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News & Media

Campaign to recruit foster parents exceeds goal

Port Saint Lucie – The goal was simple: Add at least 25 new foster homes by December 25.

The results were simply astounding: Devereux CBC, through the combined efforts of Child Placing Agencies Camelot Community Care, 4KIDS of the Treasure Coast and Place of Hope, recruited, trained and licensed 47 new homes.

That number represents an 88 percent increase over the original campaign goal and brings the number of foster homes in Indian River, Martin, Okeechobee and St. Lucie counties to 150.

"This is an incredible win for our community, and entirely due to the amount of work that our child-placing agencies have dedicated to the project," said Christina Kaiser, community relations director for Devereux CBC.

"We told them we needed more homes, and they stepped up the game."

Devereux CBC coordinates and oversees the local child-welfare system. It contracts with Camelot, 4KIDS and Place of Hope (and most recently Mount Bethel Family Services) to recruit, train and license foster homes in the four-county area.

The push for more homes is a constant one, Kaiser said. However, Devereux CBC made foster-home recruitment the top agency priority in 2015 after experiencing abnormally high numbers of children placed out of circuit or in residential group homes.

"Group care is critical to any child-welfare system, but ideally, we want children to live in foster homes," Kaiser said. "And we want them to stay in their home counties."

Having a large pool of foster homes makes that possible, she said.

Devereux CBC's recruitment efforts included adding two licensing agencies, focusing on specific populations and communities and aligning all of its outreach and public relations activities with the recruitment efforts of its child-placing agencies.

Outreach and education activities kicked off in May 2015 from a series of springtime breakfasts and became known as the 25 by 25 campaign.

"Thus 25 new homes by December 25," Kaiser said. "That was the number of homes we needed to start moving children placed out of circuit back to our community and out of group care."

Foster parent informational material was distributed to 2,500 individuals through a network of more than 20 community groups and partners during the eight-month public relations campaign. And existing foster parents told their stories through letters to the editor that were submitted twice a month.

Today, there are 22 percent fewer children living in residential group care than there were last spring. Most of that decrease was experienced among younger children, while teens and sibling groups continue to make up the bulk of children living in residential care.

Of the more than 200 children in licensed foster care, about 34 percent are teenagers. However, less than 2 percent of local foster homes are licensed to take teens.

"We aren't done yet," Kaiser said. "There's no magic number of foster homes that we need, but we need more - and the statistics on teenagers bear that out."

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