



KidsFirst

making children's voices heard

2021 ANNUAL REPORT

PICKING UP THE PIECES

LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

In the game of Jenga (cover) and Operation, one wrong move can mean the game's over. At Kids First, children tell us about a wrong move they made in their lives that seemed to make everything fall apart. Kids might feel responsible for their parents' split. Or maybe they had an outburst at school and the whole class was affected.

Thanks to you, kids can put the pieces back together after conflict. In 2021, Kids First continued to grow, adding two peace facilitators in three additional schools to help students resolve conflict. Our joint parenting sessions expanded their reach through mediations on Zoom. And the number of children the court referred to our child representation team increased 25% from the previous year.

It's serious work, but we get to sprinkle in some fun with kids through play. It might be a five minute dance party at school to celebrate a week of positive behavior or playing Chutes and Ladders with a younger client to put them at ease. We hope our love for working with kids comes through in this Annual Report to you, our supporter.

When kids feel they have no good move left, you guide them in a positive direction. Thank you.



Jennifer Shuey
Executive Director

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TORI CARSON



Tori joined Kids First in 2021, serving as a Youth Peace Project Facilitator at Franklin Middle School. Tori previously worked in the field of criminal and juvenile justice. Her empathetic and calm demeanor gains the trust of kids and teachers.

CHERI MASE-REIDER



As the new Director of Operations, Cheri builds up Kids First with her enthusiasm and uplifting spirit. Cheri's background in HR and project management, as well as her infectious positivity and creativity, are assets in her role.



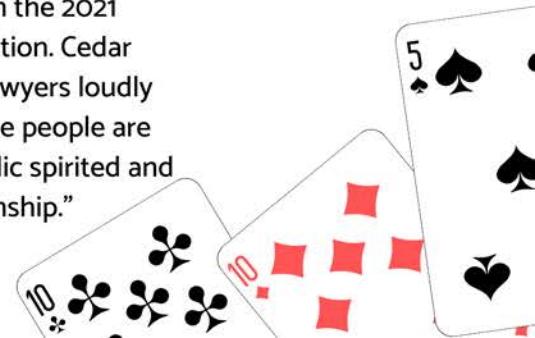
After 14 years at Kids First, Director of Operations Kandy Sands took a position with the federal court system after relocating with her family to the Des Moines area. Kandy's many talents and dedication helped Kids First become the organization it is today. Here's the team at her send off – and no surprise, she's now volunteering!



ALLISON HEFFERN RECEIVES 2021 CITIZENSHIP AWARD

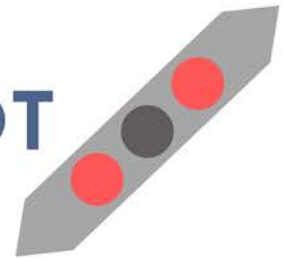


Kids First Attorney Allison Heffern was honored with the 2021 Citizenship Award from the Linn County Bar Association. Cedar Rapids Attorney Bill Nicholson said, "Where some lawyers loudly bulldoze, this lawyer thoughtfully carves. While some people are inconsistent and self-centered, she is steadfast, public spirited and generous. Allison is a classic example of good citizenship."





FRIENDSHIPS NOT BATTLESHIPS



Like the concealment of ships from the other player, conflicts for kids often stem from a lack of awareness about the other person's point of view. Kids First's school-based peace facilitators help kids work through conflict by communicating face-to-face in circles (mediation). Kids resolve the problem so one argument or circulating rumors don't sink their friendship.

Here's what teachers say about Kids First's restorative justice circles:



Restorative circles have greatly contributed to keeping our school environment safe and providing students an outlet to feel supported.



Circles have really saved my classroom culture. It feels like we are really addressing issues and not just sweeping them away.



I love the work that you do with our students. You are an asset in helping students resolve conflicts, improve relationships, and increase self image.

Since 2017, Kids First has grown the peace project from a single facilitator in one school to five facilitators in eight schools. Cedar Rapids Schools served by Kids First (2021-22):

- Metro High School**
- Franklin Middle School**
- McKinley Middle School
- Wilson Middle School**
- Erskine Erskine School
- Grant Wood Elementary School
- Hoover Elementary School
- Johnson Elementary School

****Schools added in 2021**



WATCH THIS 3 MIN. VIDEO TO HEAR WHAT STUDENTS HAVE TO SAY ABOUT KIDS FIRST CIRCLES.

To scan the QR code: open phone camera,
position code in frame, click on link



WHERE'S WALDO?



Remember the fun of a Where's Waldo book, when Waldo could be anywhere? Now the same is true for divorcing parents who want to attend mediation! Since the pandemic began, Kids First therapist Laura Martin has hosted joint parenting sessions on Zoom. Virtual sessions have opened up a whole new level of accessibility for parents.

- Kids First's geographic reach is greater – serving parents across Iowa
- Parents who can't take time off work can meet over their lunch break from their phones
- Parents without transportation or gas money can attend (and sessions are free!)

Zoom has been a surprisingly wonderful resource. Parents seem more at ease when they're not across the table from each other and can be in the comfort of their own space. Zoom breakout rooms have been really helpful when a parent needs a break or I need to talk with them separately for a bit. Seeing the program expand and having parents resolve conflict has been the biggest reward.

– Laura Martin, LISW



LIFE SKILLS

In every job, life skills (“social-emotional skills”) are critical. Companies seek employees who can manage emotions, work collaboratively, and problem-solve. Kids First gives kids these tools so they can enter the workforce and adulthood successfully.

