



# Communities Connected *for Kids*

Connections - May 31, 2023



*The difficulties of living in foster care can take a significant toll on children's mental and behavioral health. Up to 80 percent of children in foster care have significant mental health issues, compared to approximately 18-22 percent of the general population. This year, Psi Pi Omega, in collaboration with Project Pink & Green Foundation, supported foster care and mental health awareness by assembling toiletry bags for children in care and bringing them out to the CCKids' 1K for Kids & Story Stroll.*

## Story Stroll Draws Crowd to Raise Awareness for Foster Care

**Port St. Lucie** – More than 100 people attended CCKids' Third Annual 1K for Kids and Story Stroll Saturday, marking a turning point for the foster



care awareness event.

Past events, hosted since 2021 at Port St. Lucie's Hillmoore Lake Park, have drawn fewer than 50 participants.

"I don't know if it was the merchandise, better outreach or just more people getting out after the pandemic, but we saw a nearly 100 percent increase in attendance this year," said Christina Kaiser, community relations director for Communities Connected for Kids, the nonprofit organization that oversees the child-welfare system in Indian River, Martin, Okeechobee and

St. Lucie counties.

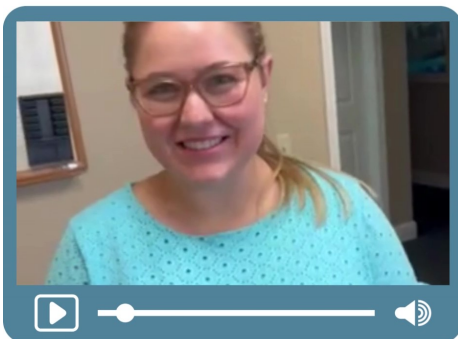
Participants who signed up for and attended the event received a free tee-shirt with a unique 2023 foster care message that reads, "I went 1K for Kids... How far will you go?"

"In the previous two years, we had lots of shirts left over," Kaiser said. "This year, we had plenty of room in our cars for the drive back home."

A prominent feature of the event is 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.

It was all in celebration of National Foster Care Month, celebrated every year in May.

"We want our community to know the children and families who make up foster care," Kaiser said. "Their stories are worth telling, and we think we've created the perfect interactive experience to share them."



Event organizers also dovetailed the event with a toiletry drive called Project Sparkle. Many people brought donations with them to the park, while the local chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha brought bins and boxes full of individual toiletry gift bags for both girls and boys.

CCKids entered the names of those who brought toiletries into a raffle to win a \$50

Visa gift card. We are very happy to announce that Susan Jones is the winner of this raffle! Susan, if you're reading, please email your contact information

to [Christina.Kaiser@CCKids.net](mailto:Christina.Kaiser@CCKids.net). Click the frame to see the drawing.

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*The Communities Connected for Kids Board of Directors and Managing Staff met for a four-hour annual retreat earlier this month to begin strategic planning for the next four years. Much of what was discussed revolved around external affairs and getting Board members more involved with community outreach. One suggestion was to invite staff and community members to join Board members on its External Affairs Committee.*

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June 10th 9am - 2pm

**PRIDEFEST**

*Party in the Park*

Sanhill Crane Park

2355 S.E. Scenic Park PSL, FL

**ALL AGES WELCOME**

## We're Lifting Families Together This June During Reunification Month

**Celebrate Reunification**

Florida Coalition for Children

*"Being with family is what every child wants and we should do all we can to ensure that." - Rose and Brian Bailey, foster & adoptive parents*

*Lifting Families Together*

The families of 174 children in Okeechobee and the Treasure Coast are spending the summer together this year after being reunited during the past year. Those families are stronger and healthier after overcoming the crises in their lives that led to child abuse and neglect.

That's a 29 percent increase from the number of families reunited during the same time period last

year, said Christina Kaiser, community relations director for Communities Connected for Kids. Last year, 135 children were reunited with their families.

Children belong with families, said Jerra Wisecup, licensing and caregiver support specialist. We celebrate our foster families who give children

temporary respite and our adoptive families who offer permanency.

But it's a special cause for celebration when we can return children to their own homes, she said. That's what we celebrate in June, during National Reunification Month.

"Most families recognize that they need the services – the help – we offer," she said. "They work hard and they get through it, stronger, healthier and with healthier coping skills that meet their children's needs."

National Reunification Month recognizes those efforts, as well as the people and institutions supporting the reunification journey.

The community can get involved by submitting words of encouragement to case managers, guardians, caregivers, families - everyone involved in the reunification process - to this online [form](#).

And don't forget to follow our Lifting Families Together campaign on social media. Throughout the month, we will recognize our reunification heroes – case managers, substance abuse and mental-health providers and others in the community who helped make reunification as well as short videos of encouragement from the community.

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**first tee**  
treasure coast



Communities  
Connected  
for Kids

## COME JOIN US

Boys & Girls Clubs St. Lucie County  
Westside Campus

**July 29th at 9 AM**



A morning of golf and  
fun!

- All Ages
- All Skill Levels
- Boys & Girls



To Register:



*SCAN ME*

Communities Connected for Kids | 1860 SW Fountainview Blvd., Ste. 200, Port St. Lucie, FL 34986

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