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Big Shoes: DCF leader did well by Volusia, Flagler – Editorial

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Abramowitz gets accolades for his community work

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Protecting kids from abuse: Switch to community care working in abuse by Guest Columnist  
Alan Abramowitz

Orlando Sentinel, April 15-20, 2007

Showing Commitment to Stop Child Abuse

Orlando Sentinel, helping to make a difference, by Alan Abramowitz

You are the Key – Prevention and its many forms... by Alan Abramowitz

# New DCF chief set to tackle challenge

By RAY WEISS  
STAFF WRITER

DAYTONA BEACH — Alan F. Abramowitz, a former Kansas State University football player, said Wednesday he wants to bring a team approach to his new job as district administrator of the Department of Children & Families office for Volusia and Flagler counties.

Abramowitz, a 42-year-old attorney, was second in charge of DCF's Palm Beach County district for the past 18 months.

"My strengths are I love challenges. I enjoy solving problems as a team," he said. "I'm looking

forward to taking on the job and being part of the community."

He said he expects to begin work in about two weeks, taking over a department that has had a tumultuous history in recent years. He plans on drawing on his criminal and family law background, something he expects will help in overseeing difficult cases.

Abramowitz said his "focus will be to continue as part of the DCF team, to provide the best services possible and ensure safety and well-being of our most vulnerable citizens of our community."

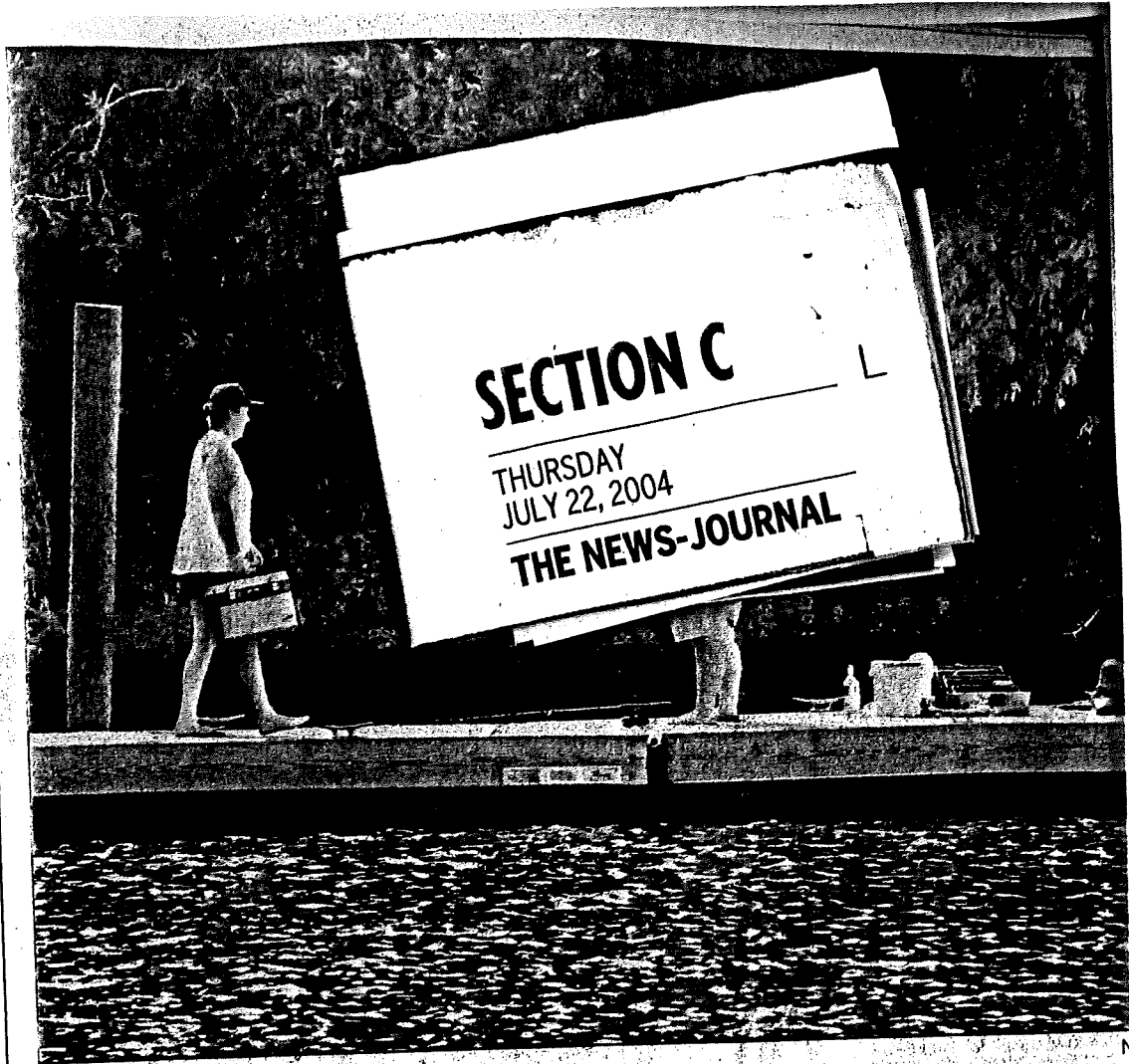
Abramowitz said he hasn't had a chance yet to look into the strengths or weaknesses of his new department. But one of his goals is to make the department more accessible to the public, giving it a human face.

"My boss says I'm too accessible," he said, laughing. "But I like to hear what's going on."

Part of his job will be overseeing the five-year contract that DCF signed with Community Based Care in December 2001 to privatize foster-care operations, including protective services and adoptions. DCF's inspector general's office is investigating CBC after three agency employees said they repeatedly expressed concerns about workers falsifying reports and engaging



ABRAMOWITZ



Boo Cook, right, of Orange City and friend Jessie Hanson of Deltona fish for bluegill at Lake Monroe morning. The newly renovated park quietly reopened July 3. "I love it. It's nice," Hanson said. job."

## Park sparkles for boaters, anglers after renovation

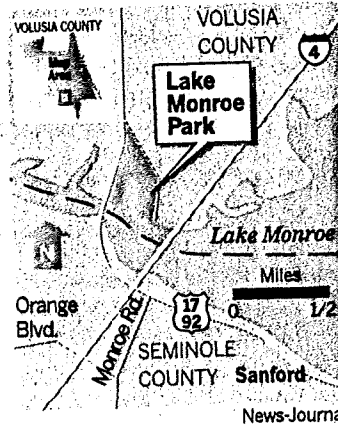
By JAMES MILLER  
STAFF WRITER

DEBARY — Gary Ford was looking for a place to launch his 25-foot trawler for a trip down the St. Johns River to Jacksonville. After doing an errand in Sanford one afternoon last week, he decided to check out the ramps and docks at recently renovated Lake Monroe Park.

