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CONNECTIONS

A CCKids Community Newsletter

April 22, 2026

April is Child Abuse Prevention Month

April is Child Abuse Prevention Month—a time to come together as a community and stand up for children.

At Communities Connected for Kids, we see every day how important it is to support families early, strengthen connections, and ensure every child has a safe, stable, and nurturing environment to grow.

This month, we're joining communities across the Treasure Coast to raise awareness and take action. From participating in the MANicure Movement to connecting with families at local events, we're working to start conversations and remind people that prevention starts with all of us.

Because behind every statistic is a child who deserves to feel safe, supported, and loved. Together, we can help prevent abuse before it happens and build a stronger, safer community for our children.

To learn more or get involved, visit: <https://cckids.net>



LEARN the signs of abuse and speak up. Knowing the signs can help save a child.



VOLUNTEER with local organizations. Your time can make a lasting impact.



BECOME a foster or respite parent. Open your heart and home to a child in need.



MENTOR a child or teen. You can help shape their future.



DONATE items for children in need. Small donations can bring big comfort.



SUPPORT families before crisis. Stronger families create safer communities.



RAISE awareness in your community. Start conversations. Share resources. Make a difference.



FLORIDA ABUSE HOTLINE:
1-800-962-2873

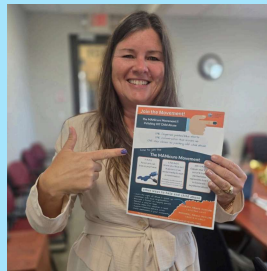
NATIONAL ABUSE HOTLINE:
1-800-4-A-CHILD



www.cckids.net

Be a voice. Be a hero. Be the change.





Some supporters shown are Bikers Against Child Abuse Treasure Coast Chapter, Okeechobee Sheriff's Department, Indian River Fire Rescue, CCKids Staff, Matt Markley and Lori Swift from Hibiscus Children's Center, Dana Anderwald from CCKids, Senator Gayle Harrell, Indian River Sheriff Office, Carol Deloach CEO CCKids and Tony Loupe CEO Early Learning Coalition St Lucie, Members of the Hibiscus Guild, and Realtor Tammy Eiseman.

Join the Movement!



The Manicure Movement®
Polishing Off Child Abuse



ONE fingernail painted blue starts
ONE conversation that moves us
ONE step closer to polishing off child abuse

how to join the

The MANicure Movement

PAINT
Polish one nail blue on your hand

ENGAGE
Share your blue nail in person or on social media to start a conversation

*MANicureMovement
*ChildAbusePrevention
*CommunitiesConnectedforKids

INFORM
Explain that 1 nail out of 5 that is painted blue represents how 1 in 5 kids will experience abuse

The Manicure Movement will be active all month long in our community painting one nail blue to represent the 1 in 5 children who will experience abuse. Check out these short videos:



**MCSD SUPERINTENDENT
MICHAEL MAINE**



**INDIAN RIVER COUNTY
FIRE RESCUE**



**CITY OF PORT ST. LUCIE
Proclamation**

WHEREAS, child abuse and neglect remain serious issues affecting communities across the nation, with millions of reports made to child protective services each year; and

WHEREAS, children are among our community's most valuable resources, and their safety and well-being are essential to a healthy and prosperous future; and

WHEREAS, abuse and neglect can have lasting psychological, emotional, and physical effects that impact victims throughout their lives; and

WHEREAS, many organizations such as Communities Connected for Kids work to support children and families in Martin, St. Lucie, Indian River, and Okeechobee Counties; and

WHEREAS, effective prevention depends on partnerships among families, educators, health professionals, community and faith-based organizations, businesses, and law enforcement working together to create safe, stable, and nurturing environments for children; and

WHEREAS, Child Abuse Prevention Month is an opportunity to raise awareness, encourage community involvement, and reaffirm that prevention remains the best way to protect our children and support strong families.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, Shannon M. Martin, Mayor of the City of Port St. Lucie, Florida, do hereby proclaim April 2026 to be observed as

Child Abuse Prevention Month

in Port St. Lucie and encourage all residents to raise awareness, support families in need, and participate in community efforts such as the MANICure Movement to show their commitment to protecting children.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the Official Seal of the City of Port St. Lucie, Florida, to be affixed, this thirty-first day of March in the year of our Lord, two thousand twenty-six.

