

Childlink

Building strong links for children in need.



December 2006-January 2007



SOUTHWEST FLORIDA COMMUNITY SERVES AS THE BACKBONE FOR OUR CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM

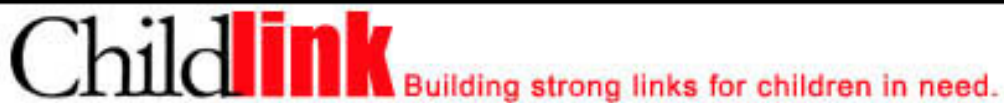
Chris Card
Interim CEO
Children's Network of Southwest Florida



As we begin the new year, I would like to wish all of our advocates, foster parents, adoptive parents, guardians and friends a very happy and healthy 2007! I also want to thank everyone who has been so generous to the abused and neglected children of Southwest Florida. Since the child welfare system has transitioned into a "Community Based Care" model, this community has stepped up to the plate in recent months to assure that not only are services meeting the needs of our children, but that each child living in foster care had a great holiday, just like every other child.

Since arriving at the Children's Network of Southwest Florida, I have had the opportunity to meet with several community groups and individuals who really care about our most vulnerable children living in Southwest Florida. I witnessed firsthand the support provided to us through community activities and fundraisers. I have met with the community alliances, school counselors, foster parents, youth in foster care, providers, Lee County Human Services Council and many other child welfare advocates. I have seen an outpouring of support through our First Annual Walk-a-Thon, the Adoption Conference, the Teens for Teens Benefit Show performed by young bands in the area, Holiday Gift Giving Campaign, Season of Light Campaign and the Walk-a-Mile project, matching our foster youth with local elected officials and decision makers. This is the avenue for community engagement, oversight and accountability that is the core of a truly successful "Community Based Care" child welfare system.

These efforts clearly underscore a few of the primary tenets in child welfare reform. First, that the community will respond both with their time and expertise to assure that the children and families are receiving our best efforts to attain safety and permanency for each child. Second, that this community will be generous with their resources, providing the children in our care with the enhanced life experiences and support that they need and deserve. These enhancements include prom dresses, tutoring, furniture for a family so children can be safely returned home, school supplies, clothing, computers, shoes, fees for athletic programs and extra curricular activities, after school care and child care. Anyone who has raised a child understands that the everyday little needs that many of us take for granted are what provide the foundation for a child to develop and thrive with a comforting sense of normalcy.



This Holiday Season was incredible due to the tremendous support provided by our generous community. We received cash donations and gifts valued at over \$240,000. These donations helped provide more than 7,000 gifts to 1,600 children and their families in the child welfare system, providing all with a very blessed holiday. This community is further blessed through the tremendous work done year round by the Foster Care Council of Southwest Florida and Foster Care Advisory Services, Inc. Both of these organizations were key contributors to the success of our holiday gift giving campaign. As you will see in this issue of ChildLink there are many other organizations and businesses that also supported the Holiday Gift Giving Campaign as well and we are very grateful for that support.

Finally, I have been very impressed with how this community continues to provide great caring foster families, adoptive families, case workers, and community agencies that care for our children every day. These foster and adoptive families are the most incredible group of loving people that open their homes and hearts to abused and neglected children twenty-four hours a day. There are over 240 foster families and over 90 families in Southwest Florida that step forward each year to adopt our children looking for permanent families.

In closing, I would like to acknowledge and thank this community for providing the compassion, service, expertise, oversight, and the resources that make it possible for the Children's Network of Southwest Florida to successfully keep these most vulnerable children safe and in permanent loving homes. God bless you all, each and every one.

AGAIN, HAVE A HAPPY AND HEALTHY NEW YEAR!

CHILDREN'S NETWORK OF SOUTHWEST FLORIDA WELCOMES A NEW LOCAL BOARD OF DIRECTORS

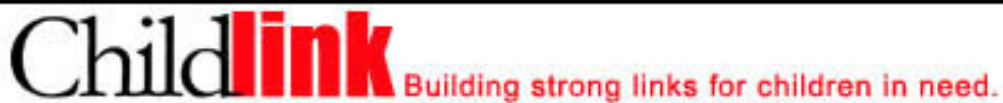
The Children's Network of Southwest Florida would like to welcome a new local Board of Directors. Their primary function will be to oversee the administrative and community development aspects of the Children's Network of Southwest Florida. One of their immediate tasks will be to interview and select the new Chief Executive Officer of the Children's Network of Southwest Florida.

