention Center, and Pinecrest Gardens. Her paintings have been featured on the PBS TV show "Art Loft," and several of her paintings were selected to be on the set of "David Makes Man," a drama TV series from Miami Oscar winner Tarell Alvin McCraney ("Moonlight") on the Oprah Winfrey Network. Wallace's art publications include Sacramento Poetry Center's "Tule Review," "The Grief Diaries" and "The Menteur" (Meg Wallace Collections, 2020).

9. REFERENCES



- Belanger, K., Copeland, S., & Cheung, M. (2008). *The role of faith in adoption: achieving positive adoption outcomes for African American children*. *Child welfare*, 87(2), 99–123.
- Braciszewski, J. M., & Stout, R. L. (2012). Substance use among current and former foster youth: A systematic review. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 34(12), 2337–2344.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2012.08.011>
- Casa Valentina. (2020a, April 1). *About Us*. <https://casavalentina.org/about-us/>
- Casa Valentina. (2020, April 1). *Aging Out*. <https://casavalentina.org/aging-out/>
- Citrus Family Care Network. (2020a). *Citrus FCN Scorecard May 2020*.
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1htOXQ58uTQC4vEzUtqMi8TwYFYFtifAp/view>
- Citrus Family Care Network. (2020b). *Fostering Information*. <https://www.citrusfcn.com/foster-Adopt>
- Dworsky, A., Napolitano, L., & Courtney, M. (2013). Homelessness During the Transition from Foster Care to Adulthood. *American Journal of Public Health*, 103(S2), S318–S323.
<https://doi.org/10.2105/ajph.2013.301455>
- Educate Tomorrow. (2020). *Educate Tomorrow: Who We Are*. <https://www.educatetomorrow.org/who-we-are/who-we-are/>
- Educate Tomorrow. (2020). *Educate Tomorrow: Our Work*.
<https://www.educatetomorrow.org/our-work/our-work/>
- Florida International University. (2020, May 29). *Fostering Panther Pride*. FIU Student Access & Success. <http://sas.fiu.edu/fpp/>
- Eleventh Judicial Circuit of Florida. (2020). *Juvenile Dependency*.
<https://www.jud11.flcourts.org/Juvenile-Dependency>
- Florida Coalition for Children (FCC). (2018). *Blueprint Campaign*. <https://www.flchildrenblueprint.org>
- Florida Courts. (2020, May). *Dependency Benchbook*. <https://www.flcourts.org/Resources-Services/Court-Improvement/Family-Courts/Dependency/Dependency-Benchbook>
- Florida Courts. (2020b, May). *Family court issues that occur in dependency cases: Delinquency and Dependency*.
https://www.flcourts.org/content/download/215994/1961910/Floridas_Dependency_Benchbook_DelinquencyAndDependency.pdf
- Florida Department of Children and Families. (2019a). *Department Regions and Circuits*.
<https://www.myflfamilies.com/newsroom/media-guide/circuit-regions.shtml>
- Florida Department of Families and Children. (2020). *Florida's Child Welfare Statistics*.
<https://www.myflfamilies.com/programs/childwelfare/dashboard/>
- Florida Department of Children and Families. (2019a). *Fostering Definitions*.
<https://www.myflfamilies.com/service-programs/foster-care/definitions.shtml>
- Florida Department of Children and Families. (2019d). *Independent Living*. <https://www.myflfamilies.com/service-programs/independent-living/youth-young-adults.shtml>
- Florida Department of Families and Children. (2019). *Levels of Foster Care Licensure*.
<https://www.myflfamilies.com/service-programs/foster-care/levels.shtml>
- Florida Department of Children and Families. (2019b). *Florida Guardian ad Litem*.
<https://www.myflfamilies.com/service-programs/foster-care/support-fostering.shtml>
- Florida Department of Children and Families. (2019b). *Office of Child Welfare Florida's Child Welfare Practice Model*. <https://www.myflfamilies.com/service-programs/child-welfare/child-welfare-practice-model.shtml>

Florida Department of Children and Families. (2019). *Office of Child Welfare Statutes, Rules, and Operating Procedures*. <https://www.myflfamilies.com/service-programs/child-welfare/statutes-rules-operating-procedures.shtml>

