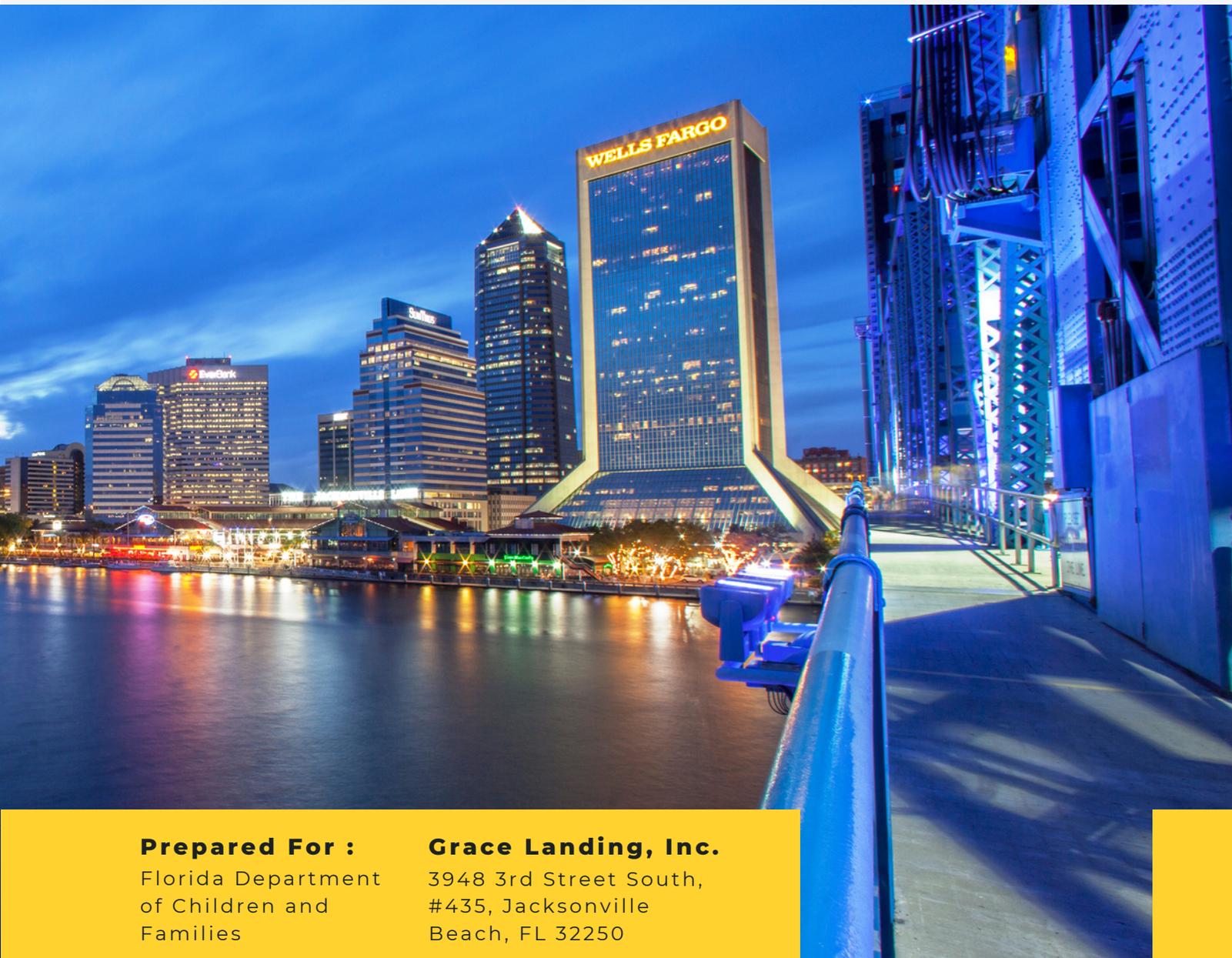




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DUVAL COUNTY LANDSCAPE STUDY

Summer 2022



Prepared For :
Florida Department
of Children and
Families

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We at Grace Landing, Inc. would like to thank all those who participated in the development of this report. Without the Duval County community, our development team, and our readers interested in making a difference in the lives of families and children, we would not have completed our study.

Thank you to all the following community organizations who participated in interviews about the child welfare system in Duval County:

- Florida Department of Children and Families
- Circuit 4 Dependency Court
- Family Support Services of North Florida
- Daniel Kids
- Hope Multiplies
- Guardian ad Litem Foundation for Children
- Isaiah 117 House
- Florida's Children First
- Exchange Club Family Center
- Christ's Church
- Church of Eleven22
- Elevate Life
- Mayo Clinic
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Thank you also to our wonderful development team for making this report into reality:

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Finally, thank you for reading and responding to the Florida foster care crisis. With your help, we can make a positive change in the way vulnerable children and families are cared for.

ABSTRACT

This study was conducted by Grace Landing on a grant from the Florida Department of Children and Families. After completing a document and data search on Duval County, 14 persons from 14 community organizations were interviewed.

The key findings are as follows:

1. Many families are struggling with life controlling issues at higher averages and children in Duval County are being impacted negatively.
2. The Community Based Care lead agency has been successful in their statutory task of caring for children in NE Florida based on key state and national metrics.
3. Florida state executive leadership has created innovative policies and funding streams to promote the goals of child welfare.
4. Public healthcare systems have expressed a willingness to collaborate with the community-based faith and civic organizations and child welfare agencies to promote volunteerism and community engagement.
5. Civic community leaders have similarly expressed a willingness to collaborate with the faith community and the child welfare agencies to support evidence-based models of care.
6. The faith community represents the most significant resource of volunteers and potential foster parents in the community and are keen to engage evidence-based strategies to deal with the foster care crisis.
7. Formal county and regional systems of care present as closed systems that exclude community leaders outside of their formal system to participate in the task of protecting the children of NE Florida.

The key recommendations of the study are as follows:

1. The establishment of a Coalition for Children First in NE Florida that incorporates all these community based civil society networks
2. Tasking the Coalition to:
 - a. Explore the implementation of the National Court Watch Project
 - b. Produce and publish a third-party caregiver satisfaction survey
 - c. Publish quarterly Placement Quality Reports using the Quality Placement Index [A] to evaluate CFSR data compliance in NE Florida
 - d. Develop faith-based Family Advocacy Centers in select communities and neighborhoods to coordinate local resources for families to prevent child abuse and promote healthy family
 - e. Promote promising practices and evidence-based Fatherhood Initiatives and explore opportunities for collaboration between faith community, child welfare, public health, and civic community

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OPEN LETTER

In 2021, Grace Landing partnered with the Florida Department of Children and Families to review the condition of the foster care system in Duval County and determine where the greatest needs are in the community. Grace Landing conducted 14 interviews across organizations most involved or looking to be involved with the child welfare system. Each interviewee answered a standard set of questions, and each was afforded anonymity to elicit candid responses. Although some questions could be answered with a simple yes or no, most were open-ended and were intended to stimulate expansive remarks.

We also conducted quantitative research, reviewing U.S. Census data to gain a better understanding of the socio-demographics and challenges facing the community at large. We hoped that by researching the larger factors at play, we would be able to identify key factors that could be contributing to the foster care demand in Duval.

Our goal for conducting the study was to establish a quantitative and qualitative baseline for the prevention and quality placement services provided to children and families. This baseline will serve as a benchmark for our Duval Quality Placement and Prevention Index Annual Report.

We are grateful to the organizations and individuals who shared their views with us. We appreciate their open communication and willingness to share their understanding of the Duval foster care system.

We humbly submit this report to the Duval community at large. Grace Landing applauds the work of the agencies and hopes to engage in genuine conversation and collaboration with the child welfare system, faith communities, healthcare systems and civic and business communities in Duval to advance child abuse prevention and quality foster care placements.

Changing the way communities care for children and families through community awareness, volunteer engagement, social capital investing, and community strengthening,

Bill Hancock

Executive Consultant and Area Managing Director

Fostering Our Future at Grace Landing

INTRODUCTION

On April 25, 2002, the Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF) shocked the nation by notifying police that Rilya Wilson, a 5-year-old girl, had been missing from state custody for 15 months. Her caregiver at the time, Geralyn Graham, told authorities that someone identifying themselves as a caseworker had taken Rilya “for testing” for behavior problems in January 2001. Two other individuals identifying themselves as employees of DCF had visited twice following the January visit, acting as if they were aware Rilya had been taken and were requesting toys to help her adjust to her surroundings.

Rilya’s caseworker, Deborah Muskelly, was tasked with visiting Rilya’s foster home monthly and reporting on her progress. However, Muskelly falsified records and did not visit the home after early January 2001. Another caseworker found inconsistencies in Muskelly’s records in 2002 and scheduled a visit to Rilya’s home, only to discover her missing.

On May 6, 2002, Governor Jeb Bush (1999-2007) appointed a Blue-Ribbon Panel on Child Protection to investigate Rilya’s disappearance. The panel conducted eight public hearings and heard more than 30 hours of testimonies from a wide range of experts; biological, foster, and adoptive families; child welfare players; and academics during May 2002. They also reviewed thousands of records, reports, and trends.

The panel pieced together a timeline of events and offered recommendations for the child welfare system moving forward. Gov. Bush agreed to implement most of the panel’s recommendations by 2003, including background checks for potential foster parents and notifying police of any missing children immediately.

The panel discovered that DCF had been ordered 16 times since 1985 to restructure the agency to address failures within the organization. A 91-page document was reviewed that detailed each action and inaction taken by DCF. By 1998, DCF had been ordered to transition to Florida’s current community-based care (CBC) model by 2004 with the understanding that the model allowed for more flexibility in addressing community issues.

While DCF was in the process of transitioning to the CBC model at the time of Rilya’s disappearance, her investigation highlighted the need for drastic changes in Florida’s foster care landscape. While not listed as a recommendation by the panel, their report does have an entire section discussing the successes of pilot CBC programs across the state and the positive changes it can have if implemented correctly.

