



Aging Out Of Foster Care: Sadowski State and Local Housing Trust Funds Provide Some Safety

BY LYDIA BELTRÁN
FLORIDA HOUSING COALITION

EMANCIPATION - a word known in the foster care system as the time when a youth turns 18 years old and “ages out” and also known as the “release from the child welfare system” of which these youth have depended on for most of their lives. Along with this reality is the full responsibility in finding their housing, employment, health care and support system. At 18 years of age, most pack their belongings in suitcases and trash bags and set off on their own.

National experts estimate that of the 18 year olds that “age out” of foster care each year, up to 40% will face the cruel reality of homelessness, less than 45 percent will have completed high school and less than 50 percent will be employed. Without a support system, 41% will be on some type of public assistance by the time they are 22 years old. This is a national and statewide issue that is being addressed on various public and private levels. As with many vulnerable populations, a comprehensive approach is needed to prepare foster youth with an alternative to the revolving door of delinquency, alcohol and substance abuse, homelessness and incarceration.



The Florida Housing Finance Corporation has joined the ranks in this comprehensive approach through its *2006 RFP Demonstration Loan – The Development of Transitional Housing for Youths Aging out of Foster Care*. A total of five applicants were given preliminary funding commitments and are in the final commitment process for the housing development plans. The Florida Housing Coalition is providing technical assistance to assure that the housing development plans are achieved as proposed. The technical assistance is critical as some of the awardees are supportive services based and have limited housing development background. A summary of the awardees is as follows:

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The most recent legislation addressing foster care was “The Road to Independence Act” (Fla. Stat. Sec. 409.1451), enacted in 2002, requiring that young adults leave foster care at the age of 18. The Act allows for potential funds to be provided through the Department of Youth Children and their Families for pre-independent living (ages 13 - 15), life skills (ages 15 - 18) and subsidized living (18-23). The subsidized living allows for some financial assistance but is restricted to those who are enrolled in a community college and maintain a C average. But child advocates report that many youth with developmental disabilities and mental health problems do not meet the academic requirements and do not benefit from the program.

CAMILLUS HOUSE - MIAMI

Established in 1960 by the Little Brothers of the Good Shepherd, Camillus House, once an overnight shelter, has grown into a full service center offering a full “continuum of care” for the poor and homeless. Camillus House programs include emergency assistance with food, clothing and shelter, job training and placement, residential substance abuse treatment and aftercare, behavioral health and maintenance, health care access and disease prevention, and transitional and permanent housing.

Project: St. Jude will provide transitional housing for males out of foster care who are pursuing continuing education. Construction rehabilitation of an existing historic apartment building will provide eight – one bedroom/one bath units. Each unit will be fully renovated, furnished, and equipped with computers. The project is within walking distance to the Miami Dade Community College Downtown Campus and public transportation. A case manager will live



Camillus House, Lummus Park Historic District- Downtown Miami

on site and manage tenant services. The supportive services will be provided by “Our Kids” of Miami. The construction and operations will be the responsibility of Camillus House.

FHFC Demonstration Loan – Up to \$900,000

The rehabilitation of a historic building will be the future site of Camillus House’s first adult foster youth housing.



CHILDREN’S HOME SOCIETY (CHS)

Established in 1902 as a Jacksonville orphanage, CHS is a statewide multi-service agency providing social services such as foster care, adoption, child abuse prevention, emergency shelters, group homes, case management and treatment for developmentally disabled children. There are two CHS projects associated with the Foster Youth Demonstration Loan:



Existing apartment building where youth are currently living.

Project: CHS Buckner Division, Transitional Housing - will be built on CHS’ currently owned property providing housing for nine teen girls and/or mothers ages 16-23. Six units will be located in a group home with common areas and four units will be located in two separate module style buildings each consisting of private entrances into two - two bedroom apartments each with their own common kitchen areas. The project is located near the downtown area, with access to educational facilities. There will be a 24 hour on-site staff person and services will include job coaching, supportive counseling, mental health, education/ tutoring assistance, parenting classes, infant/child care, and transportation.

FHFC Demonstration Loan - \$249,000

The New CHS Group Home- Vero Beach.



