



# Communities Connected *for Kids*

Connections - Nov. 2 , 2023



*From left, News Channel 12 Anchor Liz Quirantes interviews CCKids Caregiver Allie Hamilton for an upcoming segment of Forever Family. The segment runs every Tuesday during the WPEC CBS 12 5 p.m. newscast.*

## Four Families, Seven Children, One Amazing Success Story

**Port St. Lucie** – Large sibling groups are tough for the child-welfare community. They get split up. There aren't enough homes willing to keep them together. Separation often means disconnection.

But not always.

Sometimes, even after being separated, the system works beyond expectations.

That happened recently when a sibling group of seven children - separated into three foster homes - found their way back home thanks to the partnership between their respective caregivers and their family.

They all worked together; if one child had a birthday, all the children came to celebrate. If there was a trip to the park, everyone was invited. The caregiver families also had multiple phone calls with the children's family, assuring them that the children were safe and staying in touch.

The children in Mig McDonald's home were placed in a special academic program and bloomed in their education - so much so, that when it was time to reunify, their mother agreed to let them finish out the school year at Ms. McDonald's home.

All the children are now home, stronger and healthier than ever, in large part to the fact that the family now has a support system of caregivers.

The caregivers - Allison Hamilton, Jocelyne Fimiano and Mig McDonald - were nominated for statewide recognition and recently won as a team CCKids' Topaz GEM (Going the Extra Mile) award.

The also were featured in a recent taping of Forever Family, a program that leverages the power of local media to raise awareness for the local foster-care system and to help find adoptive homes for children.

"This is exactly the kind of outcome we want for all children in care," said Christina Kaiser, CCKids' community relations director. "Our foster care network is trained to work closely with biological families to ensure children retain important family connections and to help soften the transitions into and out of care."



Looking for a Way to Help? Click [Here](#).

*There are so many ways to help children in foster care this year. Click the picture above for more information. There, you will find links to become a sponsor in our Making Christmas Bright drive, a program for businesses and larger social groups. You also will find a portal to our online gift drive, which is ideal for families and smaller groups looking for ways to help.*

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## CCKids Commitment to Excellence Reveals Itself in GEM Awards

**Fort Pierce** – Communities Connected for Kids congratulates Larry Olson and Lawanda Reason for winning this quarter's Going the Extra Mile – or GEM – Award.

Olson and Reason won the award, an honor given to staff and caregivers for excellence in service to children and families in Okeechobee and the Treasure Coast, for the period spanning July through September.

Reason, a case manager in St. Lucie County, received the award in the Emerald Division, which covers case-management staff. She was nominated by her colleague, Lacey Hamrick, for her generosity to one of the children on her caseload.

At the beginning of the school year, one of the children on Reason's caseload had shoes with broken soles. When she asked him what type of shoes he wanted, he asked for a pair Jordans.

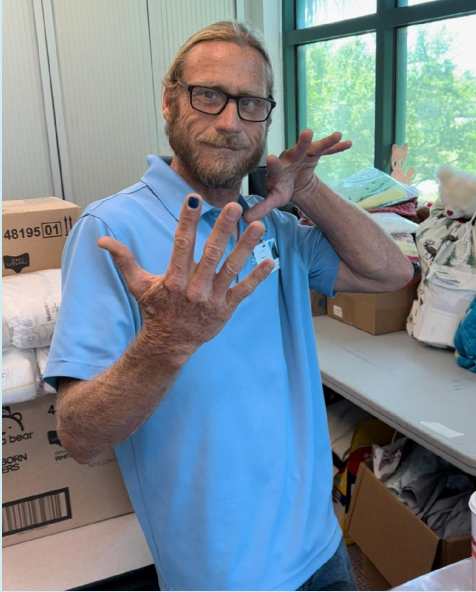
"Lawanda didn't think twice about buying them for him," Hamrick said. "She used her hard-earned money to provide this child with the shoes he wanted. "She has a heart of gold."



Olson, one of only two CCKids IT specialists, received his GEM award in the Ruby Division, which recognizes the work of administrative and program staff. He was nominated by multiple people, including the entire training department.

