Greetings! We are so happy to share another year with you!

As the ‘little non-profit that could’, 2019 proved a transformative year for Speak Up for Kids of Palm Beach County. Our Board of Directors and staff were proud of prior years’ outcomes, and we were determined to build on those successes with a continued commitment to expanded service delivery, ensure lean operations, and put in place appropriate protocols for sustainability.

The bar is set high because our work supporting the best interests of abused, abandoned, and neglected children requires nothing less than our everything.

Through individual donations, grants, and community partnerships, Speak Up for Kids made possible:

- Provision of much needed **supplies and wrap-around services** to caregivers across our county in the interest of safety and security for the children in our charge.
- Access to activities serving to **enhance normalcy** and allow children to just enjoy being children.
- Identification of and funding for **therapeutic and other life-enhancing services**.
- **Comfort** during the most chaotic time in their young lives.
- **Hope and a future** for abused and neglected children and youth.

We (You + Us) have accomplished great things this year and we hope you are as proud as you read through the pages in this report as we were during our time of reflection and compilation, remembering how important it is that we celebrate every achievement.

We would be remiss if we did not mention that the final eight weeks of our operating year were disrupted and, in some ways, overshadowed by a type of chaos we could never have predicted; something the likes of which most have not experienced in their lifetime.

COVID-19 remains, at the time of this writing, a clear and present danger. We watched as it impacted several local nonprofits with many forced to lay off staff within two weeks of its presence in our county. We are so humbled by the service of and so grateful to our volunteer Board, grantors, donors, community partners, staff, and GALs for working diligently to outline protocols, course adjust, and see the silver linings.

"Use your knowledge, and your heart, to stand up for those who can’t stand, speak for those who can’t speak, be a beacon of light for those whose lives have become dark.”

-Julie Andrews

As we move forward, our commitment to support the 15th Judicial District Guardian ad Litem Program by increasing the ranks of trained, court-appointed volunteer advocates, building community awareness, and working towards normalcy and permanency initiatives for children involved in dependency cases remains resolute.

These times are sobering, but they have provided us an opportunity to commemorate victories, assess our existing capabilities, identify shortfalls, and plan strategically to enhance our ability to serve the best interests of our communities’ most vulnerable.

More than ever before, we need your continued pledge of support as we roll out new initiatives. Thank you for taking this journey with us.

Your Partners in Heartfelt Advocacy,

H. Shaw Thomas        Coleen LaCosta
Board President         Executive Director

Speak Up for Kids of Palm Beach County, Inc. • P.O. Box 1896, W. Palm Beach, FL 33402 • www.SpeakUpForKidsPBC.org
A 501(c) 3 non-profit, we exist to support exclusively the Guardian ad Litem Program, 15th circuit.
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MISSION
100% Advocacy for every abused, abandoned, and neglected child in Palm Beach County.

VISION
Through 100% advocacy every child is nurtured, supported, and has access to connections and resources necessary for them to know their value and reach their full potential.

“Do what you can, where you are, with what you have.”
-Teddy Roosevelt

Speak Up for Kids of Palm Beach County, Inc. is the exclusive 501(c)(3) fundraising arm for the Guardian ad Litem Program of Palm Beach County, Florida.

Through the recruitment, training, and retention of Guardian ad Litem VOLUNTEER CHILD ADVOCATES the cycles of abuse, violence, and crime are being broken, while children’s futures are being rewritten.

These Volunteer “Guardian Angels” are committed exclusively to each child’s emotional, educational, and physical well-being throughout dependency court proceedings.

Serving as the only 100% objective voice, and effectively, the eyes and ears of the dependency court, they ensure representation of the all-around well-being of abused, abandoned, and neglected children in our community.

Over 700 volunteers serve one-on-one with each child directly to get to the heart of what IS REQUIRED for that child to thrive. These Volunteers then work in concert with a Child Advocacy Manager and Guardian ad Litem Attorney to present, in dependency court, each child’s best interests.

We continue to evolve to meet the ever-changing needs of the community Children, Volunteers and Advocacy teams we champion and support. The work is challenging, and the road bumpy, but we forge ahead knowing that with each Child and Volunteer connected, the impact is REAL, now and into the future, throughout Palm Beach county.
Our Focus

Plainly stated, we want to rewrite the stories of children traumatized by abuse, violence and crime, recognizing that only through effective advocacy can those cycles be broken. It is not easy. It is not to be taken lightly. It requires dedication. It is accomplished one child and one advocate at a time.

“Pleasure in the job puts perfection in the work.”
-Aristotle

Our Special Initiatives:

**THERAPEUTIC COURT**
An award-winning pilot, the first of its kind in the US, to serve the most complex cases in our county through a round-table team approach. Every agency involved in a child’s case is represented and held accountable every week in a single meeting with Judge oversight.

In its first year, TC achieved 11 adoptions across the 20 most traumatized children in the county’s care.

**EARLY CHILDHOOD COURT**
Child victims of abuse enter the system at every age. ECC is targeting the best interests of infant and toddler child victims -- 0 to 3 years. Working with their families, ECC is ensuring safe, permanent homes for these young ones faster.

