

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### National Foster Care Month 2021

**Pensacola, Fla. (April 30, 2021)** – Twenty years ago, in 2001, FamiliesFirst Network of Lakeview Center (FFN) became the designated lead agency in Escambia, Santa Rosa, Okaloosa and Walton counties for foster care and related child welfare services. The team is working toward an important goal in 2021, and asks for the community's help:

Currently, too many children are placed in foster homes or group foster homes outside the local area because we simply don't have enough homes in the four-county area. The distance complicates family visitation, and removes children from friendships and other supports, and can re-traumatize children. Take a look at current statistics by county showing how many foster children are in homes outside their communities:

- Escambia County 58% of children
- Walton County 98%
- Santa Rosa County 70%
- Okaloosa County 65%

It's not only about having more foster homes, but rather, the right foster homes. Children come into the child welfare system with needs — first and foremost, the need for love and safety. Children also need medical and therapeutic foster homes. It's important to keep siblings together too, and right now 96% of children coming into care have one or more siblings.

People in the Gulf Coast community step up time and again to make our community the great place it is. If you can help, please contact Michelle Giordano, FFN community relations manager, at 850.860.4259. FFN provides training, you just have a big heart and be willing to step up.

Virtual information sessions are ongoing and the schedule is at [FamiliesFirstNetwork.org](https://FamiliesFirstNetwork.org) > Virtual Foster Parent Info Sessions.

#### CONTACT BELOW IS FOR MEDIA USE ONLY

For more information about this press release or to schedule an interview, please contact Tish Pennewill at 850.469.3621 or [Tish.Pennewill@bhcpns.org](mailto:Tish.Pennewill@bhcpns.org).

*About FamiliesFirst Network of Lakeview Center, Inc.*

*Under a contract with the state of Florida, FamiliesFirst Network is responsible for the safety, stability and well-being of abused and neglected children in northern Florida's four westernmost counties: Escambia, Santa Rosa, Okaloosa and Walton. Our Mission is to help people throughout life's journey. Our services include protective supervision, foster parent recruitment, adoptive parent recruitment, and specialized help for teens and young adults preparing to leave the foster care system. A program of Lakeview Center, FamiliesFirst Network served more than 6,900 children in 2020. To learn more, go to [FamiliesFirstNetwork.org](https://FamiliesFirstNetwork.org).*