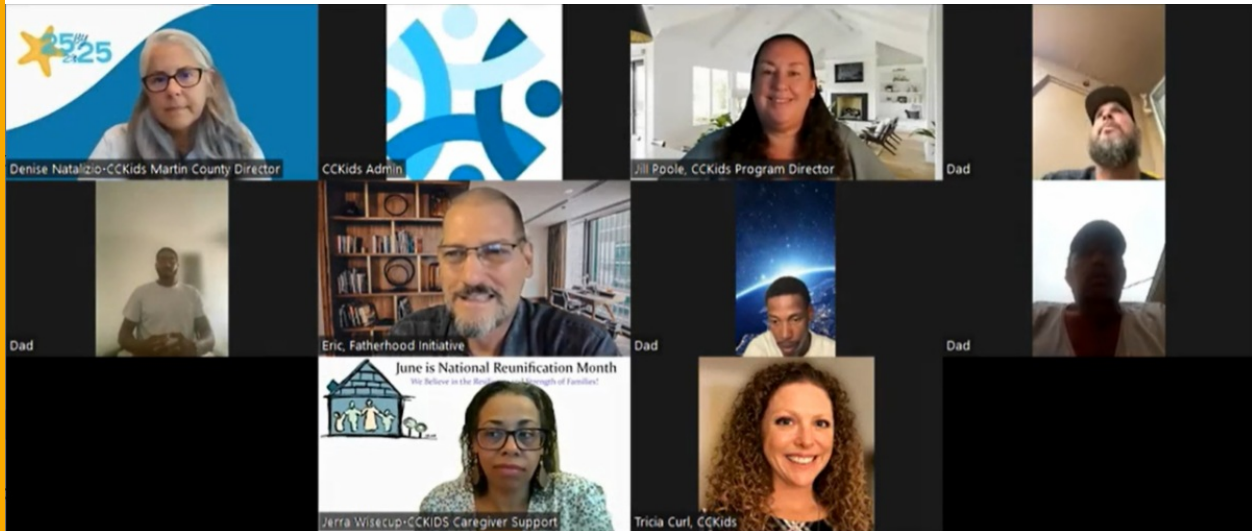




Connections - Juneteenth



CCKids renewed its series of live-streamed roundtable events earlier this month with the Fatherhood Roundtable, an open and frank discussion about the local child-welfare system and the dads who learned to navigate it. Unfortunately, the livestream was rendered inaccessible due to technical issues that have since been resolved. Click the image above to see a two-minute highlights reel from the event.

Early Services Program is Supported and Funded by the Governor

Port St. Lucie – A proposed program to keep more families together as they navigate the dependency system that received widespread support from local legislators has made it safely through the budget and veto process.

The program - called the Early Services Engagement Program - is now officially green-lit for funding.

"The Early Services Engagement Program is designed to prevent children from being removed from their home," said CCKids Chief Operating Officer Cheri Sheffer.

It does that by reaching out to families earlier in the investigative process.

There are two major parts to the state's dependency system. There's child protective investigations, which is handled by the state Department of Children and Families. And there are dependency case management services, which is provided by Communities Connected for Kids.

CPI's have a complex job identifying risk and providing immediate safety actions to prevent removals, Sheffer said. Sometimes, the number of diverse and complex investigations makes it challenging.

"The early engagement program will allow us to engage more immediately in this extremely high risk scenario, and provide more comprehensive oversight of the families that are most at risk of removal while the CPI finalizes the required elements of their investigation."

CCKids' program is based on a successful model in Jacksonville that has already received considerable support among legislators. The program will focus on St. Lucie County and if successful, can be replicated in Indian River, Martin and Okeechobee counties.

"Keeping children in home by helping their families with early access to intensive services reduces trauma and improves outcomes for children and families and for the community of care," Sheffer said.

Special funding requests for the program were sponsored in the senate by Sen. Gayle Harrell and in the house by Rep. Dana Trabulsy.

The contract for the program is being finalized now.

Two Years In, Family Finders is Doing Exactly What it Says



By Lesa Sims

CCKids' Director of Permanency and Well Being.

The Family Finders program has been a part of CCKids for about two years under the Permanency and Well-Being department. The program's goal - and the work of all program staff - is to research, identify and locate family connections for children in licensed foster care.

We believe every connection is important for our children in license care, and these connections contribute to a healthy well-being for the child. Family Finders staff conduct exhaustive searches for relatives and other people close to children in foster care. This includes relatives, godparents, family friends, adult siblings and more.

We strive to establish ongoing connections between the child and the known adult, regardless of whether they will be placed with them or not. The ultimate goal, however, is to nurture these connections into stable placements for children while they are in care.

To date, we have identified 98 connections, completed nine home studies, nine Interstate Commerce requests for children whose connections are outside the state of Florida and two Out of County Services requests for children whose connections are outside of the Treasure Coast and Okeechobee.