LIFE

SELF AWARENESS

Kids First divorce workshops help kids identify their feelings about divorce as well as the importance of talking about their feelings instead of bottling them up.

LIFE

SELF MANAGEMENT

Kids First attorneys teach kids how to respectfully self-advocate. Attorneys connect kids to therapists to learn coping skills for stressful events.

LIFE

SOCIAL AWARENESS

Kids First peace facilitators bring kids in conflict together in a circle. Kids hear what the hardest part was for the other person, which builds empathy.

LIFE

RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

The Kids First therapist works with parents to build communication and cooperation. When parents’ relationships improve, kids learn how to have healthy relationships too.

LIFE

RESPONSIBLE DECISION-MAKING

When youth engage in conflict, Kids First peace circles help kids decide together what it will take to end the conflict and make things right.

WE’RE THERE FOR LIFE

A 16-year-old boy Kids First represented two years prior texted his lawyer out of the blue one evening after he and his dad had a heated argument. His dad wanted him to get a job, but the teen felt stretched to maintain his 4.0 GPA and his commitment to the basketball team. Over two hours of texting, the Kids First lawyer gave the teen tools to calm himself and coached him to respectfully self-advocate in a rational discussion with his dad. The boy thanked the Kids First lawyer and said, “It’s nice to know I have somebody in my corner 100% of the time.”



KEEPING SCORE: 2021

2,412 CHILDREN & PARENTS SERVED

Child Representation

99%

COURT ORDERS
REFLECTED KIDS'
WISHES FOR
SAFETY &
STABILITY

95%

FAMILIES
CONNECTED WITH
NEEDED SERVICES
LIKE COUNSELING

83%

CASES SETTLED
WITHOUT A TRIAL

*Nationally, only 15% of
high-conflict custody
cases settle without a trial

Youth Peace Project in Schools

1,605

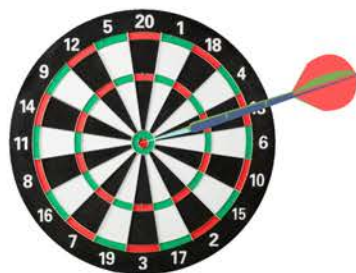
RESTORATIVE
CIRCLES

99%

CIRCLES ENDED
IN AGREEMENT

96%

OF KIDS GAINED
SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL
SKILLS



Joint Parenting Sessions

157

MEDIATIONS

95%

OF PARENTS
REDUCED CONFLICT

2021 Annual Expenses: \$783,658

15

STAFF

5

PROGRAMS

460

HOUSEHOLD
SUPPORTERS

\$39.90

HOURLY COST TO
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SERVICES



Kids First supporter and pool shark, Don Johnson, celebrated his 105th birthday by inviting friends to give to Kids First. Don's birthday celebration raised over \$1,200 to help children in conflict. Thank you, Don!



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Thank you to our friends at Anderson Bogert for helping clear our 2021 Wish List! Students, clients, staff and parents will benefit from their generous gifts.



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Acknowledging your support is important to us. If you spot an error, please call Sarah at 319-365-5437 so we can correct the digital edition.

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WIN, WIN

After being introduced to Kids First by their son Nate, Mike and Cindy Dunn have gone all in. "We feel Kids First's mission to create stability for children who are defenseless and have nowhere to turn is so laudable," Mike says. When it was time to begin taking required minimum distributions from their IRA, Mike and Cindy generously rolled a contribution over to Kids First. Mike says, "The advantage of making a direct rollover gift to Kids First is they receive the benefit of 100% of the rollover without the normal assessment of personal, federal or state taxes to the donor. It's really a win, win situation."

If you are 70.5 or older, you can make a tax-free distribution from your IRA to Kids First. Mike suggests contacting your IRA custodian if you are interested in making a rollover gift.

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Mindy & David Sorg
Vernon Squires
Bruce Thayer

Volunteers:

Scott Bennett
Jace Bisgard
David Blankenship
Charles Crawley
Maria Doce
Ruthie Dunn
Shannon Finnegan
Ann Hammond
LaToya Harrington
Lynn Hartman
Tricia Hoffman-Simanek
Nikki Kettelkamp
James Klein
Ryan Koester
Jack Minder
Jamie Rieder
Sophie Rieder
Kandy Sands
Libby Slappey
Steve Sovern
Vernon Squires
Jennifer Zahrt



Kids First's Director of Operations, Cheri Mase-Reider, taught the Kids First team how to make their own Kombucha tea at a holiday gathering.

It's all fun & games

Games and art activities help Kids First attorneys connect with child clients. Your in-kind gifts keep overhead expenses low so Kids First can devote resources to directly help kids in conflict. These games on Kids First's wish list would be welcome additions to our supply!

- | | |
|---|---|
|  Blokus |  Hoot Owl Hoot! |
|  Cahoots |  5-Minute Dungeon |
|  Don't Break the Ice |  Forbidden Island |
|  Legos |  Markers |
|  Lincoln Logs |  Fidget Toys |
|  Operation |  Rubik's Cubes |
|  Outfoxed! |  Yo-yos |
|  Taco vs. Burrito |  100-piece puzzles |
|  TacoCat |  Coloring books (all ages) |
|  UNO Attack! |  Paint by sticker books |

www.kidsfirstiowa.org | 319.365.5437

Thank you to Mercy Medical Center for printing this annual report!