Following the changes Gov. Bush instituted, Gov. Charlie Crist (2007-2011) launched the “Explore Adoption” initiative. “Explore Adoption” started as a media and grassroots campaign that partnered with 25 organizations and launched television and radio campaigns and a hotline promoting adoption. The campaign focused on teens, sibling groups, and children with disabilities - the children who typically spend the most time in foster care.

The initiative resulted in “a record-breaking number of adoptions of children from state care and one-third fewer children in out-of-home care.” [1] This focus on adoption was a distinct change from Gov. Bush’s initiatives and seemed to have a positive impact on the foster care system.

Gov. Rick Scott (2011-2019) signed a bill in 2014 changing the way that DCF investigates child abuse cases. The law funded over 250 additional child protective investigators and established a response team to investigate child abuse deaths of children previously involved in the child welfare system. It also provided additional resources for authorities to handle abuse cases.

Gov. Scott also signed a bill in 2016 that changed the “best interest standard” regarding adoption cases. With the new law, dependency court judges were allowed to weigh all relevant factors when an adoption intervention occurs, preventing an abusive biological parent from dictating where a child is placed for adoption.

These laws were at the forefront of Gov. Scott’s child welfare initiatives due to 2014 report from the Miami Herald noting that at least 477 children from families with at least one encounter with child welfare died between 2008-2013. Most of these children were under the age of five.[2] Known as the “Lost Innocents,” Gov. Scott referenced these children in several of his statements regarding changes to the child welfare system.

In 2019 Gov. Ron DeSantis signed into law the “A Year is a Long Time in the Life of a Child Act,” a measure designed to reduce the amount of time abused and neglected children spend in foster care.

Senate Bill 262 aims to improve communication and accountability in the dependency process so that maltreated children may reach safe, permanent homes within one year. That could mean reunification with the parents, adoption, or placement with a permanent guardian, such as a relative.

The measure requires parents whose children have been placed in the dependency system to be referred for services within seven days. They must keep their contact information current and notify the court of any barriers to completing their case plans. The Department of Children and Families must anticipate barriers and give parents strategies to overcome them, and also must make sure parents get updated contact information if the caseworker on the child’s case changes.

This year marks the twentieth anniversary of Rilya's disappearance and nearly twenty years since the institution of community-based care. During that time, the child welfare industry has made incremental progress away from the transactional fee-for-services environment to a performance-based environment that requires evidence that services are providing sustainable change.

With the passage of the 2018 Family First and Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) and the redirection of congregant care funding and restriction of group home placements, child welfare agencies now focus more than ever on foster care prevention, family preservation, and kinship care. When foster care is required, the 2021 SB 80 law provides guidelines for quality foster case management and additional resources for foster parents.

While the November 4, 2021, investigation into Eckerd Connects Community Alternatives in the Tampa Bay area shows that there is still work to be done, our hope for this report is to consolidate the accomplishments of the CBC model in Duval County and suggest recommendations to better serve the community at large.



KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE DUVAL COUNTY CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM

KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

To better aid the reading of this report, we have provided our key findings and recommendations at the beginning. Here we outline the elements the community at large can engage in to make lasting changes to the way children and families are served. Following our recommendations, we include a researched snapshot of Duval County from publicly available sources, along with a discussion of the current available resources for families in Duval and the quality of those services. Lastly, we discuss the current trends impacting the child welfare system in Florida.

Throughout our research, we discovered the following key findings:

1. Many Families are struggling with life controlling issues at higher averages and children in Duval County are being impacted negatively.
2. The Community Based Care lead agency has been successful in their statutory task of caring for children in NE Florida based on key state and national metrics.
3. Florida state executive leadership has created innovative policies and funding streams to promote the goals of child welfare.
4. Public healthcare systems have expressed a willingness to collaborate with the community-based faith and civic organizations and child welfare agencies to promote volunteerism and community engagement.
5. Civic community leaders have similarly expressed a willingness to collaborate with the faith community and the child welfare agencies to support evidence-based models of care.
6. The faith community represents the most significant resource of volunteers and potential foster parents in the community and are keen to engage evidence-based strategies to deal with the foster care crisis.
7. Formal county and regional systems of care present as closed systems that exclude community leaders outside of their formal system to participate in the task of protecting the children of NE Florida.

It is with these findings in mind that we have developed the following recommendations for the Duval County community as a whole:

Form the Coalition for Children First of Northeast Florida

The Children First Coalition would be a group of faith, civic, public health, child welfare, local government, business, and individuals partnered to serve children involved in or at-risk of being involved in the child welfare system. The coalition would work to address local issues by building the necessary social capital in communities to execute a relationship-based approach to mobilizing, organizing, and equipping community based organization like local churches, civic group, networking groups, citizen groups, professional associations, and local business leaders to serve children and their families in targeted zip codes and neighborhoods.

By contributing to the scalability and sustainability of a professionally managed volunteer movement, the coalition will work to build meaningful relationship to advance the economic, social, emotional, mental, and physical health and well-being in our county, by zip code and neighborhoods.

Each member of the coalition would provide formal and informal services to families that supplements the volunteer activities of the community and neighborhood. These services would range from SafeCare and Parent Aide to foster care pre-licensing and in-service training and high fidelity volunteer wraparound support for families, and Citizen Review Panels. Services also include in-direct activities such as advocacy, research, technical support, and training for coalition members and volunteers.

Explore the implementation of the National Court Watch Project [45]

"We should put efforts into making sure that good decisions are made by judges in their judicial reviews. The juvenile bench should be treated as an important post and judges would be well-trained to do their job. The GAL and attorneys for parents and children should also be well-trained and have the resources to do their jobs well." - expert interviewee

The National Family Court Watch Project volunteers attend hearings using a standardized observational instrument to flag problems they witness in family courts, such as litigants without legal representation; language, vision, or hearing barriers; family violence issues; etc. The goal is to reveal national trends within family courts and work with the court system to find solutions.

Volunteers are typically:

- Interested citizens
- Para-professionals
- Law students
- Senior citizens

- Student interns from various undergrad programs
- Graduate programs of study
- University professors are offering this project to their students as a class project

Publish a third-party caregiver satisfaction survey for Northeast Florida

The third-party caregiver satisfaction survey would provide caregiver feedback to community stakeholders and help inform a continuous quality improvement across agencies and systems of care. It would be modeled after a federal foster parent satisfaction survey and cover a wide variety of support services caregivers receive, including financial assistance, material goods and services, training, respite care, wrap around support, and being part of a child's treatment team.

The results of the survey would help organizations better address the local challenges caregivers are facing.

Produce Placement Quality Quarterly Reports

At the time of this report, there is no standard way to define or measure the quality of services being provided or the lasting impact they have on our neighborhoods.

Fostering Our Future as developed a Placement Quality Index to meet this need. While the Index has been developed to measure the quality of foster care placements, there is the potential to adapt the content to be used in prevention services, as well. The Index can be reviewed in Appendix A.

Develop faith-based Family Advocacy Centers to coordinate local resources for families to prevent child abuse and promote healthy family

The Family Advocacy Center would be the center for family well-being in the community. Found in both rural and urban areas, The Center would provide preventative and supportive services tailored to the needs of the surrounding communities. These communities could be as large as counties or as small as neighborhoods. The number of Centers created would depend on the needs of the community and the resources available. The Center would build an Acts II community (community asset-mapping, family-strengthening, and resource sharing) by recruiting and training wraparound volunteers to provide support to families.

Built with the faith community in mind, The Center will focus on five pillars: family, housing, community, health, education, and jobs. The Center would be established and maintained by partner networks of churches within the zip code or county. The hope is that the informal system of care discussed in the "Supply of Available Foster Care Services and Resources" section would have more opportunities to serve local families and create transformational life-long relationships.

Promote promising practices and evidence-based Fatherhood Initiatives and explore opportunities for collaboration between faith community, child welfare, public health, and civic communities

The Coalition would identify community organizations implementing fatherhood initiatives and request data to determine the effectiveness of the programs. An analysis of the data or lack of would allow the coalition to determine additional recommendations for implementing fatherhood initiatives in Duval County and discover ways for the child welfare, public health, and civic communities to partner with the faith community to benefit the community at large.

These recommendations focus on involving ordinary citizens being involved in the work of protecting the most vulnerable children in our neighborhoods. The importance of engagement is covered under the section titled “Supply of Available Foster Care Services and Resources,” but put simply – we believe in the phrase “it takes a village to raise a child.”

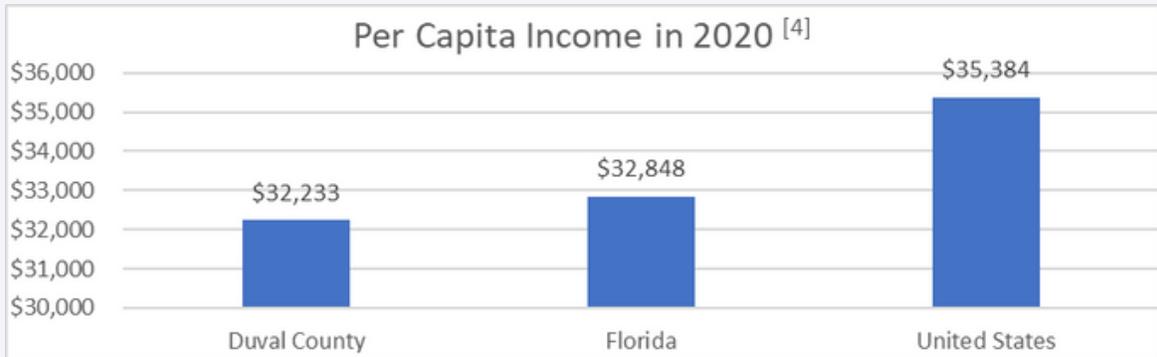
The next four sections provide a snapshot of the environment surrounding the child welfare system in Duval County that led to these recommendations:

1. Factors Threatening Family Stability and Child Safety
2. Supply of Available Foster Care Services and Resources
3. Quality of Services Delivered and Outcomes Achieved
4. Trends and Forces Driving Change in Florida’s Child Welfare System