Project: CHS Treasure Coast Division - Transitional Living Program provides housing and aftercare services promoting independence and preventing homelessness. Its current 12 bed program will be expanded to include 9 newly constructed units, consisting of 6 - one bedroom and 3 - two bedrooms, 2 of which will be provided for parenting youth and one for a case manager. The program is designed for youth aging out of foster care and continuing their academic pursuits through a GED program, college, technical schools, and/or those being discharged from residential care such as mental health centers and/or juvenile justice placements.

FHFC Demonstration Loan - \$750,000

The current youth Transitional Center (in Ft. Pierce) is located in an undesirable area with little opportunity for employment, education and enrichment. Daily exposure to crime, drugs and other negative influences is a strong concern.

The new location in Vero Beach (10th Avenue/6th Avenue) will provide a safe and secure setting as well as ample opportunities for employment and education. It will foster hope and convey to the youth a sense that people care.

“The Transitional Living Program is teaching me to become a responsible adult. It’s a stepping stone, but the program gives me a chance to make it on my own, and get the help and advice I need from case managers who really care about me,” said one youth involved with the program.



DANIEL – IMPROVING THE ODDS FOR KIDS - JACKSONVILLE

Established in 1884 as the Orphanage and Home for the Friendless, it was later established as the Daniel Memorial in 1893. Its foster care and family counseling services were incorporated in 1956 followed by various program expansions throughout the years such as the Therapeutic Foster Care Program in 1981. The name was changed in 1999 to “daniel-Improving the Odds for Kids.” In 2003, it attained foster care privatization and afterwards adoptive services were established. Its JaxBuild Program, designed to help youth learn a construction trade while obtaining a GED, was also added to its many services.

Project: daniel Project Prepare will consist of two rehabilitated buildings on the daniel campus resulting in 18 fully accessible and renovated apartments for homeless youth. Common areas such as the kitchen, staff office, community room and laundry will also be renovated. Staff will be on site at all times. Youth will participate in services to prepare them for entering adulthood with education, employment and social skills.

FHFC Demonstration Loan - \$300,000

“I barely glance at our well-worn building as I hurry through the doors to attend to my portion of what our agency does



Newly planned site 1526 Parental Home Road, Jacksonville.

best...building. I've found daniel's mission models that of a construction foreman, yet on a humanitarian level."
 - James D. Clark, LCSW, President.

Since moving into Project Prepare "I have learned to be more Independent and responsible. I pay my rent on time and I keep my apartment neat and clean" - Davesha 18 years old

Since moving into Project Prepare "I have obtained my High School Diploma through attending the Jax Build Program. I am looking forward to graduating in March. I am also planning to attend FCCJ this summer because I want to be and Architect." - Jean 17 years old



**TURTLE NEST VILLAGE,
 INC. (TNV) – WEST
 PALM BEACH**

Established in 2002 to assist former foster youth ages 18 to 21, TNV currently provides housing assistance with the requirement that the youth achieve an educational goal (GED, college or vocational), find jobs, receive counseling and work with coaches on life-skills training. Youth participate in a 12 to 24 month program and graduate on an on-going basis depending on readiness based on the goals achieved. Upon graduating,

"Being born into an abusive home and then being raised in the foster care system had a huge impact on my life. I did not feel cared about and I did not feel safe and did not know who to trust. I began using drugs and alcohol and my attitude was that I did not care for my life or what became of it. At eighteen years old I had no education and no home. Soon after, God opened a door for me and guided me to Turtle Nest Village. There I was introduced to a clean and loving environment, where people actually took time to teach me life skills, money management and how to love myself. Through the Turtle Nest Program, I have completed my high school diploma and I am now attending Palm Beach Community College. I take good care of myself and do not do things that hurt me or anyone. The program inspired me so much that I now want to be involved working with children and making a change in the foster care system."

-TNV Graduate

TNV provides follow-up support and assists with emergency needs that may arise related to such issues as transportation and, health care.

Elizabeth Brown, TNV founder recalls the following:

"Walking on the beach, searching my mind for a name for this organization, I stumbled over a mound of sand with baby turtles crawling out. Some were heading toward the ocean, others toward the road. I cupped the misdirected babies in my hand, one at a time, and carried them to the ocean. Once in the water, they instinctively knew what to do.