Florida FAPA. (2018, July 7). *About FloridaFAPA*. FloridaFAPA.Org. <http://floridafapa.org/about-us/>

Florida Foster/Adoptive Parent Association (FAPA). (2019). *Bylaws*. <http://floridafapa.org/about-us/bylaws>

Florida TaxWatch. (2015, November). *Challenges Facing Florida's Community-Based Child Welfare System*. <http://www.flchildren.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/TaxWatch.pdf>

Guardian ad Litem (GAL). (2014). *Volunteer FAQ*. Guardian Ad Litem for Children. <https://guardianadlitem.org/faq/>

Guardian ad Litem (GAL). (2020, April). *Standards of Operations*. <https://guardianadlitem.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/GAL-Standards-Rev.-4.30.2020-FINAL.pdf>

Habitat for Humanity. (2020). *About*. Habitat.Org. <https://www.habitat.org/about>

Hogan, J. M. (2020). *Understanding the Mental Health Risks for Children in Foster Care*. One in Five Minds Blog | 1in5minds. <https://info.1in5minds.org/blog/understanding-the-mental-health-risks-for-children-in-foster>

Independent Sector. (2018). *Value of Volunteer Time*. <https://independentsector.org/value-of-volunteer-time-2018/>

Meg Wallace Collections. (n.d.). *About*. MW Collections. Retrieved July 25, 2020, from <https://mwcollections.com/about-1>

Merriam-Webster. (2020). *Respite*. In *Merriam-Webster.com dictionary*. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/respice>

Miami Dade College. (n.d.). *Single Stop - Single Stop USA - Miami Dade College*. MDC.Edu. Retrieved September 29, 2020, from <https://www.mdc.edu/main/singlestop/>

Miami-Dade State Attorney Office. (2020). *Human Trafficking Unit*. <https://humantrafficking.miamisao.com/about>

National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL). (2019, June 18). *Youth Homelessness Overview*. <https://www.ncsl.org/research/human-services/homeless-and-runaway-youth.aspx>

National Conference of State Legislators. (2019, November 1). *Mental Health and Foster Care*. *Ncsl.Org*. <https://www.ncsl.org/research/human-services/mental-health-and-foster-care.aspx>

One Church One Child of Florida. (2020). *About Us*. One Church One Child of Florida (OCOC). <http://www.ococfl.org/about.html>

Positive Pathways. (n.d.). *Our Vision*. Retrieved September 29, 2020, from <https://www.positivepathwaysflorida.org/our-vision-1>

Project 1.27. (2020). *What is a 1.27 Network Ministry?* <https://www.project127.org/127-network.html>

Ryan, J. P., Marshall, J. M., Herz, D., & Hernandez, P. M. (2008). *Juvenile delinquency in child welfare: Investigating group home effects*. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 30(9), 1088–1099. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2008.02.004>

Statistical Atlas. (2018). *The Demographic Statistical Atlas of the United States - Statistical Atlas*. Statisticalatlas.Com. <https://statisticalatlas.com/county/Florida/Miami-Dade-County/Household-Types>

Statistical Atlas. (2018a). *The Demographic Statistical Atlas of the United States - Statistical Atlas*. Statisticalatlas.Com. <https://statisticalatlas.com/county/Florida/Miami-Dade-County/Household-Types>

Statistical Atlas. (2018c). *The Demographic Statistical Atlas of the United States - Statistical Atlas*. <https://statisticalatlas.com/place/Florida/Opa-Locka/Race-and-Ethnicity>

The Florida Children’s System of Care (SOC). (2018). *Wraparound*. Department of Children and Families (DCF). <http://socflorida.com/wraparound.shtml>

The Office of Criminal Conflict and Civil Regional Counsel. (2020). *About the Office of Criminal Conflict and Civil Regional Counsel*. Rc3fl.Com. <http://rc3fl.com/rc3-information.php>

Voices for Children Foundation, Inc. (2019). *Who We Are*. Beavoice.org <https://beavoice.org/who-we-are/>

Voices for Children Foundation, Inc. (2019). *THE PROBLEM*. Beavoice.Org. <https://beavoice.org/the-problem/>

VOUS Church. (2020). *Our Pastors*. <https://www.vouschurch.com>



EXPLORE FOSTER
MIAMI

January 2021

As the city evolves, all new findings can be found at www.explorefostermiami.com.