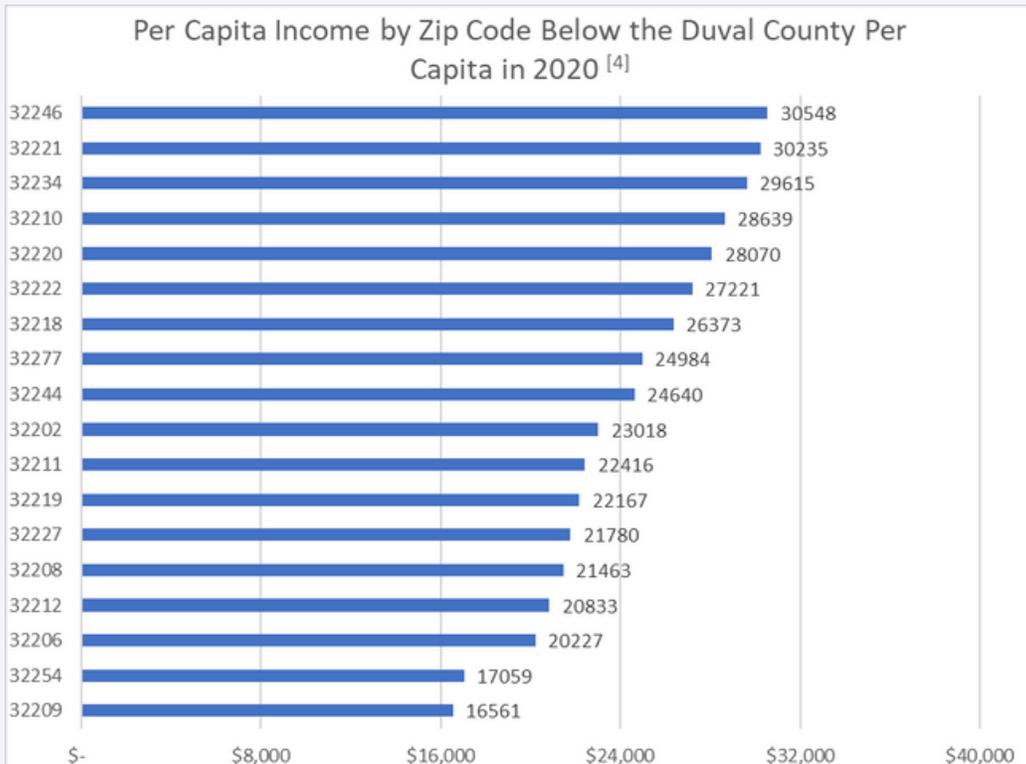


FACTORS THREATENING FAMILY STABILITY AND CHILD SAFETY

FACTORS THREATENING FAMILY STABILITY AND CHILD SAFETY



According to 2020 U.S. Census, Duval County has a per capita income \$615 less than the State of Florida and over \$3,000 less than the United States overall. However, Duval County has a wide range of per capita income levels when the researched is zoomed in by zip code.



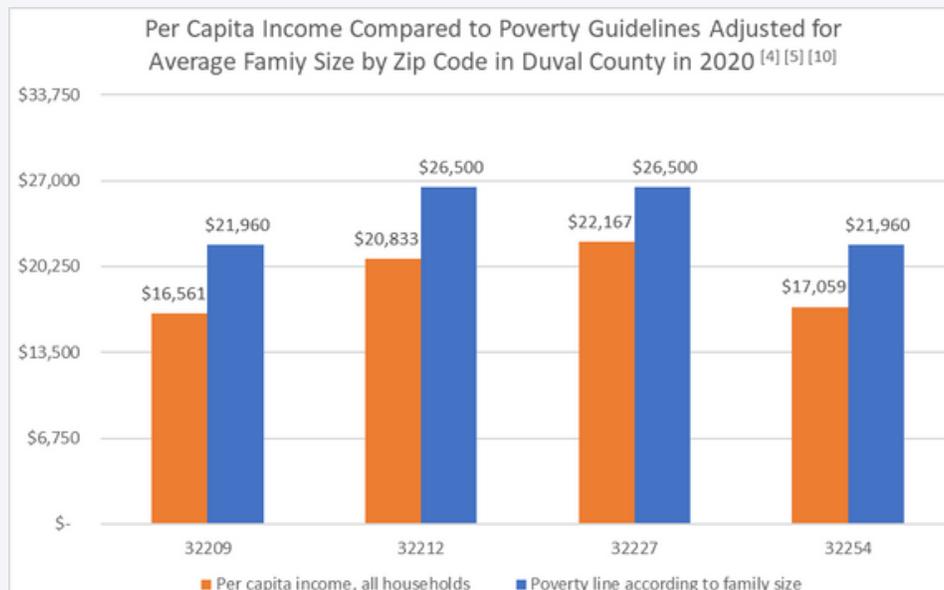
In fact, out of the 34 zip codes located in Duval County, 18 have a per capita income lower than Duval County (Appendix B).

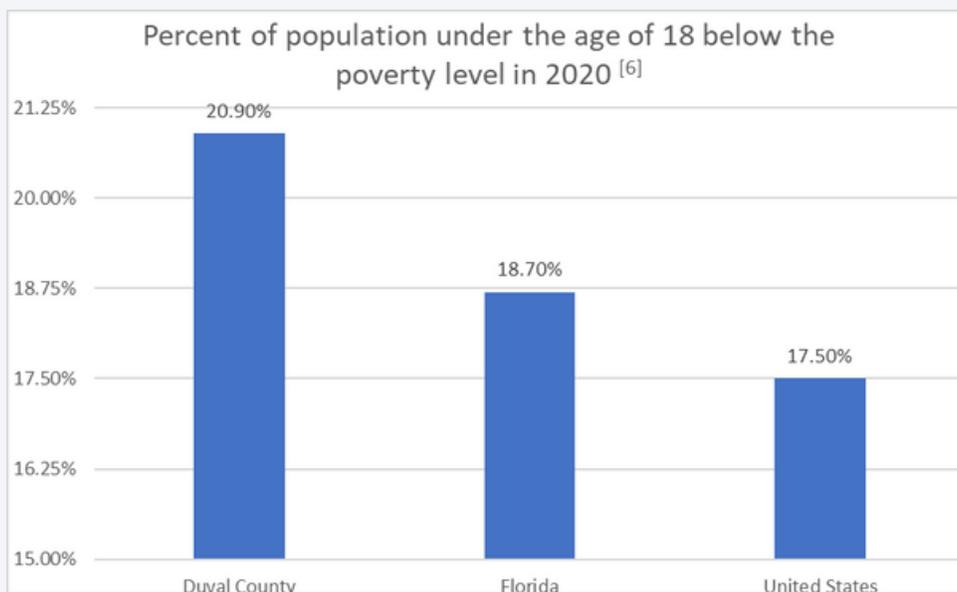
The Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE) provides the following 2021 poverty guidelines for the 48 contiguous states and the District of Columbia [5].

Persons in family/household	Poverty guideline
1	\$12,880
2	\$17,420
3	\$21,960
4	\$26,500
5	\$31,040
6	\$35,580
7	\$40,120
8	\$44,660

The 2020 U.S. Census shows the average family size of Duval County being 3.2 [10]. Comparing the average family size and per capita income for Duval County to the Poverty Guidelines, there are six zip codes that fall under the poverty line.

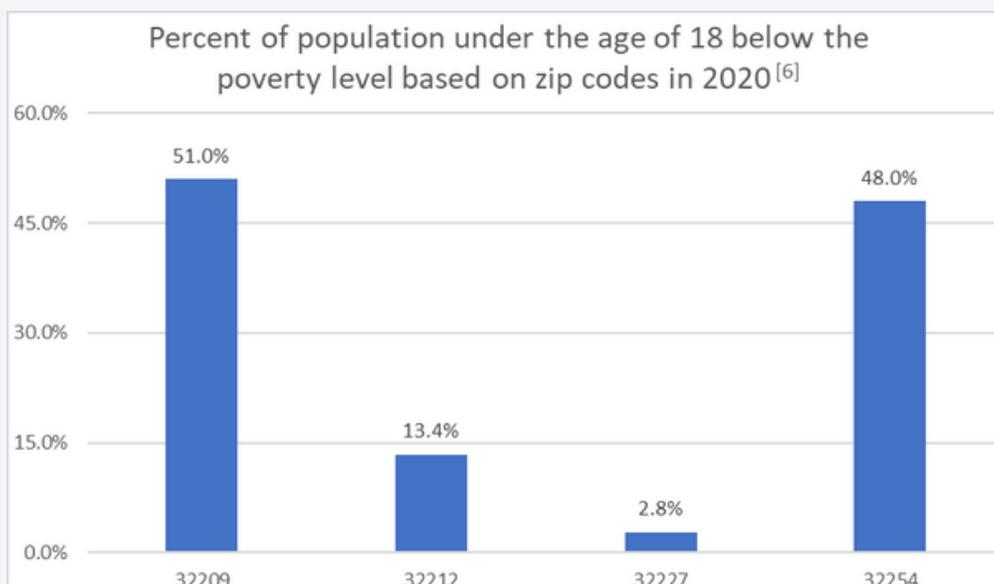
Zooming in to these six zip codes and comparing their average family sizes (Appendix A) with their per capita income, four zip codes have a per capita income at least \$4,000 below the poverty line according to the poverty guidelines developed by ASPE.