**FOSTER PALM BEACH**
Dependency numbers continue to rise, and safe housing for our children remains in short supply. In 2018, we extended our impact efforts by creating Foster Palm Beach to recruit more foster families locally. 2019 saw this program institute a multi-pronged approach to outreach through faith-based advocacy, seeking corporate partnerships, and creating a unique opportunity to engage South Florida Realtors through the Open House Initiative.

We continue to dedicate our resources to the areas of mitigating trauma, seeking safe, permanent homes, and ensuring overall well-being. These have proven to be the areas of greatest need while proving intervention is most impactful as it relates to long-term positive outcomes in the lives of our community’s children.

We know that advocacy works. It is why advocacy matters.
In 2019 we introduced ways to better engage, build awareness, and raise money to fulfill our charter of serving our community’s children.

New Initiatives Include:

**CORPORATE PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM**
Now, more than ever, consumers and employees alike are looking to businesses to exercise **SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY** by tackling important societal issues impacting the communities they inhabit. *Speak Up for Kids* has outlined a comprehensive program whereby local organizations can contribute either monetarily, through volunteer hours, or both.

**CELEBRATING ADVOCACY - PROCLAMATION**
Serving as a celebration of the amazing outcomes realized through advocacy, multiple municipalities throughout Palm Beach County stand united in proclaiming the month of May, *Speak Up For Kids + Guardian ad Litem Month*. This proclamation honors the work of volunteers, program partners, and policy makers daily changing the trajectory of a child’s life.

**STUDENTS SPEAK UP FOR KIDS!**
In an effort to *empower students with opportunities to serve and speak up* for the children involved in Palm Beach County’s dependency court system, *STUDENTS Speak Up for Kids* will provide students the tools to create their own advocacy campaigns.

“The only way to discover the limits of the possible is to go beyond them into the impossible.”

-Arthur C. Clarke
As our capacity to serve increases, we can make decisions that help more children, provide more permanency, assist with more normalcy initiatives, and ensure safety, educational, social, and emotional needs are met.

**Our Impact**

We (YOU + Speak Up for Kids) made an IMPACT!

- **2,505** Children Served
- **1,020** Children in a Safe, Permanent Home
- **700** Volunteer Child Advocate “Guardian Angels”
- **11,000** Court Hearings Attended
- **23,510** Advocacy Hours Donated
- **190,000** Advocacy Miles Traveled
- **>$1 Million** DONATION VALUE of Miles Driven and Hours Given in Palm Beach County THIS YEAR!
REUNIFICATION

Rebecca and Chase haven’t had the easiest path. They entered care after their father passed unexpectedly and their mother, Samantha, fell into a deep depression that lead to drug use. As she spiraled out of control, her young children, then ages five and seven, were forced to fend for themselves. Many nights they went to bed hungry and many mornings they went to school dirty. School officials notified the abuse hotline and the state intervened. Rebecca and Chase were removed from Samantha’s care and she was given a plan of action to get her life back on track and eventually get reunified with her children. It took 14 months, but Samantha was diligent. She entered rehabilitation, secured employment, was consistent in visitation, and completed her plan. Over that 14 months, she faced serious odds, but communicated with the foster family and her Guardian ad Litem every step of the way. When it came time for reunification, she needed beds and bedroom furnishings for Rebecca and Chase and was open with the Guardian ad Litem who reached out to #SpeakUpForKidsPBC for help. Because of YOU, Rebecca and Chase are reunified and snuggled in beds with accompanying pillows and blankets!

SINGLE DAD PLACEMENT

Norman was eight years old when his mother died of cancer. His mother, Elaine, was an only child and her parents had passed away years before. Elaine’s best friend, Lucy, agreed to provide temporary shelter for Norman, but had four children of her own. As plans were being made for Norman, Lucy shared with his Guardian ad Litem the identity of Norman’s father, Matthew. Lucy explained that Elaine never told him about Norman. Between the Guardian ad Litem and the case worker, contact was made with Matthew and, although he was shocked by news of potentially having a son, he wanted to establish paternity, build a relationship, and make a life with Norman. Slowly but surely Matthew did everything he needed to do including multiple visits with Norman requiring Matthew to travel on limited means. Speak Up For Kids was able to facilitate Greyhound tickets to facilitate visits leading up to father and son being reunited.
As our capacity to serve increases, we can make decisions that help more children, provide more permanency, assist with more normalcy initiatives, and ensure safety, educational, social, and emotional needs are met.

“The donor is sure to rest easy knowing that his or her donation, in full, truly made a difference.”
-UniversalGiving.org, 2016

Our Service to Children **REQUIRES fiscal responsibility**

In 2019, 90% of every dollar raised was reinvested, **DIRECTLY** into the program.
Abuse, Neglect + Other Trauma can mark a child for LIFE!

**TRAUMA** is a reality for many but is heightened for child victims of abuse. GAL volunteer advocates are usually assigned to the most complex, serious cases – cases in which children are at higher risk of poor outcomes due to past and anticipated continuing trauma.