Olson has consistently been a source of support for the training department despite multiple moves, challenging situations, and changing equipment needs.

Most recently, a technical glitch threatened



to prevent trainees from completing a very important test and delay their start in case management. Olson came in, solved all of the problems and ensured a smooth, calm, testing environment for trainees.

“Larry willingly took on the additional tasks involved with the move of our HQ office,” said Tammy Tappan, CCKids Information Systems Administrator. “By doing this work, he clearly worked outside of his 'normal' job duties to ensure that the new HQ office was set up properly, while also saving CCKids the cost of hiring an outside contractor for much of the work.

Olson took on yet another additional task when CCKids discontinued its contract with the vendor who maintained the agency’s intranet and internal systems. He learned coding and special systems and is maintaining those systems until a more long-term solution is found, Tappan said.

CCKids’ Board of Directors will recognize Olson and Reason during its November Board meeting. Each employee will receive a \$100 bonus and a plaque.

We are happy to take nominations from the community. If you know a CCKids employee who has gone above and beyond, let us know. Click the link to the nomination form.

*Top picture is Lawanda Reason; bottom picture is Larry Olson, painting a nail for the MANicure Challenge, a program in April meant to raise awareness for the prevention of child abuse.*

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## Martin County Manager Represents CCKids During Special DC Visit

Martin County Manager Denise Natalizio recently participated in critical advocacy training provided by Social Current, the accreditation body formerly known as COA.

The training - called SPARK 2023 - was hosted in Washington, D.C., to prepare participants from throughout the nation for face-to-face meetings with members of Congress.

Natalizio was part of a contingent of conference attendees from Florida and Illinois who met with Rep. Janice Schakowsky (D-Illinois), whose aid is picture above, center, as well as Rep. Brian Mast (R-Florida) and Sen. Marco Rubio (R-Florida).

They discussed the Streamlining Federal Grants Act, an act designed to improve the effectiveness and performance of federal grants and the application and reporting process.

## CCKids Team Packs the House



*CCKids participated in the 2023 Pack the House - a food-packing event organized last weekend by the Treasure Coast Food Bank in preparation for the busy holiday season ahead. Our team included Permanency Director Lesa Sims and her team of permanency specialists, Stacy Shearer, Ashley Coburn and Jessica Abadia. Treasure Coast Food Bank @ tcfoodbank*

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*From left are Licensing Coordinator Kenyetta Louis, caregiver Debbie Gangaram and Kinship Navigator Rose Bailey - with donations from the Hands and Feet of the Treasure Coast.*

# No Tricks, All Treats Thanks to Community Generosity

**Port St. Lucie** - There were no tricks this Halloween season for local kinship caregivers – just a friendly knock on the door and a bag of treats.

This week, CCKids’ kinship navigators distributed 22 bags of food to the families they serve throughout Okeechobee and the Treasure Coast. It was all thanks to an unexpected donation from Hands and Feet of the Treasure Coast, an organization that provides resources to foster parents and relatives caring for family members in CCKids’ child-welfare system.

Hands and Feet had extra food donated to its pantry, so the organization’s coordinator – Kristin West – offered to share the abundance with the CCKids’ Kinship Navigator program.

The program provides support to relatives and others caring for children in the child-welfare community and helps them access local resources to ensure those children don’t move further into the system or into licensed foster care.

“Our kinship families often have urgent needs for financial assistance or other tangible goods,” said program supervisor Rachel Khail. “Because of these donation, caregivers get to experience relief and support as they work tirelessly to keep children in safe homes where they feel bonded.”

She added that strong partnerships with community provides like Hands and Feet allow the entire child-welfare system to better serve families.

Khail’s team spent the week sorting and packing food and other donated goods into family bags. Families who could pick up their bags came to CCKids headquarters in Port St. Lucie Wednesday, while the remaining bags are being delivered by staff throughout the rest of the week.

The Hands and Feet project began serving local families in July of 2022. “When we get a request, we go to the community first,” West said. If that doesn’t work, the request is posted to a following of Amazon “wish listers,” people who follow the project and purchase needed items.

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