



For Immediate Release
Contact: Robert Friant, CSH
212-986-2966, x245
robert.friant@csh.org

Further Reducing Homelessness, Foster Care, Child Abuse and Neglect is HEART of Mission

Forum Engages Local Community in Conversation on Child Well-being

(Fort Lauderdale, FL – October 19, 2016) – Through collaboration with local advocates, civic and business leaders, HEART (Housing, Empowerment, Achievement, Recovery, Triumph) Alliance for Sustainable Families, is moving forward to preserve more families and ensure the safety of children in Broward County. At a forum held today, HEART rolled out its plan to further engage the community in broader efforts to reduce homelessness among families, caseloads for child welfare agencies, and circumstances that could separate children from their parents.

“HEART has housed and helped 53 families with a combined total of 155 children,” said Mark Dhooge, President and CEO of [Kids In Distress, Inc.](#) (KID), which is the lead agency in the HEART Alliance partnership. “Of course having a home of their own is important to these families, especially since some were homeless for years. But just as crucial are the services they receive, providing the interventions and skills to make sure children remain with their parents and grow and thrive in a safe, loving environment. We are seeing success by relying on supportive housing and we are hoping to engage more community involvement to expand our efforts.”

Federal officials, national advocates and members of the community involved in advocacy and formulating housing and child welfare policies joined Dhooge at the HEART county-wide Symposium held throughout the day at Hyatt Place in Fort Lauderdale.

“We strongly support innovative approaches to help families grow stronger and prevent the unnecessary removal of children,” said Rafael López, the [U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Commissioner of the Administration on Children, Youth and Families](#). “We applaud H.E.A.R.T., KID, Inc., and their partners for their proactive approach to address the housing and services needs of families. We can do so much more to reduce child abuse and neglect when we act with urgency to keep families safe, housed and together.”

Local leaders too have applauded HEART’s approach and embraced greater action to keep families together and children out of homelessness.

“We show our strength as a community when we strive to protect our children,” said Mandy Wells, Director of [Broward County Community Partnerships Division](#). “The H.E.A.R.T. initiative gives children the chance they deserve by creating a stable home so they can thrive and not experience the trauma of homelessness. Too many children and families in Broward need housing and supportive services, and this effort helps address this critical need.”

According to the 2016 Broward County Point in Time Count, there are approximately 148 homeless families comprised of 303 homeless children in Broward County. Unfortunately, because they lack housing and access to the critical services they need, these families could face the risk of children being removed from their parents and placed into foster care. HEART is a robust array of integrated services and affordable housing that reduces homelessness, child removals and foster care placements while increasing healthy parenting, employment, financial management skills and housing stability.

HEART also is one of five national demonstration sites funded by the [Children’s Bureau of the Administration of Children and Families](#), in partnership with the [Administration on Children, Youth and Families](#), within the United States Department of Health and Human Services, to help vulnerable families realize affordable housing and self-sufficiency. The other sites in the demonstration are: [Memphis Families Strong Initiative](#) in Memphis, Tennessee; [Partners United for Supportive Housing in Cedar Rapids](#) - Cedar Rapids, Iowa; [Families Moving Forward](#) - San Francisco, California; and [Intensive Supportive Housing for Families](#) - State of Connecticut.

These sites, including HEART, have succeeded in housing over 300 families nationally and are addressing some of the most difficult challenges facing parents and children while keeping them together.

Several speakers at today’s symposium noted the national demonstration is grounded in the [Keeping Families Together](#) supportive housing model first developed by the national nonprofit [CSH](#) and the [Robert Wood Johnson Foundation](#).

“What HEART is accomplishing through supportive housing is critical because we know in many circumstances families staying together means better lives for children,” said Deborah De Santis, President and CEO of [CSH](#). “In some studies, nearly 50% of adults experiencing homelessness indicate they were once in foster care and for many the life-long trauma doesn’t stop there. The national initiative involving HEART represents a chance to break generational cycles of despair through efforts to lift the whole family up through affordable housing and tailored services.”

For more information on HEART, please contact Andria Dewson, MSW, KID, Inc. and Project Director of HEART Alliance at 954-390-7654, x1244 or AndriaDewson@kidinc.org

###