He liked what he saw.

Standing on one of the new floating docks, the Daytona Beach man gestured across the water toward the heavy woods maybe 500 feet away.

"The cove is protected from the southeast wind," he said. "It's good for boating, in general. I'm almost tempted to go and get my boat right now. They've fixed it up so nicely."



ties are scheduled to open this week or next, and county officials will have a ceremonial opening Saturday.

Officials said the park fills an ever-growing need for public boating access to the St. Johns River. It is also a crucial piece of the county's much-publicized trail puzzle and — officials hope — an asset for nearby DeBary Hall, a major county recreational and tourism project.

"I think everybody is going to be really happy," said Councilman Bill Long, whose district includes DeBary. "The bikers and the boaters and the

Closed last May for \$1.2 million in renovations, the 42-acre park off U.S. 17-92 quietly reopened July 3 to give boaters holiday access. Camping facilities

SEE PARK, PAGE 2C

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ernness, district officials have now moved invested sales tax

[cindi.brownfield@news-jrnl.com](mailto:cindi.brownfield@news-jrnl.com)

## DCF

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1C

in sexual misconduct — yet no action was taken.

Community Based Care, which oversees more than 1,000 children in the child welfare system in Volusia and Flagler counties, has struggled with turnover and other problems. A monitoring report released earlier this month showed improvement, though some problems still exist.

Behind his easy-going manner, Abramowitz has some expectations on how a department should run.

He said in the last 18 months more than 1,700 backlogged cases in Palm Beach County had been reduced to zero and that children in out-of-home care had been reduced by 25 percent by stressing prevention.

"In Palm Beach we're also real high on adoptions. By far, we're No.1 (per capita)," he said. "The judges are instrumental in that."

Betsy Lewis has served as acting district administrator since February 2004 and will continue in her position as district manager for support services.

Local child advocates are looking forward to working with Abramowitz.

"We have needed strong leadership throughout the state in all these districts," said state Sen. Evelyn Lynn, R-Ormond Beach. "I'm pleased Secretary Regier has chosen to give us a

person with high qualification and who appears to have a strong background and commitment."

Linda Merrell, a member of Community Alliance, the board that oversees the transition from DCF to private providers, said his qualifications sound "like someone we need who can guide us through these tumultuous times."

Abramowitz has been with DCF since August 2000. He served as the chief legal counsel for the department's Districts 7 and 13 before moving to District 9 in Palm Beach. He was assistant general counsel for the Department of Juvenile Justice's Orlando office for four years. Abramowitz also worked as an assistant public defender and assistant state attorney.

He's been a guardian ad litem, local Advocacy Council member and a crisis intervention counselor. Abramowitz also worked on the Women Victims of Violence program for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in Kenya and served in the Peace Corps in Thailand.

Abramowitz, who is married and has two sons, holds a juris doctorate from Florida State University, master degrees in public administration and sociology and a bachelor's degree in psychology.

— Staff Writer Suzy Kridner-Wymes contributed to this report.

The facilities the county replaced were decaying remnants of those early days, said John Harper, facilities planning and development manager for the county's Leisure Services division.

"They were really showing their age," he said.

The revamped park has four new floating docks, a fishing dock, five picnic pavilions, a bathroom, a bath and shower building for campers, a parking lot and an office.

Before the recent work, the only improvements the county made were two two-lane boat ramps put in five years ago, Harper said.

Part of the park's popularity derives from the need for boat launches on Lake Monroe and the St. Johns River, officials said.

In addition to Lake Monroe Park, the county's Mariner's Cove Park has a launch on Bethel Creek that empties into the lake, while Deltona has a boat launch across Lakeshore Drive from its Community Center.

The fee for launching a boat is \$2 plus tax, while one night of camping will cost \$10 in the summer and \$12 in the winter.

While Seminole County has two free boat ramps only a few hundred feet away, Volusia officials think the presence of park employees — something absent from the Seminole County park — will give visitors a sense of security that overrides the cost.

Also among the \$1.2 million improvements is a trailhead to

After Florida was the United States lake was given the president James

An 1887 news version, the lake tells a more fanciful story of a grandson of a lieutenant in the Seminoles. An eye-witness claimed the lieutenant's first name wasn't mounted on a tree who sped off into a swam with Monroe across an arm of the lake henceforth, because Lake Monroe.

SOURCE: N

serve a planned county's under spring-to-spring will extend Springs to DeLe

The paved wide trail will completed 1.2-r runs from Ger DeBary Hall. I pleted by summ

"That's going neat ride from to Gemini and DeBary Hall," I ing that he ho tion would bri to the historic broke ground .

\$1.3 million tra tors center ther

## RESCUED

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guard, is hospitalized with a stomach aneurysm.

"I walked and cried," Ganta said. "It was about all I could do."

turned to tears of joy when an Orlando woman called her Tuesday and said she had found one of the dogs. The woman recognized the dog from the news.

Muffin was seen wandering near the gates of the House of Hope teen center. On Wednesday, a DeLand woman whose

picked up the dog after also recognizing it from the news. By Wednesday afternoon, Ganta had both pooches by her side.

Police haven't found the minivan, but Ganta had plenty of good news for the day.

"I was just told my husband, Charles, is coming out of ICIT"

## HEA INSUI

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DAVID A. TUC

...over her with a pot and a hammer. Linton had just poured boiling water on Sadosky, Cas-

cially enjoyed reading and eating out, he said. While laid up in the hospital, Sadosky developed a blood clot that caused death on May 27. ... r said the motive is unknown. Linton had a friendship. Sadosky's moves out of state, other daily and tutor there was of hostility between her mother and Linton. Assistant public defender

Jeff Richards told the judge that Sadosky told law enforcement that Linton practically was emotionless during the at-

led an active, full life, according to Castor. The widow espe-

Missy Stoddard can be reached at [mstoddard@sun-sentinel.com](mailto:mstoddard@sun-sentinel.com) or 561-832-2895.

# DCF manager gets promotion

BY SAM TRANUM  
STAFF WRITER



Alan Abramowitz, a Department of Children & Families administrator who worked to clean up the agency's troubled Palm Beach County operations, has been promoted to a position running DCF operations in the Daytona Beach area.

**MOVING:** Alan Abramowitz is leaving Palm Beach County to work in Daytona Beach. Staff photo/Nicholas R. Von Staden

employee turnover. He had been working as chief legal counsel for two DCF districts in Central Florida after joining the agency in 2000.