As the director of this wonderful program, I am very proud to share a couple of success stories:

Our first story is about a local aunt who lost touch with her family but was rediscovered through the Family Finders process. Her nephew had been in care for many years, resulting in a lost connection. Our program was able to locate a maternal aunt through various search methods. Once the aunt was located, Family Finder completed a home study, and it was approved. The youth is now placed with his aunt and cousins and is doing well.

The second story is about a teenager who was adopted by his paternal grandparents at a young age. After the boy's grandfather died, his grandmother surrendered him to the Florida Department of Children and Families; she informed the department that the young man's biological parents were deceased.

After many searches, phone calls, texts, and letters were sent out to potential family or connections for this young man, it was discovered that the young man's biological parents were not deceased. After more searching, Family Finders was able to locate the young man's biological mother and grandmother through a letter.

When mom received the letter, she informed Family Finders that she had been searching for her son for the last 10 years. Mom is currently writing letters to this young man, and the young man is currently working with his therapist to help him process these new relationships.

These are the stories that drive our work. With more connections, we will have many more happy endings.

Everyone Can Get in on the Mission in June During Reunification Month

By Jerra Wisecup
Caregiver Support & Licensing Specialist

In our world of child welfare, we have many initiatives and causes for celebration, but June is special. In June, we celebrate National Reunification Month!














You can help improve reunification outcomes by supporting relationships through small actions like those outlined in our June Reunification Month Action Calendar below. We believe these actions, which shouldn't take more than a few minutes of your time, will have long lasting effects for our community, our caregivers and the children and families we serve. Just click the calendar to get started.



As a bonus this year, email Jerra, Jill, and Tricia no later than Tuesday, July 9, 2024 at 4 p.m. to be entered into a raffle to win a \$50 Gift Card—anyone may enter to win!

The Winner will be announced July 12. Your email must include at least five actions from our Reunification Month Action Calendar that you completed in the Month of June to be entered into the raffle. Whether you complete just one or all of our suggested 30 action items (**we LOVE overachievers**), or come up with your own, the idea behind this Action Calendar is to support our efforts to help families heal by spreading encouragement and positivity within our local child welfare system.

As always, we thank each of you for what you do to support families and children touched by our system of care. Please make sure to forward and share this information with your staff, coworkers, caregivers, birth parents, youth, child welfare professionals, and other community partners.

June Reunification Month 2024				Important dates for Reunification Month:			
				June 1	Spread the word about Reunification Month by posting on your social media pages!		
				June 10	Click HERE to join us on Facebook LIVE at 6:30PM for a Fatherhood Roundtable!		
				June 26	Click HERE to join us on ZOOM at 12PM for a LIVE Moment of Cheer! Meeting ID: 851 8887 5725 Passcode: 420382		
MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN	
Use these hashtags daily, throughout the month of June to help raise awareness! #CelebrateReunification #ReunificationMonth #CelebrateFamily	Remember to email us with at least FIVE actions you completed this month for the chance to win a \$50 gift card!				Spread the word about Reunification Month by posting on your social media pages. 	Help us spread awareness for our upcoming Fatherhood Roundtable by sharing the event HERE !!	
3	4	5	6	7	8	9	
Call/text a birth parent and tell them some of the ways you have seen them change that are not necessarily case plan tasks. 	Call/text a birth parent words of encouragement! 	Call/text a Caregiver and ask what you can do to help him/her today.	Encourage a birth parent to record themselves reading a book for their child(ren) and play it for the child(ren) to hear/see.	Text a Child Protective Investigator, "Thank you for working hard to keep our children safe."	Make a birth parent smile! Send a funny quote, meme, or joke. 	Text a birth parent a smiley or silly face photo of his/her child(ren).	
10	11	12	13	14	15	16	
 Join us on Facebook LIVE at 6:30PM for our Fatherhood Roundtable!	Call/text a Case Manager and ask what you can do to help make his/her day easier today! 	Text a Family Support Worker, "Thank you for making sure our kids can maintain important relationships."	Send a "Thank You" note/email/ocard to a CLS Attorney, Parent Attorney, or Judge. 	Get together with friends, family, staff, colleagues to create and share your own Moment of Cheer with us! from the CCKIDS Facebook page and CELEBRATE reunification with us!	Ask a birth parent to send a family photo for their child(ren) to see whenever feeling homesick.	FATHER'S DAY!!! Send a birth father a photo of his child(ren). 	
17	18	19	20	21	22	23	
Call/text/email a Guardian Ad Litem, tell them how much you appreciate his/her partnership! 	Send a birth parent a masterpiece (artwork, drawing, painting, story, or poem) completed by his/her child.	Call/text/email a Supervisor, Program Director, or County Manager to compliment one of their staff and his/her hard work.	Text a case manager, "Thank you for the late nights and long hours that you put in for our kids!"	Make a caregiver smile or laugh by sending a funny photo, joke, or meme! 	Email/call/text a Placement, Licensing, or Kinship worker to thank them for his/her hard work!	Text/email your favorite motivational quote/poem to a Child Protective Investigator or Case Manager.	
24	25	26	27	28	29	30	
Text a smiley face emoji to a Case Manager (no extra words needed). 😊	Text/email your favorite motivational quote/poem to a Child Protective Investigator or Case Manager.	Join us on Zoom at 12PM for a LIVE Moment of Cheer!  Meeting ID: 851 8887 5725 Passcode: 420382	Call/text a birth parent and ask what you can do to help make his/her day easier today!	Share our Moment of Cheer from the CCKIDS Facebook page and CELEBRATE reunification with us! 	Text a caregiver, "Thank you for the many daily sacrifices that you make for our kids."	Send a "Thank You" note/email/ocard to a therapist, or other service provider who has helped make reunification possible!	



