



Connections - May 15, 2025



Foster and Adoptive Dad Jeff N. waits for the splash during CCKids' Caregiver Appreciation Pizza & Pool Party. The annual event is a celebration of foster families during the month of May, with is National Foster Care Month. A generous contribution from Seacoast Bank makes it possible for us to close the park to the public for one fun evening of foster-care comradery.

Community Reaches Adoption Goal Early

Port St. Lucie – Communities Connected for Kids' child welfare system in Okeechobee and the Treasure Coast reached its 2025 adoption goal earlier

this year – four four months head of its June 30 schedule.

“Our goal for the 2024-2025 year was 75 – a number we expected to reach at the end of our fiscal year in June,” said Christina Kaiser, CCKids community relations director.

Instead, Kaiser said the area exceeded that goal in February, ending the month with 77 children placed in adoptive homes.

This year’s increase in adoptions is part of a multi-year trend resulting in more children exiting out-of-home care (foster care, for example) and finding permanency.

CCKids’ overall permanency outcomes – which include children returning home or finding permanent homes with relatives, in addition to adoption – has increased steadily for the past several years.

In fact, CCKids consistently is among the top-performing Lead Agencies for child permanency in Florida. Lead Agencies, like CCKids, are organizations that oversee local child-welfare systems throughout the state.

“We really have to give credit where it’s due,” Kaiser said. “Children’s Home Society is part of our network of providers, and they are responsible for adoptions in our area; the adoption staff works hard to find adoptive homes for children who need them.”



Cheryl P., above, and her husband, Travis, are foster parents in Stuart.

Local Caregivers Honored for their Dedication to Children in Care

Port St. Lucie — Communities Connected for Kids is proud to recognize the Payne Family as one of two foster homes who recently received the Topaz GEM – Going the Extra Mile – Award, which honors foster parents who demonstrate extraordinary dedication, compassion and commitment to the children in their care.

The Cheryl and Travis P. family has provided a loving and nurturing home to many children over the years, and their impact continues to shine—especially in the lives of two children who were in their care for more than two years.

“Throughout the placement, the Payne family not only advocated fiercely for the girls but also built a strong, respectful partnership with the girls' biological

family,” said Alexis Armstead, a licensing and placement specialist with CCKids’ recruitment provider 4Kids of the Treasure Coast. “They supported the successful transition to the girls’ grandparents’ home, showing unwavering love every step of the way.”

The Cheryl and Travis remain actively involved in the girls' lives—babysitting for the grandparents and offering support whenever needed. Their commitment to long-term connection is a testament to the deep, authentic bonds they form with every child who enters their home.

“We were honored to be a part of our girls’ story and humbled that their family continues to allow us to be a part of that story,” Cheryl said. “We hope our experience can inspire others to get involved in this amazing journey called foster care.”

This kind of unwavering dedication to fostering not only meets the basic needs of children—it enriches their lives with dignity, joy, and genuine care. The family was recognized with a personal phone call from CEO Carol Deloach, a plaque and a gift card.



Melissa and Robert J., above, are foster parents in Port St. Lucie.

Melissa and Robert J. also received a Topaz GEM award. The Port St. Lucie couple exemplify what it means to go above and beyond for youth in care, particularly in navigating complex placement situations with empathy, transparency and collaboration, said Josie Kirchner, CCKids' Director of Clinical Services.

Kirchner nominated Melissa and Robert for the award, highlighting their support of a teenager with a history marked by repeated relationship

disruptions and the loss of several potential permanent connections.

“What began as a transitional weekend visit quickly blossomed into a powerful connection, and the teen did not want to leave,” Kirchner said. However, there were strict – and formalized - rules that had to be followed due to past behavior that threatened the teen’s safety.

The family reached out to the professionals involved in the teen’s life to fully understand his unique needs, and sat down with the youth to explain the reasons behind the new rules surrounding internet use, social media, and messaging.

With compassion and mutual respect, Melissa and Robert worked with him to co-create a plan tailored to his needs. Together, they developed a personalized, practical agreement that maintained safety while still allowing access. The teen took ownership of the process, designing a strategy for how the foster family could help him stay on track and make safe, responsible choices in the digital world.

“Receiving the GEM Award is an incredible honor for both of us,” Melissa said. “It means so much to be recognized for doing what we’re passionate about -supporting children and families in foster care.

“Every child deserves to feel safe, loved and supported, and we’re grateful for the opportunity to be part of that journey together.”

Both the families were recognized with a personal phone call from CEO Carol Deloach, a plaque and a gift card.



It's a Myth...

We're busting myths and answering questions about foster care all month in celebration of National Foster Care Month. Follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#) this month to hear stories from foster mom Kim J., above, who addresses the commonly asked question, "How are you involved in deciding which children come to stay in your home?"



1K Walk and Story Stroll is This Saturday!

The 2025 CCKids 1K for Kids & Story Stroll will take place from 9 a.m. to noon, Saturday, May 17, in its new venue - the Port St. Lucie Botanical Gardens and newly expanded Pioneer Park.

The 1K for Kids is a special event that celebrates local foster homes while also serving as an education and recruitment tool for the broader community as part of the CCKids' 25in2025 campaign to add 25 foster homes by the end of the year.

The route will wind around succulent plantings, hanging orchids, a butterfly garden and much more. Along the way, there will be stories of children and families in the foster-care community brought to life through QR codes.

Additionally, anyone interested in learning more about becoming a foster parent will have the opportunity to connect with a recruitment specialist.

Registration - which was set up to ensure that the first 100 participants could get a free event shirt - is now closed. There is no limit on the number of people invited to take the stroll, however.

Please note, those who registered for a shirt must attend to claim their shirts.



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