

Public Policy Summary 2008 Legislative Issues

The United Way Public Policy Committee, comprised of representatives and advocates of our health and human services community, has written issue statements that relate to twelve key policy areas in the upcoming 2008 legislative session. Following is a summary of the position statements, which have been approved by the United Way Board of Directors.

Budget Reductions & Property Tax Reform

The United Way urges the Florida legislature to be sensitive to the needs of all of the state's residents as it considers budget reductions and property tax proposals.

Behavioral Health

The United Way of Volusia-Flagler Counties, Inc. supports the Volusia/Flagler Behavioral Health Consortium's recommendations for the following policy and funding issues to improve the availability and quality of mental health and substance abuse programs.

Developmental Disabilities

The United Way of Volusia-Flagler Counties, Inc. supports critical, necessary and adequate funding that protects individuals with developmental disabilities while facilitating choice and community options.

Eldercare

The United Way of Volusia-Flagler Counties, Inc. supports increased funding of Community Care for the Elderly (CCE) Program; affordable and attainable housing; restricted implementation and improved oversight of Medicaid reform; and a comprehensive older adult mental health and substance abuse services act.

Healthy Start

The United Way of Volusia-Flagler Counties, Inc. supports the Florida Legislature providing for continued funding for services for pregnant women and infants, including Healthy Start and Healthy Families, Medicaid Waiver and SOBRA counseling, unfunded prenatal care, the family planning waiver program and funding for Healthy Families Florida. United Way also supports the Department of Health's Budget Issue Proposal to increase funding for the Medicaid matched Fetal Infant Mortality Review process.

In addition to the above support for level or increased funding of Healthy Start and Healthy Families programs and services, United Way pledges its support for their recommendations regarding Pregnancy Medicaid and Medicaid Reform including: a) consideration of alternative pilot initiatives, b) adequate AHCA authority to ensure HMO contract compliance, and c) inclusion of legislative language that ensures HMO providers uphold quality standards sufficient to maintain provider networks for pregnant women.

Homelessness

The United Way of Volusia-Flagler Counties, Inc. supports: 1. The expansion of services for chronically homeless individuals and requests that local, state, federal and private funding sources agree to prioritize this population for funding consideration. 2. Expansion of transitional shelter beds for single adults. 3. A collaborative interagency approach that addresses the fundamental causes of homelessness with a focus upon providing homeless individuals with opportunities for economic independence. 4. Create additional affordable housing.

Juvenile Justice

The United Way of Volusia-Flagler Counties, Inc. supports a balanced juvenile justice system ensuring the availability of quality prevention, diversion, and community-based services. Juvenile justice programming must include graduated sanctions and incorporate gender responsive and culturally competent programming that values the role of families and communities. **Toward these ends the United Way supports increased funding to enhance existing prevention and commitment programs for delinquent youth.**

Kidcare

The United Way of Volusia-Flagler Counties, Inc. supports a seamless and simplified KidCare program to assure coverage for more eligible uninsured children and improve retention rate with adequate funding for marketing and community outreach. Fully fund Florida Kidcare based on projected enrollment growth and maximize available federal funding for Florida.

Medicaid Reform:

The United Way of Volusia-Flagler Counties, Inc. **Supports:** A valid evaluation and public review by the Legislature of the Medicaid pilot programs to assure adequate and quality coverage for all beneficiaries and verified statutory modifications to improve the Medicaid program. It is critical to maintain open ended federal cost sharing to address the needs of a growing Florida population and protect the core elements of Medicaid.

School Readiness

The United Way of Volusia-Flagler Counties, Inc. supports increased funding for the School Readiness program.

Workforce/Affordable Housing

The United Way of Volusia-Flagler Counties supports the 2008 Legislature in the reauthorization and full funding of the Sadowski Affordable Housing Trust Fund, *without a cap*, and to appropriate all monies from the Trust Fund to support affordable housing, including housing for very low income and special needs individuals.

Youth Transitioning Out of Foster Care

The United Way of Volusia-Flagler Counties, Inc. supports the changes in eligibility requirements and adequate funding of programs aimed at assisting youth who transition to adulthood from the child welfare system. These youth are victims of child abuse or neglect. They are leaving the child welfare system as adults because no family has stepped forward to be a resource for them. The most abused youth, and for whom no family has been willing to provide, deserve the opportunities that should be available to them as they make this most important transition.