The new local Board of directors includes Mark M. Geisler, ACSW, Interim Chairman of the Board, Irving Buchan, Betty A. Busbee, Paul Morrisette, and Sakinah N. Salahu-Din, Ph.D., MSW. Each future edition of Childlink will feature a short biography on a Board Member.

CHILDREN'S NETWORK OF SOUTHWEST FLORIDA LAUNCHES HOLIDAY GIFT GIVING CAMPAIGN

The Children's Network of Southwest Florida has launched its Holiday Gift Giving Campaign for children in foster care. Many community organizations have stepped forward to offer their help, buying gifts for children and families in need. Wish lists were sent out to all of the foster families living in Lee, Collier, Charlotte, Hendry and Glades Counties. Relative and non-relative families in need were also identified and received help for the holidays. Over 1600 children and families in foster care received gifts this holiday season.

Thanks to our generous community sponsors for providing gifts for children in foster care. Our families appreciate all of the help and support that they get during the holidays. The Children's Network of



Southwest Florida would like to thank Michelle Spellman and Sandy Rieser for all of their help and support in making this year successful. We would also like to offer a huge thank you to the staff at Lutheran Services Florida, Ruth Cooper Center for Behavioral Healthcare and Family Preservation Services, Inc. for their consistent support during the holiday gift giving. Finally, we would like to acknowledge the following donors for all of their help during the 2006 Holiday Gift Giving Campaign. With everyone's help and kindness, children in foster care had the best holiday ever!

Accent Reporting Services

Alcorn Electric
Alice Sweetwater's Bar and Grille
All Faiths Congregation
Applebee's Bar & Grille
Bentley Village
Bette McLean
Bikes for Tykes
Breckenridge Golf and Tennis Club
Brenda Merchant
Cape Coral Jaycees
Carol Wallace
Caroline Clifton
CB Richard Ellis
Chapel by the Sea: Sew N Sews
Charlotte Harbor Yacht Club
Church of the Resurrection:
Mary's Kids
City of Ft. Myers Code Enforcement
CJ Management & Consulting LLC
Classic Rock 94.5 FM
Clori Atkins
Coastland Center
Collier County Bar Association
Comcast
Congregation of PCT Ministries
CPH Engineers
Debbie Rambo
Department of Environmental Protection
Department of Transportation
Ellen Feige
ERA Flagship Realty
Erik Robinson
Family to Family
Farr Law Firm
First Christian Church of Ft. Myers

First Christian Church of Cape Coral
First Presbyterian Church of Naples
First United Methodist Church
Fishtail Boat Club
FLAME Productions/Internet
Foster Care Advisory Services Inc.
Foster Care Council of Southwest Florida Inc.
Ft. Myers Congregational United Church of Christ
Ft. Myers Toyota
GAP
Germain Auto of Naples
Golden Gate Moose Lodge
Grace United Methodist Church
Hole Montes Inc.
Holy Trinity Presbyterian Church
Ivy Brown
JDS Construction
John R. Woods Realty
Juliette Detrick
Kappa Delta Pi- Florida Gulf Coast University
Kathy Petru
Katy Brooks
Kim Chaney
Kim Fisher
Larson Light Tools
Lehigh Acres Middle School
Longshore Lakes Women's Club
Macy's
Mark Motors
Mary Beth Anderst
McGarvey Construction
Melissa Degaetano
Mike and Pat Piasecki

