



Communities Connected *for Kids*

Connections - Jan. 22, 2025



Jordan Bebout, CCKids' community resources coordinator, joins the board of directors for the Young Professionals of Martin County, a networking group that helps promote professional development among younger workers. Bebout, far left, was one of three new members installed last week during the group's annual installation gala. Networking has helped CCKids increase the number of volunteers, sponsors and donations.

Finding Affordable Housing is Tough; CCKids Tries to Make it Easier



Stuart – The housing market is tough for everyone, but it's especially difficult for young people just trying to get a start in the world – especially for those leaving the foster care system.

That's why Communities Connected for Kids, the organization that oversees the child-welfare community in Okeechobee and the Treasure Coast, created the position of housing specialist in 2024.

The position is one of three in the state of Florida, funded as part of a three-year grant and pilot program by the state Department of Children and Families.

"We received this grant because affordable housing has been recognized as a major crisis on the Treasure Coast," said Caryn Toole, director for CCKids' Road to Success program, which prepares teens and young people in foster care for independence.

Frank Avilla was hired to the position in the fall of 2024. As housing specialist, he is responsible for serving young adults transitioning out of foster care by focusing on building community relationships, identifying affordable, safe and community housing and exploring new and existing fund sources to support future housing initiatives.

He has a long history of partnership building on the Treasure Coast, having worked 10 years for Children's Home Society as adoptions marketing specialist and for seven years at Hibiscus Children's Center as director of the organization's Career Pathways to Independence program.

"I have a passion to help meet the basic, and sometimes complex, needs of our young adults as they age out of the state foster care system," Avilla said. "To be able to assist them in securing safe and affordable housing while they're still trying to find themselves in this world is incredibly rewarding to me."

Among the first orders of business for Avilla is connecting with people who can help or who would be interested in becoming host homes for young adults. For more information, email Frank.Avilla@cckids.net.

Inside the Mission: *Antonia Rocks a Masters*

Tallahassee – As a young person who spent

much of her childhood in foster care, Antonia Fede received federal funding that would help her make a successful transition into independence while also navigating the COVID-19 pandemic.

She budgeted carefully and used what she needed. And with the rest, she purchased school supplies for children in foster care so that they, too, find success.

That's just one example of the leadership skills and sense of community engagement that Antonia Fede, who goes by Tonia, is bringing with her as she launches into independence with a shiny new degree.



Tonia graduated last fall from Florida State University with a masters in both social work and public administration.

She did it in one year, and she did it with a perfect GPA.

A former resident of both St. Lucie and Indian River counties, she earned an associate's degree from Indian River State College and is now doing a post-graduate internship at FSU to earn her social work license.

"I have been in and out of care growing up throughout my life. I have always had a passion for helping those around the world, standing up for what's right, and most importantly those in need. I feel as though elders and children are the most mistreated in society."

Tonia said she wants to give back to the community that helped her when she was in foster care. She says she is especially grateful to a former case manager and her adoptive mother, who she credits for guidance and keeping her motivated through college.

"Words are not even enough to express how much I'm thankful," she said.



The Good & the Sad of Recent Provider Changes

Lisa McBride, RN,BSN
Nurse Care Coordinator

First, the very good news: Sunshine Health has a new transportation vendor that started January 1. Called Alivi, this vendor's transportation service is a covered benefit on the Sunshine health insurance plan.

Sunshine members can have unlimited trips per month for medical and dental

appointments and to pick up prescriptions at the pharmacy. In addition, Sunshine Health also provides up to three roundtrip rides per month for social outings, classes and the like.

Sunshine members can schedule these rides using the contact information below:

- To schedule a routine ride, call Alivi reservations at 1-844-352-0414 (TTY 711) between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. Eastern Monday through Friday. Trip requests must be made 24 hours in advance.
- Here is the weblink with all the information on this covered benefit: <https://www.sunshinehealth.com/members/medicaid/benefits-services/transportation-services/alivi-faq.html>

Remember—if you are under 18, you must have an adult ride with you.

Now for the sad news: Longtime mental health provider, Suncoast Mental Health Center, will no longer provide services beginning February 14. The following is a community letter from our friends at Suncoast:

Dear Community Partner,

After careful consideration and due to financial challenges, we regret to inform you that Suncoast Mental Health Center, Inc. will be closing its doors permanently on February 14, 2025. This decision comes after 27 years of dedicated service to the community, providing vital mental health services and support since 1998.

*Any clients needing to access their medical records are encouraged to contact: **MedicalRecordsRequest@smhcinc.org**.*

We are deeply grateful for your partnership and trust in referring clients to our agency over the years, and thank you for your understanding as we assist our clients and community partners through this transition.

Recruitment Campaign Greet New Year with Twist

Communities Connected for Kids ended 2024 a few families short of its 25by2025 goal to recruit 25 new foster homes by January.

In total, 23 foster homes were added in 2024, with 14 added after the official campaign start in May.

That's a good start, says Jill Poole, licensing and caregiver support director for CCKids.

"I am very optimistic that we will surpass our goal by continuing the campaign into 2025," she said.

It's an easy transition for the campaign, moving away from 25 homes *by* 2025 to 25 homes *in* 2025.

"Our goal from the beginning has been one of development," said Christina Kaiser, CCKids community relations director. "The idea is to create awareness and maintain it from year to year.

"The results - the homes - will come naturally from that," she said.

Those who want to help CCKids promote the campaign or highlight our needs for foster homes can find a year of monthly social-media campaigns, zoom backgrounds and assorted campaign materials at cckids.net.



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

[Unsubscribe](#) | [Update Profile](#) | [Constant Contact Data Notice](#)



Try email marketing for free today!