PERSPECTIVE ON BUDGET REDUCTIONS & PROPERTY TAX REFORM

The United Way is gravely concerned about the impact that budget reductions and impending property tax reform in Florida will have on Florida residents and communities, and on our state's overall quality of life. Regardless of one's position on the "rightness" or "wrongness" of reform, the impact on human services is disturbing.

Make no mistake: The United Way, the many community providers we fund, and other community nonprofits and faith-based organizations that are the backbone of our state's human service system will do all we can to fill the human services void caused by reform. We urge Floridians to support the many fine organizations working to improve the quality of life in their communities. The reality, however, is that the void will be too big to fill.

Already, with nonprofits struggling to address huge deficits in human services and funding, Florida ranks near the bottom of just about all index of human services across our nation. To the extent that budget reductions and property tax reform results in loss of further funding and services, Florida will sink even deeper.

The United Way urges the Florida legislature to be sensitive to the needs of all of the state's residents as it considers budget reductions and property tax proposals. We, together with others around the state, will document the extent to which residents lose services as result of the reforms and will work with the legislature to ameliorate those losses as we move toward the 2008 legislative session.

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

POSITION: The United Way of Volusia-Flagler Counties, Inc. supports the Volusia/Flagler Behavioral Health Consortium's recommendations for the following policy and funding issues to improve the availability and quality of mental health and substance abuse programs.

Maintain the 80% Direct Spend Requirement for Medicaid HMOs - Section 409.912(4)(b), Florida Statutes, requires HMOs and prepaid mental health plans to spend 80% of their Medicaid mental health capitation rate on direct behavioral health care. If the 80 percent direct spend requirement is eliminated, HMOs and other managed care organizations would be able to reduce benefits and limit essential care without regard to their capitation.

User Fees - To assist in addressing the increasing demand for community-based mental health and substance abuse treatment, it is recommended that the legislature consider increasing user fees for individuals mandated to participate in treatment. Similarly, the legislature should consider increasing taxes on targeted items which directly increase the demand for substance abuse and mental health treatment. Examples include a drug court participation fee, increase in tobacco taxes, a special tax on alcoholic beverages, an excise tax on gambling enterprises, etc.

Systematic Policy In Consideration of Reductions in Treatment Programs - It is recommended that the State establish and publish a policy which articulates the standards by which any future reductions in behavioral health services are to be made. The legislature should develop a clearly defined process which guides decisions regarding reductions in services to the state's most vulnerable populations. Documented project outcomes, cost efficiencies and cost impact should be key measures considered in decisions to continue, reduce, or eliminate programs. Input should be sought from community alliances, family members, consumers of care, advocates and interested citizens prior to decisions to reduce services.

Medicaid Managed Care - Fully and carefully evaluate the outcomes of Medicaid managed care pilots in Duval and Broward Counties prior to expanded implementation in other areas of the state. As an alternative, the State should support efforts to integrate Medicaid and DCF Mental Health and Substance Abuse programs for the severely mentally ill population.

Prevention Efforts to Reduce Alcohol and Drug Use Among Youth and Young Adults Promote recurring funding for prevention initiatives targeting underage drinking and drug use among adolescents and young adults. Support legislation that would limit access to alcohol and drugs to youth.

Special Member Projects in Volusia and Flagler Counties - Retain legislatively-sponsored projects that have produced documentation of positive client outcomes and cost effectiveness in serving the most vulnerable substance abusers and mentally ill in Volusia and Flagler Counties.

Mental Health / Substance Abuse Insurance Parity - Local, state and federal policymakers should support federal and state initiatives that provide access to insurance coverage for substance abuse and mental health disorders which are consistent with accepted medical standards of practice.

DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

POSITION: The United Way of Volusia-Flagler Counties, Inc. supports critical, necessary and adequate funding that protects individuals with developmental disabilities while facilitating choice and community options.

BACKGROUND: In Florida there are over 95,000 individuals with disabilities who depend on care and support from human service organizations. Over **15,000** individuals with disabilities, those who are the most vulnerable, remain on the State's official Medicaid Waiver wait list for services, over 10,000 of these are children. The waiting list is growing by 300 per month. In the 2006-2007 budget services have been limited, restricted and reduced. These individuals who have the greatest of disabilities in our State cannot afford any further reductions in funding or services without serious implications.