Mom's Club of Cape Coral Northwest

Moms Club of Naples
Mt. Hermon Dance Ministry
N. Ft. Myers Eagles
Naples Grande Resort and Club
Nike Factory Store
Nikki Olsen
Noonan Academy of Cape Coral
Office Team
Orthopedic Specialists of Southwest Florida
Outback Steakhouse
Owen Ames Kimball Company
Patnode Roofing
Patrick Murphy
Paula Weaver
Paychex Inc.
Pediatric Orthopedics of Southwest Florida
Peggy Campbell
Pyramid II
Quarles and Brady LLP
Radiology Regional Center
Ralph's Angels
Renaissance Montessori School
Riverwoods Plantation
Robin Antone
Ronald McDonald House Charities Southwest Florida, Inc.
Rose Murray
Royal Woods Association Inc.
Ryland Homes
Salon Bamboo
Teens for Teens Benefit Concert
The Dwal Family
Tonia Agathos
Tracy Cummings
Vicki and Bob Bubar
Weekday School
Winkler House

COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS PROVIDE SPECIAL EVENTS FOR CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE AND THEIR FAMILIES



From left to right: Matt Hoerner, Gary Lawicki, Lisa Marazzi, Dave Ambrozewicz, Vickie Ambrozewicz, Jan Jones, Santa, Kim Morgan, Nikki Peek, Rocco Toscano, Mary Breen, Richard Holtzman & son, Anthony Brunco, Joanne Thorton, Tara Grifford, and Shelly Lochut.

On Thursday, December 7th, Ft. Myers Toyota provided one special foster mother in Lee County with a Holiday Home Make-Over. Lorraine Wallace, a foster mother for over 19 years, has taken in over 100 children into her home. Ft. Myers Toyota provided her family with a tree with all of the trimmings, decorations for the inside and outside of the home, stockings and gifts for each of the six children currently living in the home. When the children arrived home from school, they were excited to see the house transformed into a winter wonderland. The Children's Network of Southwest Florida would like to thank Ft. Myers Toyota for providing this family with a wonderful holiday. We would also like to thank Lorraine Wallace for her 19 years of dedication to children living in foster care.

Macy's and Applebee's Neighborhood Bar and Grille once again teamed up to provide a pancake breakfast for foster families living in Lee County. On Thursday, December 14th, over 100 foster parents and children gathered at Applebee's in Ft. Myers to celebrate the upcoming holidays. Each family first enjoyed a pancake breakfast, provided free of charge by Applebee's and then were treated with a surprise visit from Santa Claus. Each child was given a gift, provided by Macy's. Every year our families look forward to this tradition and once again, thanks to Macy's and Applebee's, it was a huge success. Thank you to all of the volunteers and staff that



From left to right: Scott Fischer, Applebee's, Karen Martie, Macy's, Debra Webb, Children's Network, Tonya Purcell, Santa Claus provided by Macy's, Chelsea Purcell, and Emily Purcell.

gave their personal time to making the holidays better for children living in foster care.



From left to right: Maison Wunderlich, Jeff Wunderlich, Cape Coral Jaycees, Santa Claus, and Scott Jacobs, Cape Coral Jaycees.

On Saturday, December 16th, Cape Coral Jaycees once again provided 15 children living in foster care in Cape Coral with a holiday shopping spree at Wal-Mart. Each child was given \$30 to shop for gifts with their foster family. Some of the children purchased gifts for their loved ones, while others picked out their favorite toys. The Children's Network of Southwest Florida is very happy to partner with the Cape Coral Jaycee's, who have continually supported children living in foster care over the holidays as well as during back to school time.



2ND ANNUAL TEENS FOR TEENS BENEFIT CONCERT RAISES FUNDS FOR TEENS IN FOSTER CARE

The 2nd Annual Teens for Teens Benefit Concert was held on December 2nd at Grace United Methodist Church in Cape Coral. This annual event was started last year in an effort to raise funds for teenagers who were living in foster care over the holidays. Teenagers are often the most vulnerable during the holiday season, some living in shelters and others needing gifts.

This year, over 200 teenagers from all over the state of Florida were in attendance. Two nationally renowned bands performed: All Shall Perish from California and With Faith or Flames from Tennessee. Other local bands also came to support the cause including Kings Conquer, Demise Of All Reason, Phoenix Mourning (signed by Metal Blade Records), Witness To A Murder and Seize The Empire.

