

Devereux

COMMUNITY BASED CARE OF OKEECHOBEE & THE TREASURE COAST

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News & Media

A Note from the CEO - Carol DeLoach

Port Saint Lucie – One of the first lessons I learned as I began my career in the Florida dependency system was this: No matter how hard you work, one of your families sooner or later will come back into the system.

That's when everything you ever read or learned about substance abuse, domestic violence or good old-fashion, unpredictable human behavior becomes something real - the adversary to hard work and good intentions.

Drug addiction, family violence and mental illness drive child abuse in our society. The number of children impacted by abuse and neglect in our own community remains unacceptably high; in fact, the majority of children entering foster care are removed from home due to these very issues.



None of these problems, however, exist in vacuums; they impact one another, and both cause and are caused by one another. The trauma inflicted on children by each adverse experience leads to a disproportionately increased risk of substance abuse, domestic violence and mental illness in their own lives, perpetuating the cycle.

We must therefore reject the ineffective silo approaches to serving children that defined our relationships with other systems in the past. Our prevention strategies in child welfare must include an engagement with any system whose indicators impact our own - the substance abuse and mental health, domestic violence and juvenile justice systems, to name a few. I'm proud to say that this is happening in Okeechobee and the Treasure Coast.

Our various systems are working together, closing the gaps that separate one critical program from the next. We've worked hard to ensure that abused and neglected children and their families have greater access to behavioral health and domestic violence services. We've done this by training together, sharing resources and implementing programs that address shared outcomes for all systems.

April is National Child Abuse Awareness and Prevention Month. It's a time to reflect on these challenges as well as successes, to tell our stories and spread the word that the fight to end child abuse will not cease until every child in our community feels safe in his or her own home.

Picking a month on the calendar and assigning a cause to it isn't enough. Casting a few choice stories - good or bad - doesn't tell the whole truth. Child abuse just isn't that simple, and neither is the work we do to chip away at it.

It's hard work, and it's daunting.

But giving up isn't an option - that's the second lesson I learned working the front lines. Child abuse doesn't stop just because we might. So we learn to flex some muscle, plant our legs and PUSH BACK. And we hang on to the one thing we can never afford to lose in this battle - hope. Our children have it. Their families have it. Our caregivers, providers, case managers, supervisors, specialists, counselors, partners and everyone who continues to push back has it.

And that's not something you commemorate for only one month.

[Read Carol's guest column in Tuesday's edition of TC Palm.](#)

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