Abramowitz has been deputy district administrator for DCF's Palm Beach County office for 18 months. He will start in about 10 days as district administrator for the agency's operations in Volusia and Flagler counties, he said.

While Abramowitz was serving as deputy to Palm Beach County District Administrator Ted Simpkins, the district eliminated a 1,700-case backlog, Abramowitz said. It also signed a deal to privatize services for foster children. Since that change, the average caseworker's workload has declined from about 75 children to about 20 children, Abramowitz said.

Palm Beach County Circuit Chief Judge Edward Fine said Abramowitz's departure is a loss for Palm Beach County.

"He got a lot done," Fine said. "He was very good to work with."

Abramowitz, 42, came to Palm Beach County in February 2003 to help overhaul DCF's county operation, which had suffered through a number of high-profile child deaths, been criticized by grand jury reports and been plagued by

front lines at least once a month to work as a protective investigator, said Marilyn Munoz, a spokeswoman for DCF in Palm Beach County.

Abramowitz said he learned a lot as deputy administrator in Palm Beach County and enjoyed living in the area. He said he was excited about his new appointment.

"I wanted the opportunity to be a district administrator at some point and this was the opportunity," he said by phone while house hunting with his wife in Volusia County on Thursday. "I'm going to come here [the Daytona Beach area] with an open mind and we're going to do this together."

Before joining DCF, Abramowitz was assistant general counsel for the Department of Juvenile Justice's Orlando office for four years. He also has been a public defender, assistant state attorney and a Peace Corps volunteer in Thailand.

Sam Tranum can be reached at [stranum@sun-sentinel.com](mailto:stranum@sun-sentinel.com) or 561-243-6522.



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# New local DCF administrator digs in

## Abramowitz Favors Hands-On Approach

**NAME:** Alan F. Abramowitz

**AGE:** 42

**TITLE:** District administrator for the local Department of Children & Families office.

**ANNUAL SALARY:** \$99,790

**EDUCATION:** University of Central Florida, master's in public administration; Florida State University College of Law, juris doctorate; Kansas State University, master of arts in sociology and bachelor of science in psychology.

**EXPERIENCE:** Deputy DCF district administrator for Palm Beach County; chief legal counsel for District 7 and District 13; representing Orange County and eight other counties; assistant general counsel for the state Department of Juvenile Justice; and assistant public defender.

**OTHER:** Volunteer work abroad, including helping refugees in Kenya and teaching English and domestic violence prevention in Thailand with the U.S. Peace Corps.



By **DEBORAH CIRCELLI**

STAFF WRITER

**DAYTONA BEACH** — Trying to explain your job to a 6- and 8-year-old can be tricky, especially when you're charged with protecting children against abuse, in many cases by their parents.

Alan F. Abramowitz, in his first week as the new local district administrator for the state Department of Children & Families, tells his two sons, Ryan and Brennan, he's like a supervisor of superheroes.

The heroes, he tells them, are the child protective investigators, case workers and the employees who help families apply for food stamps and other assistance.

"Their whole mission is to do good things," the 42-year-old says he tells his children. "Kids and parents are having problems, and we need to help them."

Abramowitz, former DCF deputy administrator in Palm Beach County, plans to provide that help in Volusia and Flagler counties by working closely with the community and agencies such as the state Department of Juvenile Justice, for which he was once assistant general counsel.

In his previous job, he took a hands-on, high-energy approach, going out with child protective investigators and even taking on some of his own cases. He plans to be the same type of leader here.

"He actually felt the pain of the investigators when he took these cases," said Sergio Rosario, a supervisor in Palm Beach County for DCF investigators and former union representative.

Abramowitz said he couldn't

SEE DCF, PAGE 2C

## DCF

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1C

truly understand his employees' jobs unless he did it himself.

"I know the frustrations," Abramowitz said. "I understand what they go through."

Thursday he was off and running on his second day on the job, meeting with area judges and members of the DCF Community Alliance advisory board. He spent his first day introducing himself to employees in about a half dozen DCF offices.

DCF Secretary Jerry Regier named Abramowitz to the position last week. He is the third administrator in the past three years, replacing Ron Zychowski, who moved to Seminole County in January.

Foster care will be high on his list of priorities. Deanna Schaeffer, a member of the Community Alliance, hopes Abramowitz will bring a "new set of eyes" to the district's contract with its foster care provider, Community Based Care of Volusia-Flagler Counties.

Schaeffer is especially concerned about a current DCF inspector general investigation into complaints from former employees, including child safety issues.

"We hope he will be here a while to put some good things in place and remain here long enough to see some positive outcomes that can be lasting into the future," Schaeffer said.

Abramowitz said he's "here for the long haul." He bought a house in DeLand with his wife, Jodi, also a lawyer, who volunteers to work DCF appeal cases in the Orlando area.

While he has not had time to review some of the local issues, he plans to be in constant communication with Community Based Care. Even when a private agency takes over a DCF service, the department is still accountable, he said.

"I don't care who is doing the work," Abramowitz said. "I'm ultimately responsible for what happens."

He also has plans in the next two months for meetings at community centers to hear from residents about what they want to see from the department.

Abramowitz believes in keeping an open mind and writes letters to parents about why decisions were made if a parent expresses concern.

"I have thick skin. People are not going to offend me," Abramowitz said.

In Palm Beach County, he spent 18 months lowering case loads and closing a backlog of cases. He also reduced the number of children placed in foster homes and with relatives. He hopes to do the same in Volusia and Flagler counties, which has about 1,200 children in out-of-home care.

Putting in place more prevention services and returning children more quickly to their families or toward adoption will be a priority.

"A year is a long time in the life of a child," Abramowitz said. "If we can do it in three months, we should do that."

## Looking past headlines: DCF helps a lot of families, chief says

By Rick Tonyan  
BEACON STAFF WRITER

With a grandfather, his father and a brother all in the Army, Alan Abramowitz decided to find another way to serve the people of the United States.

After stints as a state attorney, a public defender and a Peace Corps volunteer, the DeLand lawyer believes he's found his niche, in the often controversial, frequently maligned Florida Department of Children and Families. And he couldn't be happier.

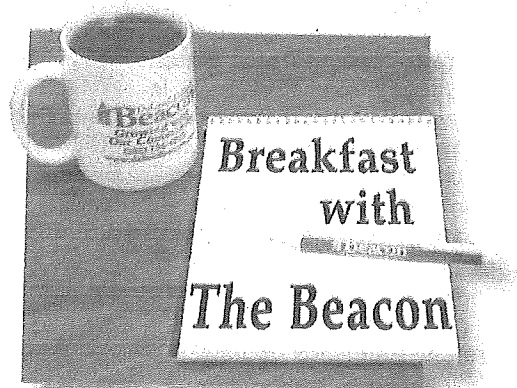
"When I go to work, I'm happy," he said. "You can live your whole life and never get a job like this."

