



Communities Connected *for Kids*

Connections - Oct. 31, 2024

Happy Halloween!



Communities Connected for Kids' CEO Carol Deloach, middle, and COO Cheri Sheffer meet with Rep. John Snyder to discuss the state of local child welfare, including funding issues that continue to challenge the local system of care.

CCKids Releases 2024 State of Our Children

STATE OF OUR CHILDREN



18%

DECREASE in the number of children under supervision this year.

The amount of children removed from their home decreased this year.



31%

DECREASE in the number of children sheltered.



15%

INCREASE in the number of children exiting out of home care (going back home, adopted, etc.)



OUR DEFICIT BY 2025

\$2.4 million

Funding issues will begin to impact programming without intervention. We are working with the Department of Children and Families and the Florida legislature to correct this issue.

Early Engagement

We advocated for and received special funding from the state legislature to create the Early Services Engagement Program. The program will reduce the number of children removed from home by bringing services to families at a much earlier point in the dependency process. We expect a near-immediate return on investment and impact to our out-of-home-care population.



Communities
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Port St. Lucie – Communities Connected for Kids released its 2024 State of Our Children, and, despite the threat of a looming deficit, the kids are alright.

In fact, the number of children entering care slowed significantly during the past 12 months, bringing the total number of children in care down by 18 percent, while another significant decrease was realized in the number of children sheltered (generally speaking, the first step to being removed from home.)

Numbers continued to go in the right direction regarding children leaving care. CCKids saw a 15 percent increase in the number of those

children who left foster or group care to return home or who were adopted.

And because a \$2.4 million deficit is expected by 2025, the new Early Services Engagement Program was set up through a special legislative appropriation - a move that means the program could be launched outside CCKids' existing budget. The program will help prevent children from entering deeper-end services and is expected to pay for itself within two years, potentially lowering costs throughout the system.

CCKids' financial challenges are due to the way state funds are distributed among Florida's child-welfare lead agencies. The model is designed in a way that financially punishes agencies that are successful in key indicators, such as the number of children moved to permanency or who are prevented from entering deep-end services.

Currently, the state Department of Children and Families is working with CCKids and the state's other lead agencies to design a different funding model.

Community Goes All In for Special Thanksgiving Luncheon

By Christina Kaiser
Community Relations Director

Communities Connected for Kids
unveiled its Co-Parenting

Thanksgiving Luncheon in 2019 to give families the opportunity to celebrate the holiday with their children in foster care.

Like many things launched just before the COVID-19 pandemic, subsequent luncheons were put on the backburner - until now.

We are so proud to bring back this wonderful, mission-focused event in 2024 and even prouder of the community that is stepping up to help us fund it.

A single ask on Facebook has already resulted in more than \$2,000 in sponsorships and donations, which will be used to buy turkeys, hams and all the Thanksgiving dressings, as well as providing fun activities for attending families. We will highlight those sponsors in the days to come, on our Facebook and Instagram accounts and in future newsletters.

I am searching for pretty words to tell you why this event is so important to us. But it occurs to me that those words may not be necessary. This event works because of how simple it is, because most people - lucky people - understand the importance of family, connection and second chances.

This event allows children to share a meal and a few hours of fun with the most important people in their lives: their families and their caregivers. It strengthens bonds between caregiver and family, making later transitions easier for the children who love them all, and demonstrates that people can come back from their mistakes with help and support.

To me, it's the most mission-focused event we host all year. I'm so happy to be part of it, and I'm very, very happy that so many in the community see it the same way.

The Co-Parenting Thanksgiving Luncheon is scheduled for Nov. 16 and will host eight families by invitation. Our sponsorship levels are \$250 and \$100, but donations in any amount can be made via our PayPal account, which you can access [HERE](#).



Aspiring Chef Honored for Advocacy

Local son Jamar "Jesepi" King was recognized October 16 as Outstanding Youth Advocate during the 2024 Palm Beach Advocates for Children Awards.



The awards were presented by Florida's Children First, a statewide organization dedicated to giving voice to children and young adults in foster care.

King, a quite, driven young man who rides miles on a bicycle to get to work and school every day, was in CCKids' foster care system from age 7 to 9 and then again from age 14 through his high-school graduation.

"There are a lot of good things and a lot of things that can be improved," said King, regarding foster care. "A lot of kids are still kids when they age out."

That's why King joined Florida Youth SHINE, an arm of Florida's Children First that mobilizes young people to advocate for issues important to children in care.

For example, Youth SHINE will advocate for housing and housing supports in the next legislative session.

King's long-term plans include owning his own food truck. He learned how to cook - and developed a talent for it - while living in a group home.

"I didn't always like what some of the house parents would cook, so I just started messing around in the kitchen," he said, adding that his interest in cooking was supported by the house parents; he was later hired by a five-star, beachside restaurant.

His specialties are pastas, Asian cuisine and desserts.

"I make a lot of cookies and cinnamon rolls," he said.

Pictured above are, from left, Margie Dotson, Jamar King and Cheryl Brown.

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