

Devereux

COMMUNITY BASED CARE OF OKEECHOBEE & THE TREASURE COAST

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News & Media

Permanency team wins excellence award

Port St. Lucie - The Circuit 19 Permanency Roundtable team that reunited a long-estranged mother and daughter earlier this year was awarded for its trailblazing work with the 2017 Child Welfare Excellence Award.

[Florida Department of Children and Families](#) Secretary Mike Carroll presented the award during this year's Child Protection Summit, an annual gathering of child-welfare professionals from throughout the state.

The team, a cross section of professionals from multiple agencies, received the award for collaboratively and positively impacting the life of a child and family.

Through the Roundtable process - established locally in 2014 with the help of [Casey Family Programs](#) - teams are assembled to identify and remove barriers to permanency on a child-by-child, family-by-family basis.

Cases that come to the Roundtable are the most complex and often represent children who have languished in the system for years due to behavior or mental health issues.



This Circuit 19 Permanency Round Table team won the Child Welfare Excellence Award during the 2017 Child Protection Summit. From left: Sara Topmiller, Pilar Harris, Gary Bokas, Denise Waninger, Wendy Rodriguez, Stacey Wickett and Roberta Katz.

Not pictured: Paul Nigro, Fay Clark, Hilary Pinder, Carol Deloach & Cheri Sheffer.

"We look at each case, we talk about it, ask questions and then the brainstorming begins," said Sara Topmiller, who coordinates the Roundtable on behalf of Devereux Community Based Care and the Circuit 19 child-welfare community. "No idea is a bad idea, and some of them have been way outside the box."

But it's sometimes the craziest ideas that work.

That was the case early this year, when the team worked to reunite a teenager with her mother, whose parental rights had long been terminated.

"It just hadn't been done before," said Cheri Sheffer, Devereux CBC Chief Operating Officer, who sits on the Roundtable. "But mom had gotten herself together and had established a support network, and the child was struggling emotionally and was alone in the world.

"It just made sense to try."

Everyone on the Roundtable, including the child's Guardian ad Litem, case manager and Child Legal Services, agreed that returning the girl to her mother was in her best interest and the best way for her to find permanency.

"It was a revolutionary idea, but that's the case that everyone talks about and holds up as an example of success," Topmiller said.

For more information, including how to become a foster parent, please [click here](#).



The Permanency team wasn't the only local institution recognized during the summit. Lorrene Egan, Devereux Community Base Care St. Lucie County Manager, was recognized for more than 30 years' service to children and families.

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