Sally Walsh
For: **Sally Walsh**
City Clerk



Shannon M. Martin
Shannon M. Martin
Mayor

CCKids extends sincere thanks to Mayor Shannon M. Martin and the City of Port St. Lucie for proclaiming April 2026 as Child Abuse Prevention Month. This recognition reinforces our shared commitment to protecting children, supporting families, and strengthening prevention efforts throughout our community.



Greetings Adoptive Parents,

My name is Shearon Demps, and I am the Post Adoption Specialist for Communities Connected for Kids. I provide support to adoptive families across the Treasure Coast and Okeechobee regions.

Beginning this month, a Post Adoption section will be featured in the CCK monthly newsletter, offering resources, tips, and helpful information for families. I can be reached at 772-475-8159 or via email at shearon.demps@cckids.net.

Adoption is a lifelong journey that involves every member of the family. The Post Adoption Support Group is designed to help families navigate the “normative crises” that often arise throughout the adoption experience. These challenges are commonly connected to core adoption issues, such as experiences of loss, memories of biological family, and post-traumatic symptoms in adoptive children. The group is facilitated by adoption-competent therapists from Residing Hope.

Post Adoption Support Groups are held virtually via Zoom on the first Monday of each month. To learn more or submit a referral, visit <https://residinghope.org/> or contact the main office at 386-259-5413. This service is provided at no cost.

Call 211 if you need immediate help. It is a free and confidential service that connects you to expert, caring help for various needs, such as housing, food, health, and mental health.

SERA, Age 17

Sera's bright, wonderful smile can light up any room. She loves going to school and enjoys learning new things. Those who know Sera describe her as friendly, outgoing, and adventurous.

Sera has a wide range of interests, including listening to rock, rap, and hip-hop music. She is a big fan of anime and dreams of someday creating her own anime comic books. In her free time, she enjoys swimming, going to the beach, watching Nickelodeon, and cheering on her favorite characters from Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. One of her all-time favorite movies is Space Jam. Sera is a special young person in need of a forever family who will provide patience, care, and love as she continues to grow and thrive.

Interested in learning about adoption?
Please contact Children's Home Society
at tcadoptions@chsfl.org

ADOPTABLE CHILD SPOTLIGHT

FAMILY FINDER ADOPTION SPOTLIGHT

Adoption Success Story

Family Finder helped turn an old connection into a forever family for a young teen. After a 15-year-old boy entered foster care, Family Finder conducted a detailed case review and uncovered a note identifying the child's Godmother as a former caregiver. Using that information, the team located her through Facebook and initiated contact, taking extra care to verify legitimacy before moving forward.

A home study was completed, and the child was placed with his Godmother. While the journey included challenges and a temporary disruption, she remained committed and continued advocating for him. Nearly two years later, she welcomed him back into her home with the goal of adoption. Just four months later, the adoption was finalized in November 2025.

Today, he is thriving in the loving, permanent home of his Godmother—a powerful example of persistence, connection, and the life-changing impact of Family Finder's work.

Check out these benefits your adopted child is able to receive from Sunshine Health:



Sunshine Health Pathway to Shine Specialty Plan Benefits to help you and your family

- **\$50 Over-The-Counter Benefit:** \$50 provided per household per month to buy products like cough, cold and allergy medications, first aid supplies and vitamins. View the [Over-the-Counter Health and Wellness Catalog \(PDF\)](#) to find products.
- **Healthy Rewards Program:** Take steps to protect your child's health and [earn reward dollars](#) for completing certain preventive health activities, such as well child visits for some age groups and weight loss coaching.
- **Care Grants:** Up to \$150 per child per year for services and supplies for social or physical activities, such as gym membership, sports equipment, art supplies and application fees for post high school education.
- **Life Skills Development:** Education for children [ages 12 and up](#) with developmental disabilities to help them keep, learn or improve skills and [functioning](#) for daily living.
- **Transportation:** Unlimited to medical appointments; 3 trips per month for nonmedical needs.

Caregiver Swimming Lessons

- Caregivers can get group swimming lessons at the YMCA. Includes up to 8 lessons from a local YMCA, if available.
- Ages 18 and older. In areas where YMCA does not exist, members may use a local swimming vendor.
- Show member ID card at the YMCA front desk to sign up.

Swimming Lessons (children only)

- Children under 21 years old can receive group swim sessions which include up to 8 lessons from a local YMCA.
- One group session, up to 8 lessons from local YMCA. In areas where a YMCA does not exist, members may use a local swim vendor.
- Show member ID card at the YMCA front desk to sign up.