Abramowitz, who lives in DeLand and works out of his Daytona Beach office, now is the administrator for the department's district covering Volusia and Flagler counties. Everything from food-stamp applications to nursing-home inspections comes under the scrutiny of the department.

Most criticisms of the department come from investigations of child abuse and handling of child-custody cases. For years, media reports have highlighted a string of horror stories coming from the department.

There have been reports of the department removing children from loving homes on flimsy abuse charges. Then, there have been stories of the department ignoring valid abuse complaints and leaving children to be victimized.

The department was created in 1998, out of the state Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services in hopes of making the agency more responsive to endangered children and families in crisis.



But, the horror stories continued. Late in the same year the department was created, Kayla McKean, a 6-year-old Lake County girl, was beaten to death by her father. Department investigators repeatedly had looked into complaints the girl was being abused. But, there was no follow-up to the investigations, and local police weren't notified.

The death inspired the state Legislature to approve the Kayla McKean Child Protection Act of 1999. That law requires better reporting of child abuse and other reforms.

Abramowitz, 43, already was working with young people, as a public defender in Palm Beach County's juvenile court, when media reports of Kayla's death and the reforms within the department inspired him to consider switching jobs. He went to work for the department Aug. 11, 2000. He arrived in the Volusia-Flagler district about a year ago.

Administrative problems keep the department in the media spotlight. Several weeks ago, reports

Please see **BREAKFAST, 4A**

from Tallahassee told of about 1,200 fax messages, some of which were about endangered children, never getting into the hands of department investigators.

Those messages were waylaid because the department was updating its fax machines and electronic telephone equipment. Some fax messages were stored in computers, but never distributed to the right office.

Abramowitz said 58 of those messages were about cases in this district, but nobody was endangered because a message wasn't received on time.

According to Abramowitz, horror stories about the department abound because stories about the agency's successes can't be properly told. The worst cases — such as Kayla McKean — become police investigations and court cases and thus are public record.

Under state law, department success stories, such as adoptions of abandoned, abused children into loving homes, are kept confidential to protect the privacy of those involved. Thus, the public never hears of them, Abramowitz said.

Since Children and Families split off from Health and Rehabilitative Services, there has been a slow but steady and measurable improvement in investigating cases and resolving problems, according to Abramowitz. For example, each abuse investigator used to have about 80 cases at a time. Now, after more investigators have been hired and the system streamlined, the caseload is down to about 20.

"People forget how bad it used to be," Abramowitz said.

Another positive, he said, is that the agency is learning better how to keep troubled families together and still keep children safe. That lessens the need for foster care and lessens the trauma for children, Abramowitz said.

And, it can get better, he said, as the community gets more involved with the department.

West Volusia is becoming increasingly involved, according to Abramowitz. Teachers and other educational-system employees are on the front lines for spotting evidence of abuse in school-age children. Neighbors can see evidence of abuse of younger children or the elderly.

Church congregations are prime sources of foster parents for children who must be taken from their homes. Business people lend support to civic organizations supplying money to help West Volusians in economic crisis.

"This is a community effort. The success or failure is the community's," Abramowitz said. "Fortunately, this is a very giving community."

Giving to the community was in-

Abramowitz, the youngest of three sons, was raised on a variety of Army bases throughout the world.

His oldest brother, David, followed the family tradition and became an Army officer. The middle brother, Sid, was a football player who spent four years in the National Football League, playing offensive tackle for the Baltimore Colts, Seattle Seahawks, New York Jets and Indianapolis Colts.

According to his youngest brother, Sid Abramowitz's major claim to fame in pro football was getting hit on the head with a thrown ball, an accident that became immortalized in a sports-blooper video.

As his brothers chose their career paths, the gypsy-like life of a military family made Alan Abramowitz long to identify someplace as a permanent home. Since his father owned some property in Palm Bay and the family frequently vacationed in Florida, Abramowitz decided on Florida.

So, when it came time for him to apply to a college, Abramowitz wanted to go to Florida State University and play football for the Seminoles. Instead, he got a football scholarship to Kansas State University.

Several years later, he applied to FSU's law school. His first application was rejected. "I wrote back and told them, 'You forced me to play football for Kansas State and now you're forcing me to get a law degree from Kansas State.' They reconsidered."

Besides getting his law degree, Abramowitz also met his future wife.

County Public Defender's Office, after Alan had spent two years in the Peace Corps, mostly teaching English in Thailand.

The couple have two sons, Brennan, 8, and Ryan, 6, who are entranced by DeLand's public skateboard park.

"Things are great in DeLand," Alan Abramowitz said. "The community's size is ideal. You get to know all the players."



BEACON PHOTO/RICK TONYAN

### **Working to keep families together**

Alan Abramowitz, right, administrator of the Department of Children and Families district that includes West Volusia, explains how the state agency is changing. *Beacon* staff member Al Everson listens intently, during "Breakfast with The Beacon." Each Monday, *The Beacon* invites a local newsmaker to chat with the news team. Abramowitz told how, with the help of community partners — agencies and individuals — Children and Families is learning better how to keep troubled families together and still keep children safe.

The Daytona Beach News-Journal

Sunday, July 24, 2005 7c

**PASSION:** New leader not afraid to speak up

LOCAL

# DCF administrator's passion inspiring

By **DEBORAH CIRCELLI**  
STAFF WRITER

**DAYTONA BEACH** — Less than two weeks on the job, Alan Abramowitz stood at the funeral of a 2-year-old foster-care child last year, taking on the role of a father more than a state worker.

No biological family members were present. The local district administrator for the state Department of Children & Families recalls telling workers that “we are his family and the world missed out because he died so young.”

As he looks back on his first year as a district administrator, Abramowitz, 43, who has two elementary-age sons, said it was one of the “most emotional and yet inspiring” days of his career as one worker sang and a person in the community donated the coffin. The child died from complex health problems, officials said.

SEE **PASSION**, PAGE 7C

[deborah.circelli@news-jrnl.com](mailto:deborah.circelli@news-jrnl.com)

## Did You Know?

*Charles Loring Brace — ordained minister-turned-social reformer — was a pioneer in the foster-care field:*

- Brace, born in 1826, became interested in child welfare while at the Union Theological Seminary in New York City.
- He decided to forgo a career as a minister to help the plight of the homeless children in New York City — who numbered more than 30,000 in the 1850s.
- In 1853, Brace helped found The Children's Aid Society of New York and served as its director. He later created the “orphan train” movement, which sent thousands of orphaned and at-risk children to live with families across rural America.
- Brace died in 1890.

