



FAMILY MATTERS

STRONGER FAMILIES, STRONGER COMMUNITIES

FAMILIES FIRST NEWSLETTER SPRING 2019

WWW.FAMILIESFIRSTPBC.ORG

PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT: CHILD FIRST

Witnessing Violence Changes A Child . . . Forever

At 18 months, Elena was already exhibiting the effects of witnessing her father's violence against her mother. She was hitting her mother and avoiding playing with dolls that depicted male figures, among other behaviors.

Witnessing violence, no matter at how young an age, can and does change a child for life – unless help is found quickly, which it was in Elena's case. She and her mother, Lydia, were connected to Families First's Child First program that deals with the most serious cases involving children exposed to violence and trauma.

The toddler saw her substance-abusing father throw an object at her mother; it narrowly missed Elena. Elena's mother left the father, leaving mother and daughter without emotional or financial support. While Lydia had many strengths, including earning an AA degree and holding a job, the Child First team noted that the mother had difficulty interacting with Elena. Also, Elena had started hitting Lydia which upset her, reminding her of the episodes of domestic violence from Elena's father.



After gaining Lydia's trust, the Child First care coordinator first helped her with budgeting and other issues before turning attention to Elena's emotional and psychological needs. She noted that Lydia was expecting too much from her tiny daughter. For example, when they read together, Lydia became frustrated that Elena was not interested in turning pages. The care coordinator suggested that instead, mother and daughter look at the pictures without reading every word. Then the clinician set about addressing the toddler's aggression. Because play is a child's language, the clinician introduced toys including dolls, a doll house and helping figures to elicit Elena's story.

Read full story. (<https://www.familiesfirstpbc.org/witnessing-violence-changes-a-child-forever>)

What Makes Child First Unique

Child First is a nationally evidence-based program aimed at reducing the negative, long-term developmental impact of stress and trauma on children. Palm Beach County was Child First's first program outside Connecticut where it was developed. The Children's Services Council of Palm Beach County awarded funding to Families First to start the program. The pairing of a care coordinator with a licensed clinician is what sets Child First apart from other services – providing the social supports, coupled with counseling needed to reduce the negative, long-term developmental impact of stress and trauma on children. In 2018, Child First served 101 families including 101 children and 140 adults.

Mary Mitchell, MSW, LCSW, found the Child First clinical director position a perfect fit for her after a long career in New York. "My professional mission has always been to help children and parents cope with trauma and to help mitigate its adverse effects on mental and physical health and brain development. Child First has been highly successful in doing just that."



Spring Highlights

All In For Families First Poker Tournament-In January, our supporters took a gamble to attend our second All In For Families First Poker Tournament in January at Roger Dean Chevrolet Stadium.



Families First gave a special thanks to donors and volunteers at its Annual Donor Breakfast.



Wonderful time at the Honda Classic with Julie Swindler, Samantha Whiteman, Barbara LeBrun, Judith Schumacher and Renee Constantino.



Some 40 families we serve received free cribs through a giveaway program held at Clinics Can Help. A total of 300 were given away to needy families.



The happiest of our families got an all-expense-paid vacation to "the happiest place on earth" thanks to a local foundation, FUNding Working Families.



Our CEO Julie Swindler was in the spotlight twice, receiving the Social Worker of the Year for Palm Beach County award from the National Association of Social Workers; and the Women of Worth (WOW) award from the Central Palm Beach County Chamber of Commerce.

