



# Heartland for Children

## FOSTER CARE NEWSLETTER

August 2024

Page 1

Back-to-School Edition!

*Dear Caregivers,*

I hope you have had a wonderful summer with your family. It is so hard to believe that school will be starting back very soon.

I have been reflecting on how important it is for our caregivers to help prepare children to return back to school so that they feel confident and prepared as they enter the classroom and sit amongst their peers that first week. Our local caregivers do an amazing job making sure children and youth are school ready. Thank you for all you are doing to get children and youth prepared to head back to school.

A few years ago, I had a youth in foster care share with me that her education was the one thing no one could take away from her and that she could control in her life when things seemed out of control while she navigated the challenges of being in the foster care system. This youth went on to graduate from college. This message she shared with me I will never forget.

We all have a role to play to make sure we help navigate any educational opportunities and barriers. The school system has many opportunities for children and youth in foster care to get involved in clubs, sports, and community service. Please support these opportunities for them because positive healthy supportive relationships do develop with school staff that can be very helpful to them while in foster care. Also, please feel free to reach out to our Heartland for Children Education Specialist if you need help navigating any school barriers. Cherie Perryn can be reached at 863-519-8900 ext. 292 or [education@heartlandforchildren.org](mailto:education@heartlandforchildren.org).

Let's make this new school year be the best it can be for children and youth in foster care in Circuit 10.

Kim Daugherty, CEO  
Heartland for Children



## More Proof that Fostering Matters!

Social Media post from EC to LACP

as one of the children you have once fostered i can say you were the best part of being in a system that is other wise a crappy place. when i say you changed both mine and my sisters life's for the better i truly mean it. i can't explain how much i appreciate you for not only opening up your home but your heart to two little girls who just needed someone and somewhere we felt safe. we love you and are so so grateful 💖



## Pod Cast: Mental Health & Back to School

[Let's Talk About Mental Health & Back to School](#) (Click on the title to go to the podcast)

Air Date: 8/1/22

The new school year is almost here! Most parents in Polk, Highlands and Hardee counties agree that they want to learn more about how to prepare their children to be successful in school.

On this episode of Let's Talk About It, Natalya Clemens, Heartland for Children's Community Engagement Specialist, and Tiffani Fritzsche, Children's Services Director with Peace River Center, talk about the importance of mental health for parents and children when it comes to going back to school! Listen in on this conversation for practical tips for parents, caregivers and children.

If you or someone you know is needed help, contact Peace River Center's Emotional Support & Crisis Line: 863-519-3744 Learn more about Peace River Center's services: [peacrivercenter.org](http://peacrivercenter.org)

Be sure to [subscribe](#) to receive email updates on our podcast. If you have a suggestion for a podcast episode, email us at [info@heartlandforchildren.org](mailto:info@heartlandforchildren.org).



## Council on Accreditation (COA) Survey Is Coming Soon!

You know how important your opinion is to us! In the upcoming weeks, we will be asking you to complete a stakeholder survey for the Council on Accreditation (COA). The COA surveys are completely confidential and are submitted directly to COA for them to use as part of their evaluation of Heartland for Children (HFC). Since you are currently caring for children or youth served by HFC, it would be very helpful for COA to know what you think about our organization and its services.

What is COA and why do we do this? COA is a national organization that sets standards for quality service. HFC has been accredited by COA since 2009 and we undergo a reaccreditation review every 4 years. Our contract with the Florida Department of Children and Families requires that we maintain our accreditation.

Please be on the lookout for the survey link and thank you for all that you do for our children and community!

Please direct any questions to:

Kim Corpus

Contract Manager

(863) 519-8900 ext. 206

[kcorpus@heartlandforchildren.org](mailto:kcorpus@heartlandforchildren.org)

## Foster Home Statistics

- 3 New homes licensed in July 2024
- 81 Families inquired about fostering in July 2024
- 3 Of the families were referred by current Foster Caregivers
- 174 homes total in Circuit 10

YOU are our best recruiters for new foster families! Please share your stories with others and ask them to contact us at (863)519-8900 x289 if they are interested in learning more about fostering. Thank you for your recruitment efforts!