— Compiled by News  
Researcher Karen Duffy  
SOURCES: [childrensaidsociety.org](http://childrensaidsociety.org),  
World Book Encyclopedia

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1C

Local child advocates say Abramowitz's passion and love for children is what has enabled him to improve the perception of the local foster-care system and enhance services for children in Volusia and Flagler counties since he started work last July 28.

Lucy Hadi, secretary of the state DCF, said Abramowitz's "personal commitment and leadership style have laid the foundation for success" in the district.

Local officials point to a drop in the number of children in foster care, more children being reunited with families, a decrease in court cases being delayed and fewer children being removed from their homes.

"He has an eye on the future, and a big heart for the kids," said Linda Merrell, vice chairwoman of the Community Alliance, a local DCF advisory board.

Whether he's attending weekly civic group meetings, return-

ing a grandmother's phone call or sending e-mails to local leaders at all hours of the night, officials say, Abramowitz is responsive, innovative and a community player.

"He's in there breathing what we are doing," said Jim McBrayer, a foster parent and court-appointed guardian. "He's out there at our picnics cooking the hamburgers. I know that's simple, but he's out there all the time doing that stuff."

Local officials say Abramowitz's biggest accomplishment is helping turn around DCF's local foster care contract agency, Community Based Care of Volusia and Flagler Counties. After problems such as workers falsifying reports, Abramowitz gave the agency notice to improve or lose their contract.

"He is not afraid to report a problem," said Jack Levine, a statewide child advocate for 27 years. "He does not hide and hope for the best."

The notice to Community Based Care prompted a change in leadership at that agency



News-Journal/NIGEL COOK

Alan Abramowitz, center, district administrator for the state Department of Children & Families, talks with clients of the Mental Health Association of Volusia County's Debra Anne House in Daytona Beach recently. Those who work with him say his passion for children has helped the agency improve.

with the hiring of former DCF administrator Ron Zychowski.

"(Alan) has made some very tough decisions," said Ray Salazar, Community Alliance chair-

man. "I think we're seeing the result of that now."

The number of children being served in foster care and other placements outside their home

has dropped to about 996 in June compared to 1,172 last June.

"It's like night and day," Abramowitz said. "In the beginning, I was up all the time looking at stuff wondering how we can get from A to B."

Now, he said, Community Based Care has built an "ethical climate" and he has confidence in Zychowski's leadership. He wants to see more community members on that agency's board and looks to expand the contract another five years.

Some Community Alliance members say they still have concerns when it comes to turnover in case workers and attorneys. They also worry about a statewide proposal that could cut attorneys.

Circuit Judge Shawn Briese, who previously handled the court through which abused and neglected children receive state protection, also asked to be moved because he did not think the two agencies were doing enough to get cases to the court on time.

Abramowitz, who receives an

annual salary of \$99,789, said the court issue has improved and he knows there is other progress to be made. He sees this upcoming year as being even better for children.

More services already are being offered in the home, giving investigators an alternative to removing children. DCF investigators removed 32 children in June, or 6 percent of the cases they investigated, reports show, compared to 42 for the same month last year, or 11 percent.

Abramowitz said he is on call 24 hours a day for investigators "so they don't have to feel they are out there alone."

When he's not working with staff, he said, he's answering questions, encouraging people to volunteer as guardians and educating the public about such dangers as shaking a baby.

Abramowitz said they need that open dialogue with the public, "whether it's good or bad."

"We need to be challenged and have people come to the table," he said. "We have the solutions right here in our community."

WEDNESDAY  
OCTOBER 19, 2005

THE NEWS-JOURNAL

## Child-welfare system working

The Oct. 13 article "Abuse reports hit 5-year high" is a breath of fresh air. Not because of the increase in calls to the abuse hot line, but because the state Department of Children & Families is "removing fewer children from homes than in past years." How fortunate for the children and families of Volusia and Flagler counties that their child welfare system is being led by people with courage, intelligence and integrity. Local DCF administrator Alan Abramowitz and Ron Zychowski, president of Community Based Care, get it. As founder of The Institute for Authentic Social Work, I believe they and their teams understand how the child welfare system should work.

They get that foster care is supposed to be a last resort, not the ever-expanding industry that it has become, with black and poor families being disproportionately represented. These gentlemen get that foster care is supposed to house children who could not be safe with their own families, not children whose families are experiencing poverty-related problems or manageable family issues.

They get that family preservation is cost effective, morally correct and just plain smart. They get that with fewer children entering the system — and those remaining with their families faring better because the DCF investigators are connecting them to necessary services and resources — all aspects of the system improve.

They get that returning children home is as important as their being adopted. They get that when caseloads are smaller, the quality of care to children in the system improves, their length of stay in care is reduced, and they are less likely to join the thousands of former foster

children who are now a part of the homeless, prison or welfare populations. They get that when workers experience less stress and believe in what they are doing, employment retention is positively impacted and turnover-related expenses are reduced.

It sounds as if Abramowitz and Zychowski are willing to work themselves out of jobs. Because they are, they will always be in demand. I commend them for their courage.

RENEE MICHELLE HARRIS  
Miami Gardens

THURSDAY  
NOVEMBER 17, 2005

THE NEWS-JOURNAL

COMMUNITY VOICES

# Wanted: Heroes for children

By ALAN ABRAMOWITZ

**R**ecently I took part in judging an art contest for children. The children drew pictures of people who are heroes in their lives, those who watch over them and keep them safe. There were the usual pictures of those we consider heroes — police officers, soldiers and firemen — but many drew pictures of their moms and dads, who for many children are the real heroes in their lives.

This gave me pause because as a parent you don't think of yourself as a hero. In Volusia and Flagler counties, we have approximately 65 children looking for their own heroes; they want "forever families." These children are being cared for in some form of foster care.

I wish to take this opportunity to draw attention to these very special children, letting people know the great need for adoptive parents. Gov. Jeb Bush has signed a proclamation declaring November as Adoption Awareness Month. In keeping with the governor's "No Place Like Home" initiative, the Department of Children and Families along with its community-based care partners encourages adults to seriously consider becoming adoptive parents.

Currently 3,565 children in Florida are eligible and awaiting adoption. To children without parents, the most important thing a parent can do is provide a stable, safe and loving home that they can call their own. This month, DCF has kicked off a public service announcement campaign entitled, "You don't have to be a hero to



be a hero." If being a hero to a foster child is the right fit for you, please log on to DCF's Web site at <http://www.dcf.state.fl.us/adoption/> or call the department for information at (800) 96-ADOPT (962-3678).

