



THE FLORIDA CENTER  
FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD



# Building Strong Families... One Child at a Time

Triplets Ava, Aiden, and Madison, age 5  
Starfish Academy Class of 2017



*The Florida Center for Early Childhood helps at-risk children, and their families, overcome obstacles to reach their full potential. We serve children birth to 8 in Sarasota, Charlotte, and DeSoto/Hardee counties, regardless of income. Services include speech and occupational therapies, mental health therapy, behavior support, an inclusion-model preschool with services on site, an in-home child abuse prevention program, and the state's only Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD) diagnostic clinic.*

**75%**

of children and families served are living at or below poverty level

**55%**

of preschoolers at The Florida Center have experienced moderate to severe developmental delays

**100%**

of all families surveyed indicated they were “very satisfied” or “satisfied” with early education and intervention services received



**Kathryn Shea, LCSW**  
**President and CEO**



**Larry Lawman**  
**Board Chairman**

Dear Friends of The Florida Center,

A common theme for this past year has been collaboration— not only between staff, our families, and stakeholders like you – but through a wide range of partnerships with others who are working to provide better outcomes for at-risk children and families.

Looking back, here are just a few of the ways in which we strengthened our organization, as well as the children and families we serve:

- Helped expedite the process of moving infants and toddlers from foster care into stable, permanent homes through Early Childhood Court
- Helped struggling families move beyond poverty through the 2Gen strategy
- Accepted babies into our early childhood classrooms to help meet the demand for more high-quality infant care
- Expanded our Board of Directors with the help of a strategic task force of community stakeholders
- Launched a new website to better connect with our funders, friends and community partners

Looking forward, we are excited about the many opportunities to expand our reach and transform the lives of our community’s most vulnerable population.

We encourage you to take a few moments to read some of the personal triumphs of our children and families made possible through your generous support. Together, we are “Building Strong Families. . . One Child at a Time”.

Gratefully,

Kathryn Shea and Larry Lawman

**Vision:**  
*We envision a time when every child will be loved, nourished, and encouraged to reach their full potential*

# Funding Their Success

**2,270**

children and their families served

**3,642**

individual and family mental health sessions completed

**5,000**

sessions of speech and occupational therapies, and behavior support completed

**60**

evaluations completed at our Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders clinic

**100**

part-time and full-time employees at The Florida Center

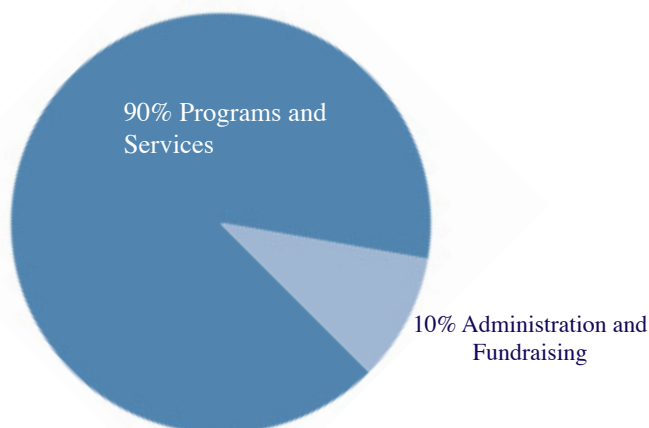
**714**

families served in Sarasota, Charlotte, and DeSoto/Hardee counties through the Healthy Families child abuse prevention program (Originally contracted to serve 672)

