



Communities Connected *for Kids*

Connections - Aug. 9, 2023



Communities
Connected
for Kids

2023 State of Our Children

MANY OF OUR CHALLENGES CAN BE ATTRIBUTED TO POST-PANDEMIC ENTRY INTO CARE AS WELL AS GREATER TRAUMA-BASED BEHAVIORS. WE HAVE ADDED SERVICES TO ADDRESS THESE ISSUES AND ARE HOPEFUL FOR BETTER OUTCOMES IN THE COMING YEAR.

Successes

- 30% more kids adopted over goal
- 4% More kids living with kin
- 8% more relatives licensed

Challenges

- 22% more kids in care
- 14% more removals
- 44% more kids in group care
- 8% more kids in foster care
- 16% fewer foster homes

CCKids is a community-based lead agency contracted by the Florida Department of Children & Families. For more comprehensive data reports go to the Office of Child & Family Well-Being Dashboard at myflfamilies.com.

More Children Coming Into Care Builds Pressure for System

Port St. Lucie – Communities Connected for Kids' 2023 State of Our Children - an annual report created to give the community a general overview of the local child-welfare system - is revealing some post-pandemic growing pains.

The number of children entering care during the past 12 months increased by 157 children, from 707 in 2022 to 864 as of June 30. That's a significant 22 percent increase, CCKids Community Relations Director Christina Kaiser said.

Making the increase more significant is the fact that many of those children have greater behavioral issues stemming from deeper trauma.

"So we have more children coming into care with a greater acuity of issues," Kaiser said. "And that impacts other measures, like the number of children who are removed from home and the number of caregivers willing to become licensed foster parents."

In fact, the number of children served out of their homes increased on average by 32, from 478 in 2022 to 510 this year. While the number isn't dramatic, CCKids officials are concerned the increase may be the beginning of a trend with wide-reaching impact.

For example, when the number of children coming into care increases, but the number of foster homes doesn't keep up, more children are likely to end up in group homes.

That's exactly what happened this year, Kaiser said.

"The number of children in shelter jumped from an average 44 last year to 65 this year," she said.

While group care is an essential part of the child-welfare community, it should not be used as a placement of last resort. That's because most children do better in a home environment. It's also significantly more expensive to the system of care.

So why are more children entering care this year? The answer is complicated, but child-welfare professionals have known for years that socio-economic and political shifts create pressure on families that often result in increased substance abuse, domestic violence and mental illness - the three big drivers of child abuse.

Three years of a health crisis, partial shut downs and limited community interaction - combined with the rising cost of living - may be part of the problem.

"We also saw a significant decrease in children in care during those three

years," Kaiser said. "And now we are seeing what might be considered an expected increase following the pandemic."

It's not all bad news, though.

The 2023 State of Our Children points to some positive trends that could have a tremendous impact on the system of care for years to come.

"As in previous years, our community of care excels at finding adoptive homes for children," Kaiser said. This year marks the sixth consecutive year that the local area - thanks to the hard work of CCKids' adoption provider, Children's Home Society - has exceeded its annual adoption goal.

And although the number of licensed foster homes dropped, the number of relative caregivers who opt to become licensed to care for their own kin continues to increase.

This year, 118 relatives were licensed compared to 109 in 2022. That's an 8 percent increase that allows more children to stay close to home - and removes some strain from the area's network of foster homes.

Interested in becoming a licensed foster parent? It's obvious we need you! Call (772) 873-7800 and ask for Jerra to get started. You can also find more information about CCKids at [CCKids.net](https://www.cckids.net).



August is Family Fun Month

As the sunniest days of the year stretch out before us, there's no better time to embrace the spirit of togetherness and celebrate the bonds that make life truly meaningful.

August is here, and with it Family Fun Month—a whole 31 days dedicated to creating cherished memories with our loved ones.

In a world that often moves at a dizzying pace, Family Fun Month serves as a gentle reminder to pause, connect, and savor the simple pleasures of life. It's a time to put aside the demands of work, the distractions of screens, and the busyness of schedules, and instead, focus on what truly matters: spending quality time with family.

There's no one-size-fits-all approach to celebrating—whether your family is big or small, near or far, there's a myriad of ways to make the most of this special time.

- 1. Outdoor Adventures:** Embrace the beauty of nature by going on hikes, picnics, or bike rides together. Whether it's a stroll in the park, a day at the beach, or a camping trip under the stars, the great outdoors provides the perfect backdrop for bonding and creating lasting memories.
- 2. Creative Escapades:** Unleash your artistic side with craft sessions, DIY projects, or even a collaborative family mural. Let creativity flow and watch as everyone's individuality shines through in colorful and imaginative ways.
- 3. Culinary Delights:** Turn your kitchen into a culinary playground. Experiment with new recipes, bake sweet treats, or even have a family cook-off. The process of cooking and enjoying a meal together fosters a sense of unity and joy.
- 4. Game Nights:** From classic board games to video game marathons, game nights bring out laughter, friendly competition, and a healthy dose of good-natured rivalry.
- 5. Storytime and Movie Nights:** Gather 'round for storytelling sessions or cozy movie nights. These simple activities allow for shared moments of laughter, suspense, and heartfelt discussions.
- 6. Acts of Kindness:** Dedicate some time to spreading kindness as a family. Whether it's volunteering, organizing a community clean-up, or writing letters to those in need, working together to make the world a better place is a heartwarming experience.

Follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#) this month as we show you how our CCKids families have fun!

First Tee Treats Local Children to Morning of Golf



Children in care on the Treasure Coast were treated to a fun day of golf, thanks to [First Tee](#), the [Boys and Girls Clubs of St. Lucie County](#) and Fort Pierce's [Westside Church](#).

First Tee, an organization that teaches life lessons through the game of golf, hosted a special event on July 29 for families and local children served by CCKids' system of care in Indian River, Martin, Okeechobee and St. Lucie counties.

Instructors spent the morning with the children, helping them with their golfing efforts. The morning event took place at the campus of Westside Church in Fort Pierce. CCKids said 19 children registered for the event.

"We think the interest is there, and we hope to have a larger reach next year," said CCKids Martin County Manager Denise Natalizio, an avid golfer who made the event possible. "We're excited to do it again."

Summer is School Supplies Time!



[Keller Williams Realty](#) organized a school-supplies drive among its members and donated enough book bags for at least 50 children. Here are



This little one helped collect school supplies with her grandmother, Tammy Eiseman, who organized the Keller Williams drive.

three of those children, leaving
CCKids' Kinship offices with brand
new bags for school!



CCKids' clinical team (and a couple of up-and-coming clinicians) volunteered for a shift at the [United Way of St. Lucie County's Back to School Bash](#), which provides school supplies to local classroom and to CCKids for children in the dependency system.



Children from [Surfside Church](#) help to bring school supplies to CCKids' Fort Pierce offices. The children are part of the Mark Young Family. Young is the church pastor and also serves on the CCKids Board of Directors.



Foster Parent Ilena Honas, a past recipient of CCKids' Going the Extra Mile - or GEM - award, also contributed to the school-supplies drive. [Translations USA](#), in Stuart, and several St. Lucie County branches of [Seacoast Bank](#) - pictured below - hosted collections to benefit children in care.



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