*Abramowitz is the district administrator for the Florida Department of Children and Families' District 12, which includes Volusia and Flagler counties.*

THURSDAY  
NOVEMBER 17, 2005

THE NEWS-JOURNAL



ABRAMOWITZ



LYNN

### Prevention leaders honored for work

Several local leaders were recognized for their efforts in keeping Volusia and Flagler counties safe, healthy and drug-free.

Alan Abramowitz, local administrator for the state Department of Children & Families, and Sen. Evelyn Lynn, R-Ormond Beach, were recognized Tuesday as 2005 Who's Who of Prevention Leaders in Florida at the Florida Statewide Prevention Conference in Orlando.

Others recognized included

Tony Barhoo, director of programs at The House Next Door based in DeLand, which offers prevention and family counseling services.

Frances Webb, receptionist at The House Next Door, also was honored. Agency director Steve Sally said. Webb, 83, has supported clients and staff for 15 years with a "warm smile, a loving heart, tissues to dry the tears and home-baked goodies."

— Staff Report

# DCF stalwart moves on to larger turf

Alan Abramowitz, a success in the agency's Volusia district, will take over for the Orlando area.

By APRIL HUNT  
SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

A longtime state worker credited with helping turn around one of the most troubled child-welfare systems in Florida will take over the Orlando area's largest family welfare agency later this month.

Alan Abramowitz, 43, has been top administrator for the Department of Children & Families district that includes Volusia and Flagler counties since July 2004.

On Dec. 23, he will become district administrator for the DCF district that covers Orange, Osceola, Seminole and Brevard counties. Current administrator Mike Watkins is leaving to head a nonprofit agency in the Panhandle.

DCF Secretary Lucy Hadi announced the appointment Wednesday. No replacement has been named for Abramowitz.

"It will be a challenge to take on a larger district and larger caseload, and I love a challenge," said Abramowitz, an attorney who was DCF's general counsel in the Orlando region for several years.

After Abramowitz took over in Daytona Beach, DCF demanded changes from the agency that contracts with the state for child-welfare services. The agency, Community Based Care or CBC, was accused of falsifying reports and delaying reunions of children with their families.

Last summer the University of South Florida documented the



ALAN ABRAMOWITZ: His new district includes Orange, Osceola, Seminole and Brevard counties. He starts the job Dec. 23.

Colleagues describe that attitude as part of Abramowitz's tenacity and seemingly endless energy. They credit him with having an open relationship with the community, volunteering both good and bad information about DCF decisions.

None was surprised to hear that he plans to again develop partnerships with community groups that work with the homeless and substance abusers — work they and he said will translate into heading off child abuse before it happens.

"That is important to him, and he will be relentless in moving that philosophy through the organization," said Ron Zychowski, who took over CBC during its woes and worked with Abramowitz on the system's revival. "He's like the Energizer Bunny. He doesn't stop."

Abramowitz began his public-service career as a prosecutor in the 18th Circuit that includes Seminole and Brevard counties. He then worked briefly as a public defender in Lakeland before serving in Thailand for the Peace Corps.

He returned to work as a public defender and later became assistant general counsel for the state Department of Juvenile Justice. Abramowitz also spent 17 years in the Army National Guard and Army Reserve as a legal officer.

He worked three years as general counsel for the DCF district he will now head. He left in 2003 to become deputy administrator for the DCF district based in West Palm Beach.

Abramowitz lives in DeLand with his wife, Jodi, also an attorney, and their two sons.

*'It will be a challenge to take on a larger district and larger caseload, and I love a challenge.'*

changes and listed Volusia and Flagler as a state model for child-welfare programs.

"He helped re-create the attitude of that district, and he did it very quickly," said Jack Levine, a longtime Florida child advocate. "He is one of the most trusted legal minds in DCF."

One controversy during his tenure has been the battle he inherited for an infant named Christian, who DCF placed with an Orange City foster family for 16 months. Denise and Ivar Baklid raised the boy until DCF removed him from their home and placed him with relatives in Tennessee in 2002.

The two sides are still fighting over the boy, now 4. On Monday, a state appeals court ordered DCF to return the boy to the Baklids.

Abramowitz, who has a photo of Christian on his desk, said the agency will continue to fight in the case.

"I know of no expert that doesn't agree with the agency's position," he said. "We will continue to do everything legally possible to protect the best interest of the child."

April Hunt can be reached at 407-420-6269 or ahunt@orlandosentinel.com.

THURSDAY  
DECEMBER 8, 2005  
THE NEWS-JOURNAL

# Local DCF chief heading for Orlando job

By **DEBORAH CIRCELLI**  
STAFF WRITER

**DAYTONA BEACH** — After helping to turn around the local child-welfare system, the area's top administrator is leaving to help children in the Orlando area.

Alan Abramowitz, 43, district administrator for the state Department of Children & Families, will step down Dec. 22 to take over as the head of the DCF district for Orange, Seminole, Osceola and Brevard counties.

He replaces Mike Watkins who is resigning to work for a private foster-care agency in Tallahassee.

Abramowitz has been administrator for Volusia and Flagler counties for 17 months and is the third administrator to leave since 2002.

While community leaders say they will miss Abramowitz's hands-on and open management-style, some are worried whether the progress the local system has made will continue.

"I'm heartsick. It's going to be a terrible loss to us," said Elaine

Holt, a member of the Community Alliance, a local DCF advisory board. "He's really been an asset to our community."



**ABRAMOWITZ**

Abramowitz, who has been with DCF since 2000, was asked by DCF Secretary Lucy Hadi to take the new position. Hadi pointed to Abra-

mowitz's success as the local district administrator and his prior service as DCF's chief legal counsel for the Central Florida district.

"Alan's passion for service to people in need and his strong collaborative skills are a good fit for the challenges of this new assignment," she said.

The Orlando area District 7 has three Community Based Care agencies that contract with the state to provide foster care services to more than 5,000 children, as opposed to about 1,470 in Volusia and Flagler, he said. His

annual salary will go from about \$100,000 to \$120,000.

Abramowitz said he still plans for now to live in DeLand, where his two sons attend school. His wife, Jodi, an attorney, will continue to do volunteer legal work for the district.

Abramowitz spent the past year working to turn around Community Based Care of Volusia and Flagler Counties, which

contracts with the local district. He put the agency on notice last year to improve or face losing its \$20 million contract. The agency, with new leadership by Ron Zychowski, has since decreased the number of children in care by increasing adoptions and returning more children to their families.