2008 LEGISLATIVE ISSUE:

- Continue the "carve out" from Medicaid Reform for Developmental Disability (DD) Medicaid Waiver and ICFDD funded services to ensure that state and federal resources are used to serve individuals with disabilities, and support the Agency for Persons with Disabilities (APD) as the free standing agency that administers DD programs.
- Support APD (Agency for Persons with Disabilities) systems changes that: Reduce duplication of effort, limit high administrative costs, lessen unnecessary regulation, and respond to inflationary increases.
- Increase jobs for individuals with disabilities by supporting efforts at the national and state levels to add incentives such as funding health insurance through the Medicaid Buy-In program; and, strengthen state policy that promotes gainful employment through state purchasing of products and services offered by RESPECT of Florida.
- Support or oppose, as appropriate, general liability and health care legislation that affects consumers and the community agencies that serve them.
- Support expansion of the public guardianship program.
- Promote enhanced funding of children's therapy rates and full funding for Early Steps.
- Oppose language that mandates competitive bidding for VR services.
- Support funding for special needs emergency/all hazards shelters for the developmentally disabled and other vulnerable populations.

ELDERCARE

BACKGROUND: Volusia and Flagler Counties have over 170,000 individuals living in their communities over 60 years of age. Most of these senior citizens live independently, but many are in need of supportive services to remain independent and self-sufficient in their later years. The following are some recommendations for elder care in Florida.

I. SUPPORT INCREASE FUNDING OF COMMUNITY CARE FOR THE ELDERLY PROGRAM:

Support increased funding for Community Care for the Elder (CCE) by \$11 million. CCE enables seniors to remain in their homes avoiding pre-institutionalization. This is one of the most cost effective programs in our state with Lead Agencies, such as the Council on Aging of Volusia County, providing essential home care for the elderly at an average cost of \$1,600 a year versus nursing home care at approximately \$42,000 a year.

Implement Lead Agency bid exemption as passed/mandated in the 2004 by Senate Bill 1226.

II. SUPPORT AFFORDABLE AND ATTAINABLE HOUSING:

Support maintenance of the Sadowski Trust Fund (STF) and fully appropriate these funds, which were established in 1992, tied to documentary tax revenue, to address the housing crisis in our state for low income residents. The STF has not been fully funded since FY 02/03, with funds being diverted or not being appropriated. Less than half of the \$939.5 million generated by this doc stamp was allocated for the states housing needs last year.

III. SUPPORT RESTRICTED IMPLEMENTATION AND IMPROVED OVERSIGHT OF MEDICAID REFORM:

Support implementation that is inclusive of maintaining the existing community-based county and/or non-profit provider network at all levels for consumer choice and as alternative services.

Support volunteer consumer participation, mandatory disaster preparedness and recovery action by Medicaid Managed Care and HMO programs for enrolled consumers.

Support external evaluation that offers comparison of Medicaid Reform model with existing non-profit network service provision.

Oppose implementation of Florida Senior Care and Medicaid Reform statewide without external evaluation of pilot initiatives.

IV. SUPPORT A COMPREHENSIVE OLDER ADULT MENTAL HEALTH AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE SERVICES ACT:

Support legislation that establishes a comprehensive services act of mandated planning, development, funding, implementation and evaluation of mental health and substance abuse services for the elderly of Florida.

Support prescription drug tracking and monitoring through legislation that improves and increases the oversight of prescription drugs.

HEALTHY START

POSITION: The United Way of Volusia-Flagler Counties, Inc. supports the Florida Legislature providing for continued funding for services for pregnant women and infants, including Healthy Start and Healthy Families, Medicaid Waiver and SOBRA counseling, unfunded prenatal care, the family planning waiver program and funding for Healthy Families Florida. United Way also supports the Department of Health's Budget Issue Proposal to increase funding for the Medicaid matched Fetal Infant Mortality Review process.

In addition to the above support for level or increased funding of Healthy Start and Healthy Families programs and services, United Way pledges its support for their recommendations regarding Pregnancy Medicaid and Medicaid Reform including: a) consideration of alternative pilot initiatives, b) adequate AHCA authority to ensure HMO contract compliance, and c) inclusion of legislative language that ensures HMO providers uphold quality standards sufficient to maintain provider networks for pregnant women.

