



CONNECTIONS

A CCKids Community Newsletter

August 14, 2026

READY, SET, SUCCEED: Community Comes Together for New School Year



As a new school year begins, children and youth throughout our community are preparing for fresh opportunities, new challenges, and exciting possibilities. For many children in foster care, however, the start of the school year can also bring uncertainty. Something as simple as a new backpack, school supplies, properly fitting clothes, or a new pair of shoes can make a meaningful difference in helping a child feel confident, prepared, and ready to learn.

This year, our community came together in an extraordinary way to ensure that children, youth, and young adults served by CCKids started the school year with the tools they need to succeed.

Thanks to the generosity of United Way of St. Lucie and Okeechobee, American Legion Post 40, Gerelco Electrical Contractors, Rack'd Roofing, BlueScope, Lil Feet of St. Lucie County, and many other incredible community partners, businesses, organizations, and individual donors, CCKids was able to provide 270 students and young adults with backpacks, essential school supplies, and other back-to-school necessities. Through the

support of Lil Feet of St. Lucie County, children in care who needed them also received brand-new shoes, helping them step into the new school year with confidence and pride.

These donations mean so much more than notebooks, pencils, backpacks, and shoes. For children and youth who have experienced trauma, instability, and uncertainty, beginning the school year prepared sends a powerful message: you are valued, supported, and worthy of every opportunity to succeed. Having the supplies they need helps build confidence, reduce anxiety, and allows them to walk into the classroom feeling like their peers rather than standing out because of their circumstances.

This support is equally important for the young adults in our Independent Living program. As they pursue college, vocational training, certifications, and other educational opportunities after age 18, many back-to-school expenses become their personal responsibility. Community support helps ease that financial burden and provides encouragement as they continue building independent, successful futures.

Because of the kindness and generosity of our community, 270 children, youth, and young adults will begin this school year with hope, pride, and confidence. They will know that there are people throughout our community who believe in them, care about their success, and are invested in their future.

From all of us at CCKids, thank you for helping make the start of this school year brighter. Together, we are doing more than providing school supplies. We are creating opportunities, building confidence, and reminding every child and young adult we serve that they are supported as they take the next step toward achieving their dreams.



UNITED WAY
St. Lucie &
Okeechobee



American Legion Post 40



*Grace Baptist Church Delivers
Dignity for Children in Foster Care*



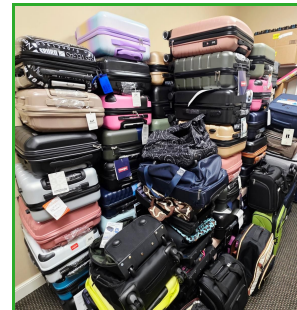
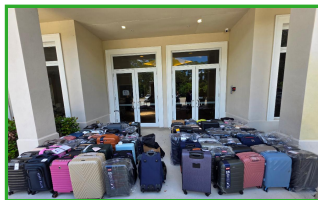
Thanks to the generosity of Grace Baptist Church in St. Lucie County, 112 children in foster care will have a safe and dignified way to carry their belongings during times of transition. After organizing a community-wide luggage drive, church members exceeded their goal and donated 112 brand-new carry-on suitcases to Communities Connected for Kids (CCKids).

For many children entering foster care or moving between placements, belongings are often packed in trash bags. Grace Baptist Church wanted to change that reality by providing luggage that gives children a sense of dignity, comfort, and worth. The new suitcases will be distributed to children and teens served by CCKids across the region.

What started as a simple collection drive became a powerful demonstration of community compassion. Each suitcase represents more than a place to store belongings. It sends a message to a child that they are valued and supported during uncertain times.

CCKids is grateful to Grace Baptist Church and everyone who contributed to this meaningful effort. Their generosity will help ensure that children experiencing transitions can do so with a little more dignity and a reminder that their community cares.