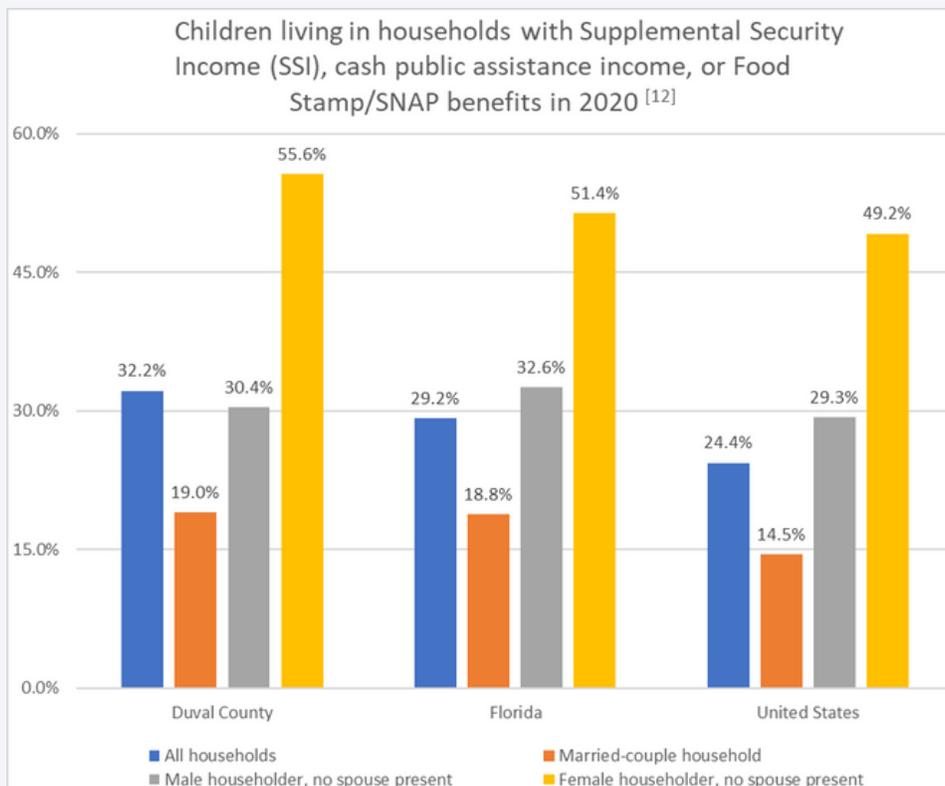




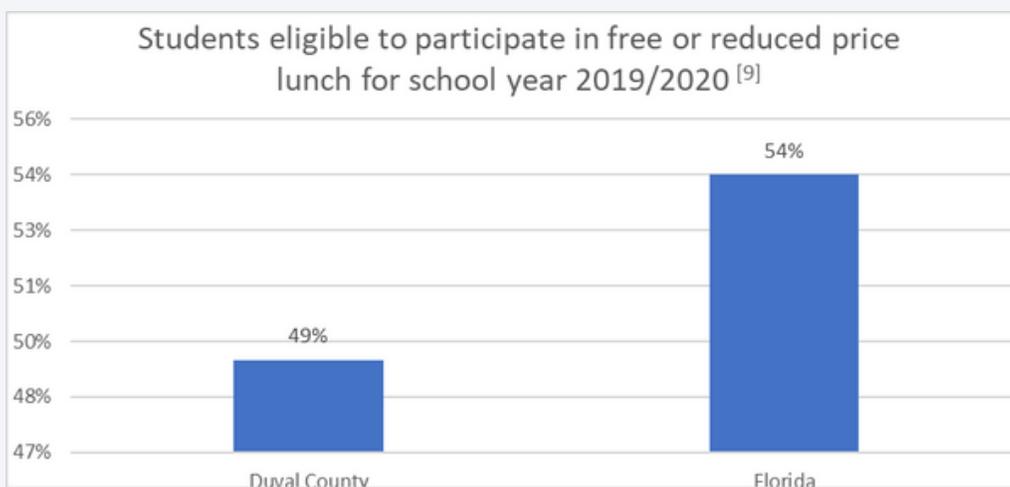
The U.S. 2020 Census indicated that Duval County has a higher percentage of children under the age of 18 below the poverty level than both Florida and the United States.

The chart below shows the percentage of children under the age of 18 below the poverty line in the four zip codes mentioned above.

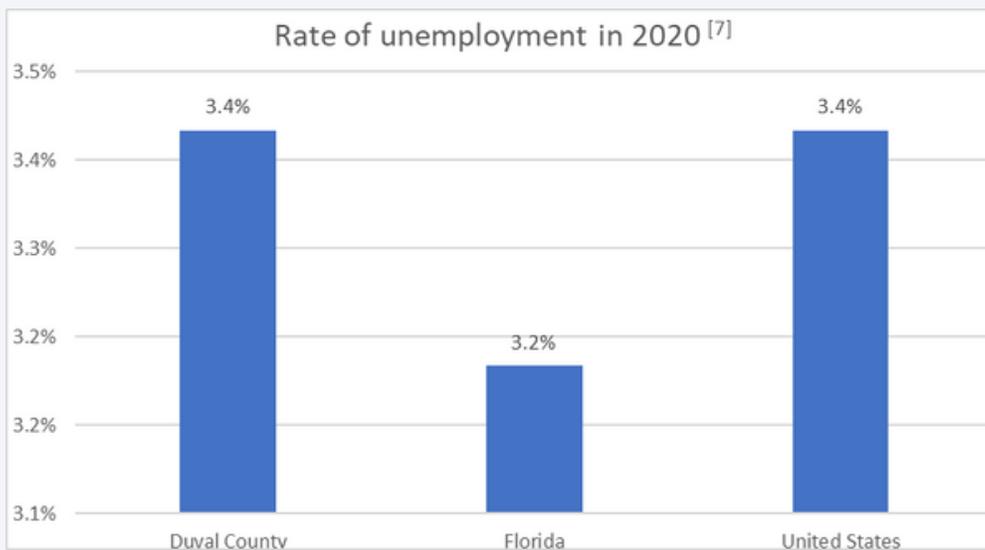




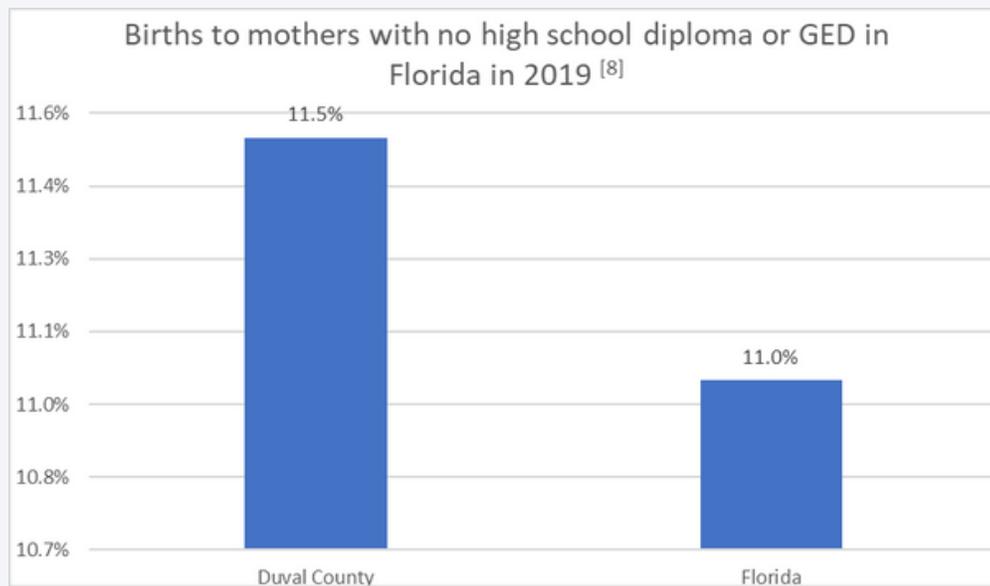
Duval County has a higher percentage of children living in households with Supplemental Security Income, cash public assistance income, and Food Stamp/SNAP benefits across all household types than both Florida and the U.S.



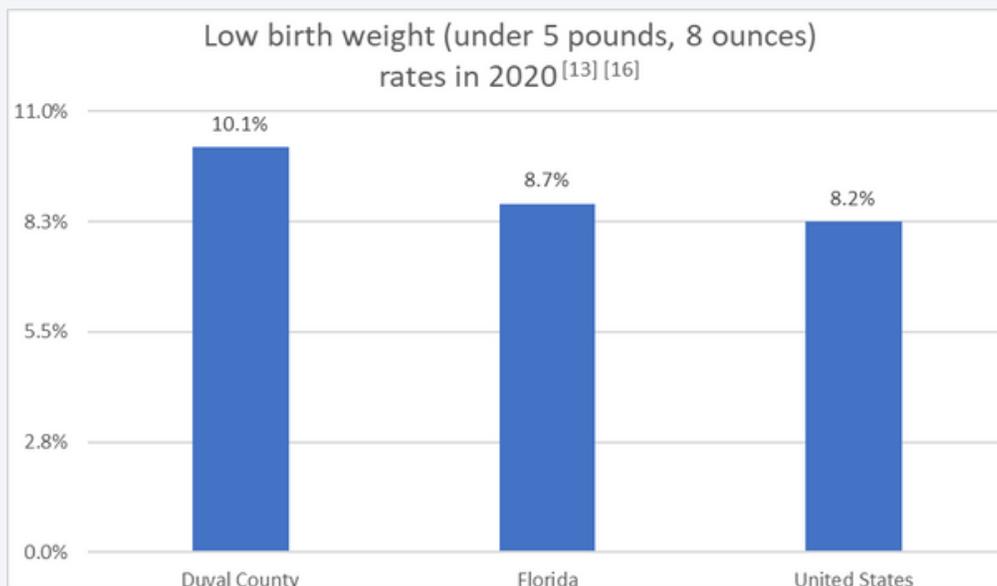
Duval County has a lower percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunches for 2019-2020 than Florida overall. A percentage for the U.S. was not found at the time of this report.