[deborah.circelli@news-jrnl.com](mailto:deborah.circelli@news-jrnl.com)

# Big shoes

## DCF leader did well by Volusia, Flagler

**A**sk Alan Abramowitz for his cell-phone number. He'll give it to you. Ask him to show up at a local meeting to support a human-service initiative. He'll be there.

Abramowitz spent the past 17 months as District 12 administrator for the Department of Children & Families. The title makes him sound like the ultimate bureaucrat. But his strength had nothing to do with pushing paper. It had everything to do with establishing connections and setting standards for DCF services.

This week, Abramowitz announced his reassignment — from Volusia and Flagler counties to District 7, which covers Orange, Seminole, Osceola and Brevard counties. The change will mean a bigger caseload, more people to get to know, more challenges. We have no doubt Abramowitz is up to the new task.

He will definitely be missed. Human-services advocate Elaine Holt spoke for many Volusia and Flagler residents when she said she was "heart-sick" over Abramowitz's pending departure, a sentiment echoed by Dee Schaeffer of Healthy Communities and Lindsay Roberts of the Volusia/Flagler Homeless Coalition.

You may wonder how Abramowitz won so much support in such a short time — especially since his tenure started in the middle of an angry debate between District 12 officials and Community Based Care of Volusia and Flagler Counties, the nonprofit agency created as part of the state's foster-care privatization move. When Abramowitz arrived, the foster-care system was in a mess. As a result, some children may have stayed in foster care longer than necessary, and the department didn't have a good picture of how the private agency was doing its job.



Within a month, Abramowitz told Community Based Care to improve. A few months later, when the agency hadn't progressed enough, he put them on notice that their contract was about to be termi-

nated. The tactic, from an outspoken supporter of social-service privatization, underscored Abramowitz's commitment to accountability.

The tough stance worked. Under new leadership (Ron Zychowski, who used to hold Abramowitz's job), Community Based Care found a new focus, one that considers the harm to children

who are removed from their home while doing everything possible to keep them safe. Independent community leaders agree that child protection has improved radically.

Getting tough was only part of the job. The other asset Abramowitz brought was an ability to connect. After visiting the Homeless Assistance Center in Daytona Beach, he chose it as the first site for a computer system that allows homeless people to apply for food stamps and welfare without going to a DCF office. He talked to the Volusia County Council on behalf of a jail alternative program for mentally ill, nonviolent arrestees. He launched a Community Agenda project intended to create a "blueprint" for social services in the two-county district.

Abramowitz was a match for Volusia and Flagler counties' strengths. He fit into the close network of agencies already providing services to children, the poor and the disabled. His successor will find a community accustomed to seeing the DCF as a partner and ready to build on Abramowitz's good work.

## Abramowitz gets accolades for his community work

Alan Abramowitz is a top administrator for the Department of Children and Families who enjoys good press and sincere accolades.

The *Orlando Sentinel* described him as "helping turn around one of the most troubled child-welfare systems in Florida," in District 12's Volusia and Flagler counties.

An editorial in the *Daytona Beach News Journal* said his "strength had nothing to do with pushing paper. It had everything to do with establishing connections and setting standards for DCF services."

He chose the Homeless Assistance Center in Daytona Beach for a computer system that allows homeless

people to apply for food stamps and welfare without going to a DCF office. And

he championed alternatives to jail for mentally ill, nonviolent people who are arrested in Volusia County.

Recently, 43-year-old Abramowitz received the 2005 Florida Prevention Leadership Award for his community work, as well as the 16th Annual Sam Bell Award from Serenity House, which provides substance abuse treatment for the indigent and homeless.

Now, Abramowitz has been reassigned to District 7, which covers Orange, Seminole, Osceola, and Brevard counties.

"The change will mean a bigger caseload, more people to get to know, more challenges," the *Daytona Beach News Journal* said. "We have no doubt Abramowitz is up to the task."



**ALAN ABRAMOWITZ,** right, is congratulated by Florida Drug Czar Jim McDonough.

TUESDAY, MARCH 14, 2006

FLORIDA TODAY

COLUMNS

# Protecting kids from abuse

## Switch to community care working in Brevard

Community-based care was the Legislature's idea to transfer the management of foster care and related services from the state to the local community.

Brevard County successfully made the switch of more than 1,200 children and their families on July 1, 2005 to a nonprofit agency, Community Based Care of Brevard, or CBC.

While the Department of Children and Families continues to oversee the performance of CBC of Brevard, it has complete oversight of foster and related services to children and families along the Space Coast.

The success of this effort to date can be directly attributed to the involvement of Brevard citizens and their local government representatives.

It is in the foundation of community based care that everyone has a role. When a crisis occurs, members of a family's support system are called upon as active participants in the resolution process.

If that is not possible, we reach out to others to provide safe and stable homes for children so that parents can focus on the reunification of their family.

In today's system, CBC of Brevard is able to develop individ-



**Alan  
Abramowitz**

*Guest  
Columnist*

ualized programs to meet specialized needs.

As of March 6, CBC of Brevard reported that more than 200 children and their families received assistance that ultimately diverted them from foster care or protective services through customized "diversion programs."

During my initial visits to Brevard, I was heartened by both the continued and direct involvement of local citizens with CBC of Brevard.

Because of that involvement, families in Brevard now have a number of innovative prevention programs that attempt to address problems before they reach a crisis stage.

There is no doubt this community has a strong network of advocates, social service providers, and faith-based providers committed to protecting Brevard's most vulnerable citizens.

And many are vulnerable.

Drug and alcohol abuse, poor parenting skills, untreated mental health problems, homeless-

ness, affordable child care, and poverty can contribute to the abuse, abandonment and neglect of a child.

So how can we really make a difference?

We've got to do what makes sense. We must give parents the guidance, resources and support they need to keep their families safely together before a crisis escalates to the level of child abuse.

Our Brevard team continues to be a network of child advocates focused on accomplishing one mission — to protect, promote, and strengthen our children and families.

In a song by Tracy Chapman I am reminded, "I've seen angels wearing the disguise of ordinary people living ordinary lives, filled with love, compassion, forgiveness and sacrifice."

I applaud this community and I commit our support to the children and families of Brevard.

But please know that your support is essential to the success of this effort. To find out how you can you make a difference, call CBC of Brevard at (321) 752-3183. ■

**Abramowitz is the Department of Families and Children administrator for Brevard, Seminole, Orange and Osceola counties.**

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— RICHARD POOLE  
LONGWOOD

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— JOHN T. McCREA  
WINTER PARK

President Bush: I am hooked on big oil for eds and transporta- ny local drug dealer port the president's ned off of this drug

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## FOSTER CARE

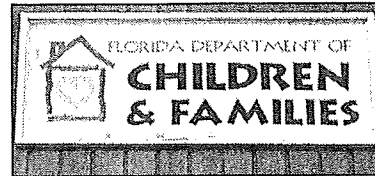
# Helping to make a difference

I remember turning 18. It's an exciting time in life, an era that presents many opportunities as well as big decisions. It is at this crossroads that we lay the foundation for the person we will become. For some youth, it is the question of continuing education or beginning careers; for others, it may be love or parenthood.