BACKGROUND

Low Birth Weight, Prematurity, and Child Abuse and Neglect: Healthy Start and Healthy Families programs and services have had a proven track record of reducing the incidence of poor birth outcomes and child maltreatment. Reduction in these incidences is cost efficient and promotes lifelong health and well-being for Florida's children. Healthy Start and Healthy Families Programs both leverage substantial local and private matching funds. Base funding for Healthy Families Florida has remained flat for five consecutive years, while health insurance and worker benefit expenses have steadily increased.

Access to Care: While Healthy Start and Medicaid expansions have contributed to improvements in the care for women during pregnancy, gaps still exist in obtaining care prior to and after delivery. Utilizations of HMO's for pregnant women has resulted in disproportionate incidences of late or no entry to care due to a lack of providers in the Medicaid prenatal care network. Introduction of the Medicaid Reform pilot initiative in our service area threatens to further divest private OB/GYN's from the Medicaid system.

Infant Mortality: Healthy Start Coalitions who have implemented Fetal Infant Mortality Review (FIMR) projects have carefully reviewed incidents of infant death and based on the review findings, have more effectively targeted resources and services where the need is greatest. At present, there are less than ten (10) FIMR projects throughout Florida, each funded at less than \$23,000.0 per year.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Continue to fund Healthy Start Programs and Services, which leverage substantial Federal match.
2. Increase Healthy Families base funding of \$28,324,795 by 13.65% to align with the rate of inflation.
3. Consider alternate pilot initiatives for Medicaid Reform for pregnant women. These alternate initiatives would be developed with feedback and buy-in from private OB/GYN's to ensure that adequate provider networks are available to sustain the target population.
4. Ensure that AHCA (Agency for Healthcare Administration) has the necessary authority to enforce contractual requirements for private HMO's.
5. Develop a quality rating system for private HMO's (both provider ratings and consumer ratings) to promote positive competition and dedication to service and consumer satisfaction.
6. Support the Department of Health's Division of Family Health Services 2007-08 Legislative Budget Request via Budget Issue Proposal to the Surgeon General. The total amount of funding necessary would be \$2,659,716 with \$2,120,857 being general revenue funding and \$ 538,859 Medicaid matching funds. (Current FIMR projects are funded at \$22,107 per project and require medical professional to review infant death cases.) Additional funds would ensure that adequate infrastructure exists to comply with contract requirements.

HOMELESSNESS

POSITION: The United Way of Volusia-Flagler Counties, Inc. supports: 1. The expansion of services for chronically homeless individuals and requests that local, state, federal and private funding sources agree to prioritize this population for funding consideration. 2. Expansion of transitional shelter beds for single adults. 3. A collaborative interagency approach that addresses the fundamental causes of homelessness with a focus upon providing homeless individuals with opportunities for economic independence. 4. Create additional affordable housing.

BACKGROUND: The following is the collaborative strategy developed for and used by the agencies participating in the Continuum of Care:

1. Use of the 330 North Street facility as a primary interface with homeless individuals and using case management and data collection resources to identify homeless subpopulations in need of intensive services.
2. Pursue federal, state, local and private grant funding sources to increase case management and supportive services
3. Partner with all agencies serving the homeless to implement a shared management information system through a HUD approved Homeless Management Information System.
4. Increase opportunities for homeless individuals to access mainstream resources through enhanced partnerships with local, state and federal resources.
5. Expand services for homeless individuals in underserved areas of Volusia and Flagler Counties.
6. Develop financial resources to provide permanent shelter for chronically homeless in West Volusia.
7. Expand access to treatment and supportive services for homeless through letters of agreement and incentives provided by funding agents.
8. Secure operational funds for the operation of a 94-bed shelter at 330 North Street, prioritizing families with children, medically needy homeless, and youth exiting foster care.
9. Enhance service relationships with faith-based programs to maximize the human and financial resources in our communities.
10. Develop partnerships with the medical service providers to enhance access to emergency, triage and ongoing care for homeless individuals.
11. Develop a collaborative discharge program with hospitals, jails and treatments facilities to address the housing needs of homeless who are exiting jails, hospitals or other treatment facilities, or are aging out of the foster care system.

