

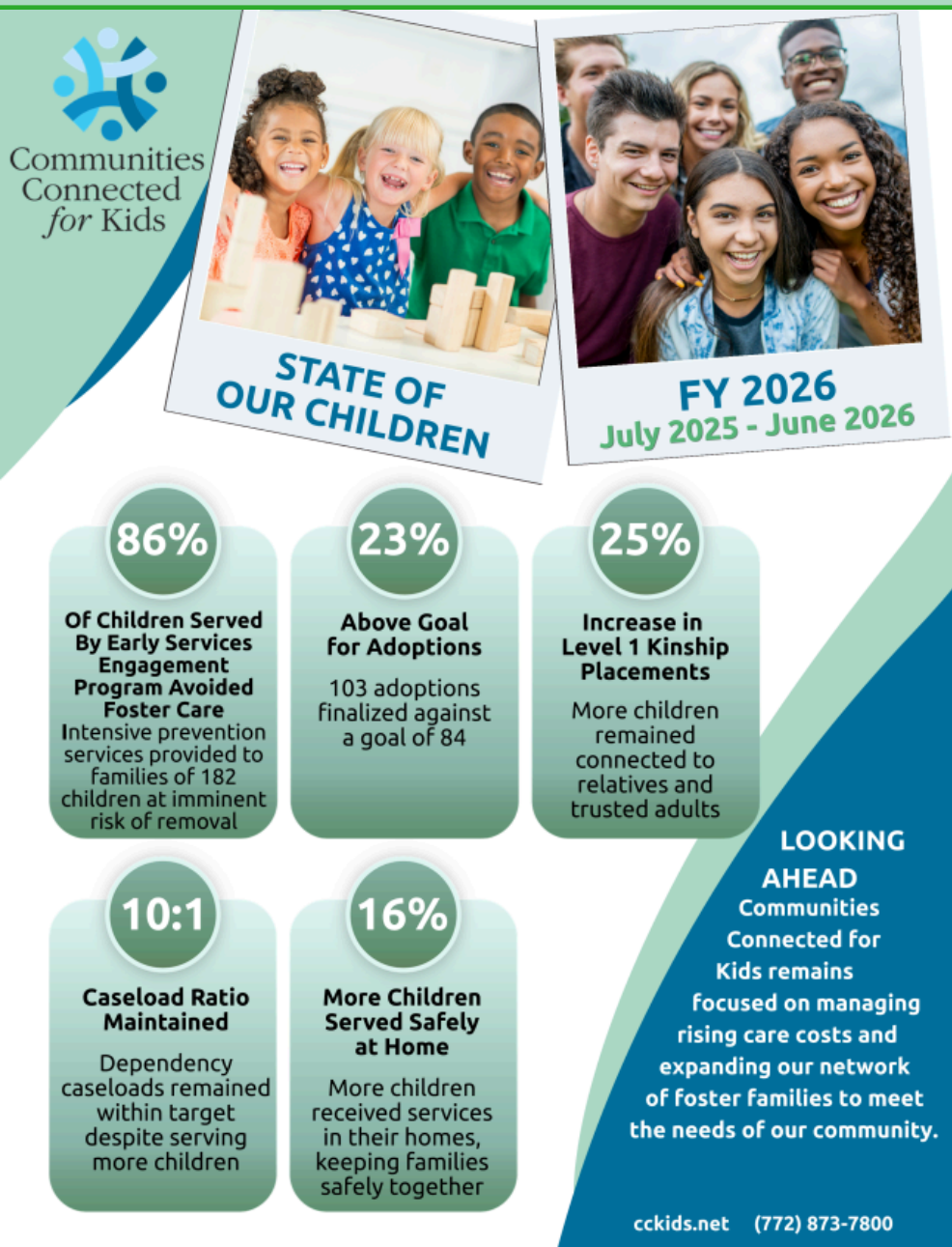


CONNECTIONS

A CCKids Community Newsletter

October 6, 2026

State of Our Children Released for Fiscal Year 2026



Each year, the Communities Connected for Kids State of the Children report provides a snapshot of the challenges and successes impacting children and families throughout our community. The Fiscal Year 2026 data highlights key trends in child well-being, safety, education, and family stability, offering valuable insights to help guide our collective efforts. As we review this year's findings, we are reminded of both the progress made and the ongoing need for strong partnerships to ensure every child has the opportunity to thrive.

