



# Communities Connected *for Kids*

Connections - March 3, 2023



*More than 200 people attended the Community Connections Prevention Expo, which CCKids staff hope to build into an annual signature event.*

## **Expo Packs Halls, Brings the Resources**

**Port St. Lucie** – More than 200 people attended CCKids' prevention expo last month, demonstrating both vast - but sometimes unknown - resources and the community's desire to access them.

The expo, which boasted 33 vendors on two floors of CCKids' St. Lucie West headquarters building, immediately outgrew itself.

Event planners already are working on the event for next year and plan to host it in a larger venue to accommodate more vendors and guests.



The expo grew from a behavioral health fair launched by CCKids' clinical staff prior to 2020's COVID pandemic. That event focused on behavioral health services and was targeted to dependency case managers as a way to broaden their engagement with available services that might help the children and families on their caseloads.

About 60 people attended those early events, which were discontinued to accommodate pandemic-era safety procedures.

This year's event started to take shape when CCKids' Director of Organizational Development Nicky Smith approached Josie Kirchner, Director of Clinical and Placement Services, and her team about adding a training component. Kirchner's team saw the potential for attracting more case managers and many other child-welfare professionals and began shifting the event's focus to prevention services.

Indeed, many of the event's attendees were case managers and child protective investigators from the state Department of Children and Families.



A news crew from Forever Family - a program that leverages the power of local media to find families for children seeking adoption - captured video of the event, which was featured later that week on the News Channel 12's 5 p.m. segment.

Other features of the event included a NARCAN training and Mindfulness seminars.

"Participants had the opportunity to increase their knowledge on ways to recognize and respond to opioid overdose and leave the training with a supply

of NARCAN," Smith said. "They also had the opportunity to practice some self care - an important tool for people who spend their days addressing trauma."

# CCKids Faces Hard Times, But We're Up for the Challenge

**Carol Deloach, CEO** - For the first time since CCKids began serving the community, we are facing a financial deficit.



This deficit has absolutely nothing to do with our performance or our financial stewardship. In fact, CCKids is the state's top performer as reported late last year in the Department of Children and Families' accountability report. We have been fiscally sound as well accumulating a carry-forward (unspent dollars) of \$2.5 million to use in case of unexpected costs.

I am incredibly proud of the hard work and resultant outcomes that have been achieved for our children and families in Circuit 19.

Unfortunately, our successes appear to have been a significant contributing factor to our current problem.

Our agency - as well as those that cover Citrus and Broward - was excluded from last year's \$150.5 million appropriation of recurring funds - the largest child-welfare funding allocation in recent history.

This happened because an allocation model was used that did not recognize the growing number of children entering our system or give us credit for the excellent job done in reducing the number of children under supervision.

Now the good news.

Our agency has excellent relationships with our legislative delegation, all of whom are aware of our predicament.

We also are working very closely with other Lead Agencies, the Florida Coalition for Children and the Department of Children and Families to make up this year's shortfall through a special process called Back of the Bill funding.

And last week, we had a team in Tallahassee engaging with our entire delegation as well as Sen. Gayle Harrell's appropriations committee. In fact, Sen. Harrell, who is chair of that committee, requested that a representative from the team - as well as those from other impacted Lead Agencies - testify before the committee on the impacts of the allocation model.

I am very hopeful that we will succeed. We are embraced by legislative champions who understand our issues and by our sister CBCs and by our

membership body, the Florida Coalition for Children. The Department also acknowledges our position and is working to help us find a solution.

In the meantime, I have encouraged our staff to keep up the good work of strengthening families, reuniting children with their parents, securing foster-care placements and finding adoptive homes for children.

I understand our responsibility to you, the community, and will keep you informed as we navigate through these challenges.

## Celebrating the Helpers

March is National Social Work Month, and CCKids is celebrating all those who dedicate their professional time to serving others with a month-long social media campaign.

The campaign, which begins today and is being shared throughout the state, features videos from social-work professionals who work in various parts of the child-welfare system. They include case managers, placement specialists and guardians ad litem, to name a few.



Melanie Kranker, pictured here, is featured today on [Facebook](#). She is the behavioral health supervisor for CCKids and also a licensed social worker.

It's important to note that CCKids' campaign features helpers from across the system with a variety of degrees, and not only licensed social workers.

"March is National Social Work Month," said CCKids' Community Relations Director Christina Kaiser. "But we think it's an excellent opportunity to highlight the work of all those who contribute to our system of care - no matter their degree."

Follow us all month long for more videos and insight into the minds and hearts of our social-services professionals - as well as some of the young people whose lives were impacted by them.

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*You know it's spring when the Knit Wits host their annual drive-through baby shower for children in foster care! The Knit Wits are a knitting group of PGA residents. Every spring, they collect new and gently used baby items and donate them to Communities Connected for Kids. Their 2023 event was held earlier this week outside the Island Club, where neighbors drove through and dropped off carloads of diapers, blankets, gift cards and financial donations.*