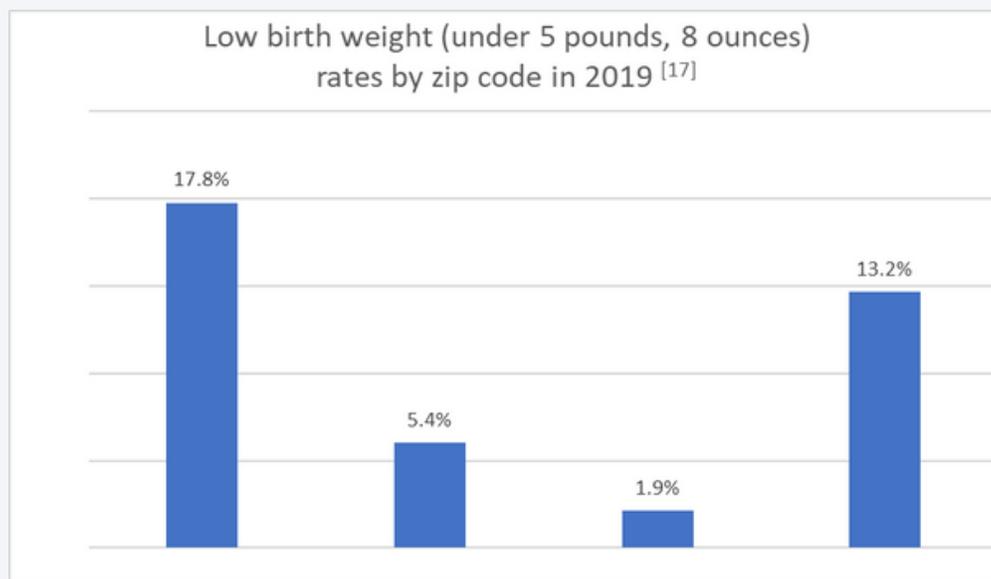
The unemployment rate in Duval County in 2020 was higher than Florida but was equal to the national rate.



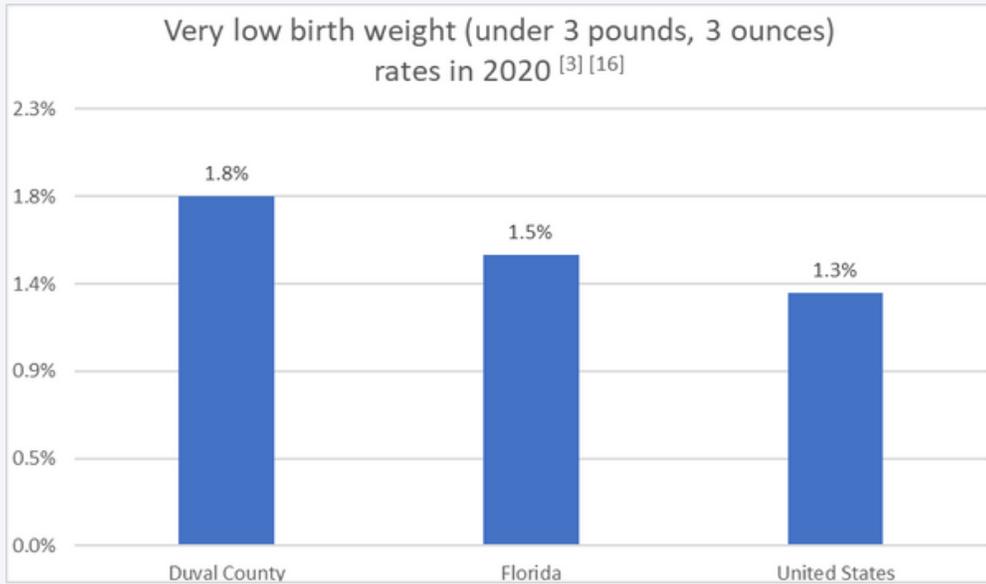
The percentage of births to mothers with no high school diploma or GED is higher in Duval County than Florida. A percentage for the U.S. was not found at the time of this report.



T Duval County had a higher rate of low birth weights than both Florida and the United States in 2020.

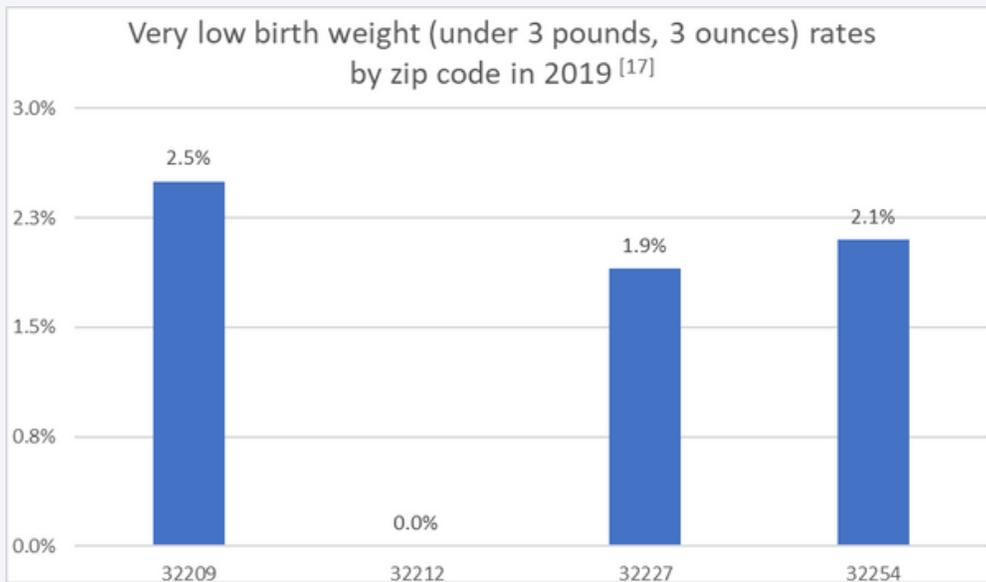


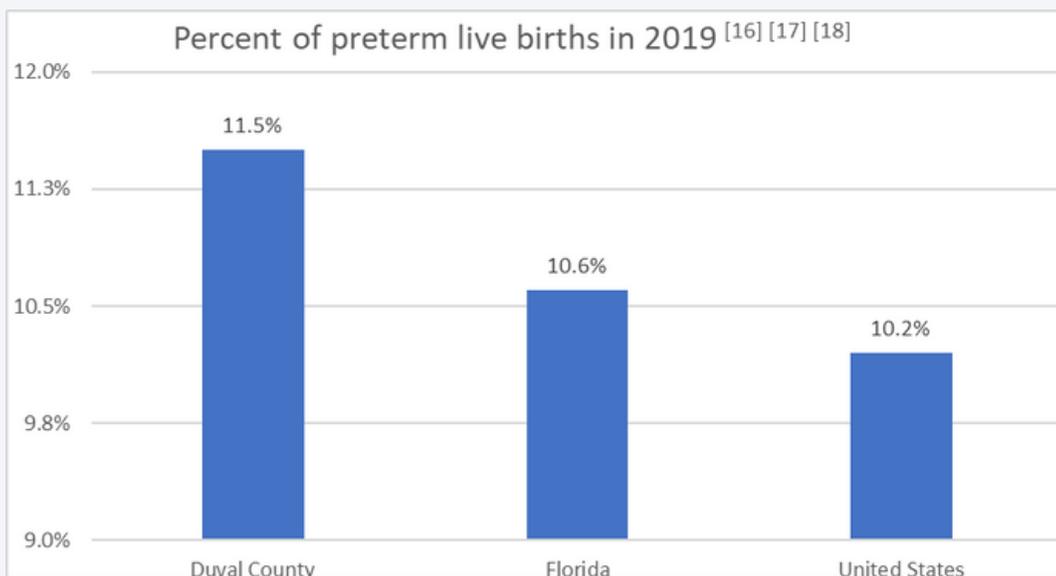
Two of the zip codes previously discussed had low birth weight rates higher than Duval County in 2019.



Duval County also had a higher percentage of very low birth weight rates than both Florida and the United States.

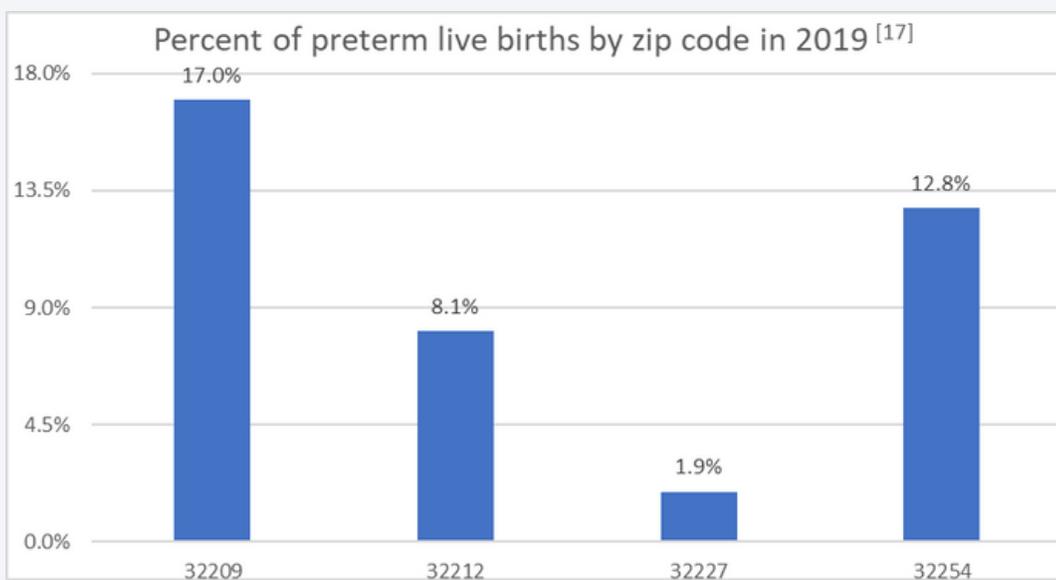
Three of the four zip codes discussed previously had a higher percentage of very low birth weight rates. There was no data available for the fourth zip code, 32212.