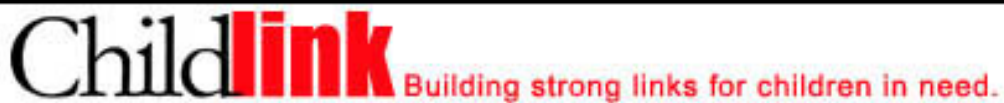
Kathleen Scott and Dawn Crooks, coordinators of the event, stated, “We are very excited about this event to be able to help teenagers that are currently living in foster care.” “The funds raised will go toward holiday gifts for these young adults who have been removed from their homes due to abuse or neglect”, said Scott. The Children’s Network of Southwest Florida would like to thank all of the sponsors who made this event possible:

- C&J Management & Consulting Inc.
- Grace United Methodist Church
- One Ministries
- Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
- Pepsi Company
- Papa Johns
- Altair Industries
- Guitar Studio of Ft. Myers
- Albertsons Supermarkets

FOSTER CARE COUNCIL OF SOUTHWEST FLORIDA PROVIDES COMMUNITY RESOURCES TO CHILDREN LIVING IN FOSTER CARE

For the past six years, the Foster Care Council of Southwest Florida has employed a mission to enrich the lives of children who are removed from their homes, either temporarily or permanently, due to abandonment, serious neglect, physical or emotional abuse. They are a huge source of support for the Children’s Network of Southwest Florida, providing the 1600 children in Southwest Florida living in foster care with the programs and funding needed to have a healthy, normal lifestyle. Over the course of a year, they provide over \$400,000 to children living in foster care and have also contributed \$20,000 a year towards television advertising for the recruitment of foster homes. We would like to provide you with information about the programs and support they offer.

The primary support that is provided by the Foster Care Council of Southwest Florida is **Project Enrichment**. The main focus of **Project Enrichment** is to fund enrichment activities to children living in foster care such as school clothing, equipment, musical instruments, lessons, computers and sports programs.



Children living in foster care often come into the system with nothing but the clothing they are wearing. These enrichment items and activities provide children with the self esteem and self worth they are desperately seeking. Here are some of the highlights of the accomplishments of this program:

- In 2005, the Foster Care Council of Southwest Florida sent almost 175 children in foster care to summer camps here in Southwest Florida. A number of students were sent to specialized sports, theatre or academic camps, providing them with an opportunity to discover and develop their hidden talents.
- Foster Care Council of Southwest Florida has purchased and provided over 50 children with computer packages which includes a laptop computer, printer, paper, mouse and pad, and an extra ink cartridge.
- They are also providing LeapPad Learning Systems and Leapster Multi Media Learning Systems to children between the ages of four and ten. These systems teach reading, science, math and other subjects to children who are not yet ready for a computer.
- Foster Care Council of Southwest Florida has provided children with recreational assistance such as trips to Disney World and Busch Gardens, horseback riding, sports lessons, dance lessons, and bicycles.
- Every child that is enrolled in Project Enrichment is automatically enrolled in the **Birthday Club**. The Birthday Club sends each child in the foster care system a birthday card with a \$25 gift card to Wal-Mart.

Children in foster care are often moved from home to home; therefore, many of the those children change schools frequently, resulting in academic delays. To fulfill this need, Foster Care Council of Southwest Florida has created a private tutoring program called the **Education Train** to help keep these children on track with their education. All tutors are certified teachers and each child is given to pre and post testing in order to assess their progress. The tutor also follows the child, no matter what home they are moved to. Children can continue on with their tutor for up to six months after leaving the foster care system.

The Children's Network of Southwest Florida would like to thank the Foster Care Council of Southwest Florida for all they do our most vulnerable children. Thanks to their commitment, these children can enjoy more stable and fulfilling home lives.

THE 3rd ANNUAL JOYS OF ADOPTION BREAKFAST A SUCCESS

The 3rd Annual Joys of Adoption Conference was hosted by the Children's Network of Southwest Florida on November 17, 2006 at the Hyatt regency Coconut Point Resort & Spa in Bonita Springs. Adoptive parents, foster parents, child welfare workers and those interested in adopting gathered to highlight the need for permanent homes for children awaiting adoption. This event is held during National Adoption Month, dedicated to building awareness and finding adoptive homes for some of Southwest Florida's most vulnerable children. There are 124 children that have not yet been adopted in Lee, Collier, Charlotte, Hendry and Glades counties.

