

Broward's Foster Care System

“Citing the familiar litany of crowded foster homes, child on child sexual abuse and an overburdened system, a national child advocacy group’s report released Wednesday concludes that there may be no worse place to be a foster child than in Florida.” (The Herald, 2000)

The department of Children and Family has begun the process of changing the way foster children are handled in Broward county. Traditionally, the department placed a child in any home available with a vacant bed. Today, children are assessed and have their assessments run through a computer database that helps match a child with an appropriate placement.

A new unit that specializes in having a case manager work with parents to help get their children out of foster care and returning them to a relatives or making them available for adoption shows promise in reducing the number of foster children in the county (Sun-Sentinel, 1999).

These improvements have come at a point in time where talk of privatization is prevalent. The state is currently working to toward turning over the entire state foster care system to private organizations. This lofty goal is expected to be achieved by the year 2003.

Currently, The Department of Children and Families decide what type of services the child needs, if the child should be kept in the home, placed under supervision, or foster care. Under most circumstances the state contracts with private organizations for services. Under the new model private agencies will be responsible and accountable for all services, care of foster children.

In Sarasota the model is currently in place and utilizes one lead agency (YMCA’s Children, Youth and Family Services Inc.) that takes the place of the county department. This organization receives financial resources which allow them to contract with other organizations for services. The state will ultimately pass money to the lead agency based on what the community spent the previous year along with projections for the following year. The budget does not take into account a sudden increase in cases which historically have taken place. It

should be interesting to see how Broward county devises a plan to move foster care to a privatized entity.

Continuous improvement is the goal and can be achieved with the help of volunteers in the community. Mentoring a foster child, becoming a foster parent, providing support services for organizations that directly effect foster children are all worthy causes to be involved in. It is important for individuals to support legislation and legislators that advocate for foster children and work to add or improve services for these children.

Gruskin, S. February 15, 2001 "Critics: Foster care still limping." *Sun-Sentinel* , pgs. 1-2B.

Rudavsky, S. May 5, 1999 "Who's watching out for children?" *The Herald*, pgs. 1A&18A.