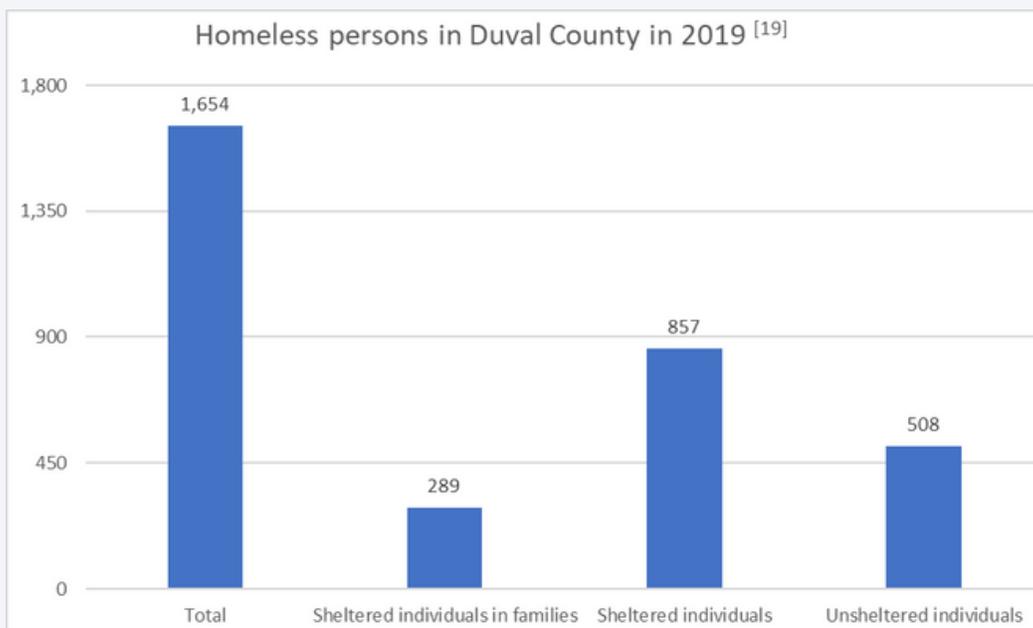




Duval county also had a higher rate of preterm live births in 2019 than Florida and the United States.

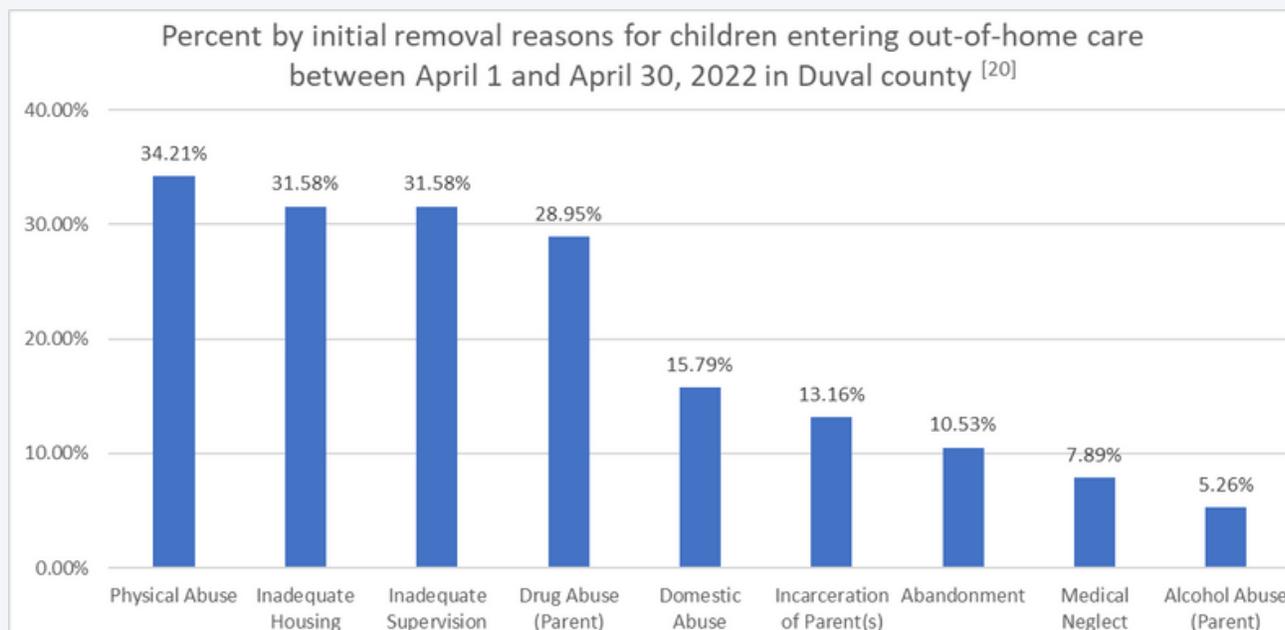
Two of the zip codes had a higher rate of preterm live births than Duval County.



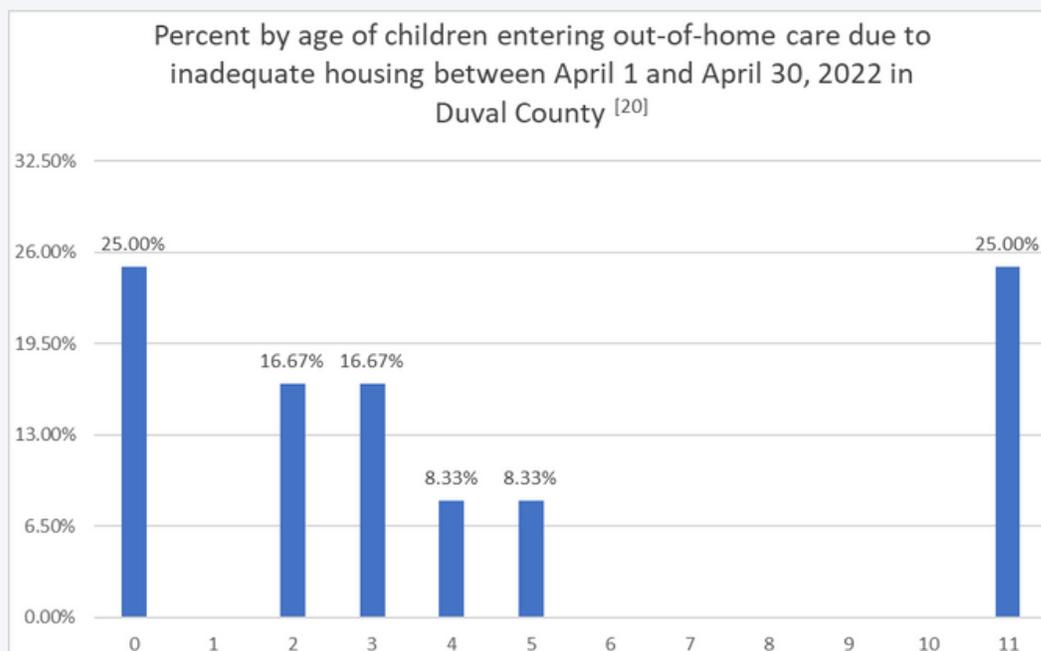


In Duval County in 2019, 289 families experiencing homelessness were sheltered.

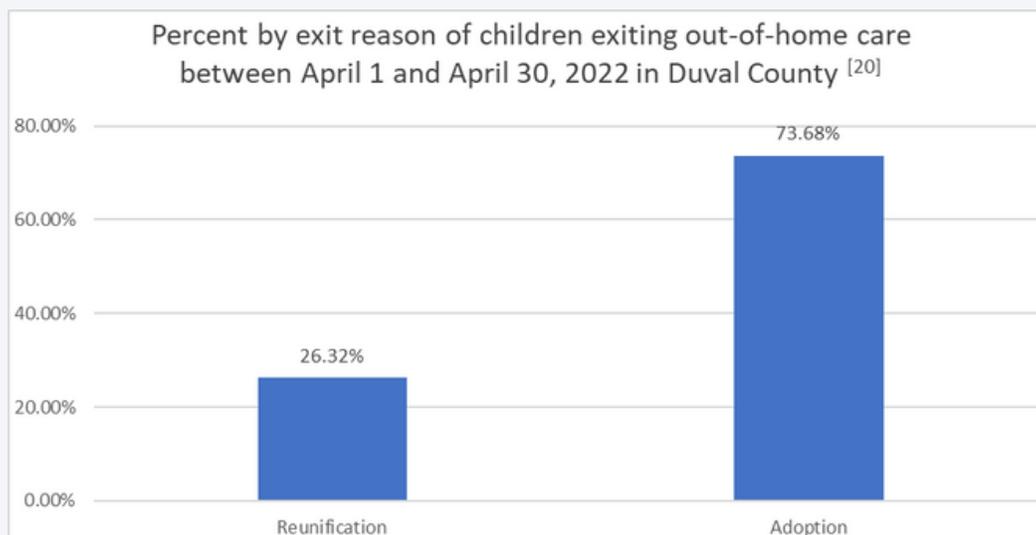
With this in mind, 31.6% of children entering out-of-home care between April 1 and April 30, 2022 were initially removed due to inadequate housing. 31.6% of children were removed due to inadequate supervision.



The most common reason for removal during this time period was physical abuse.



175% of children entering out-of-home care in Duval County between April 1 and April 30, 2022, were below the age of 5. The other 25% were 11 years of age.



The most common reason for children exiting out-of-home care in April 2022 was adoption. Reunification with the biological family consisted of 26% of the children exiting out-of-home care.