## TLC Association News



Please make plans to join TLC Association on Friday, August 16th at 6:00 pm for our monthly T.L.C. ASSOCIATION, INC. dinner, social time, and training meeting. This month we will have training on Behavioral Therapy with Carrie Davis from I Love ABA. As always, TLC will provide a free dinner for your family and free childcare for your children during our training. Please contact Lori Chapman Peacock at [loripeacocktic@gmail.com](mailto:loripeacocktic@gmail.com) to reserve your childcare with ages of the children and to let us know how many to prepare dinner for.

We will be meeting at:  
Trinity Baptist Church  
6633 Old Rd 37  
Lakeland, FL 33811

We will also have our new Care Closet open for you to browse and free food to give away from 5:00 to 6:30 before the meeting.

**SAVE *The* DATE**  
10-19-2024  
FloridaFAPA Mini Conference  
HOSTED by TLC Association Inc and HCFPA

Details to follow  
Questions, please contact  
Lori Ann Chapman Peacock,  
TLC Association Inc, President  
813-892-3016



## FY 2023 – 2024 Year in Review

By Chris Dyer, Director of Quality & Contract Management

The 2023–2024 fiscal year was a busy but very productive year for Heartland for Children and our System of Care. Some of the highlights include:

- In large part due to our performance, we successfully were awarded another 5 year contract to continue doing this work as the Lead Agency for Polk, Highlands and Hardee counties.
- Over 160 children found forever homes, surpassing our target of 155 finalized adoptions;
- There were only 503 children that entered the foster care locally from investigation removals, marking the lowest number in a single year since 2007–2008;
- Heartland for Children had 44 new foster homes licensed during this year;
- Placement stability performance was significantly higher meaning the children we are serving are in stable and caring homes;
- We had 694 children that exited out of home care;
- There were 45 new case managers hired and completed training this year and we had a higher retention rate of case managers than in recent years;
- All of the items above have allowed caseloads to decrease for case managers, providing an opportunity to increase attention on individual cases and the needs of the children and families;
- We had a significant reduction in runaways over the fiscal year meaning children are feeling more safe and nurtured in their placements;
- And lastly, We celebrated more than 20 youth successfully graduate high school this year;

As we look ahead into the 2024–2025 fiscal year, our work to continuously improve our system of care does not stop. Some of the areas of focus will include, but not be limited to:

- Increasing the number of siblings placed together to move performance towards the state target of 65%;
- Improving the numbers of children that achieve permanency within 12 months;
- Improving the quality of work related to safety, permanency and well-being for all children we serve; and
- Further support our foster home network through expanded TBRI opportunities, engagement with Phoenix Counseling Services, and infusion of evidence based practices like FFT.



## Important Dates in August



8/13 - Board Rate Payments Disbursed

8/16 - TLC Meeting & Training at 6:00 pm

8/29 - Foster Care Advisory Council Meeting 12:00 - 1:00 pm



“ Every child is ONE CARING ADULT away from being a SUCCESS STORY.”

JOSH SHIPP  
(FORMER FOSTER TEEN)



Since 2003, Heartland for Children has been the community-based care lead agency contracted with the Department of Children and Families serving Polk, Highlands and Hardee Counties. As the lead agency, Heartland for Children assumes the responsibilities for System Administration of a comprehensive child welfare service provider network that includes:

- protective services
- foster care
- adoption
- independent living
- placement services
- prevention
- family preservation
- family support services
- other related services

### MISSION

Improving safety, permanency, and well-being for all children in Polk, Highlands, and Hardee Counties.

### VISION

To eliminate child abuse and neglect in Polk, Highlands, and Hardee Counties.

### DID YOU KNOW?

Current stats as of July 14, 2024...

1,874

children in foster care in Circuit 10

174

foster families in Circuit 10

167

adoptions in the 2023-2024 fiscal year

### Our Greatest Need



There is an urgent need for **foster + adoptive** families that are willing to open their hearts + homes to teens, sibling groups and children with special needs. To learn more, call 863-519-8900 x 289!

Learn how you can get involved:



www.heartlandforchildren.org