



Connections - April 19, 2023



*The PGA Knit Wits attended CCKids' 2023 Volunteer Appreciation Breakfast earlier this month. The Knit Wits is a group of knitters who host an annual drive-through baby shower for CCKids, collecting diapers, clothing and other essential items for children in care.*

## **CCKids Honors its Essential Helpers During Volunteer Appreciation Month**



More than 50 people attended CCKids' 2023 Volunteer Appreciation Breakfast earlier this month, marking the first time in several years that the organization has hosted the event.

"We were so excited to bring this event back to the community," said Christina Kaiser, CCKids Community Relations Director. "Between the pandemic and staffing issues, we just haven't been able to do it."

But with the addition of a new outreach team member and more people feeling comfortable in small social settings, Kaiser said it was time to make volunteer appreciation a priority.

The event also marked the addition of a new category to the organization's GEM - Going the Extra Mile - award series. Three individuals and one group were given the Diamond GEM Award: Mia Kirchner, for Youth Volunteer of the Year; Katie Vella, for Staff Volunteer; Amparo Gomez, for Community Volunteer; and It's My Very Own - Midport Church, for Group Volunteer.

"Mia has been at my side, helping me with my end of the Christmas drive for the last six years," said Kaiser, while CEO Carol Deloach and Board Chair Melanie Wiles presented her with the Youth Volunteer of the Year Award. "I didn't have any staff in my department for many years, so Mia's assistance

was mission critical."



Another volunteer in the annual toy drive, Amparo Gomez, was recognized as the Community Volunteer of the Year.

The Christmas drive is a massive undertaking, Kaiser said. CCKids and its partner Guardians for New Futures collect more than 3,000 gifts from four counties and from among more than 100 local businesses, churches, social groups and individuals.

"Amparo coordinates all of that activity," Kaiser said. "she organizes volunteers, organizes and schedules the entire project and makes sure that every child in care gets what they requested."

Vella, CCKids Placement Supervisor, moved from the southwest part of Florida last summer; shortly after, Hurricane Ian struck the very community she had just left, Kaiser said.



"She may have been new, but she certainly wasn't a novice," she said. "She spoke to her supervisor and asked if she could lead the rest of CCKids in a hurricane-relief collection."

Vella coordinated the efforts of staff, collected supplies from throughout the community and then, with the help of staff, drove the supplies there twice and helped with unloading and distribution.



It's My Very Own is a group of women affiliated with the Midport Church who dedicate nearly 30 hours every month making tote bags, filling them with age-appropriate goodies and essential items and delivering them monthly so that children have something of their own when they enter foster care.

"The award for community volunteer of the year was hard, because we have several groups in the community host events and drives on behalf of our children and families throughout the year," Kaiser said. "I can't wait to honor more at our 2024 breakfast."

For more information about how you can get involved, email Kaiser at [Christina.Kaiser@CCKids.net](mailto:Christina.Kaiser@CCKids.net).

*Pictured, from top, are: Mia Kirchner, getting a hug from Christina Kaiser after receiving her award from CEO Carol Deloach and Board Chair Melanie Wiles; Amparo Gomez receiving the diamond award from Chair Wiles; Caryn Toole, Evan Hunsberger and Katie Vella organizing Hurricane Ian supplies; and Kay Jones, receiving the award on behalf of the Midport Church.*

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## Shirts, Chance to Win for Those Who Register

Registration for this year's 1K for Kids & Story Stroll - a community celebration of National Foster Care Month - is now open. The first 100 people to register will get free shirts.

**New this year, all participants who bring new/unused toiletries to the event will be entered into a chance to win a \$50 Visa gift card.**

The event is a 1K walk that can be done at your own pace, anytime between 9 a.m. and noon, Saturday, May 20, at Port St. Lucie's Hillmoor Lake Park, 1957 SE Hillmoor Drive.

Bring the dogs, bring the kids, and take the Story Stroll, a 1K walk along a tree-lined trail dotted with the stories and videos of children and families of the local foster-care community.

Shirts - along with juice provided by a generous donation from [Sunshine Health](#) - will be distributed at the event, located at Port St. Lucie's Hillmoor Lake Park, 1957 SE Hillmoor Drive. We will also have a food truck for anyone who wants to purchase additional snacks.

REGISTER

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