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## **CHILDREN FIRST CENTER BACKGROUND**

The DeKalb County Parent Group for Handicapped Children, Inc. d.b.a. Children First Center is adamant in its belief that every child, regardless of limitations deserves the opportunity to grow to learn and to achieve his highest potential. The Children First Center mission is to help children become all they can possibly be. Children First Center provides comprehensive services for children and families. The family-centered services offered are designed to strengthen families by helping them acquire the skills they need to protect, support and nurture their children.

The DeKalb County Parent Group for Handicapped Children, Inc. d.b.a. Children First Center is a not-for-profit agency, which has had a long and successful history of providing services to children with special needs and their families. Established and incorporated in 1971 by a group of parents who realized how critical the early years were to their children with disabilities, the Children First Center provides family focused, family centered Early Intervention services for infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families. Our expertise in working with families and our desire to meet even more community needs, led us to expand our services to include working with at-risk families. In 1995, Children First Center became the lead agency in a three county collaboration that brought the Healthy Families program to our counties. This Healthy Families program was one of the first in the state to be credentialed. In 1996 in an effort to serve families in crisis, Children First Center became a provider of Family Preservation Services in DeKalb, Noble, Steuben, LaGrange and Whitley Counties.

A Board of Directors and an Executive Director govern Children First Center. There are approximately 60 individuals employed by the agency. Various staff members actively represent the agency in the 3 county area on Advisory Groups, Boards, and Councils. The Executive Director has worked in Early Intervention for over 30 years. She has been the Executive Director of the Children First Center since 1979. The Healthy Families Program staff members have very strong backgrounds in child development, typical and atypical development, early intervention



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strategies, family dynamics, techniques for guiding children's behavior, and home visiting. The annual budget of nearly 3 million dollars sustains the many services that support 2,500 children and their families each year. This agency is an active participant in local community projects, state level planning groups and multiple collaborative efforts.

#### **COLLOBORATION:**

Children First Center works collaboratively with many agencies in our communities in attempts to assure that children and their families have needed services available to them. Children First has partnered with the hospitals, the Health Departments, and local Departments of Child Services. Children First has also partnered with local agencies to provide basic parenting classes in each of the three counties. Our therapists see children in child care settings where we consult with child care providers on appropriate activities for all children. We are always ready, willing and able to share our expertise and resources with other agencies if the activity has the potential of helping children and their families.

For more information about Children First Center, visit the organization Web site at <http://www.childrenfirstcenter.org>.