Inside the Mission: Profiles in Foster Care

Port St. Lucie – Communities Connected for Kids unveiled its Profiles in Foster Care series earlier this spring.

The project, which introduces local foster parents to the community through a series of short bios and pictures, is also a product of CCKids' #25by2025 campaign to

add 25 foster homes by 2025.

"We hope that by sharing these foster-care stories and experiences, others may be inspired to consider their own foster-care journey," said Christina Kaiser, CCKids community relations director.

Today, we are pleased to introduce Trish Crawford, a very new foster parent licensed in January with her husband, Billy.

Trish and Billy have four adult biological children in their 30s and have fostered two teenage girls from their home in Fort Pierce.

"We decided to become foster parents after hearing the statistics for teens that age out of the system and how many become addicts, homeless or end up in prison," Trish says. "This tugged on our hearts and we felt the need to help.

"My advise for anyone looking to foster would be to pray on it and then pray some more.

"It's not an easy decision but there are moments that are rewarding.

"Even if you only do it for a little bit you can make a difference in a child's life."

If you are interested in being a foster parent, call (772) 873-7800, and ask for Jerra Wisecup.

Need Camp? Here Are a Few Offerings in St. Lucie County

ALPI CAT Summer Enrichment

2202 Ave. Q, Fort Pierce, (772) 466-2631

The CAT Summer Enrichment Program is designed to bring hands on learning and summer fun together to create a fun and safe learning environment for children ages 5-14.

The ARC of St. Lucie County

3361 S. Jenkins Ave., Fort Pierce, (772) 468-7879

Provides summer activities for youth with special needs, including weekly field trips, arts and low ratios, to provide appropriate supervision for children ages 3-22.

Boys & Girls Club of St. Lucie County

BGC Summer, (772) 460-9918 X 107

Provides activities for youth with varied creative arts activities, educational enrichment, college/career preparation, and digital/performing arts. There are several locations throughout the county.

End It! Arts Based Summer Experience

2810 S. US1, Fort Pierce, (772) 302-3731

Provides summer arts-based learning programming for 6th-12th graders with varied creative arts activities. Teens will work on Disney's Aladdin Musical Production over the 8-week program.

Exceptional Academy for Differently Abled Learners

8557 Commerce Centre Dr., Port St. Lucie, (772) 777-4830

Designed for children with special needs in a way that allows learners to maintain consistency in their daily routines.

Florida International University

11350 SW Village Parkway, Port St. Lucie, (772) 345-4800

five-week summer internship for junior and senior high-school students to experience first-hand the process involved in biomedical sciences.

Frontline for Kids

309 S. 7th Street, Fort Pierce, (772) 464-0100

focuses on educational enrichment, leadership, positive decision-making and career exploration, serving children 5-17.

Future Generations

3300 Ave. L, Fort Pierce, (772) 528-9931

Provides summer activities where youth have the opportunity to create sounds, learn, and play instruments in addition to various learning programs.

Helping People Succeed

3361 S. Jenkins Ave., Fort Pierce, (772) 320-0791

Specialized summer programming for children diagnosed with emotional, behavioral and learning disorders.

Lindsay School of the Arts

710 Orange Ave., Fort Pierce, (772) 342-8651

Performing arts summer program activities for kids 7-18, including dance, drama, art, music and creative writing.

Multi-Cultural Resource Center

302 N. 23rd St., Fort Pierce, (772) 672-3710

Summer program for youth providing fun educational activities for children ages 5-13.

Save Our Children

464 N. 9th Street, Fort Pierce, (772) 370-5420

Provides fun learning along with games and crafts for kids 5-13.

Sunrise Theatre Foundation

117 S. 2nd St., Fort Pierce, (772) 461-4775

In partnership with Stage Fright Academy, two three-week long camps will provide a performing arts experience for youth.

St. Lucie County Parks and Rec

1306 Ave. M, Fort Pierce, (772) 462-1991

Provides educational and recreational summer program for ages 5-14 designed to enhance learning and skill building.

YMCA of the Treasure Coast

1301 SW Bayshore Blvd., Port St. Lucie, (772) 878-7337

Summer programming in multiple locations that include the arts, sports, gardening and field trips along with weekly trips to the pool for ages 5-13.

Communities Connected for Kids | 549 NW Lake Whitney Pl. Ste. 204 | Port St. Lucie, FL
34986 US

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