



ALACHUA COUNTY  
Health Promotion  
& Wellness Coalition

# 2023 Annual Report

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*"To build a safe, healthy and drug-free  
community for residents of Alachua County"*

# Table Of Contents

About HPW

Message from the Director

*A Year in Review:*

- Run for Your Life 5K
- DEA Drug Take Back Day
- Youth Summit
- Friday Night Done Right

Awards & Recognitions

10 Years in the Community

Fundraising the Mission

Partner and Board Member Recognition

Looking Ahead to 2024

# About Alachua County Health Promotion and Wellness Coalition (HPW)

HPW's goal is to prevent youth substance use through raising awareness, reducing access to drugs, and providing alternative activities. To accomplish these goals, partnership and community involvement are essential.

01

## Education

By educating youth, families and the general community on substance use trends and risks, youth can make better decisions regarding substance use and parents can have informed conversations with youth about the risks.

02

## Access

Reducing access to alcohol and other drugs can keep youth safe and prevent negative consequences such as drinking and driving, substance use disorders, overdoses and more.

03

## Alternative Activities

Offering alternative activities such as trivia games, kickball, and movie nights can offer a different way for youth to have fun with friends without using substances. Additionally, this provides opportunities to teach valuable skills such as resisting peer pressure, using healthy coping skills and more.

# A WORD FROM THE DIRECTOR:

## We're Turning 10!

It has been a pleasure to continue to be able to serve the community in the capacity of Director, here at the Alachua County HPW Coalition.

2023 brought about growth, innovation and sustainability, as we celebrate 10 years of serving Alachua County! As the year closes, it's time to reflect on what has been accomplished, successes and challenges, and look ahead to the future.

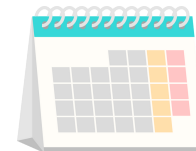
We look forward to what 2024 will bring and recognize that none of these efforts would be possible without the contribution and assistance of staff, community partners, volunteers and interns. Without all of our partners, we could not accomplish our goals.

From myself, HPW staff, and board members, we would like to thank all of our wonderful partners and agencies for everything accomplished this year.

- *LaShay Johnson*

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## A Year in Review:



In 2023, HPW accomplished a number of goals, expanded its programs, and continued to improve services. Over the past year, HPW reached over **500** youths through programs such as the Youth Summit, Friday Night Done Right, Town Hall and more. The Coalition also conducted its largest ever number of Friday Night Done Right events with **5** in one year, received a record **145** participants at the 5th Annual 5K Color Run, and worked with **78** volunteers.

The following pages provide a highlight of HPW Coalition's greatest and most exciting achievements over the past year, much of which depended upon the assistance of partners and volunteers.



# 5TH ANNUAL RUN FOR YOUR LIFE 5K

The 5th Annual Run for Your Life 5K took place on Sunday, September 24th at Depot Park in Gainesville. The purpose of this fundraiser is to recognize those affected by the ongoing opioid crisis while raising awareness in the community.



At the event, **145** participants joined the color run along with **25** volunteers. University of Florida students from Alpha Epsilon Delta (AED) provided the majority of volunteers along with community partners. HPW also organized a community fair with local organizations such as Meridian Behavioral Healthcare to provide resources for participants.



UF Health Florida Recovery Center also provided education about Narcan/Naloxone which can be used to reverse opioid overdoses in an emergency. Additionally, there was a warm-up session for attendees, led by a community partner and personal trainer, Cordera Ferguson of Fountain of Youth Footwork.

This family-friendly event will take place again next September at Depot Park and HPW welcomes everyone to join!



# DEA DRUG TAKE BACK DAY

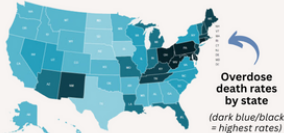
The National Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) Drug Take Back Day took place twice in 2023, April 22nd and October 28th. Supported by the DEA, the nationwide event spreads awareness and prevents the misuse of prescription drugs as community members safely and anonymously drop off unused or expired medications. Additionally, by collecting drugs from the community, this program helps protect the environment by preventing medication flushed into local water sources. This year, **105 lbs.** of medication were collected at DEA Drug Take Back Days sites hosted by HPW.