Photos courtesy of MaryAnn Ketcham



CCKids is proud to launch the Tresses of Texture Hair Care Initiative, a program designed to ensure children and youth in care have access to the specialized products needed to care for textured hair. Our goal is to stock these products at all four CCKids service centers, making them available to children, caregivers, and group homes throughout our region.

A graphic for the Tresses of Texture Hair Care Initiative. At the top is a photo of two young girls with curly hair. Below is the title 'TRESSES OF TEXTURE' in large purple letters, followed by the subtitle 'A Hair Care Initiative for Youth in Foster Care'. A paragraph explains the initiative's purpose: 'For many children in foster care, hair care is about more than appearance—it's about confidence, identity, dignity, and belonging. Children with textured hair are often placed in homes where caregivers may not have the knowledge, resources, or specialized products needed to care for their hair properly. The Tresses of Texture Initiative was created to help bridge that gap by providing culturally appropriate hair care products, tools, and education for youth and caregivers throughout our community.'

TEXTURED HAIR BRANDS:
MIELLE DESIGN ESSENTIALS, PAUL MITCHELL ORGANICS, THE DOUX, CAMILLE ROSE, OLAPLEX, BRIGEO, MIZANI, REDKEN, AS I AM, CANTU, AMIKA, TGIN

MOST NEEDED ITEMS

- ♥ Cleansing Shampoos
- ♥ Moisturizing & Leave-In Conditioners
- ♥ Deep Conditioners & Hair Masks
- ♥ Curl Creams & Moisturizers
- ♥ Hair Oils & Scalp Treatments
- ♥ Styling Gels & Edge Control
- ♥ Products for Locs & Relaxed Hair
- ♥ Gift Cards for Target, Walmart, and Local Beauty Supply Stores
- ♥ Satin Bonnets & Pillowcases
- ♥ Wide-Tooth Combs & Detangling Brushes
- ♥ Sectioning Clips & Rat-Tail Combs
- ♥ Hair Ties, Scrunchies & Rubber Bands
- ♥ Spray Bottles
- ♥ Edge Brushes
- ♥ Microfiber Towels

Every donation helps a child feel confident, seen, and supported.

CONTACT: 772-873-7800

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LITTY SUMMERS Litty.Summers@cckids.net

SCAN HERE FOR THE ONLINE WISHLIST

OR DROP OFF AT:
549 NW LAKE WHITNEY PL
SUITE 204
PORT ST. LUCIE, FL 34968

Communities Connected for Kids

We're excited to share that the initiative is already making an impact. Adira Mayfield, Florida Youth SHINE Treasure Coast Chapter Vice President, recently collected and donated textured hair care products to Hibiscus Children's Center Village in Vero Beach. HCC is committed to making the products available to the youth they serve and helping replenish supplies as needed. Hair care is an important part of self-esteem, identity, and belonging. With your help, we can ensure local children in care have access to the products they need to feel confident and supported.



DONATE PRODUCTS HERE

CCKids Leaders Present at Statewide Child Welfare Conference

Communities Connected for Kids was proud to have Katie Vella, St. Lucie County Director, and Josie Kirchner, Clinical & Placement Director, present at the 2026 Florida Coalition for Children (FCC) Conference, held July 19-21 at the Sunseeker Gulf Coast Resort in Charlotte Harbor. The annual conference brought together more than 500 child welfare professionals from across Florida to share best practices, explore innovative approaches, and strengthen partnerships that support children and families.

Katie and Josie served as panelists for a workshop titled "Keeping Families Connected," which highlighted how community partners can work together to support families struggling with



significant behavioral health, substance use, and mental health challenges among teens. The presentation focused on strategies that help families remain safely together and prevent unnecessary entry into the child welfare system or out-of-home care due to abandonment. Alongside partners from the Department of Juvenile Justice, Family Safety & Preservation Services, New Horizons of the Treasure Coast, and Southeast Florida Behavioral Health Network, Katie and Josie shared how collaborative approaches such as crisis intervention, motivational interviewing, and wraparound services can empower parents to continue caring for their children in the least restrictive setting possible. Their presentation showcased the power of community partnership in creating better outcomes for youth and families across our region.