Katie Vella Honored with Legacy Leadership Award

Communities Connected for Kids is proud to recognize Katie Vella, St. Lucie County Director, for receiving the Legacy Leadership Award. This prestigious honor celebrates Katie's outstanding leadership, unwavering dedication, and lasting contributions to improving the lives of children and families in our community.

Through her commitment to collaboration, advocacy, and service, Katie has played a vital role in strengthening support systems for children and families throughout St. Lucie County. Her passion for making a difference and her ability to bring partners together exemplify the mission and values of CCKids.

Congratulations, Katie, on this well-deserved recognition and thank you for your continued leadership and impact!



Join CCKids at the....

DeBerard Family Foundation & United Way St. Lucie & Okeechobee present

Okeechobee Halloween Extravaganza

October 31 5:30-8:00

Benefitting Healthy Start of Okeechobee



Music - Games - Trick or Treating

at Okeechobee Agri-Civic Center 4601 Highway 710

booths and sponsorships are available
contact Michelle at Michelle@deberardfamilyfoundation.org or 772-285-6076

HELP BRING JOY TO LOCAL CHILDREN IN NEED



HOLIDAY TOY DRIVE



YOU COLLECT, WE PICK UP & DELIVER

How To Help:

Sign up your church, school, business or social group to sponsor a toy drive

For more information or to sign up, please contact:
Dana.Anderwald@cckids.net

How it Works:

- 1) You will be given a list of children's names & wishes (a general drive can also be done)
- 2) Collect gifts from your members
- 3) Toys are picked up & given to the children!

Please Avoid:

Used toys
Food or candy
Gift wrapping

To make a monetary donation, scan here



This is a partnership between Guardians for New Futures & Communities Connected for Kids. Donations will be distributed to children served by CCKids' system of care.

Interested in being a sponsor? [Click here to email](#)



Youth SHINE Members Embrace Self-Care at the Summit

Youth leaders from Florida Youth SHINE recently attended the Florida Children and Families Summit, accompanied by CCKids Road to Success mentors Margie Dotson and Litty Summers, who continue to support and encourage youth as they develop leadership, advocacy, and life skills.

During the Summit, the youth received special Lavender Life stuffed bunnies, generously donated by the Lavender Life Company and provided through a partnership with Guardians for New Futures for Kids for youth in foster care. The lavender-scented companions are part of a "Taking Care of You" initiative that promotes self-care, mindfulness, emotional wellness, and healthy coping skills.

More than just a stuffed animal, each bunny serves as a reminder that taking care of mental and emotional health is an important part of success. Through simple practices like deep breathing, reflection, and self-care, young people are encouraged to build resilience and confidence as they navigate their journeys.

CCKids is grateful to the Lavender Life Company, Guardians for New Futures for Kids, and the dedicated Road to Success team for helping create meaningful moments of comfort, connection, and support for youth in foster care.

JOIN US OCTOBER 15 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

CCKids Attends Treasure Coast Child Summit

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Communities Connected for Kids (CCKids) recently attended the annual Treasure Coast Child Summit, hosted by Guardians For New Futures. The summit brought together child welfare professionals, educators, advocates, law enforcement, and community partners from across the region to learn about emerging issues affecting children and families and to share strategies for keeping children safe and supported.

CCKids was proud to support the event as one of its sponsors and to participate alongside many organizations dedicated to improving outcomes for children and families. The summit provided valuable opportunities for learning, networking, and collaboration, reinforcing the importance of community partnerships in creating brighter futures for children throughout the Treasure Coast.



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.



**Dave Thomas
Foundation
for Adoption**
Forever Families for Children in Foster Care

NEXT WEEK!

**Too Many Losses
Too Soon:**

Healing Begins with Being Heard

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 8, 1-2:30 P.M. ET



Don't miss Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption's **FREE webinar** featuring C.A.S.E. CEO Debbie Riley on Oct. 8 from 1-2:30 p.m. ET.