The success of these events are due to partners such as the Alachua County Sheriff's Office, Alachua Police Department, University of Florida College of Pharmacy students, Newberry Opioid Task Force, Hitchcock's Markets, Trinity United Methodist Church and more. These partners provide law enforcement for everyone's safety, host drug collection sites, volunteer during the event and promote the program within the community.

## WHAT IS THE OPIOID CRISIS?

Opioids are prescribed for **pain relief**, often after surgeries. Unfortunately, these medications, such as Hydrocodone, are **highly addictive** and large pharmaceutical companies like Purdue Pharma labeled them as non-addictive so doctors overprescribed opioids, leading many to develop a substance use disorder.



In 2017, the U.S. government declared the opioid use epidemic a national public health emergency. Since then, the numbers of overdoses and addiction rates have only increased. In 2022, there were **109,680 overdose deaths** in the United States, the highest yet with roughly **75%** of those deaths involving opioids.

### Why is Fentanyl so Dangerous?

When it comes to opioids, synthetic versions such as fentanyl are a leading cause of overdoses and fatalities. Synthetics are made in labs without natural sources and are designed to be incredibly strong.

This is 2mg of fentanyl, a lethal dose for most



In fact, fentanyl is **100x stronger than morphine** and **50x stronger than heroin**. Drug dealers lace other substances with fentanyl because it produces a strong high with low costs to increase their profits.

## Education & Outreach:

HPW's mission of raising awareness about substance use trends is a high priority. This includes providing infographics about the ongoing opioid crisis at community events such as the DEA Drug Take Back Day and the Run for Your Life 5K Color Run. General understanding about these issues can drive solutions such as proper drug disposal.

## Rx Destroyer:

Compared to other collection programs such as the DEA Drug Take Back Day, the Rx Destroyer offers immediate safe drug disposal. Bottles already include active disposal ingredients and can be used multiple times until full. This creates opportunities for disposal at community events such as the 5K Color Run.





# FRIDAY NIGHT DONE RIGHT

One of HPW's community outreach strategies is Friday Night Done Right, or FNDR, as it is commonly referred to. This program is built to provide youth with alternative weekend (Friday) drug-free activities such as trivia, karaoke, movie nights, and more. By providing a mixture of fun activities and prevention education, HPW encourages youth to abstain from alcohol or drug use during their free time and find healthier entertainment and coping options. HPW uses this time to provide a variety of topics pertinent to today's youth, such as bullying, peer pressure, refusal skills, and mental health, just to name a few!

HPW staff continue to be intentional while serving the community by tailoring topics and activities based on the hosting site. FNDR has partnered with agencies and organizations such as CDS' Interface Youth Shelter, A Quinn Jones School, and Oakview Middle School serving over 300 students this year alone!



*FNDR hosted at A. Quinn Jones School*



*Midnight Basketball with the City of Gainesville*



*FNDR with partner, First Love Yourself, Inc*

*friday night*  
**DONE RIGHT**

# TOWN HALL

On April 19th, HPW hosted *Town Hall: Dare to Live*, at Gainesville High School and welcomed youth, parents, and community members. The event was divided into two sessions, youth and adults.

Adults attended a panel with representatives from law enforcement, schools, parents, and healthcare. During the session, adults attended an educational presentation on recent drug trends and had the opportunity to ask unique questions on the spot. Youth attended a motivational session hosted by Mr. Corey Collins and River Phoenix Center for Peacebuilding, as well as participated in a number of educational activities such as fatal vision goggles to demonstrate levels of impairment.

Town Hall concluded with a free meal for participants, raffle prizes and resources such as HPW parent toolkits. Participants also completed evaluation forms with **82.6%** of youth and **80%** of adults rating the event as excellent.



## Mr. Corey Collins

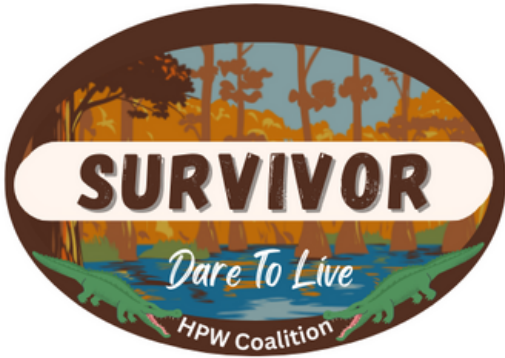
As a Youth and Community Specialist at the River Phoenix Center for Peacebuilding, Mr. Corey specializes in youth dialogue centered around community, education, and peacebuilding. As the youth speaker for this year's Town Hall, he not only engaged with teens on topics of substance use prevention and healthy decision-making, but also assisted in goal setting.