**SUPPLY OF AVAILABLE
FOSTER CARE SERVICES
AND RESOURCES**

SUPPLY OF AVAILABLE FOSTER CARE SERVICES AND RESOURCES

The current method of calculating child welfare services defines capacity in terms of the number of available licensed foster care beds or foster families. This definition does not include the informal networks and institutions communities have that increase human capital and improve the capacity to cope with difficulties in life through peer-to-peer support services. In fact, John McKnight, civil rights activist and co-founder of the Asset-Based Community Development Institute, criticized how government-funded human service agencies tended to use only experts and systems to problem-solve community issues in his article entitled “Do No Harm: Policy Options that Meet Human Needs:”

The community, a social space where citizens turn to solve problems, may be displaced by the intervention of human service professionals as an alternative method of problem-solving. Human service professionals with special expertise, technique, and technology push out the problem-solving knowledge and action of friend, neighbor, citizen, coalitions, and association. As the power of profession and service system ascends, the legitimacy, authority, and capacity of citizens and community descend. The ‘citizen’ retreats. The ‘client’ advances. [21]

McKnight identifies one of the primary needs of many ‘labelled’ people (e.g., ex-offenders, elderly, etc.) is to be incorporated into community life. Instead, they are removed from community life and surrounded by professional services. While this replacement of community by professionals has a large impact on the labelled person, it also has an effect on the community members. Citizens who could help integrate the labelled person into the community are no longer allowed to do so. Instead, they are directed to act as a volunteer to assist the professional system, who then determines when and how the citizen can interact with the labelled person.

For those whose “emptiness” cannot be filled by human services, the most obvious “need” is the opportunity to express and share their gifts, skills, capacities, and abilities with friends, neighbors, and fellow citizens.

Capacity, then, needs to look beyond the number of foster care beds to consider additional resources available in the community, through churches and other volunteer-based organizations. The contribution of volunteering goes beyond the value of services provided. Volunteering has been linked to the formation of social capital – social connections that help to build trust and collective action within the community.

Robert Putnam argues that a community that is more connected is likely to have a greater level of trust and reciprocity among its citizens, leading to a more cohesive and stable society with economic and social benefits. [47]

For example, high levels of connectivity and trust can reduce transaction costs, improve information flows, and enhance workplace cooperation.

Unfortunately, child welfare agencies generally do not demonstrate the type of creative and innovative thinking that recognizes the community as more than just a service area. This lack of recognition and application of how communities can come alongside vulnerable families and children in a relational way often leaves a complex array of programs now surrounding the labelled person. This creates a new environment where the community once stood, with its own peculiar incentives, rewards, and penalties. Often, the behaviors created in this artificial environment are different from those in communities principally shaped by neighborhood relationships. As McKnight explains:

Each individual program appears to be reasonably needed and appropriate. However, in the aggregate, each program has become ineffective and often harmful. The situation is analogous [similar] to a person who dies taking 20 different pills, any one of which might have been helpful. [21]

Therefore, to bring about fundamental change in how we serve vulnerable children and families, we need to broaden our perception of the type of capacity that is available, beyond simply counting the number of beds and foster families. In Duval County, our experience has been that the formal system of care acts as a closed system.

If we focus on the faith-community specifically, churches must work through bridge organizations in order to partner with the lead agency. These bridge organizations act as the gatekeepers of opportunity for the faith community. The lead agency uses them to determine when and how the faith community can interact with the formal system of care, just as McKnight describes.

If any one of the 1,065 [22] churches in Duval County want to work in the child welfare space, they must partner with the small bridge organizations and adapt their ministry to fall within the defined limits that the bridge organizations and lead agency have set.

It has been our experience that anyone interested in serving outside of those limits is unwelcome in the formal system of care.

However, the average church in America has 100-150 attendees, meaning Duval County has anywhere between 106,500-159,750 members of the faith community that could be a resource for vulnerable families. [46]

What does this look like?

- One church we spoke to has a backpack drive in July that reaches 1,000-2,000 children in vulnerable neighborhoods each year. Backpack drives are one of the more common events churches conduct.

- Multiple churches have ministries where they provide meals to vulnerable families in the community.
- One church has a ministry where their lead pastors conduct church services at local jails on Sunday mornings.
- Several churches partner with community outreach organizations to provide volunteers, goods, and monetary donations for the local community.

Looking beyond faith-based organizations, civic organizations also have a great impact on the informal network system. For example, Exchange Club Family Center has been a non-profit Child Abuse Prevention Center for 30 years and has provided prevention services for nearly the same amount of time. However, their services have been outside the formal system of care for over 15 years.

This informal system of care is vital in supporting the Duval County community, and unfortunately, based on our observations, the informal system has not been as strategically involved as it could be to make lasting changes in the community. At this time, there isn't a standard way to measure the impact the informal system is having, especially the faith community.

However, based on our estimates, the impact that the formal and informal systems of care would have if there was a high level of cooperation would be transformational in Duval County.



**QUALITY OF SERVICES
DELIVERED AND
OUTCOMES ACHIEVED**

QUALITY OF SERVICES DELIVERED AND OUTCOMES ACHIEVED

The Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF) requires lead agencies to provide data on their activities once a month or once a quarter, depending on the metric. The performance measures cover safety, permanency, well-being, and monthly and annual trends. This data has been gathered since 2006 and is housed in the Office of Child Welfare Dashboard.

While these metrics have been used to understand the current child welfare environment and ensure the lead agencies are meeting targets, the dashboard does not define or measure quality.

At the time of this report, there is no standard way to measure the quality of services.



TRENDS AND FORCES DRIVING CHANGE IN FLORIDA'S CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM



TRENDS AND FORCES DRIVING CHANGE IN FLORIDA'S CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM

There have been several initiatives in Florida regarding the child welfare system in the last few years. This section outlines these initiatives. For links to the initiative websites, please see the references section.

Executive Leadership

Faith-Based and Community-Based Advisory Council [23]

The Council was developed by Gov. DeSantis in 2019 to “maximize the collaboration between faith-based community organizations and state agencies to help strengthen individuals and families.” It is comprised of 24 members from across the state.

According to the advisory council’s website, “the Council is tasked with providing annual recommendations to the Governor and Legislature that...encourage the government and the faith-based community to work together to improve social services for Floridians.”

The Council influences the child welfare legislation in the state and is a key partner in the Governor’s Faith and Community Based Initiative. They have had a major impact by endorsing a partnership with CarePortal and opening communication between Florida government and the faith community.

MyFloridaMyFamily [24] [25]

MyFloridaMyFamily is an initiative launched by First Lady Casey DeSantis in 2020 that is designed to connect families with faith- and community-based resources across the state. Specific to the foster and adoptive community, the website allows individuals or organizations to sign up to receive or provide local resources to families in need. The website also provides resources for recruiting organizations and individuals to sign up to the site.

MyFloridaMyFamily is a key member of the Governor’s Faith and Community Based Initiative.

“The goal of *MyFloridaMyFamily* is to have all Florida faith institutions actively engaged in supporting and strengthening Florida families.”

Partnering with For Others, *MyFloridaMyFamily* provides a variety of options for serving the local community.

For Others [26]

For Others is a non-profit organization based in Georgia. Founded in 2019 under the name Angel Armies by Christian Music artist, Chris Tomlin, and his wife, Lauren, For Others has a presence in 42 states and has served 14,000 children.

The organization has three areas of service:

- Prevention: For Others has developed partnerships in the locations they serve to connect families to local resources and partners to avoid having families enter the child welfare system.
- Support: For Others has worked to develop a support network for those impacted by the child welfare system and meet their tangible needs.
- Belonging: For Others promotes belonging by encouraging reunification when possible, adoption, and mentorship of children aging out of the foster care system.

They are the primary partner of *MyFloridaMyFamily*.

Hope for Healing Florida [27] [28]

Hope for Healing is an initiative launched by First Lady Casey DeSantis in 2019. Similar to *MyFloridaMyFamily*, Hope for Healing is a website that consolidates “federal, state, local, private sector, faith-based, and non-profit” mental health and substance abuse resources. Users are able to find resources based on zip codes or category of user, such as parent or first responder.

For individuals looking to volunteer, Hope for Healing also directs users to Volunteer Florida [29], a site that connects Floridians with organizations in need of volunteers.

Hope for Healing is a key partner of the Governor’s Faith and Community Based Initiative.

Hope Florida – A Pathway to Prosperity [30] [31]

Hope Florida is an initiative launched by First Lady Casey DeSantis and Florida DCF in 2021 that uses ‘Care Navigators’ to create individualized plans to help Floridians identify barriers, develop long-term goals, and be economically successful. The Care Navigators act as real-life version of the *MyFloridaMyFamily* or Hope for Healing by identifying resources in the community to assist families.

“At the time of launch, services were available to children aging out of foster care, pregnant mothers managing substance abuse disorders, and other families.

Local businesses partner with Hope Florida to help participants find employment while non-profits provide resources for their individual needs. Volunteer Florida also connects volunteers with opportunities to serve with Hope Florida.

At the time of launch, pilot programs in six counties had served more than 10,000 Floridians.

Hope Florida – A Pathway to Prosperity is a key partner of the Governor’s Faith and Community Based Initiative.

CarePortal [22] [32]

CarePortal is a platform that launched in 2015 by The Global Orphan Project that connects child welfare agencies to the local community. Child welfare agencies, churches, businesses, individuals, etc. can sign up to CarePortal and send and receive requests regarding tangible needs from vulnerable families. Child welfare agencies enter a need into CarePortal, and organizations within the community will receive the request and can respond. Requests can be range from clothing to baby furniture.

Since CarePortal partnered with the Governor’s Faith and Community Based Initiative to provide Florida organizations access to CarePortal free of cost, 4,977 children have been impacted in Florida so far with an economic impact of \$1,973,507.

Legislative Leadership

2021 SB 80 [33]

SB 80 was introduced by Senator Jason Brodeur and co-introduced by Senators Ben Albritton and Lauren Book. The bill established a number of significant changes regarding child welfare:

- SB 80 requires that a face sheet be developed for each child that summarizes key data from their file and include specific information about their dependency case. It also must be updated monthly.
- SB 80 updated the Best Interest Determination standard when determining if a placement is in the child’s best interest. A few of the criteria include age, established relationships with current/proposed caregiver, and benefits of remaining or moving. It also established the importance of the role of foster parent when making decisions that impact the child.
- SB 80 outlines Best Interest Factors that must be considered for placement, including recommendation from the guardian ad litem; child’s relationship with siblings; likelihood of school change; and access to education, Medicaid, and Independent Living beneficiaries.