- Trauma can cause feelings of helplessness + intense fear
- Trauma can impact brain development + mental health
- Trauma can impact education achievement + employment

“It is our goal that every child in the dependency system has a trained CASA or GAL volunteer [...]. We have seen first-hand that these volunteer advocates make a positive difference in children’s lives.”

-Statement by 15 past presidents of the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges
MOMENTS OF IMPACT

THERAPY

Austin and his sister Vivienne were born addicted to opiates and were adopted by their aunt and uncle when their mother’s parental rights were terminated. When Austin started kindergarten, the school began having reporting concerns about his behavior. Sadly, this proved too much for his aunt and uncle who returned him to state care. It was then that the court assigned Judy as his volunteer child advocate. Judy worked to get various assessments performed and found a center that specialized in play and various other therapies. Because it was not covered by insurance, Judy reached out to us for the funding needed to get Austin much needed help. Fast forward three years and Austin is thriving in school. AND, he has a new forever family.

LIFE COACH

When Aubrey turned 14, she entered high school. She has been in dependency care for eight years; living in a group home, for the last 2 years. Aubrey, with the help of Joan, her Volunteer Child Advocate, began thinking about her future and what she wanted that to look like. Her advocate worked with her to get her classes scheduled, but when Aubrey mentioned her love for math and science and her desire to study engineering in college, Joan encouraged her, but knew Aubrey would need more direction. Joan sought funding for a life coach to specifically assist Aubrey create a roadmap for high school and college careers. Enter Rochelle, a life coach who works specifically with children involved in dependency care. Rochelle worked with Aubrey to fill her high school course load with advanced math and science courses, creating roadmap for Aubrey to qualify for dual high school and college credit in her junior and senior years. While Joan was working with Aubrey on aging out and the transition to adulthood, Rochelle helped Aubrey to outline her goals educational and career goals and work towards achieving them. Aubrey is in her senior year of college and will graduate with a Bachelor of Science in Chemical Engineering. Currently, she is completing an internship and exploring graduate school options.
Permanence yields better outcomes. Children with advocates reach a permanent home faster when compared with all children in out-of-home care.

Each Child Deserves a SECURE place to call HOME

Volunteers encourage placement in family-like settings.

Children do BEST when they can safely remain with their parents or other family members.

Our volunteers get to know the child - they LISTEN; they talk to the people in the child’s life to find out what they need to heal and thrive. They make sure the child is SAFE; and they help the child reach a safe, permanent HOME.

When it is not possible to keep families intact, advocates work to help the child reach another safe and stable forever home.

“Childhood should be carefree, playing in the sun; not living a NIGHTMARE in the darkness of the soul.”
-Pete Pelzer, Author, A Child Called “It”
**WELL-BEING** includes the skills and traits that enable children to navigate the world in a healthy, positive way. Physical and mental health, behavioral, social, and emotional functioning all contribute to overall well-being and the ability to thrive. *Speak Up for Kids* supports **VOLUNTEER CHILD ADVOCATES** as they seek to ensure milestones are met successfully from early childhood, supporting children as they transition into adulthood and beyond.

**EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT**
For infants and young children, a strong, nurturing and consistent relationship to caregivers is KEY to healthy development.

**SUCCESS IN SCHOOL**
Children in foster care are more likely to struggle academically.

**PREPARATION FOR INDEPENDENCE**
Volunteers help children set and achieve independent living, post-secondary, and career training goals.
There are simply not enough words to fully communicate the depth and breadth of how much we appreciate every contribution made to our program. OUR VILLAGE, comprised of individual donors, community partners, and public and private grants, make our work possible. Without them, there is no us!

We remain humbled by the contributions from OUR VILLAGE

Individual Donors
Community Partnerships
Public + Private Grants

We are committed to ensuring that our children’s needs are met and that all donations are used to provide direct service to local children.

“Because of YOU, we are, each day, given the privilege to serve the most vulnerable populations in Palm Beach County.”

-Coleen LaCosta, Executive Director, Speak Up for Kids Palm Beach County
DRIVING SCHOOL

Byron is 15 years old and has lived in a group home for the past 10 years. Like all children his age, he yearns to celebrate age-related milestones. With his 16th birthday quickly approaching, the milestone he set his sights on was becoming a licensed driver. After a conversation with his volunteer advocate, Lee, the wheels were set in motion. Lee researched the Florida “Keys to Independence Act” whereby children in foster care can attend driver’s education courses. Lee found a local driving school, and with assistance from #Speakupforkids, was able to get Byron enrolled and on his way to becoming a licensed driver.

TEST PREP

Roland is 15 years old and is a sophomore in high school. After some educational struggles in middle school, Roland is on track to complete his high school career and is looking forward to college. His guidance counselor told him that he would need to take the SAT and ACT tests in his junior year as part of his college aspirations. Roland’s Guardian ad Litem, also serving as his educational surrogate for the past three years, was aware of Roland’s anxiety around taking tests and found one-on-one test preparation services to help ready him for both exams. His Guardian ad Litem asked for assistance to cover the costs of enrollment, materials, and transportation. Our response? Of course!
“There can be no keener revelation of a society’s soul than the way in which it treats its children.”

- NELSON MANDELA

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