HPW would like to thank Mr. Corey for leading the Town Hall youth session!



# YOUTH SUMMIT



2023 Escape Room Theme: Survivor

In June, HPW hosted a youth summit in partnership with the Alachua County Sheriff's Office Teen Court for middle and high school students. During the youth summit, HPW hosted "Wellness Wednesdays" for over **30** youths with education on substance use and mental health. The presentation for youth covered alcohol, marijuana, and prescription drugs, as well as mental health awareness, suicide prevention and assertiveness training.

Following the educational session, youth participated in an in-person "escape room" activity by answering questions on content that was covered in the presentation. Several of the escape room questions included engaging activities such as Fatal Vision Goggles, memory challenges, and outdoor activities. The first team to finish all of the questions correctly, escaped! At the summit, youth were also empowered with tips on coping skills, refusal skills, and stress relief to reduce their risk of substance use.



In evaluation surveys, HPW scored highly with **90%** of youth agreeing that they know more about substances after participating in the summit, **93%** of youth believed the presentation was interactive and engaging, **93%** agreed the escape rooms reinforced what they learned during the presentation, and **100%** agreed that the escape room challenge was engaging and they enjoyed the competition.

# CINCO DE MAYO

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In partnership with the Gainesville Police Department, HPW coordinated a drinking and driving awareness event held in the Midtown area of Gainesville on Cinco de Mayo, a popular drinking holiday. The event took place from 9:00pm to 1:00am with free tacos and giveaway items as incentives to get involved.

During the event, law enforcement officers conducted voluntary breathalyzer tests on **218** individuals to educate on alcohol impairment levels and encourage ride sharing or designated drivers. HPW also conducted **53** surveys to learn more about drinking habits, underage access to alcohol and more.

In addition to education and raising awareness, the event also increased law enforcement presence and patrolled for those driving under the influence in the area. As a result, there was a 0.02 BAC violation charge and 2 DUI arrests that may have prevented accidents.



**Cinco de Mayo**

**LET'S TACO 'BOUT AN UBER**

Grab some tacos and enjoy the colorful decorations! While the margaritas and tequila shots can make a fun night, don't forget how you and your friends are getting home safely.

**Call an uber, lyft, taxi or a friend.** Don't make a mistake that hurts your future and risks the lives of those around you.

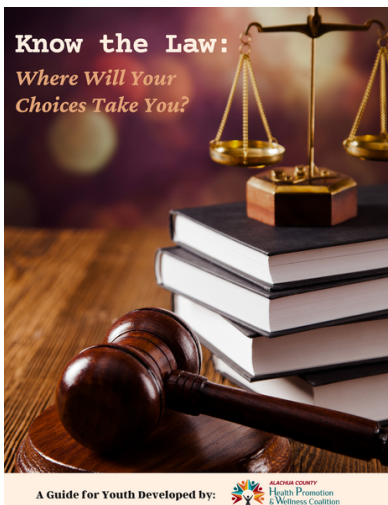
Take the breathalyzer test and answer an anonymous survey -- **then the tacos are on us!**

For some extra giveaways, complete the HPW survey too!

ALACHUA COUNTY Health Promotion & Wellness Coalition

# KNOW THE LAW

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To reflect changing times and emerging substance use trends, the 3rd edition of the Know the Law book was released. New and expanded content includes updated laws and statutes, vaping, marijuana concentrates, fentanyl, opioids, mental health, and more.

During the year, HPW held Know the Law classes at various locations. Some of those included teaching the course to 5th, 6th, 7th, and 8th grade students at Oak View Middle School as well as the Emoji Teens Therapy Workshop.

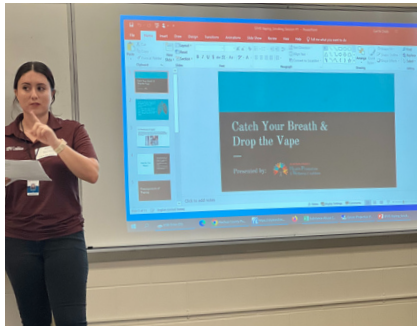


# EDUCATION SESSIONS

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By educating youth, families and the general community on substance use trends and risks, youth can make better decisions regarding substance use and parents can have informed conversations with youth about the risks.