I found myself overwhelmed by the parallels between the plight of sea turtles and foster youth leaving the system. With guidance and loving support, the chances of survival and success increase greatly."

Project: Turtle Nest Village will consist of 3 two-bedroom units and a community room equipped with a computer lab. The land was transferred to Lake Worth Community Development from the Community

Redevelopment Agency for the purpose of affordable housing. Lake Worth CDC and TNV have partnered toward this end with Lake Worth CDC to serve as the developer. Combined with a variety of pro bono services, major foundation and individual private contributions,

TNV will fulfill one of its goals to provide its own rental housing as opposed to depending on private market rate rental units. The project will be located near major transportation and public education facilities.

FHFC Demonstration Loan - \$400,000

“I believe that foster care should be improved 100%.

We don’t get an education because we move around so much, and we’re not stable because we move around so much. So by the time we’re 18, they kick us out on our own and we’re uneducated and unstable,” *said a TNV graduate.*

“They help us be more independent, they give us a second chance . . . to be on our own with the support of people who care about us. TNV is a program that helps us through tough times,” *said another graduate.*

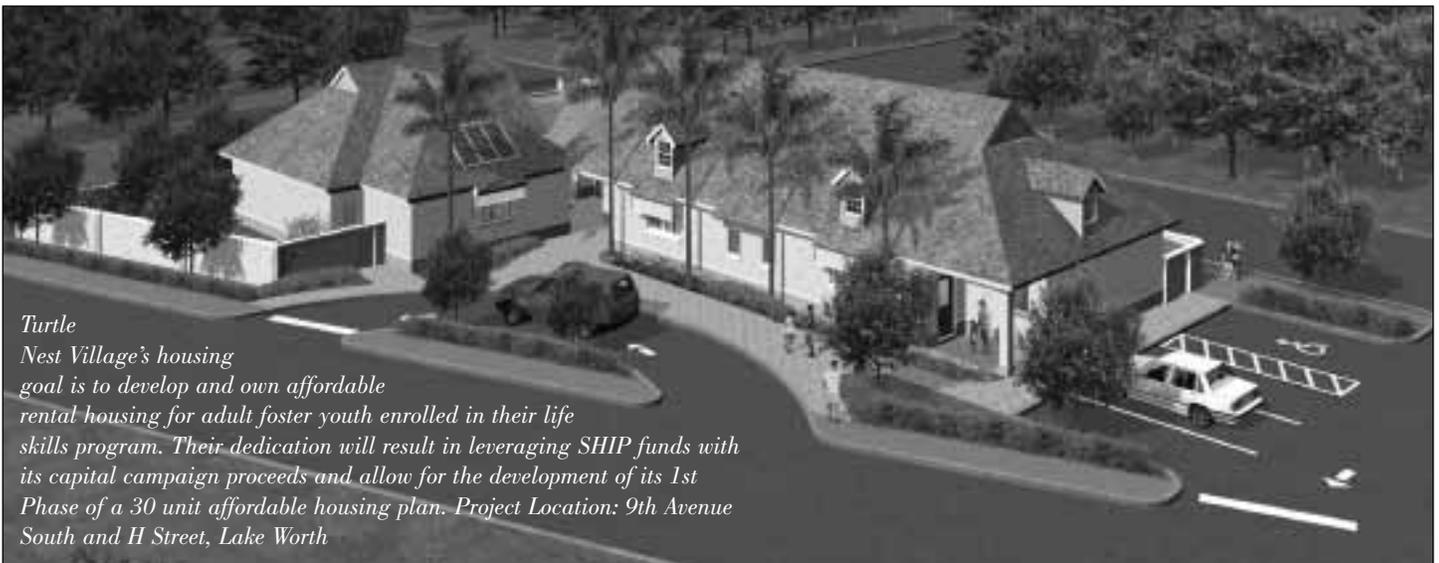
TNV RECEIVED A 2006 BANK OF AMERICA NEIGHBORHOOD BUILDERS AWARD. ALONG WITH THE RECOGNITION, TNV WILL RECEIVE \$200,000 IN GRANTS AND LEADERSHIP TRAINING THAT WILL BE PROVIDED EACH YEAR FOR A TWO-YEAR PERIOD FOR OPERATING EXPENSES AND BUILDING PROGRAM CAPACITY.

