

Panel from Our Kids: Marcel Rivas, Orlando Gonzalez and Greg Penn.

- Our Kids's goal is to foster a system of care where communication is ongoing and transparent.
- There have been many changes in licensing and placement since 2014:
 - From March - June 2014, there was an increase of over 63% in the number of children in out-of-home placements.
 - Our Kids had planned on taking over the functions of licensing, recruitment of foster homes, and retention of foster parents in July 2014. This had previously been the responsibility of each agency.
 - In January 2015, DCF told Our Kids that if they were taking over licensing, they also had to take over placement.
 - The process was centralized with Our Kids and completed in May 2015.
- There are currently 2,094 children in out-of-home placements in Miami-Dade, with the majority placed with relatives or non-relatives.
 - 546 are in licensed foster homes.
 - 232 are in residential group homes.
 - 110 are placed with other providers.
- There is a focus on both recruiting and training new foster parents and adoptive foster parents. There are now separate trainings for those who just wish to foster and more intensive training for those who wish to adopt.
- Our Kids is aware that there are not enough homes for sibling groups, children with behavior issues, or specialty homes.
- The #1 focus is to improve licensing and placement.
- 80% of removals occur between 10:00 p.m. and 3:00 a.m. The call comes into Our Kids's intake, and they have to try to secure placement for those incoming children.
 - At that time of evening/early morning, if there is no family member or non-relative able or suitable to place the child with, phone calls are made to potential foster parents. Some take the children just so they have a place to sleep until appropriate placements are found; others don't accept children if they are not the "type children" they are willing to foster (i.e. babies, teens, more than the # of children they want in their homes, etc.).
 - Another placement issue is "replacement" — when a foster parent is no longer willing/able to keep a child and a new placement must be found
 - The case manager is the Point of Contact for placement, and the interaction should be between the foster parent and case manager. Many placements fail because of lack of communication between the agency, case manager, and foster parents. The loss of placement may be because the foster parent doesn't feel supported.
 - There is a "partnership plan" which was created. It is an agreement between foster parents, community-based care, and DCF to ensure that "children have normal childhoods, as well as loving and skillful parenting which honors their loyalty to their biological family." The partnership is a common understanding of the values, principles, and relationships necessary to fulfill that responsibility. Maritza, Trudy and Orlando will discuss this in much more detail next month.
- Many say "there are no beds" for children. This is not true.
 - There are currently 251 licensed foster homes with an average of 2 beds per home. There are an additional 138 non-Our Kids homes.

- Our Kids has capacity but the existing licensed homes are not accepting many of the children coming into the system. The cases received have a much higher severity/acuity than previously. We are seeing much more serious chronic situations. There are many more teens who have experienced years of dysfunction.
- School mobility and school attendance are also issues. A court order is needed to change a child's home school. In most cases, staying in the same home school is in the child's best interest. Schools must provide transportation to keep a child in their same home school.
- Some states/jurisdictions have adopted a professional model of foster care — 1 parent is paid to stay home. This has worked well with teens. We do not currently use that model.
- "Facing the Challenge" is an initiative Our Kids has begun to support — which trains foster parents dealing with children ages 5-17 who have behavior problems. It is an evidence-based model.
- SDM-2 (Structured Decision Making) is used for placement of children. It is a system that tries to match children and foster parents for both risk and safety.
- A question was asked regarding licensing of relative placements. This is something that would have to be initiated by the judiciary. GALS can always make recommendations to the judge if a relative needs services to make a placement work.
- If homes are needed for sex-trafficking victims — current contract with Citrus Health.