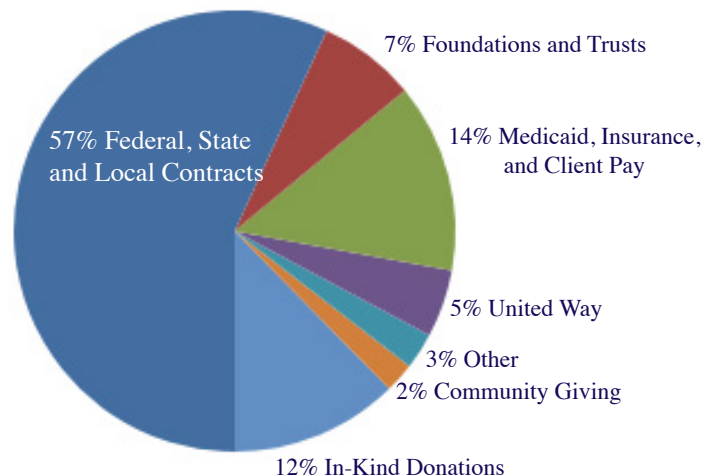
**\$5,314,623**

Total Operating Revenue and Support

## Use of Funds



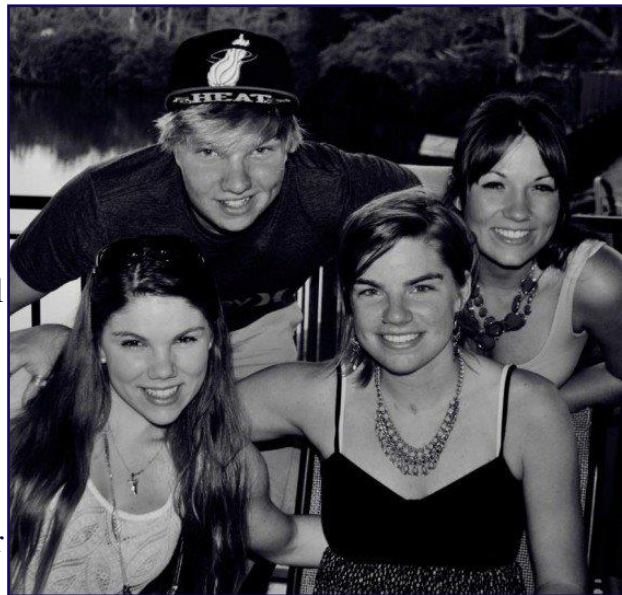
## Funds Provided By



# Establishing a Bright Future

When Thomas Dart was a toddler, he faced developmental challenges related to sensory processing, walking, and crawling. His parents, Tom and Kim of Sarasota, recognized the need for early intervention and sought help from The Florida Center (known then as the Child Development Center). With therapy, Thomas was able to get back on track and reach important developmental milestones that helped set him on the path to success.

Thomas attended Pine View School for the Gifted and played lacrosse for Riverview High School in Sarasota. Today, Thomas is a student at Florida State University and is considering a career in medicine. His family remains connected to The Florida Center, serving as ambassadors for the mission and lending community support. Thomas came back to The Florida Center recently, along with his parents and sisters, to help with a garden project that will benefit other children and families for years to come.



Thomas with his sisters Amanda, Rachael and Rebecca

## Providing Early Intervention for Success



Natasha Grabowski has a keen understanding of how early intervention at The Florida Center played a big role in helping her achieve her dreams.

“The Florida Center helped me thrive in many ways,” said Natasha, who was born with significant developmental delays and challenges. “The speech, occupational, and physical therapies helped me grow physically, start to walk, improve my social skills, and prepare me for kindergarten.”

From there, Natasha and her family worked hard to meet every developmental milestone that lay ahead. As the years progressed, her dream of going to college and one day working in the hospitality industry began to take shape.

“I am now a recent college graduate with a bachelor’s degree from Florida Gulf Coast University,” Natasha said. “And. . . I currently work at a Disney World Resort in Orlando.”

# Giving Hope to a Family Affected by Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders

Sarah and her husband adopted their two daughters at birth, with the knowledge that both girls had been exposed to alcohol prenatally. To provide the best possible outcomes for the girls, now ages two and three, Sarah brought them to the state's first and only Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD) clinic at The Florida Center. Sarah and the girls traveled all the way from the Florida Panhandle to get an evaluation and diagnosis from a multidisciplinary team trained in FASD.

"The clinic has helped in learning what we, as a family, are dealing with. . . and helped make a road map to help our family as a whole," Sarah said. "By coming to the clinic, we are seeing everything holistically: what resources we need and what help we should seek out. We have a starting point to advocate for our children. With the diagnosis, I have tools I can build on and we don't feel stuck in a rut anymore."



## Preparing for Kindergarten and Beyond

When Kristina's twin boys entered the Starfish Academy preschool at The Florida Center, they were showing signs of speech and language delays, and needing improvement with their social skills. The boys were evaluated and began working with a speech therapist on staff at the center.

"I really can't say enough good things about the teachers and staff," Kristina said. "Everyone there truly cares about the kids and has their best interests in mind in all they do."

Kristina said that the speech therapist regularly conferred with the boys' teachers to assess their progress in class, which proved very beneficial.

"I believe this integrated approach has been key in helping them get where they are now," she said. "Two years later, they are graduating from Pre-K and are at or above level in all categories. I am so thankful that I found the Florida Center!"

