



Connections - Aug. 13, 2025



CCKids sent children in local foster care back to school with the supplies they need thanks to the continuing support of the United Way of Okeechobee and St. Lucie County. The United Way provided our children with 130 backpacks full of supplies, and our staff (pictured above, with CEO Carol Deloach third from left) turned out to help assemble. CCKids also received another 55 bags of supplies from an online drive that gave members of the community the opportunity to give from the comfort of their own homes.

CCKids Sees First Net Increase in Foster Homes in Seven Years

Port St. Lucie – Communities Connected for Kids released this month its annual State of Our Children report, highlighting the broad successes and challenges of the local child-welfare community. This year's report shows gains in foster-care recruitment, reflecting the first time in seven years that the number of new foster homes has outpaced the number of those closing.

Other gains include the number of children finding permanent homes, the number of children leaving out-of-home care and returning home, and a decrease in children entering group care.

Meanwhile, the new Early Services Engagement Program ended its first year with considerable success. The program, designed to keep families out of the dependency system, served 132 children and saved more than \$900,000 in out-of-home costs - expenses that would have been realized if the children served by the program had entered the system.

State of Our Children

Successes

- We exceeded our annual permanency goal by 60 percent, finding homes for 120 children.
- The number of children exiting out-of-home care outpaced those entering care by 18 percent.
- We saw our first net increase in foster homes in seven years, bringing our total to 105 homes.
- The number of children in group care decreased by 20 percent.

Challenges

Our financial challenges continue. Although we received adequate funding to cover fiscal year 24/25, through back of the bill and risk pool, we continue to work toward an equitable statewide funding model.

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Gains in Prevention

ESEP

The Early Services Engagement Program was established by CCKids in 2024. In homes, intense services are provided to prevent children from having to be placed in foster care. The program met with immediate success. After 8 months of operations and serving 132 children, \$943,190 in savings from out of home care was realized - successfully offsetting the program's \$598,595 cost. It received a second and final legislative appropriation to take it into the second year, when it is expected to pay for itself.

CCKids Outreach Transitions with a Goodbye and a Hello to the Community

*A Message from Christina Kaiser,
Community Relations Director*

Dear Friends and Partners,

After 25 years of calling CCKids my professional home and the community my extended family, it's time for me to step into



a new chapter. It's a bittersweet farewell, because this work—and all of you—have shaped my life in ways I'll always treasure. From toy drives to ribbon cuttings, from late-night event setups to early morning races, we have built something special together.

One of the things I'm most proud of has been the Making Christmas Bright program, through which I have met so many of you. This beloved tradition will not only continue but thrive long after I'm gone. The plans for this year are already in motion, and I've been working closely with my successor to ensure a smooth handoff.

I'm thrilled to introduce Dana Anderwald, who will be stepping in as CCKids' new Community Relations Director. Dana brings fresh energy, and a genuine love for connecting people and resources.

In fact, you may already know her from her work on the Hibiscus Children's Center Guild or in her film work as a working actress in Florida. She has led her children's PTA, volunteers regularly and is a person who gets things done! I have every confidence that she will care for these programs—and for this community—just as you have always cared for me and the work we do at CCKids.



Thank you for the countless ways you've made this work not just a job, but a joy. I'll be cheering you on from my new home in Maryland.

Pictured top left is Christina Kaiser. In the bottom right picture is, from left, Dana Anderwald, Josie Kirchner and Jeff Howard. Dana began her new post this month and immediately got to work with the CCKids school supply drive. Kirchner is the clinical director for CCKids, and Howard coordinates the supply drive for the United Way of Okeechobee and St. Lucie County.

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