



## LEADERSHIP PROFILE



**Chief Executive Officer**  
**Families First**  
**Atlanta, GA**

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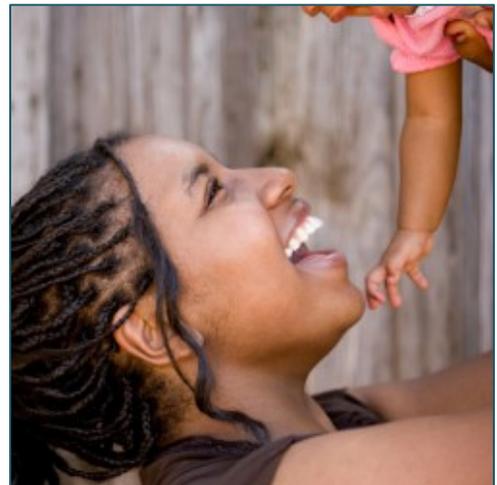
***“Empowering families to ensure  
the success of children in jeopardy”***

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### THE OPPORTUNITY

For over 125 years, Families First has been working toward a community in which all children flourish. Empowering families to ensure the success of children in jeopardy is not just a tagline in the nonprofit’s public service announcements; it is Families First’s very reason for being.

Consistent with its rich history of community engagement and ongoing commitment to addressing generational poverty, Families First recently completed a major capital campaign that allowed it to move its headquarters to a beautifully repurposed property based in the heart of Atlanta’s Westside, a neighborhood historically overlooked by the growth and prosperity experienced by much of metro Atlanta. The successful \$13.5mm campaign and office relocation were in many ways indicative of the organization’s shift from its roots as a responsive social service entity to a more proactive, respected community partner and fearless advocate for children and families.



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With the launch of a strategic planning exercise earlier this year, the CEO who has led Families First to great effect for the past eight years announced her decision to step aside so the strategy could be shaped and owned by an executive committed to leading the organization through subsequent years of implementation. The framework of the plan is being put in place, but the full plan will not be completed until the new CEO has had the opportunity to weigh in substantively.

Families First is Georgia's leading nonprofit family-service organization. Each year, it impacts some 37,000 people by delivering comprehensive, sustainable solutions for children and families, improving child well-being, promoting family self-sufficiency and helping to break cycles of generational poverty in replicable ways. Families First achieves this impact through 11 core programs and 21 services, a complex mix that is at once a source of pride and a distinct challenge to manage and fund.



The organization has thrived for well over a century by remaining true to core commitments of empowerment and enhancement, but it has also flourished because of a willingness to anticipate and adapt to changing community requirements, family dynamics, funding priorities and the needs of its own staff. What started as an orphanage in 1870 is now a holistic resource and advocate for children and families in need.

The progress of the last eight years has been substantial. The next CEO will inherit an organization respected by funders, alert to shifting political priorities, informed by data and analytics—and more committed than ever to making a lasting impact on children and families experiencing crisis, disenfranchisement or other struggles.

By joining the organization during a time of strategic evaluation, the next CEO will have both the opportunity and the obligation to help shape one of metro Atlanta's highest-regarded nonprofits as it continues to refine and focus its efforts to achieve lasting impact for the clients it serves. More information is available on the organization's [website](#), which can only hint at the pride, passion and even joy exhibited by those involved in the day-to-day work of empowering children and supporting families in times of transition or stress.

## THE ORGANIZATION

A large, multifaceted organization, Families First is known for providing a broad array of services and programs delivered with excellence, compassion and intentionality. The nonprofit has a full-time staff of about 125, many of them professionals with advanced degrees or certifications relevant to one of the many program areas.

Programmatically, Families First's staff is organized in three broad program categories plus administrative staff, shown below with approximate expenses associated with each:

- *Child and Youth Permanency*, including services related to adoption, foster care, community-building and transition to adulthood (~\$5.2mm last year)
- *Family Sustainability and Empowerment*, providing housing-based programs promoting healthy environments, self-sufficiency, child safety while battling poverty, homelessness, mental illness and substance abuse (~\$1.1mm)
- *Healthy Families and Relationships*, providing families support in parenting skills, mental health counseling and school programs (~\$2.2mm)
- *Supporting Services*, including administration and fundraising (~\$2.7mm).



Families First's programs are a source of great pride internally, and they are naturally what makes the organization so compelling for its partners and supporters, not to mention those who benefit directly from its services. That said, the very breadth of service offerings that endears the organization to so many is at the heart of the current strategic assessment, giving rise to a very basic question: What strategy and structure will produce the most impact for the most people?