HPW is available to tailor educational presentations to fit the audience and includes a variety of educational materials, demonstrations, and activities. Thank you to the community partners who solicited educational sessions to serve their population this year.



*"Catch My Breath" Presentation*



*Gainesville High School Orientation*

## Some of this Year's Presentations:

- Alachua County Sheriff's Office: Teen Court Substance Use Education
- Youth Explorers: Refusal Skills and Leadership Training
- Gainesville High School: New Student Orientation
- Santa Fe High School: "Catch My Breath" Vaping Curriculum
- Circles of Gainesville: Coping Skills and Assertiveness Training
- First Love Yourself Inc: Mental Health Awareness
- Interface Youth Shelter: Friday Night Done Right

# PRIDE FESTIVAL

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As a population of focus, HPW aims to reach the LGBTQ+ community whenever possible. Statistics show that LGBTQ+ youth face greater discrimination, experience more mental health issues, and have higher rates of substance use than their straight peers. To reach this community, HPW attended the annual Pride Festival hosted by the Pride Community Center of North Central Florida on Saturday, October 21st at the Bo Diddley Plaza. As a vendor at the pride festival, HPW offered prevention resources, conducted surveys and more.

# COMPLIANCE CHECKS

In partnership with the Florida Division of Alcoholic Beverages and Tobacco (ABT), HPW conducted compliance checks in Alachua County on November 14th and 16th. To enforce age-of-sale restrictions, **40** businesses with retail licenses were visited to check if youth under 21 could purchase alcohol or tobacco products. Over the course of the 2023 sessions, **13.5%** of tested locations failed compliance checks. The locations that failed to properly check IDs received legal reprimands applied by ABT and law enforcement, as well as received free educational materials from the HPW Coalition.



To assist in these compliance checks, members of the HPW Youth Coalition joined as Investigative Aides to visit alcohol and/or tobacco vendors and attempt to purchase underage. Alachua County Sheriff's Office (ASO) also assisted in the compliance checks, providing increased law enforcement presence and community partnership.



*Investigative Aids with Law Enforcement*



#### What is TIPS?

TIPS is a standardized online training program for alcohol vendors designed to meet FL state regulations of "responsible vendor training"

#### Why TIPS?

- Certified more than five million participants over 25 years
- Nationwide program across every state and over 50 countries
- Completely free to Alachua County businesses!

#### What are the benefits?

- Reduced Liquor Liability Premiums
- Lessened Fines and Penalties
- Recognition as a Responsible Vendor

TO GET STARTED, EMAIL:  
INFO@HPWCOALITION.ORG



In addition to the compliance checks, HPW also offers access to TIPS, an online alcohol vendor training program, to Alachua County businesses. The purpose of TIPS is to teach managers and employees the importance of checking IDs, how to recognize the signs of a fake ID, and how to serve responsibly.

Offering TIPS helps local business prevent underage sales, satisfy responsible vendor requirements, and access possible benefits such as lower liquor liability premiums and reduced fines or penalties. Information about this program was distributed to businesses that did not pass compliance checks.

# RTS BUS WRAPS



To reach college students on the University of Florida campus, HPW collaborated with the Gainesville Regional Transit System (RTS), to place wraps on bus routes that travel through campus. One message warned students of the risks of social hosting, or providing alcohol to underage youth at parties and tailgates. These wraps were installed during the Fall semester to reach students during football season.

**MAKE IT A NIGHT TO REMEMBER -- NOT A NIGHT TO FORGET**



**KNOW THE RISKS.**

**1,519 college students die each year from alcohol-related accidents.**

-- National Institute of Health (NIH)



The second bus wrap campaign addressed drinking and driving with statistics from the National Institute of Health. Installed in late November, this wrap coincides with December as National Impaired Driving Prevention Month due to the increase in drinking during the holiday season.



## RED RIBBON WEEK

Red Ribbon Week is a national prevention awareness week held each year at the end of October. The goal of the prevention campaign is to celebrate living drug free and raise awareness. To join in Red Ribbon Week, HPW hosted a “Sock it to Drugs” raffle event at Oak View Middle School. Participating students were entered into a raffle based on grade level to win prizes for wearing their best crazy socks.



Take a look at some of the entries!