- SB 80 established a priority of placements that considers biological, kinship, adoptive, and foster relations in the family.
- SB 80 provided additional supports to children aging out of care.

The intent of the law was to decrease the number of placement changes a child experiences and create a more thoughtful transition plan.

SB 80 went into effect on Oct. 1, 2021 after a unanimous agreement from the Florida House and Senate.

State-wide Leadership

Promise686 [34] [35]

Promise686 was launched in 2007 by a group from Perimeter Church in Georgia. Their vision began with Psalms 68:6 – “to fulfill God’s promise ‘to set the lonely in families’ and have been working to mobilize the church to support vulnerable families.

Utilizing their Family Advocacy Ministries (FAM) model, Promise686 strives to raise awareness regarding the needs of vulnerable children, prevent children from entering care, recruit and equip foster families, and create “Care Communities” for caregivers of at-risk youth.

Promise686 also launched a volunteer management software in 2017 call Promise Serves. Promise Serves was developed to follow the FAM model and helps ministries manage relationships, admin, and volunteer coordination. According to Promise686, Promise Serves helps to alleviate volunteer burnout and increase the longevity of volunteers.

In 2019, Promise686 partnered with For Others to reach a larger network of churches. They are now a key partner in First Lady DeSantis’ *MyFloridaMyFamily* initiative through For Others.

Community-Based Care (CBC) [36]

As described in the introduction, Florida fully transitioned to a Community-Based Care model by 2005. Despite the model having been in place for 17 years, the idea of CBC since has a direct impact on the way the state manages child welfare.

CBC outsources child welfare services to local ‘lead agencies’ and allows for a more flexible, tailored approach to local challenges. These lead agencies are then able to work with local providers to provide services to the community. The goal is to ensure the community has ownership in caring for vulnerable families.

Along with lead agencies, the CBC model also includes ‘Community Alliances’ made up of local stakeholders, nonprofits, community leaders, etc. Their purpose is to establish the needs and priorities of the community, determine short- and long-term goals, and determine the best use of community resources.

There are currently 18 lead agencies in Florida. Family Support Services of North Florida is the lead agency for Duval County.

Local Leadership

Family Support Services of North Florida [37] [38]

Family Support Services (FSS) of North Florida is the lead agency for Duval and Nassau County. They were founded in 2001 to provide child welfare services to Duval County. Their mission is to “be the leader in providing safety, stability, and quality of life for all children by working with the community to strengthen the family unit.”

FSS provides a range of services, including prevention, foster care, and adoption.

Their prevention services include the Strengthening Ties & Empowering Parents (STEPS) program, an in-home prevention curriculum for families experiencing instability and safety issues; High-Risk Newborn (HRN) program, a program for families with children under the age of 5 who could be at risk of developing severe mental health disorders; Family Assessment Support Team (FAST), an in-home program that ensures children are safe while parents receive parenting, anger management, substance abuse, and domestic violence counseling; and Integrated Practice Team (IPT), a group of community partners specialized in developing family services plans.

Under their foster care and adoption services, FSS provides pre-licensing training, home studies, and adoptive parent training and support.

FSS has launched a new initiative, a community reinvestment program, focusing on the 32209 zip code. [48] More detailed information about program goals, objectives, and desired outcomes was unavailable at the time of the interview and this report.

FSS contracts with case management organizations (CMOs) Jewish Family and Community Services, Daniel Kids, and National Youth Advocate Program to provide child welfare services to Duval County.

Jewish Family and Community Services (JFCS) [39]

Jewish Family and Community Services was established in 1917 under the name United Jewish Charities. Since 2003

they have contracted with FSS as a case management organization for child protective services. Their mission “is to strengthen the entire community by providing family and individual social services in the Jewish tradition of ‘helping people help themselves.’”

JFCS provides a range of prevention and adoption services, including private and public adoptions, programs with young children at-risk of failing or dropping out of high school, counseling, and child safety programs. They also have a food pantry and library available to families in need. JFCS does have some services available to foster parents, but their main priorities focus on prevention and emergency assistance.

Daniel Kids [40]

Daniel Kids was founded in 1884 in Jacksonville under the name Orphanage and Home for the Friendless. Their mission is to “improve the lives of children and families.” Daniel Kids launched their CBC program in 2003. Daniel Kids also provides therapeutic foster care resources, homeless/independent living resources, and oversees the Florida Adoption Information Center – a product of the Faith-Based and Community-Based Advisory Council.

Under the CBC program, Daniel Kids provides juvenile justice prevention services; out-patient mental health and case management services; school based behavioral sciences; and out-patient mental health, substance abuse, and parenting education. These services are typically provided to children and adults diagnosed with mild to severe mental health disorders.

To address the foster care issue, Daniel Kids offers STEPS and FAST to families at-risk of removal. They also provide 60-hours of pre-licensing training for therapeutic foster families for children with more advanced needs.

Daniel Kids is a CMO of FSS.

National Youth Advocate Program (NYAP) [41]

The National Youth Advocate Program was founded in 1978 in Ohio. Their mission is to be “an energetic instrument of compassion and change in the lives of children, youth, and families and the systems, structures and practices that affect them.” Rather than being a local entity, NYAP serves 65 locations across 10 states.

NYAP has a wide range of services that they provide:

- Prevention/intervention
- Position youth and family development
- Out of home placement

- Reunification/permanency
- 24/7 service reception

NYAP's website outlines their many services, too many to detail here. They are a CMO of FSS.

Exchange Club Family Center [42]

The Exchange Club Family Center was founded in 1992 in Jacksonville. They provide the child abuse prevention program, Parent Aide, to vulnerable families in Jacksonville and have been a Child Abuse Prevent Center since 1992.

Other Civil Society Organizations

Mayo Clinic [43]

Mayo Clinic's mission is to "inspire hope and promote health through integrated clinical practice, education, and research." They are one of the top employers in Florida and is the top hospital in Florida.

Mayo Clinic conducted a community health needs assessment in 2019 that outlined the identified several key health concerns in certain zip codes throughout Duval County. Their conclusion was that the top three health concerns for Duval County as a whole were access, behavioral health, and poverty.

Mayo Clinic has partnered with Blue Zones and several Jacksonville Community partners to improve the lives of residents. The "Blue Zones Project is a comprehensive initiative that transforms the environments where people live, work, learn, and play to measurably improve community well-being, resilience, and economic vitality." [49] Blue Zone Project is a community-wide initiative that works to make permanent, healthy changes to "a city's environment, policy, and social networks." More information can be found at Blue Zone's website, bluezones.com.

Changing Homelessness [44]

In 1974, Changing Homelessness was founded by several social service agencies and faith leaders. Their mission is to "guide the community effort and build capacity to prevent and end homelessness." Changing Homelessness is the lead agency for Duval, Nassau, and Clay Counties under the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Continuum of Care program.

Changing Homelessness' services including advocacy, training, and leadership to organization actively working to end homelessness. They also administer funds from a number of different funding sources. One of their larger programs is Built For Zero, a national effort to reach functional zero for veteran and chronic homelessness. Jacksonville is one of six cities selected to participate in the "large city cohort."



CLOSING SUMMARY

CLOSING SUMMARY

Our report provided a snapshot of Duval County as the community is currently. While researching the factors threatening family stability and child safety, the supply of available foster care services and resources, the quality of those services, and the trends and forces changing the child welfare system, we determined the seven key findings discussed at the beginning of this report:

1. Many Families are struggling with life controlling issues at higher averages and children in Duval County are being impacted negatively.
2. The Community Based Care lead agency has been successful in their statutory task of caring for children in NE Florida based on key state and national metrics.
3. Florida state executive leadership has created innovative policies and funding streams to promote the goals of child welfare.
4. Public healthcare systems have expressed a willingness to collaborate with the community-based faith and civic organizations and child welfare agencies to promote volunteerism and community engagement.
5. Civic community leaders have similarly expressed a willingness to collaborate with the faith community and the child welfare agencies to support evidence-based models of care.
6. The faith community represents the most significant resource of volunteers and potential foster parents in the community and are keen to engage evidence-based strategies to deal with the foster care crisis.
7. Formal county and regional systems of care present as closed systems that exclude community leaders outside of their formal system to participate in the task of protecting the children of NE Florida.

We also provided the following recommendations:

1. The establishment of a Coalition for Children First in NE Florida that incorporates all these community based civil society networks
2. Tasking the Coalition to:
 - a. Implement National Court Watch Project
 - b. Produce and publish a third-party caregiver satisfaction survey
 - c. Publish quarterly Placement Quality Reports using the Quality Placement Index(c) to evaluate CFSR data compliance in NE Florida
 - d. Develop faith-based Family Advocacy Centers in select communities and neighborhoods to coordinate local resources for families to prevent child abuse and promote healthy family
 - e. Promote Promising Practices and Evidence-Based Fatherhood Initiatives

It is the relationships that create neighborhoods and communities that change the way families are supported. It is our hope that the findings and recommendations of this report inform and inspire citizens take ownership in addressing the issues vulnerable children and families are facing.

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APPENDIX A

Quality Placement Index

The federal Child and Family Service Reviews (CFSRs) provide standard measures of safety, permanency, and well-being for children in the foster care system. Some of these metrics also apply to the services provided by private child welfare agencies. By comparing the published rates of measurements that are achieved in Florida in general and more specifically in the Northeast Florida, we can measure the relative value of the wraparound that the faith community provides.

Strategy to Draw a Baseline

The first three metrics provided below are calculated quarterly by the CBCs and published on the DCF website. [20]

The state currently does not have a metric for **foster parent stability (retention)** and nationally published research indicates that between 30% and 60% of foster parents leave within the first year. It is unclear if we would be able to obtain comparable data from the state to compare the longevity of our foster parents. We will therefore simply publish our stability data without the benefit of a baseline comparison in the hope that future researchers would be able to use this data as their baseline.

Child placement stability data is available from Florida so the Quality Placement Index will use a baseline made available to us from the state of Florida.

APPENDIX B