Foster Homes Needed

Children in Florida need foster homes that can provide safety, stability, and connection.

There is no “perfect time” in someone’s life to become a foster parent – if you’ve thought about fostering, there is no better time to take the next steps.

This free mini-course can help you make an informed decision on whether this role is right for you. No assumptions. No pressure. Just a short course that provides a realistic overview of what to expect.

Take the first step today!



Learn More Here



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.

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.

ADOPTION

Support Group



Free Virtual Support

Second Monday Each Month

7:00 - 8:00 PM

For Pre & Post-Adoptive Families

Sign Up

outpatientreferrals@residinghope.org

386.259.5413



Residing Hope
Counseling



To learn more about our services and office locations, scan the QR code and visit our webpage.

JOIN US AUGUST 20 AT 12 NOON

Let's Talk!



Communities
Connected
for Kids

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 @ Noon

July 16 Aug 20 Sept 17

Oct 15 Nov 19 Dec 17



Your participation
makes a difference!

CONTACT US

772-873-7800
<https://cckids.net>



CLICK HERE TO JOIN THE MEETING



Starting off the School Year on the Right Foot!



A heartfelt thank you to Lil Feet of SLC for donating 45 pairs of brand-new sneakers for local children in foster care. Your generosity is helping kids start the school year with confidence, comfort, and a fresh step toward success.



SAVE THE DATE

GFNF4KIDS TREASURE COAST CHILD SUMMIT

September 23th & 24th, 2026

@ 8:30AM - 4:00PM

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.

[REGISTER HERE](#)



lisa.mcbride@cckids.net

Sunshine Health Orthodontia Grant

Sunshine Health will open the next Orthodontia Grant on August 1. The grant will be open from Aug 1-31 with the eligibility criteria of being active on the Sunshine CWSP-Child Welfare Specialty Plan—now being called the Pathway to Shine Plan. Summer is a great time for kids with orthodontia referrals to have their evaluations done! Any questions can sent to Lisa McBride at:

amazon
wishlist

Please click here to donate items
needed for the children in care

Roundtable
of St. Lucie County
LEADERS UNITED FOR CHILDREN



COMING SOON! YOUTHCON

EMPOWER. | CONNECT. | INSPIRE.



SAVE THE DATE!
SATURDAY
SEPTEMBER 12, 2026



IRSC KIGHT CENTER
PORT ST. LUCIE, FL

A POWERFUL DAY FOR YOUTH.
BUILDING LEADERSHIP. EXPLORING POSSIBILITIES. CREATING CHANGE.

tykes&teens CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH COMMUNITY Trainings

Learn. Grow. Make a Difference.

These trainings are open to any **community member**. Our focus is on strengthening our ability to support youth and children. By deepening our understanding of ourselves, others, and our community, we can build stronger connections and create a more peaceful community together.

With
**Jessie
&
Cassey**

Scan to
Register!



8/12

Resiliency: A Life Source

Building inner strength to navigate life's challenges.



9/30

The Dignity Index: How to Love through Differences

Practical tools to foster respect, connection, and understanding.



10/21

Reflective Practice: Creating a Better Us

Using reflection to build stronger teams and communities.



1/13

Motivational Interviewing: Helping Others Create Change

Conversations that inspire growth and lasting change.



2/17

Professional Personality Styles: Know Who You Are

Understanding yourself and others for better communication and collaboration.



3/24

Mindfulness: Slowing Down so we Don't Stop

Simple practices to reduce stress and stay present.



All Trainings Located At:

Treasure Coast Hospice

5000 Dunn Road
Ft. Pierce, FL 34981

Proudly sponsored by:

ST. LUCIE COUNTY
Children's
SERVICES COUNCIL
Our Children - Our Community - Our Future



..... Hosted by the **TRUST** Team of **tykes&teens**

TRAUMA-INFORMED • RESPECTFUL • UNDERSTANDING • SAFE • TRANSFORMATIVE



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

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