



Connections Newsletter

September 17, 2025

September 18th Parent Council

The Parent Council is a powerful initiative giving families directly impacted by the dependency system a seat at the table. Comprised of parents who have navigated child welfare firsthand, the council bridges the gap between families and the agencies that serve them.

By sharing lived experiences, members advocate for compassionate, family-centered solutions, provide feedback to improve accountability, and mentor other parents on their journey. Their voices help shape policies and practices, fostering a more respectful and collaborative environment—one that values family strengths and prioritizes reunification and healing.

[Click on the flyer below to join us on the THURSDAY SEPTEMBER 18 at 6:30PM](#)

A flyer for the Parent Council. It features the Communities Connected for Kids logo at the top left. The main title "PARENT COUNCIL" is in large white letters. Below it, a circular image shows a family of four smiling. To the right, another circular image shows a group of four people smiling. Text on the flyer includes: "Connect with Other Parents and Share Your Experiences in our Child Welfare System! Your Perspective Helps Us Help Other Parents." and "3RD THURSDAY MONTHLY VIRTUAL MEETING @ 6:30PM". A "MEETING LINK" box contains the email "josie.kirchner@cckids.net" and the website "www.cckids.net". At the bottom, a calendar grid shows the dates: Jan. 16, Mar. 20, May 15, Jul. 17, Sep. 18, Nov. 20, Feb. 20, Apr. 17, Jun. 19, Aug. 21, Oct. 23, Dec. 18. The text "We look forward to seeing you there!" is also present.

Child Welfare Workers Appreciation Week

This week, we're celebrating the incredible people who dedicate their hearts and energy to protecting children and strengthening families. Here are some of our amazing team members sharing—in their own words—why they chose this work and what keeps them inspired.

Join us in honoring their compassion, resilience, and impact!

CHILD WELFARE WORKER WEEK

I chose to be the voice I needed as a child. Children are our future. There isn't a better investment.

Thelma Settles
LICENSING COORDINATOR



CHILD WELFARE WORKER WEEK

I was a troubled youth growing up. I was not in the child welfare system, but I did get involved with juvenile services and different diversion programs. I did not begin to get my life on track until age 22. Once that happened, I always knew I wanted to work with young people and young adults, trying to help them straighten out their lives and get on track. There were many people in my life that did the same for me.

Shawn McDonald
ROAD TO SUCCESS SPECIALIST



CHILD WELFARE WORKER WEEK

I take pride in helping families bond during visitation. My role as a family support worker fills my heart with wonderful memories watching the children overcome a traumatic experience and seeing them with big smiles again.

Keri Williams
CASE MANAGEMENT SUPPORT



CHILD WELFARE WORKER WEEK

Seeing the smiles on the kids and their family members faces as they achieve permanency is the reason why I chose this profession.

Lateshia LeSane
CASE MANAGER



**This Grandparent's Day
Consider
Foster
Care!**



Celebrating Grandparents— and Inviting Empty Nesters to Step In

Grandparents hold a cherished place in the foster care community, often stepping in as kinship caregivers to provide love, stability, and family connection when children need it most. This Grandparents Day, we celebrate their selfless dedication and the vital role they play in helping children heal and thrive.

It's also a perfect reminder for empty nesters: you, too, can make an incredible difference. With your experience, patience, and nurturing spirit, you can provide a safe and loving home for children in foster care. Whether as foster parents or mentors, empty nesters have the power to change lives—and rediscover the joy of family in the process.

[Learn More Here](#)

ESEP - Starting It's Second Year Strong

CCKids is proud to share that the Early Services Engagement Program (ESEP) has been awarded a second year of funding—a clear recognition of its impact and value in serving children and families in our community.

Launched in October 2024, ESEP helps families access support and resources early, reducing the need for children to enter out-of-home care. In less than a year, the program has already shown remarkable results:

- **Keeping Families Together:** Families engaged through ESEP received critical help before removal became necessary, allowing more children to safely remain at home.
- **Cost Savings for the Community:** Since its start, ESEP has saved the system significant resources by preventing costly placements and reducing long-term care expenses.
- **Positive outcomes for families:** Behind the numbers are real stories of stability, healing, and hope—families strengthened by the right support and the right time.

With continued funding, ESEP will expand its reach and further strengthen efforts to prevent family separation. This program doesn't just save money—it changes lives, creating stronger, safer communities for children and families.

New Shoes, New Smiles Thanks to Lil' Feet of SLC

We are so grateful to Lil' Feet of St. Lucie County for donating a large supply of brand-new shoes to CCKids! These shoes have been added to our Outreach Pantry, where they'll be available (through our Case Managers) for dependency families whenever they need them. Thanks to this generous gift, kids in our community can step into comfort and confidence, and families have one less thing to worry about.



[Click here to visit Lil' Feet of SLC and check out their upcoming Fundraiser that keeps their giving possible!](#)



Back to School Success!

CCKids sent children in local foster care back to school with the supplies they needed thanks to the continuing support of the United Way of St Lucie & Okeechobee.

The United Way provided our children with 130 backpacks full of supplies, and our staff turned out to help assemble. CCKids also received another 55 bags of supplies from our community via an online drive. A huge success all around!



GFNF Child Summit 2025

This two-day child-focused conference is offered annually. Presentations are by professionals from multiple disciplines educating our community on the latest issues impacting children and strategies to further protect them from harm. Topics are the result of collaboration with a multitude of individuals and organizations within the community.

[Click to Register](#)

A Fond Farewell to Christina Kaiser



Communities Connected for Kids honored the remarkable career of Community Relations Director Christina Kaiser as she prepares for a new chapter in Maryland. Colleagues and community partners gathered for a heartfelt farewell filled with laughter, gratitude, and memories. Christina passed the torch to Dana Anderwald, who has stepped into the role (pictured together, above).

Christina has been the heart of CCKids' community outreach, leaving a lasting impact on the organization and the families we serve. From toy drives to ribbon cuttings, late-night event setups to early morning races, her dedication shaped countless milestones that strengthened our mission.

In Christina's words:

"After 25 years at CCKids, this work—and all of you—have shaped my life in ways I'll always treasure. One of the things I'm most proud of has been the Making Christmas Bright program, which will continue to thrive long after I'm gone."

We are deeply grateful for Christina's leadership and spirit. While she will be missed, her programs and traditions will continue to shine, leaving a lasting legacy at CCKids.