At 18 my father helped me complete my application to the Air Force Academy Preparatory School. Parents are supposed to be there for you, comforting broken hearts, giving unsolicited advice and supporting you through the tough times. If you didn't have that guidance, how different would life be?

Youth who turn 18 in foster care may be eligible for a monthly stipend. But they need much more than money to successfully transition into healthy adults. It is my aspiration that these youth grow into loving parents, independent of the state Department of Children & Families.

These young adults need strong role models. Organizations such as Great Oaks Village, Osceola Children's Home and the Soci-



ety of Black Engineers are to be commended. These organizations provide children in foster care life skills and support. They are true examples of community-based care. I believe this is what the Legislature envisioned for children and families.

There are 2,800 foster kids in Central Florida. They are great kids. They play sports, sing in choirs and attend school with your children. As the new administrator for DCF in Central Florida, my vision is to strengthen the spirit of community-based care. Whatever your profession, we are all partners in the fight against child abuse. Ask yourself: How can I make a difference in the life of a child?

We all have a role. What's yours?

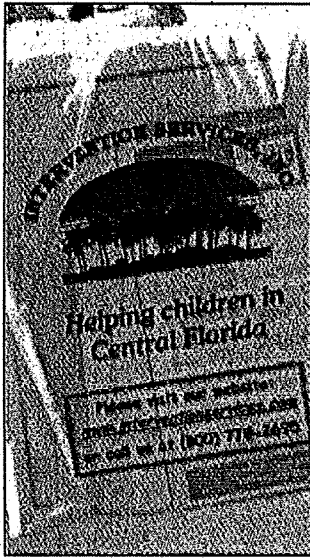
— ALAN ABRAMOWITZ  
ORLANDO

# Orlando Sentinel

ORLANDOSENTINEL.COM

SUNDAY, APRIL 15, 2007

FINAL EDITION



## SHOWING COMMITMENT TO STOP CHILD ABUSE

More than 200 Child Abuse Prevention Task Force members and community leaders gathered at Buenaventura Community Park on Friday to recognize National Child Abuse Prevention Month. Alan Abramowitz, head of District 7 for the state Department of Children & Families, said Osceola was the 2nd stop in a monthlong tour through each of the district's

counties. District 7 also includes Orange, Seminole and Brevard. After the rally, attendees walked door to door and handed out brochures that supported this year's theme, "Promoting Healthy Families in Your Community." Abramowitz said people will need his agency less when they learn to help themselves. "The state makes a horrible parent," he said.



PHOTOS BY GEORGE SKENE/ORLANDO SENTINEL

# Orlando Sentinel

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Alan Abramowitz, administrator for the Florida Department of Children & Families in District 7 (left) leads a cheer with community leaders before the start of the Child Abuse Prevention Task Force neighborhood walk in Sanford today. The group distributed resource packets to Sanford families in recognition of Child Abuse Prevention Month. The task force represents 40 community organizations in Orange, Osceola, Seminole and Brevard counties.  
(JOE BURBANK, ORLANDO SENTINEL)

April 20, 2007



# You are the Key - Prevention and its many forms...

Just as vowels are the building blocks of words, you make up the building blocks of community based care. Community Based Care means improving the quality of life for all families in the community and requires Action by Citizens, Education of the Public, Involvement of the Community, Ownership by Everyone, and Unity through Transparency.

## Action by Citizens

There are over 80 local social service agencies in Brevard County and there are countless ways to become active in the community. Participate in workgroups that discuss substance abuse and related problems and help create and promote prevention programs. Seek and write grants for community substance abuse needs. Create and participate in a public speaking campaign on prevention issues. Join community boards and service organizations. Volunteer your time in community organizations or make financial contributions. Call the abuse hotline if you suspect a child is being abused or neglected. Provide respite care for a young mother by watching her children so that the mother can have some time alone. Become a foster or adoptive parent. Assist individuals with disabilities. Assist in distributing necessary goods to families affected by catastrophic events such as hurricanes, tornadoes, or fires. Donate used clothing and goods to organizations that will make suit the goods go to families in need. Become a Girl or Boy Scout leader or coach youth sports. Donate food to the local food bank. Action is needed.

## Education of the Public

Become educated or educate others in community issues and resources. Become involved in AIDS education. Teach juveniles housed in the detention center. If you know of someone who is in need of services, direct him or her to the appropriate community resources or tell them to call 211. Attend talks given at One Senior Place on health concerns for the elderly. Go to parent-teacher associations, city government, and business associations. Read articles in the Florida Today newspapers concerning the needs and resources in your community. Attend or organize a "Citizen's Academy," a program of Leadership Brevard, which provides education about the community and encourages civic involvement.

## Involvement of the Community

Business plays an important part in community based care. If you own or operate a business, create opportunities for teen employment, apprenticeships, or scholarships. Provide financial gifts to social service organizations. Assist community events by providing facilities, making financial contributions, or volunteering your time. Loan articulate and outgoing employees to United Way of Brevard to assist with the annual community campaign. Adopt a local social service agency and provide incentives to employees who volunteer their time. Go to the 14th annual Children's Festival sponsored by Child Care Association of Brevard County, Inc. and bring your kids so they can experience a fun day of storytellers, face painting, and lots more fun.

## Ownership by Everyone

Accept that caring is a community responsibility. Advocate on behalf of the mentally ill, mentally retarded, abused and neglected children, drug or alcohol addicted, poor, and other vulnerable citizens. Join community groups that focus on providing needed resources that the state does not fund or under-funds. Initiate community activities that will mainstream these individuals. Become involved politically and write your representatives to plea for needed resources. Vote for our leaders, those who reflect the values you learned as a child. Tell your neighbors you will watch their house when they go away for a vacation.

## Unity through Transparency

The Department and our community partners pledge to share information with the community, whether good or bad. We will focus on continuously improving and overcoming challenges. We will provide real time data for community review. And we will listen to citizens regarding how we can better serve the community. The only way we can improve our community's quality of life is to be open about challenges and work as a community to solve them. Community based care will only be successful when the community is actively engaged.

## ACTION, EDUCATION, INVOLVEMENT, OWNERSHIP AND UNITY

The vowels of Community Based Care point to U as the key.

By Alan Abramowitz, District Administrator  
Florida Department of Children and Families