2023 Red Ribbon Theme



# CALMING ROOMS

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Most adults have learned how to deal with emotions and feelings. When it comes to youth, they may not yet know how to deal with stressful situations. Stress may be caused by their background and home situations which can include domestic violence, poverty, abuse, drug use, alcoholism, and other challenges. It may also be triggered by situations at school which overwhelm them or cause intense emotions. Youth such as these, need assistance to learn how to self-regulate.



HPW Coalition expanded the number of Calming Rooms implemented in Alachua County by selecting Pace Center for Girls as another location. The HPW Calming Room is designed to improve mental health, reduce conflicts among students, and assist students with self regulation.



School can be a stressful environment for teens, which can lead to emotional disturbances, outbursts and mental health events. The Calming Room allows space for youth to decompress and compose themselves. The Calming Room provides a soothing atmosphere including gentle lighting, bean bag chairs, sensory items, and reading material that promote mental health awareness.

# MEDIA COVERAGE

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Over the past year, HPW saw a significant increase in media coverage of community activities. For example, The Gainesville Sun published an article in April covering the Town Hall at Gainesville High School.



Further coverage and publicity was provided for events such as the 5th Annual Run for Your Life 5K including a report by WJCB TV20 on community educational events and efforts combating the the opioid crisis. HPW is thrilled to see greater awareness and engagement with media to spread the word about upcoming events and programs.

# TRAININGS

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In July, HPW joined other members of the prevention community at the Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America (CADCA) Mid-Year Training in Dallas, Texas. During the week-long conference, HPW attended training sessions, learned about emerging drug trends, gained new skills, and made connections with other agencies and businesses. Additionally, HPW learned about new resources such as Rx Destroyer, for local implementation.

# NATIONAL COALITION ACADEMY

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The National Coalition Academy, or NCA, is a comprehensive training program developed by CADCA's National Coalition Institute specifically designed for coalition staff and volunteers to equip these leadership teams with the “know-how” to establish and/or maintain a highly effective anti-drug coalition. This year-long training teaches core competencies and vital processes by developing six products in order to graduate: community assessment, logic model, strategic & action plan, evaluation plan, evaluation communication plan, and sustainability plan.

CADCA offered various methods to attend the NCA training. The coalition attended four separate weeklong training sessions throughout the year, with reinforcement sessions in between. The training academy also included access to a web-based workstation with a vast number of online resources beneficial to coalition work, like evidence-based practices and programs.

HPW has greatly benefitted from the intense training and will participate in the graduation ceremony in January 2024 at CADCA's National Forum in National Harbor, Maryland. This training experience has provided additional perspectives on community involvement and coalition sustainability.



# 2023 INTERNSHIPS:

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**Spring** (Elizabeth Teresi, Alexis Dysert)

**Summer** (Lucia Costas)

**Fall** (Savannah Townsend, Andrea Vasquez)



**Elizabeth  
Teresi**



**Alexis  
Dysert**



**Lucia  
Costas**



**Andrea  
Vasquez**



**Savannah  
Townsend**

In 2023, HPW continued its partnership with the University of Florida by hosting internships in the spring, summer and fall semesters. This collaboration included a wide variety of programs such as Health Disparities in Society Minor, Bachelor of Public Health, and Curricular Practical Training from the UF International Center. Over the year, HPW worked with a total of five interns in a hybrid format to allow flexibility with their academic schedules.

HPW interns devoted **over 100 hours each** to HPW's mission and worked on a number of projects such as developing infographics, conducting research on substance use trends, creating marketing materials and flyers, and preparing for community events. Some of these events included activities such as Know the Law sessions and Friday Night Done Right, where they supported staff and worked with youth. The interns were vital in major events such as the DEA Drug Take Back Days, Town Hall, Youth Summit, and the Run for Your Life 5K Color Run. Overall, their work was incredibly important to the coalition; not only did they contribute by way of their youthful input, they devoted significant time on evenings and weekends to assist staff at events.