# 96%

of parents and caregivers reported overall improvements in their child's behavior

# 100%

of VPK students showed improvements of at least 10% in biannual assessments

# 95%

of children demonstrated improvements in early literacy and self-regulation

# Strengthening a Family Bond

When Gracielli's 3-year-old daughter began acting out at her Venice preschool, the staff advised her to call The Florida Center for help. A mental health therapist from the agency came to observe the young girl in her classroom to better understand the problem.

"(The therapist) detected a lot of insecurity and low self-esteem in my daughter," Gracielli said. "Her knowledge helped me see my daughter differently and I've learned to put her needs before mine."

Gracielli said the therapist also helped her learn to respond effectively to her daughter's outbursts and tantrums.

"My therapist helped me have more patience with my daughter; to take a deep breath and evaluate the situation to see what it is that she is needing at that moment," Gracielli said. "My daughter still has her outbursts, but I've learned to modify my reaction toward her behavior.

"I feel our therapist was God-sent! She has helped my family and me through a very tough time in our lives and we will forever be grateful."



## 95%

of children who received occupational therapy and behavior support demonstrated progress toward goals

## 98%

of Starfish Academy students who received additional intervention services demonstrated progress toward goals

## 120

students 6 weeks to 5 years engaged in evidence-based inclusion curriculum at the Starfish Academy

## Helping a Family in Need

In early 2013, when Kelly found out that she was pregnant, she also learned that her husband was headed to jail. His release date was set for one month after their baby's birth. That's when Kelly decided to reach out for help, contacting the Healthy Families program at The Florida Center. She was provided with a Family Support Worker (FSW), who made weekly home visits.

"During this time, my FSW gave me constant support and resources to get by when my husband was gone," said Kelly, who gave birth to a baby girl at the end of that year. When her husband was released from jail, their FSW was there to help meet the family's needs.

"Healthy Families gave me positive support and ways to build on our relationship, and resources to get my husband into AA (Alcoholics Anonymous)," Kelly said. "It has been almost four years since Healthy Families came into my life and it has helped me have a great relationship with my husband, showed me ways to get involved in the community, to build a stronger family, and build trust in my children."

Kelly said she and her husband, who remains sober, have had a second child and are doing well. They are very active in their church, and community, and their FSW has been by their side, through it all.

"Healthy Families has been wonderful to my family!"



Kelly's daughter, age 3

# 100%

of Healthy Families participants did not have any findings of maltreatment one year after completion

# 96%

of Healthy Families Sarasota participants had immunized their children by age 2

# 93%

of Healthy Families Sarasota participants improved or maintained self-sufficiency while enrolled



# Thank you for Making a Difference!



# Thank You for Investing in Their Future

Sabrina Adams  
Ken Alexander  
Bill and Faith Allen  
John Allen  
Lucille Allen  
Pam Altier  
Steve and Judy Altier  
Bill and Tavia Ames  
Cheryl Babcock  
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The Community Foundation of Sarasota County  
The Edward & Ruth Wilkof Foundation  
The Harold C. and Jacqueline F. Bladel Foundation  
The Rubin Charitable Foundation  
Trinity United Methodist Women  
U.S. Trust Bank of America Client Foundation  
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United Way Suncoast  
Universal North America  
Wells Fargo Foundation  
William G. and Marie Selby Foundation  
Wilson-Wood Foundation



Melissa and Scott Dunlap

## Creating Change in Our Community

Scott and Melissa Dunlap have donated their time and talent to The Florida Center for more than 15 years, recognizing that there is no greater investment than in early childhood. As longtime Sarasota residents and community stakeholders, the Dunlaps see the value in helping at-risk children and families reach their full potential.

“These children are our future, and what we do to help them grow into their best selves strengthens their families and our community,” Melissa said.

In addition to their individual and corporate gifts, through Dunlap & Moran P.A., Melissa has served on the Board of Directors, chaired special events, and worked directly with the children whose lives she and Scott are helping to transform.

**To learn how you can make a difference through charitable giving, or to volunteer at The Florida Center, visit [www.thefloridacenter.org](http://www.thefloridacenter.org) or call 371-8820 x 1165.**



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**Charmian Miller**  
CFO

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VP Clinical Services

**Debbie Keyso**  
VP Healthy Families Services

**Kim Williams**  
Director Developmental Therapies

**Saran Devaughn**  
Starfish Academy Principal

**Stacy Pinkerton**  
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**Kaitlyn Kramer**  
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