The breakfast was opened by Chris Card, Interim CEO of the Children's Network of Southwest Florida. Master of Ceremonies was Stacey Deffenbaugh from ABC-7. Ms. Deffenbaugh and ABC-7 also help by putting together a

weekly segment called Wednesday's Child during which a waiting child is featured. Other speakers included Wayne Duehn, Ph.D., Professor, School of Social Work, University of Texas at Arlington; Barbie K. Reed, Chief Visionary Officer of B.K.R. Unlimited, and Susan Badeau, a Child Welfare Professional for over twenty-six years. The conference also featured a panel of teens that have been adopted, are waiting to be adopted or have chosen not to be adopted.

Last year, 92 adoptions were finalized. This year, we are hoping and planning on exceeding that number. The Children's Network of Southwest Florida would like to thank **The Sanderson's**, private photographers, for providing professional portraits of all the available children that were highlighted at the conference. We would also like to offer a huge thank you to all of the sponsors that helped make this event so successful:

Providence Service Corporation of Florida
Bank of Naples
Children's Hospital of Southwest Florida
Lecorp Homes, Inc.
Florida Baptist Children's Home
Webb, Scarmozzino & Gunter
Foster Care Council of Southwest Florida

Law Offices of William G. Morris
AIM Target Group
Children's Advocacy Center, Collier County
Crossroads Behavioral Healthcare
Sam Galloway Ford
Sandra A. Sutliff, Attorney

CHILDREN'S NETWORK CELEBRATES ADOPTIONS IN NOVEMBER



From left to right: Chris Card, Michelle Simon, Dr. Shelly King, Brittany King, Hannah King, Dr. Bryant King, and Judge James Seals.

permanent homes. There are still 124 children that are waiting to be adopted in our region. If you are interested in learning more about children that are available or would like to become an adoptive parent, please call Michelle Farquharson at 226-1524.

It was November 20, 2006, right before Thanksgiving, when 17 children and their parents in the eyes of the state became new families. The location was Judge James H. Seals' courtroom, where there was a ceremony for the children to finalize their adoptions. There are two happy occasions in Judge Seals' courtroom-when birth parents straighten out their lives and take their children home and when adoptive families step in because parents cannot resolve their problems in the home. "These are the things we work for. This is what makes the whole thing worthwhile," Judge Seals said.

There are approximately 1,600 children in foster care, relative care, group care non-relative care or under protective supervision on our five county region. Some of these children will not be able to return home to their families. These children will need

CHILDREN'S NETWORK OF SOUTHWEST FLORIDA BIDS FAREWELL TO PIONEER



In April 2003, Debra Webb, Chief Development and Communications Officer, took up a challenge – to start up community based care in Southwest Florida. She was one of the original team members who were charged with implementing the start-up contract to privatize foster care and related services. Since that small beginning, the Children's Network has grown and flourished. Debra has raised more than \$700,000 in cash and in-kind donations to improve the lives of this area's fragile children and families.

She has also been responsible for implementing the Dental Network. As a result of this effort, children in the child welfare system can receive needed dental care. Area dentists have volunteered to work with providing pro bono services to these children.

Debra Webb will be leaving the Children's Network of Southwest Florida to accept the Executive Director position at the Pace Center. The Pace Center is new to Lee County and is one of 19 centers around the state that provides social services with an educational component targeting the unique needs of at risk girls ages 12 to 18 who are identified as dependent, truant, runaway, ungovernable, delinquent, or in need of academic skills.

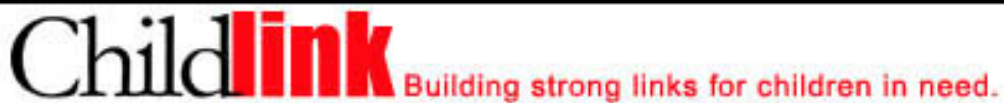
According to Webb, her tenure with the Children's Network of Southwest Florida has been challenging, fun, and exciting. More importantly, it has been rewarding. Her energy, innovations, and commitment will be missed at the Children's Network of Southwest Florida but will assure a strong beginning for the Pace Center.

