



Connections - December 18, 2019



CCKids Community Relations Director Christina Kaiser has a little fun while collecting gifts from Sun Grove Montessori School, which contributed gifts to 25 children served through the local foster-care system.

Community contributes thousands of toys in 20th year of Making Christmas Bright

ST. LUCIE WEST - More than 50 local businesses and community groups coordinated toy drives and collected more than 3,400 gifts for children in foster care, making the 20th anniversary of Making Christmas Bright one of the most prolific years for toy collection.

"Our community really cares about this project," said Christina Kaiser, Community Relations Director for Communities Connected for Kids, the non-profit organization that oversees the local child-welfare system. "We have sponsors who have been with us from the first year, and they keep coming back stronger."

The biggest sponsor in the organization's Making Christmas Bright project is the Guardians for New Futures, which coordinates toy drives for children in Indian River, Martin and Okeechobee counties, generating nearly half of the project's toys.

Minton Law PA, one of the project's newer sponsors, provided three gifts for every teenager in St. Lucie County foster care.

"That contribution can't be overstated," Kaiser said. "It's very hard to rally support for teen gifts because they can be more expensive and people seem to gravitate to the younger children."

But teenagers are still children, and they look forward to unwrapping something special on Christmas morning, she said. And because of sponsors like Minton and the Guardians, each child receiving CCKids services - including teenagers - received 2-3 gifts. Making Christmas Bright's success draws on three concepts, Kaiser said: "We keep it simple, we keep it reliable, and we pick up."

In the early fall, case managers turn in wish requests for the children on their caseloads - that's 58 case managers with a combined total of 1,138 children in 2019. Each request is entered into a spreadsheet to make up a giant list of children's names and wishes. Wishes then are assigned to sponsors, and each sponsor coordinates its own gift drive.

"Then, during the second week of December, we rent a 15-foot box truck and collect from our sponsors," Kaiser said.



Hauls from each day are unloaded in the afternoons and given back to the case managers who turned in the initial wish requests. The case managers then spend the next week visiting each of the families on their caseloads and delivering the presents to eager families who wrap them and put them under the tree for Christmas morning.

"Everyone has an important part in this wonderful project, and it's everyone working together that really makes Christmas bright," Kaiser said.

Pictured above: Toys aren't the only things Making Christmas Bright this year. Children in foster care throughout the four counties are treated to special parties like the one shown above, hosted earlier this month by the St. Lucie County Foster Parent Association.



Santa's Mobile Workshop comes to Fort Pierce, Stuart Christmas parades

CCKids participated in the 2019 Christmas parades in Fort Pierce and Stuart, rolling down crowded, candy-strewn roadways with a toy-making workshop on wheels.

The float - Santa's Mobile Workshop - featured a handmade conveyor belt generating a seemingly endless supply of toys. The belt was made of 30 individually crafted wooden links that dumped rocket ships, boats and dump trucks. And the whole contraption was "fed" with recyclable materials.

"We met the themes of both parades - a 'Green Christmas' in Stuart and 'Christmas by Land, Air and Sea,' in Fort Pierce," said Christina Kaiser, CCKids Community

Governor and First Lady DeSantis speak at 2019 Child Welfare Summit

On Tuesday, Governor Ron DeSantis and First Lady Casey DeSantis spoke at the Department of Children and Families (DCF) Child Protection Summit. This annual summit draws child welfare professionals and related partners from throughout the state to share and exchange best practices while enhancing collaborations across professions.

"As the future leaders of our state and country, our children are our greatest resource, making their safety and well-being paramount," DeSantis said. "Child welfare professionals work hard to ensure that every child grows up feeling safe, loved and happy."

Relations Director. "Our toys represented the air, land and sea elements."

CCKids will recycle the float next year for the Vero Beach and Okeechobee parades.

Click the picture above to see Santa's Mobile Workshop in action.

My administration will remain committed to making investments that support our children and strengthen Florida's families." Click [here](#) for the full press release, published December 17 by the Office of the Governor.