The annual operating budget of about ~\$10-11 million is derived from a combination of government fees and grants (35-40% of the total in a typical year), contract and service fees (20-25%) and donations (~15%). In addition, Families First's relationship with United Way has accounted for about 10% of total revenues in recent years.

The agency's finances and information needs are complex, reflecting the multiplicity of funding sources, programmatic initiatives and a strong commitment

to the power of data.<sup>1</sup> Capital campaigns aside, the organization has occasionally operated at a deficit, and discussions of costs, allocations and funding are a consistent source of attention by the staff and board. Most recently, the auditors' Report to Management for 2016 highlighted several opportunities for improvement in reporting and controls, all of which are being implemented.

The news is not stark, just complicated. For example, just this month, Families First received the exciting news that \$2 million will be included in the FY 2018 state budget for [COACHES](#),<sup>2</sup> the highly regarded health and wellness program. Offered in partnership with Amerigroup, COACHES provides social service support services to youth aging out of foster care. Such news is terrific for the constituents and an endorsement to be celebrated, but never a development to be taken for granted.



The current [leadership team](#) includes both long-term members and relatively recent hires. Upon recommendation of the departing CEO, the Chief Programs Officer has been named Interim CEO.

Families First is governed by a 30-person Board of Directors drawn from a broad cross-section of community leaders from a variety of backgrounds and organizations (corporate, governmental, professional service and health-related). Board members' commitment to the organization is unusually strong, and many former board members of long service continue to provide input as members of the Counsel of Advisors or as Honorary Board Members. The CEO search committee is made up of members from all three groups.

The pending leadership change has sparked increased engagement by its members in recent weeks, a natural byproduct of any leadership transition, and the full board is involved in the strategic review underway. Going forward, the new CEO will find the board as a whole quite receptive to innovation, evaluation and a spirit of candor in its deliberations.

## THE MANDATE

The next CEO of Families First will inherit a proud organization, a devoted team and a supportive community. To optimize the nonprofit's impact on behalf of the

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<sup>1</sup> The first data-driven electronic clinical record system at Families First was launched in 2004. Since 2009, there has been considerable investment in Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI), supported by significant multi-year funding from foundation partners.

<sup>2</sup> COACHES: Coaching and Comprehensive Health Supports

children and families it serves, the CEO can be expected to devote substantial attention to four overlapping, ongoing priorities:

1. **Strategy.** The strategic review began in earnest in January 2017, and a great deal of examination, consultation and assessment will have taken place by the time the new CEO arrives, but the final plan will be one which the CEO and the board develop and endorse mutually. The fundamental direction of the organization is unlikely to change dramatically, but there are numerous opportunities for enhanced impact on behalf of the families and communities being served.
2. **Focus.** Focus is a consistent theme in many strategic conversations, both internally and externally, prompting healthy examination of traditional priorities. For example, “Might our historic affection for an exceptionally broad footprint, both programmatically and geographically, be impinging the transformational impact that a tighter focus might permit?” The questions are difficult and the answers elusive, but there is an appetite for deciding which services and programs Families Service can truly *own* and which could best be undertaken by others (or in partnership with others).
3. **Management and operations.** Much attention has rightly been paid in recent years to external relationships, and the results have been impressive. As a prime example, the new headquarters and resource center is evidence of a wonderful convergence of bold vision, passionate advocacy and first-rate execution. There is an emerging consensus that the internal family—the organization’s own employees—would benefit from the same intentional care and mentoring so consistently shown to its external constituents.

Structurally, the CEO will be expected to organize, lead and, where appropriate, strengthen the team for optimal impact, ensuring that dedication to mission does not come at the expense of a truly healthy work environment. Additionally, attention to operating disciplines (such as financial and management reporting, collection and use of data, and the nature and timing of communications with the board) will be well received across the organization. Attention to funding streams will be critical.
4. **Strategic partnerships.** Attention to internal issues may offer some early wins with lasting impact, but Families First cannot ignore the centrality of its relationships with a broad array of partners, stakeholders and funders.



Balancing internal and external needs can be a daunting task for the head of any major social service nonprofit, especially one in transition, but the ability to manage that balance—and to develop a shared commitment to that balance across the organization’s leadership and senior staff—will be key to the CEO’s success.

One strategic partner not to be overlooked is the board itself. The CEO will be invited to reinforce an atmosphere of trust, wherein the toughest issues are addressed with respectful candor, and accountability is embraced, individually and collectively.

The above list is not exhaustive, of course, and there are many other issues that will demand the CEO’s attention. Material progress on the highlighted areas will help create the space for thoughtful consideration of the complex pressures facing the children and families the organization is committed to serve.