JUVENILE JUSTICE

POSITION: The United Way of Volusia-Flagler Counties, Inc. supports a balanced juvenile justice system ensuring the availability of quality prevention, diversion, and community-based services. Juvenile justice programming must include graduated sanctions and incorporate gender responsive and culturally competent programming that values the role of families and communities. ***Toward these ends the United Way supports increased funding to enhance existing prevention and commitment programs for delinquent youth.***

BACKGROUND: A lack of balance has resulted in too few prevention and community-based programs. A lack of funding has contract and residential providers struggling to maintain safe and effective services. Community re-entry, transition and aftercare services have gaps in service, with little follow-up. Youth, generally, and especially girls, do not receive services designed to meet their individual needs and youth of color are over-represented in every level of care and custody.

Currently, in Florida:

- Girls are the fastest growing segment of the juvenile justice system and we are ill equipped to meet the needs of this population;
- Boys' arrest rates decreased by 23% while girls' arrest rates decreased by only 6%;
- Youth of color remain grossly over-represented in the system;
- Resources are heavily committed to secure treatment facilities;
- Youth in JJ programs have complex educational needs due to history of school failure, ESE kids;
- Providers remain unable to meet the critical needs of the youth in the areas of quality medical care, mental health care, and transitional aftercare.
- Current salary levels are not adequate to attract and retain a workforce with the skills necessary to meet the more complicated treatment needs and behavioral needs of today's troubled youth. In 2005, OPPAGA reported that with entry-level salaries of \$9.00 an hour, direct care staff qualify for WIC, Kid Care and Food Stamps. Annual turnover rate for direct care staff statewide was 55% in 2005.

A nearly \$85-million budget hole remains as a result of a decade of no rate increases to keep up with inflation, as well as new standards and regulations for care. As a result,

- Requests for proposals (RFPs) by the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice have been pulled due to no bidders (6), pulled due to lack of experienced providers (3), or outright cancelled (2);
- Programs are disappearing and contracts are not being renewed as evidenced by providers turning back programs (12), programs closed when contracts expire (3), and programs closed by the state (2).

We seek a juvenile justice system that is...

- Balanced, fair and fully accountable;
- Effective at producing quality outcomes;
- Funded appropriately;
- Appropriately matching the treatment of youth with the seriousness of the crime, with a focus on rehabilitation;
- Aimed at helping the right kids at the right time in the right way, putting them on a path to become responsible adults.

2008 Legislative Issues:

Six critical issues warrant attention and action:

1. Funding for enhancement and expansion of prevention, diversion, and community-based services
2. Expand gender responsive programming for young women including specialized services for at-risk and adjudicated pregnant and parenting teens
3. Improve the quality of educational services to at risk and delinquent youth
4. Improve the quality of mental health services to at risk and delinquent youth
5. Expand aftercare support services for youth who are transitioning from residential placement
6. Improve programming by expanding evidence-based services, including programs that address gender specific needs and minority overrepresentation.

Issue Paper supported by ACT Corporation, Children's Home Society, Coalition for the Homeless, Constituency for Children, Youth & Families, Council on Aging, Disabilities Coalition, Early Learning Coalition of Flagler & Volusia, Halifax Urban Ministries, Healthy Communities, Healthy Start Coalition of Flagler & Volusia, House Next Door, Serenity House of Volusia, Stewart-Marchman Center, UCP East Central Florida.

KIDCARE

POSITION: The United Way of Volusia-Flagler Counties, Inc. supports a seamless and simplified KidCare program to assure coverage for more eligible uninsured children and improve retention rate with adequate funding for marketing and community outreach. Fully fund Florida Kidcare based on projected enrollment growth and maximize available federal funding for Florida.

BACKGROUND: The 1998 Florida Legislature passed the Florida KidCare Act in response to federal passage of Title XXI of the Social Security Act. KidCare is Florida's children's health insurance program that provides subsidized coverage to uninsured children ages 0-19 with family incomes at or below 200% of the federal poverty level. This program has played an important role in addressing the growing problem of the uninsured, however, there are eligible uninsured children not enrolled in the program. According to the Department of Health's 2004 Florida Health Insurance Study, it was estimated that over 500,000 were without coverage. A 2006 study released by the Campaign for Children's Health Care estimates that number to be over 700,000 children and cites Florida as being in the top five states for its number of uninsured children.

KidCare includes four different health programs for children:

- MediKids: ages 1-4 who are ineligible for Medicaid and the CMS Network;
- Healthy Kids: ages 5-19 who are ineligible for Medicaid and the CMS Network;
- Children's Medical Services Network: ages 0-19 with special health care needs; and
- Medicaid: ages 0-19 with eligibility determined by age and household income.