CHILDREN'S NETWORK OF SOUTHWEST FLORIDA REMEMBERS SAL ALLAN OF AMERICAN PRIDE BUILDING COMPANY



Sal Allan, owner of American Pride Building Company, passed away on November 20, 2006 due to sudden heart failure. He was known to the Children's Network of Southwest Florida as a humanitarian who financially contributed to the plight of children in foster care. American Pride Building Company has contributed almost \$20,000 towards child abuse prevention, adoption and holiday gift giving for our children.

Sal was actively involved in advocating for the vulnerable children in our community. He and his wife, Piera, took an active role in the Children's Network of Southwest Florida, sponsoring and attending the 2005 Adoption Breakfast and the 2006 Child Abuse Prevention Conference. The Children's Network of Southwest Florida would like to thank American Pride Building Company for their support and contributions. Mr. Sal Allan will be greatly missed.



THE CHILDREN'S NETWORK OF SOUTHWEST FLORIDA WELCOMES NEW STAFF

The Children's Network of Southwest Florida would like to welcome seven new employees to the team.

Dianna Berrios, Accounting Assistant in the Fiscal/IT unit. Dianna comes to us with over 13 years of accounting and banking experience, earned an AA degree in Accounting and Computers, and still found time to be a “stay-at-home” mom for a time.

Liliane Bisaha, Administrative Assistant in the Fiscal/IT unit. Liliane is attending Edison College, while working full time, and brings her 4 years of accounting experience in the business world to the Children's Network of Southwest Florida.

Sandra Gage, Training Specialist in the Staff Development unit. Sandy brings with her many years as a Child Protective Investigator for the Department of Children and Families, as well as several years as a case manager for Lutheran Services Florida. In her new position, Sandy will share her vast knowledge of the child welfare system with all of us.

Allison Huly, Intake Triage/Referral Specialist, in Utilization Management unit. Before coming to Florida, Allison spent 6 years as a pre-school teacher and then another 3 years as a case manager for the Department of Children and Families. She holds a BA in Psychology.

Mark Levesque, Network Administrator in the Information Technology unit, joins us from New England where he served for twelve years as the Network Manager for a community hospital. Mark holds an AA degree in Applied Computer Science.

Marie Olsen, Administrative Assistant, Public Relations/Community Development unit, recently retired from an over 15 year career as a law enforcement officer, specializing in child abuse and sex crimes investigations, as well as instructing and community relations. Marie is continuing her education in pursuit of a degree.

Erik Robinson, Information Technology Support Specialist in the Information Technology unit. Erik worked at the Southwest Florida International Airport for several years and then in the electrical field. He is currently pursuing a degree and is a teaching assistant for International College, tutoring fellow students.

The Children's Network of Southwest Florida is happy to have such a wealth of experience and knowledge joining our team of very competent employees. Welcome to all of you and good luck in your new endeavors!

A WAITING CHILD

Every issue of Child Link will feature a child that is waiting for a family to call his or her own.



MEET JARRETT

Eleven year old Jarrett is a spunky youth who likes to entertain others. He has developed a great sense of humor and has the ability to make lots of interesting, funny faces! Jarrett's delightful personality is extended to those known to him. He is cordial, albeit reserved. To really get to know Jarrett, you should participate with him in one of his favorite activities. Whether it is shooting hoops on the basketball court, swimming laps in the pool, pitching to him from the baseball mound or chasing him as he runs to the end zone, Jarrett is most relaxed and communicative after exerting physical energy. Given time, he will share of himself to others who invest their time and energy in him.

Jarrett's friendly nature makes him popular among the children at school and in his neighborhood. He enjoys getting together with them to listen to music or see new movies. He has a good appetite and ranks steak and mashed potatoes topped with Louisiana hot sauce among his favorites!

Jarrett is an intelligent youngster who earns mostly A's in school. His academic strengths are math and science. He is really good at analyzing things, seeing the cause and effect relationship.

Jarrett is aware of the fact that he is living with a foster family. While they provide the nurturing and care that he needs, Jarrett hopes that he will soon join his forever family.....he longs to be adopted.



The Children's Network of Southwest Florida is sponsored in part by the State of Florida,
Department of Children and Families

The Children's Network of Southwest Florida is committed to working with the community in building and maintaining a child protection system that promotes safety and stability for children and families.

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