

# BREAKING THE CYCLE

WHILE THE CHALLENGES ARE DAUNTING, DAVID BUNDY IS DRIVEN BY A DESIRE TO END CHILD ABUSE.

by Joey Rosenberg

In the 2008-2009 fiscal year, Florida's Child Abuse Hotline handled 284,071 reports of child abuse, neglect, abandonment, exploitation or threatened harm. With 201 of those cases resulting in death due to verified child abuse or neglect, anyone with a caring heart can recognize the issue requires attention.

David Bundy is taking things a step further. Abuse isn't just a priority; it's atop his agenda.

The president and CEO of the Children's Home Society of Florida and a childhood victim of such behavior, he has made assurance of quality care and support of children his life's work. Unlike many victims, who fall into a generational cycle of abuse, Bundy persevered to become a resolute advocate, dedicated to protecting the many unfortunate children who cannot safeguard themselves.

"I've always had an interest in helping families and kids who are in difficult situations," he says. "And at the Children's Home Society of Florida, that's pretty much what we do."

With the Florida organization founded in 1902 and headquartered in Winter Park, the national organization, Children's Home Society of America (CHS), is the second-largest private nonprofit organization in the United States and Canada. Providing a vast array of services, including child abuse prevention, foster care, adoption, counseling and mentoring, CHS assisted more than 97,000 children and families last year.

In 1988, after serving as executive director of the state of New Hampshire's Division for Children, Youth and Families, as well as gubernatorial appointee

for John Sununu (former chief of staff for George H.W. Bush), he left that state to become executive director of CHS's Central Florida division. In 2000, he became the CEO of the state organization while also becoming a board member and advocacy chair for Children's Home Society of America.

As head of the CHS of Florida, Bundy works to improve the core services his organization offers to families. Aside from continued striving to heighten quality, he puts great effort into developing a culture of innovation and research. "We're involved with a number of initiatives that promote innovative thinking within our staff, and we're developing strong ties with universities in the state of Florida to help us analyze the data we collect from applied research," he describes. Using this research, Bundy says, CHS can learn which approaches to care are most effective, allowing the organization to do more of what actually works and less of what doesn't.

Indeed, Bundy is making important progress in his field, but not without challenges. For the past few years, the foremost difficulty has been maintaining a sufficient level of resources in a poor economy. CHS provides services to the state of Florida and its communities, and the organization has felt the impact of shrinking state and



David Bundy persevered through his own child abuse to now lead the Children's Home Society of Florida.

local budgets. Similarly, revenues from charitable contributions are down. "Strong support from corporations and private individuals raise about \$10 million a year," he notes, "but we've had an approximate 10 percent drop-off from that average since the economy deteriorated." He adds that, fortunately, those numbers are showing signs of improvement.

These days, Bundy devotes much of his time to seeking a waiver extension on Title IV-E of the Social Security Act, which regulates federal payments for foster care and adoption assistance. Without the waiver, IV-E money can be spent only on out-of-home care. "In Florida, we have the flexibility to use those IV-E dollars to help abuse victims by intervening earlier and providing a variety of supports to keep the family together," he explains. Currently, Florida is the only state with a IV-E waiver,

and that exemption has proven to be the largest source of funding for childhood protection services. Furthermore, since the waiver took effect, Florida has reduced the number of children in out-of-home care by 42 percent. The five-year waiver, however, expires next year.

In response, Bundy has committed himself to persuading the federal government that an extension is essential. In late August, he traveled to Washington, D.C., to testify before the Senate's Foster Care Caucus to propose a broadening of IV-E waiver flexibility to all foster care programs throughout the country.

Such effort is part of a resolve that was shaped years ago.

"A lot of my passion for this cause," he says, "is a result of my upbringing and the experiences I've had as a child."