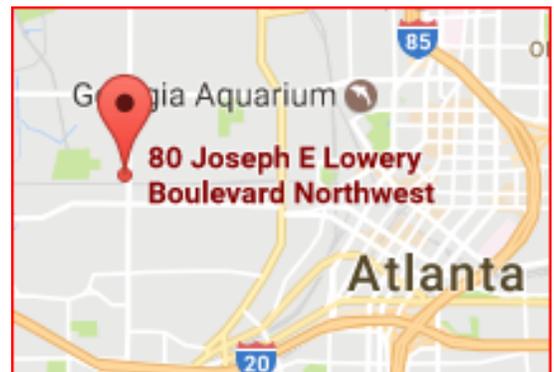
## THE RELATIONSHIPS

<b>The CEO reports to</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Board of Directors</li> </ul>
<b>And manages a staff of about 125 through the several direct reports, including</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chief Programs Officer (now serving as Interim CEO)</li> <li>• Chief Financial Officer</li> <li>• Chief Information Officer</li> <li>• Chief Development Officer</li> <li>• Director, Human Resources</li> <li>• Director, Child &amp; Youth Permanency</li> </ul>
<b>And stewarding other important relationships such as</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community leaders in the Westside neighborhood</li> <li>• Program partners (state &amp; local governments, nonprofit organizations)</li> <li>• Key philanthropic and program supporters (corporate, foundation and individual champions)</li> <li>• A cross-section of leaders and influencers from across the service area</li> </ul>

## THE LOCATION

Until 2016, Families First was based in midtown Atlanta. With major donor support, Families First was able to acquire a former school in Atlanta’s Westside and convert it into a technologically advanced community showcase.

Cradle to the civil rights movement, Atlanta's historic Westside is where Martin Luther King, Jr. lived when he articulated the vision for a society based on justice, equal opportunity and love of one's fellow human beings. Not coincidentally, Families First's new center is barely a mile from the organization's founding site in 1890, when Leonard Street Orphans' Home was opened on land that eventually became Spelman College.



## THE CANDIDATE

### ***Experience: We expect to hire...***

- A proven executive whose career reflects deep affinity for the issues and people within Families First's purview
- A leader who has demonstrated sustainable success at the helm of significant organizations or multifaceted initiatives, especially those employing strategic focus and management rigor in pursuit of greater impact
- A community-facing leader who is equally comfortable managing the internal dynamics—fostering an organizational climate of collective accomplishment and personal development
- Experience and demeanor superbly well suited for an organization that thrives on collaboration and partnering
- Deep competence in strategic thinking, combined with a management style that balances consultation and deliberation with decisiveness
- A CEO who can develop the strongest team possible, reinforcing a collaborative management spirit among the leadership that promotes candor, communication and shared commitment across the programmatic silos often endemic to the work.

### ***Character: The ideal candidate will be...***

- A true champion for the mission and advocate for the cause; someone whose commitment to children and families in need is palpable and infectious
- A mentor for the staff, a partner for the board and a trusted ally for the community
- Unafraid to take bold risks in pursuit of agreed-upon goals
- Intellectually curious; willing to reexamine the basics and prepare the way for whatever change is required to optimize impact.

**Culture: The CEO must be...**

- A compelling face of the organization and, by extension, a masterful fundraiser, ever cognizant of multiple funding sources and opportunities
- Well-connected across the larger community (or demonstrably able to become so)
- Business-minded and financially alert. Families First is all about mission, but it is also a complex business, and consistent attention to business disciplines, management rigor and the effective use of data (financial and operating) will be critical for long-term viability
- Technologically savvy. The board is not seeking a technological expert, but it is committed to harnessing the power of technology in the delivery of services and in the management of the enterprise
- A board-savvy executive able to cultivate and harness the strength (and manage the messiness!) inherent in a large, diverse board eager to contribute to a mission to which all are committed but few are expert
- A self-aware leader who fosters confidence, transparency and stability in an organization facing much change; someone who naturally elicits long-term commitment from staff and supporters, even in the face of considerable short-term challenges.



The board of Families First has few preconceptions about the precise career path it expects to attract and thus remains open to creative solutions. A background in social services would be additive, but so could a record of notable leadership within a relevant community context.

The strategic review now underway should result in increased clarity about the organization's focus and the successes it wishes to own, but true clarity requires a CEO undaunted by current ambiguities and intrigued by the opportunity to help secure the future for this historic and important organization—and for the families and children it champions.

**For potential consideration or to suggest a prospect, please email**  
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**or call Sam Pettway, Crystal Stephens or Laura DiBacco**  
**at 404-BoardWalk (404-262-7392)**