# AWARDS AND RECOGNITION

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## 2023 Community Partner Awards:

- Law Enforcement Representative of the Year: *Officer T. Ellis*,  
School Resource Officer
- Youth Advocate of the Year: *Jordan Johnson*,  
Howard Bishop Middle School
- Service Partner of the Year: *Sarah Gehrsitz*,  
Tobacco Free Alachua
- Most Altruistic Partner of the Year: *Corey Collins*,  
River Phoenix for Peacebuilding
- Most Involved Agency: The Hanley Foundation
- Youth Serving Agency: Interface Youth Shelter
- Volunteers of the Year: UF College of Pharmacy and Alpha Epsilon Delta
- Community Partner of the Year: UF Health Florida Recovery Center

## 10 Year Special Recognitions:

- Generosity Award: *Cynthia Swanson*
- Above and Beyond Dedication: *Francellette Garcia*
- Mentorship & Leadership: *Gregory Pelham*
- Long-Term Service Award: *Gwen Love*
- Constant Contributor: *CDS Family and Behavioral Health Services, Inc.*
- Impact Award: *Dr. Virginia Dodd*

# 10 YEARS IN THE COMMUNITY

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## PROGRAMS AND STRATEGIES

Since its foundation in 2013, HPW published **2** revised editions of Know the Law books, participated in **24** internship semesters with the University of Florida, completed over **600** virtual Escape Room activities with youth, participated in **93** compliance checks, and hosted **12** media campaigns on RTS buses and local billboards. Additionally, HPW attended numerous health fairs, tabling events, and open houses to educate the community where it distributed **thousands** of infographics on the importance of proper drug disposal, risks of underage alcohol use, and more.



## PARTNERS AND BOARD MEMBERS

Over the last 10 years, HPW has developed firm partnerships with community organizations such as Tobacco Free Alachua and the Hanley Foundation as well as schools such as Oak View Middle School. The HPW Board continues to expand and become more diverse with the addition of **four** new members during post-pandemic growth.



## COMMUNITY EVENTS

HPW has a number of regular community events that continue to grow. In April and October, HPW participates in DEA Drug Take Back Days with over **100lbs** collected each year. Since 2018, HPW has held five annual Run for Your Life 5K Color Runs in September at Depot Park with almost **150** attendees in 2023. HPW also hosts at least one Friday Night Done Right event for youth each quarter.

# FUNDING THE MISSION

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Over the past ten years, HPW has continually worked to expand its funding sources. Beginning with local funding and various contracts in 2013, the Coalition now has federal grants through 2026, local funding from the City of Gainesville, and additional prevention contracts. In summary, HPW has increased its funding by over **600%** since its foundation. However, grants aren't permanent and while HPW is always seeking new, reliable funding sources, donations are a vital aspect of coalition work.



# PARTNER AND BOARD MEMBER RECOGNITION

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While HPW's team works hard to implement programs and host events, much of the organization's success is due to the dedication and efforts of its Board Members. This includes connecting HPW to new partners, collaborating with existing networks in the community, attending events, providing input and suggestions, and even hosting events. HPW would like to thank its Board Members for their consistent and valuable support.

Additionally, partners are absolutely vital for HPW's programs as they contribute resources, event locations, volunteers, community connections, feedback, and more. Without the growing network of community partners that consistently support HPW such as law enforcement, schools, and community organizations that also work in substance use prevention, the Coalition would not have its current level of success.



As HPW's main sponsor, **CDS Family & Behavioral Health Services, Inc** contributes to the Coalition in a number of ways including general partnership, and housing HPW staff. CDS provides HPW with office space, access to conference rooms for meetings and events, IT support services, and more. HPW's partnership with CDS is vital to its community work and the Coalition is grateful for the long-term support.

## LOOKING AHEAD TO 2024

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- **Goal 1:** Increase knowledge, by implementing HPW's Know the Law curriculum, to a diverse population of participants.
- **Goal 2:** Provide alternative activities by expanding HPW youth coalitions across Alachua County schools and youth serving organizations.
- **Goal 3:** Grow attendance at HPW's annual 5K Color Run to increase awareness about the opioid crisis.
- **Goal 4:** Acquire additional funding to continue serving Alachua County residents.

# *Thank You to Our 2023*

## **BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

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**Mr. Gregory Pelham Sr.,  
Chair**



**Ms. Joyce Wilson,  
Treasurer**



**Dr. Virginia Dodd,  
Secretary**



**Ret. Cpl. Dontonya Cooper-Smith,  
Member**



**Ms. Veita Jackson-Carter,  
Member**



**Ret. Chief Tony Jones,  
Member**



**Ms. Gwen Love,  
Member**



**Ms. Michelle Sherfield,  
Member**



**Ms. Rachel Waters, LMHC  
Member**