This webinar will explore how professionals can better understand and support adopted teens as they navigate identity, belonging, relationships, adoption and other permanency-related experiences.

Led by Debbie Riley, LCMFT, CEO of the Center for Adoption Support and Education (C.A.S.E.), this presentation will explore the unique and often layered losses experienced by children and youth with foster care and adoption experiences, including ambiguous loss and its impact on development, identity, relationships and mental health.

Attendees will learn practical strategies for supporting children and youth as they navigate loss, grief, identity, belonging, relationships and permanency-related challenges. Debbie will also discuss factors that influence how young people experience and respond to loss and share best-practice approaches for child welfare professionals supporting children and families.

During the latter portion of the webinar, Debbie will be joined by three panelists with lived experience in foster care and adoption. They will share their perspectives on loss, grief, being heard and the supports that can make a meaningful difference throughout the permanency journey.

Join us to:

- Identify strategies for helping recruiters and social workers to address children's loss and grief
- Examine the unique losses experienced by children and youth and how these losses affect their development
- Understand ambiguous loss and its impact on children's mental health

Presenter: Debbie Riley, CEO, Center for Adoption Support and Education (C.A.S.E.)

Featured panelists: Tony Parsons, Ashley Garcia-Rivera and Betty Rivers

[REGISTER HERE](#)



26th Annual
***National Adoption
Day Event***

Saturday, November 14 | 11 AM-3 PM

Flying Pig Ranch: 5265 Emerson Ave Fort Pierce Florida, 34951

FREE, Family Event Celebrating ALL families!



**Every child.
Every dream.
Every future.**



**Communities
Connected
for Kids**





TRESSES OF TEXTURE

A Hair Care Initiative for Youth in Foster Care

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:

DESIGN ESSENTIALS, MIELLE
ORGANICS, PAUL MITCHELL,
CAMILLE ROSE, THE DOUX,
BRIO GEO, OLAPLEX,
REDKEN, MIZANI,
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

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

CONTACT: 772-873-7800

MARGIE DOTSON Margie.Dotson@cckids.net

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

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.

DONATE PRODUCTS HERE



Pastor Benny and Natasha Ramos of Love Wings Ministry generously donated a basket of items through the Tresses of Texture Campaign, helping provide essential hair care and self-care products to a child in foster care. Their thoughtful contribution reflects a commitment to uplifting and supporting youth in the community, bringing comfort, confidence, and a reminder that they are cared for and valued.

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!

BECOME A FOSTER PARENT.



Learn More Here

CCKids at COSA Showcase of Services

CCKids was proud to participate in the Council of Social Agencies (COSA) of St. Lucie County Showcase of Services on September 16 at the Fenn Center. The event provided an excellent opportunity to connect with community members, highlight available resources, and strengthen partnerships that help support children and families throughout St. Lucie.



CCKids Attends Indian River Legislative Update Luncheon

Representatives from CCKids recently attended the Indian River Legislative Update Luncheon, featuring remarks from Senator Erin Grall and Representative Robbie Brackett. The event provided valuable insights into current legislative priorities and issues affecting Florida communities. CCKids appreciates opportunities to stay informed, engage with local leaders, and advocate for policies that support children and families throughout our region.

Its My Very Own Bags

A special thank you to Kaye, Ed and their amazing group from Midport Seventh-day Adventist Church Port St. Lucie for their generous donation of Its My Very Own Bags! Their kindness and dedication to serving our community makes a meaningful difference in the lives of children in need. We are incredibly grateful for your support and partnership.





Working Together for Martin County Families

CCKids was pleased to attend the Martin County Interagency Coalition Agency Resource Fair on September 9 at the Kane Center. The event brought together organizations from across Martin County to share information about valuable community resources and services available to residents. It was a great opportunity to connect with community members and strengthen awareness of programs that support children and families in Martin County.



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.

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:



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

TRAUMA-INFORMED • RESPECTFUL • UNDERSTANDING • SAFE • TRANSFORMATIVE



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