Member services 1-855-463-4100, www.sunshinehealth.com

Because of CCKids Volunteers, Hope Shines Bright

We were honored to gather with our incredible volunteers and donors last week to celebrate the heart behind CCKids - our Volunteers.

Because of this amazing community, children and families across our four counties experience safety, support, and hope every day.



A huge congratulations to **April Dooley**, our Volunteer of the Year!

For nearly two decades, April has brought joy and magic to our foster families during the holidays — a true example of what it means to give from the heart.

A special thank you to **Seacoast Bank** for their heartfelt sponsorship — your support helps make moments like this possible.



Because of all of you, hope shines bright.



Florida Youth Shine Young Adults Advocate at the Capitol



Earlier this year, young adults from the Treasure Coast Chapter of Florida Youth Shine traveled to Tallahassee to advocate for legislative changes that support youth and young adults in the dependency system. Accompanied by mentors Litty Summers and Margie M. Dotson, the group spent a week meeting with State Senators and Representatives at the Capitol.

Our young adults represented the Treasure Coast with professionalism and confidence — impressing legislators, networking with policymakers, and advocating for bills focused on youth empowerment, financial independence, education, and workforce opportunities. They even braved the cold weather and experienced snow flurries during the trip!

Key priorities included legislation to increase youth engagement and allowances in foster care, expand postsecondary educational support and flexibility, and grow workforce education and internship opportunities statewide. Some youth were even encouraged to testify before the Senate, highlighting the powerful impact of their voices.

We are incredibly proud of these young leaders for their dedication, advocacy, and commitment to improving the system for current and future youth in care.

Newly Published Guide for Dependency Families

Bringing Your Child Home - A Roadmap to Reunification was created to empower families with knowledge, clarity, and hope. When your child is involved in the dependency system, understanding the process can make a meaningful difference. This guide explains your rights, your child's rights, and the steps and supports designed to help families reunite safely. It is meant to help you take an active role in your case, ask informed questions, and move forward with confidence.



ROADMAP TO REUNIFICATION

Bringing Your Child Home

"For me, becoming isn't about arriving somewhere or achieving a certain aim. I see it instead as forward motion, a means of evolving, a way to reach continuously toward a better self. The journey doesn't end."
—Michelle Obama

READ IT HERE

JOIN US MAY 21 AT 6:30PM

Let's Talk!
PARENT COUNCIL



Partnering for Success

Connect with other parents and share your experiences. Your perspectives help us help others!

MONTHLY VIRTUAL MEETING

every 3rd Thursday

Jan 15, March 19, May 21 @ 6:30pm

Feb 19, April 16, June 18 @ Noon



Your participation makes a difference!

CONTACT US 772-873-7800



[Click to Join the Meeting](#)

The Britney Lee Foundation brought Easter joy to children in care once again!

Through their annual Easter Basket program, they provide baskets filled with goodies and essentials to help children feel celebrated and remembered during the holiday. This year, they generously provided 50 Easter baskets to children in care with Communities Connected for Kids.



Will you consider being a

Host Home?

Young adults in extended foster care need very little - but a room in your home would mean the world.

Contact: Frank.Avilla@CCKids.net



Host Homes Needed

Young adults aging out of foster care often still need a safe place to land—a "host home" where they can continue building their future with guidance, encouragement, and belonging.

If you've ever thought about opening your home to a young adult on their path to independence, now is the time. Your support can help them gain confidence, stability, and the life skills they need to thrive.

Together, we can ensure their success goes even further.

[For more information, click here](#)

The Apple Doesn't Fall Far From the Tree

The daughter of one of our Dependency Supervisors recently completed a meaningful service project by creating hygiene bags for children in dependency care. For the project, she was challenged to identify a need in her community and develop a solution to address it.

The completed hygiene bags were made available to CCKids Case Managers to distribute to children in dependency care, helping ensure they have access to essential items when needed most.

Way to go on making a difference!



Up Against Poverty Resource Fair

Frank Avilla and Dana Anderwald represented Communities Connected for Kids on March 27 at the United Against Poverty Indian River County Community Resource Fair, connecting with families, sharing resources, and raising awareness about the support available to children and families in our community.



CCKids Out and About in the Community

CCKids staff at the Re-opening of the Children's Advocacy Center in St Lucie, Caryn Toole building homes IRC Habitat for Humanity's 2026 Women Build, Denise Natalizio and Gloria Seidule at the Seawind Elementary Golf Fundraiser, Rico The Police Dog Wearing his blue ribbon with Dana Anderwald



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