Florida KidCare is financed through a combination of federal, state and local funds as well as family premiums. There are two federal funding mechanisms: the State Child Health Insurance Program Title XXI of the Social Security Act which requires 29% state match that also includes the costs paid by families; and, Medicaid, Title XIX of the Social Security Act which typically requires a 41% state match. An adequate level of state funding is required in order to earn federal match for projected program enrollment. Funding for marketing and outreach is also essential to identify and enroll eligible uninsured children in the program. *The entire program should be marketed as KidCare for all components.* Additionally, overall program simplification for enrollment and re-enrollment should occur. And, processes that can assure uninterrupted coverage between the programs due to changes in age or household income should continue to be explored, and as appropriate, implemented.

MEDICAID REFORM

POSITION: The United Way of Volusia-Flagler Counties, Inc. **Supports:** A valid evaluation and public review by the Legislature of the Medicaid pilot programs to assure adequate and quality coverage for all beneficiaries and verified statutory modifications to improve the Medicaid program. It is critical to maintain open ended federal cost sharing to address the needs of a growing Florida population and protect the core elements of Medicaid.

Background:

The Florida Legislature passed the Florida Medicaid Modernization Act, SB 838 during the 2005 Legislative session in an effort to address the growing cost of the program and improve efficiencies in the complex Medicaid Program. The Medicaid reform legislation authorized the Agency for Health Care Administration, AHCA, to seek 1115 demonstration waivers to allow the state to make major administrative changes to Medicaid. The legislation creates demonstration pilot programs in Duval and Broward Counties that will expand statewide by 2010. The first Medicaid recipients to be shifted into private managed care are; those receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), SSI recipients, children, pregnant women below 27% of the federal poverty level. The second phase will include individuals with developmental disabilities, medically needy, and patients in the Long Term Care system through an additional waiver.

The Florida waiver represents the most far reaching changes to the Medicaid program since its inception. It establishes a budget neutrality agreement to ensure that the federal government does not spend more federal dollars under the waiver than it would have without the waiver. Private providers will have the authority to limit the *amount, scope and duration of services*. This flexibility for plans to alter services places persons with severe disabilities, developmental disabilities, psychiatric disabilities and others at potential risk of the loss of essential services.

2008 Legislative Issues

- There is great value to provide for a more efficient and effective Medicaid system. Florida has the opportunity to implement changes that assure adequate and timely access to health care for Medicaid recipients and preserve the integrity of community based "safety net" providers that will enhance the service delivery system without disruption of services for consumers in the process.
- Medicaid reform should not be expanded to other counties, statewide or include proposed expanded populations until there is a comprehensive review of the state and independent evaluations, and the Attorney General's report by the full Legislature.
- Consider successful alternative disease management models for reform and implement amendments to SB838 based on the finding from evaluations and documented community based experience.
 - Maintain the Mental Health carve out for children in the dependency system to assure needed services are immediately available to Florida's most-vulnerable children.
 - Do not reduce Behavioral Health Overlay Services (BHOS) funding for services by requiring their inclusion in managed care. These services are critical to the children in residential and group care settings.
- Adopt cost-effective administrative modifications to Medicaid that will improve access to care for beneficiaries and remove barriers for providers.

SCHOOL READINESS

POSITION: The United Way of Volusia-Flagler Counties supports increased funding for the School Readiness program.

2008 Legislative Issue:

Increase funding for the School Readiness program to ensure that the funding at a minimum keeps up to date with inflation and growth of enrollment. (School Readiness services to children ages 0-5 include child care, developmental screening and assessment, literacy activities, and provider training and technical assistance.)

- School Readiness dollars have not increased in 8 years. The purchasing power of \$100 in 1999 has declined to \$79.98 in 2006. Inflation coupled with flat funding since then has produced cumulative funding cuts of just over 20%. Annually we have been forced to absorb this loss and manage to maintain a consistent level of service to our clients. This is now no longer possible.
- Currently there are over 1,000 children awaiting school readiness services in Flagler and Volusia counties.

Lack of funding has resulted in child care providers having high staff/teacher turnover due to low wages/no benefits. Research on children's social development indicates that the adult-child relationship is an important context for children's development. Furthermore, when attachment needs of the child are not met, exploration and learning suffer. (John E. Kesner, Effects of Teacher Attachment History on Teacher-Child Relationships, 1994)

WORKFORCE / AFFORDABLE HOUSING

POSITION: The United Way of Volusia-Flagler Counties supports the 2008 Legislature in the reauthorization and full funding of the Sadowski Affordable Housing Trust Fund, *without a cap*, and to appropriate all monies from the Trust Fund to support affordable housing, including housing for very low income and special needs individuals.