of the bad statistics that happen to black males,” *said another TNVgraduate.*

“I was in and out of foster care since the age of 13 and it seemed that I changed living places about every six months. After being released from foster care at 18, I was able to find a place to live but it was a horrible living situation. I was referred to Liz Brown from TNV and was

given a great place to live and was in a program that changed my life. I am 24 years old, married, with two children and employed. Because of the TNV program, and where I am in my life now, I will always have a place I can call home,” *said another graduate.*

Providing housing for youths aging out of foster care is critical to the young adult as well as the community at large. The failure to provide affordable housing opportunities



Turtle Nest Village’s housing goal is to develop and own affordable rental housing for adult foster youth enrolled in their life skills program. Their dedication will result in leveraging SHIP funds with its capital campaign proceeds and allow for the development of its 1st Phase of a 30 unit affordable housing plan. Project Location: 9th Avenue South and H Street, Lake Worth

“I was in and out of my family’s home and then given a one week notice to leave from foster care. I was on the streets, homeless with no idea in how to get my life together. TNV provided me with a studio unit to live in and taught me to be responsible in paying rent, finishing school and getting a job. I have a pressure cleaning side business in case something goes wrong with my first job, because I never want to be without resources for myself. I am 24 years old now. Without this program, I would have ended up like some

for youth aging out of foster care results in homelessness for the youth and a host of social ills for society. A comprehensive national, state, and local approach such as interconnecting entities representing education, health, and employer resources is key to a transition into responsible adulthood. For example, innovative training programs such as YouthBuild through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development has provided thousands of youth with educational opportunities, counseling,



leadership, and employment skills. Youth receive construction training and applied skills by rehabilitating and building housing for low-income and homeless people in their communities. At the local level, community college outreach to assist in educational needs starting with GED programs, and moving students into successive educational and training opportunities is vital. But first and foremost, youths aging out of foster care must have a stable home—this is where our state and local housing trust fund programs play the most important role.

As evidenced by the five Demonstration Loan projects highlighted in this article, the monies made available through the Florida Housing Finance Corporation at the state and local level are the cornerstone to these successful programs. These monies are coupled with training and technical assistance from the Florida Housing Coalition and leveraged by private donations and a vast number of volunteers. Florida must not abandon youth aging out of foster care. When asked what message she wanted the public to hear about adult foster youth, one youth stated, “**You are our parent.**” 

LYDIA BELTRÁN is a Technical Advisor with Florida Housing Coalition. She has approximately 15 years of community development experience. Lydia has a Masters in Urban Planning from the University of California, Los Angeles.

SOURCES/CONTACTS

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www.kidscount.org

The Net, October/November 2005, Diocese of Southeast Florida

South Florida Sun Sentinel, Delray Beach, January 19, 2006

The Palm Beach Post, November 2006

For additional program information or ways in which you can join the efforts in supporting adult foster youth, contact:

Camillus House

Karen Mahar, *Director of Planning* @ 305.374.1065 or e-mail at karen@camillus.org

www.camillus.org

336 Northwest 5th Street
Miami, Florida 33128

Turtle Nest Village

Elizabeth Brown, *LCSW, Executive Director* @ 561.586.8520 or e-mail

ebrown@turtlenv.org www.turtlenv.org

900 Osceola Drive, Suite 222
West Palm Beach, FL 33409

daniel – Improving the Odds for Kids

Lesley Wells, *Vice-President of Operations* @

904.296.1055 ext 2310 or lwells@daneilkids.org

www.danielkids.org

1526 Parental Home Road,
Jacksonville, Florida 32216

Children’s Home Society of Florida, Liz Briggs, *Program Director* @ 772.489.5601 ext. 229 or e-mail at liz.briggs@chsfl.org

www.chsfl.org

Treasure Coast Division
415 Avenue A, Suite 100
Fort Pierce, Florida 34950

Children’s Home Society – Buckner Division
William Shelter, *Executive Director* @ 904.493.774 or e-mail at Bill.Shetler@chsfl.org

www.chsfl.org (click Location – Buckner)

3027 San Diego Road
Jacksonville, Florida 32247