BACKGROUND: Lack of access to affordable housing has many causes and impacts many citizens throughout Florida and within our communities. The lack of affordable/attainable housing can force teachers, police, firefighters, families with children, child care workers, and other essential service personnel from the communities in which they work. Since housing attainability (both home ownership and rental) is impacted by tax policy, insurance regulations, and access to affordable housing within communities, pro-active leadership on this issue from local, state and federal officials is essential.

While housing development has slowed and housing prices have moderated, homeownership and rental access remains unaffordable for a large segment of the population. The gap between existing affordable housing programs, rental subsidies and homeownership remains too wide, falling short in bridging the housing gap for too many Floridians. The Legislature, with support from local business and community leaders, should examine the interconnectedness of existing housing programs, tax reform, insurance reform, and supportive community services. Access to affordable housing improves the quality of life of individuals and families which improves a community's business climate and can invigorate the economy.

2008 Legislative Issue:

1. State Government should remove the cap on the Sadowski Affordable Housing Trust Fund and to support statutes, programs and rules which seek to provide adequate, attainable housing for Florida's citizens.
2. Continue requirements that a portion of State affordable housing funding be reserved to create housing for extremely low income individuals.
3. Create a set-aside from a portion of the Affordable Housing Trust Fund for the creation of housing to target special needs populations. The provision of affordable housing for special needs populations is both cost-effective and creates more stable communities.
4. Tax policy significantly impacts all Florida citizens and restricts the capacity of local governments to respond to community based and social service needs. Tax reform/relief to preserve and/or create opportunities for home ownership is vital.
5. Examine barriers to the development and funding of affordable rental housing. Current zoning regulations, impact fees, difficulties in securing insurance coverage in coastal communities, land costs, matching fund requirements, unrealistic time frames and permitting issues can create barriers in accessing available state and federal funding.

YOUTH TRANSITIONING OUT OF FOSTER CARE

POSITION: The United Way of Volusia-Flagler Counties, Inc. supports the changes in eligibility requirements and adequate funding of programs aimed at assisting youth who transition to adulthood from the child welfare system. These youth are victims of child abuse or neglect. They are leaving the child welfare system as adults because no family has stepped forward to be a resource for them. The most abused youth, and for whom no family has been willing to provide, deserve the opportunities that should be available to them as they make this most important transition.

BACKGROUND: Youth who grow up in the child protection system face significant challenges as they become adults. Seldom have they been provided with the education or experience needed to live independently. They do not have the networks and the contacts needed for successful transition. In Fiscal Year 2007 – 2008, 64 children will age out of the child welfare system in Volusia and Flagler Counties, while 215 children are eligible for life skills and other services while they continue to reside in out of home care. The struggles of former foster youth in attempting to achieve self-sufficiency are well documented. Studies have shown that youth who have been in foster care are at greater risk of homelessness, poverty, unemployment, incarceration and victimization than youth in the general population. These youth are less likely to graduate high school or attend any type of post-secondary program. In the employment arena, Florida's former foster youth earn four times less than non-foster youth.

Transitioning youth with emotional, developmental and behavioral issues face even greater challenges. These young adults disproportionately fail to qualify for needed services and supports and often become discouraged as they are placed on waiting lists even when they are eligible for much needed services.

2008 LEGISLATIVE ISSUE: We can do better. It is time to change the cycle of abused children becoming victimized adults. It is time to fulfill the promise of the State's program for these children.

1. The Legislature should fully fund services to youth leaving the foster care system as well as those support services they expect children to receive. These include Aftercare, Transition and Road to Independence services, as well as services to children 13 to 17 years old who currently reside in foster care. Circuit 7 and Community Partnership for Children of Volusia and Flagler Counties received only a portion of the funds necessary to provide minimal services to the children and young adults.
2. The eligibility for Medicaid for children aging out of foster care continues until age 21. Medicaid eligibility should be consistent with eligibility for the Road to Independence Program and continue until age 23.
3. A state-supported car insurance program should be established to subsidize car insurance costs for teens in foster care who obtain a drivers license and for those who have aged out of foster care.