



Communities Connected *for Kids*

Connections - November 27, 2019



CCKids Chief Executive Officer Carol Deboach and Paul Nigro, Circuit 19 Guardian ad Litem executive director, discuss the [#TCRings](#) campaign and prepare to kickoff the video series with their staffs.

Community leaders ring bell; help children's adoption wishes come true this holiday season

ST. LUCIE WEST - What do children in foster care really want for Christmas? They want a family to spend it with.

Communities Connected for Kids and the Judicial Circuit 19 Guardian ad Litem program are counting down to Christmas this December with #TCRings, a program to raise awareness for our community's needs for foster and adoptive homes.

Each day on Facebook, we will visit a different community or business leader. That person will read a child's adoption wish and ask a very important question: Can you help us make a child's wish for a family come true this holiday season?



"These are interesting people with a lot of followers on social media, so we hope they can help us increase awareness," said Christina Kaiser, CCKids community relations director.

Those enlisted in the project include St. Lucie County Fire Chief Nate Spera, Florida Senator Gayle Harrell and business and media partners like the Hometown News, the St. Lucie Mets and Texas Roadhouse.

There's even a circus family who comes down from the trapeze to ring the bell, Kaiser said.

Fewer than 20 percent of local children available for adoption are without family matches - a record low for the Treasure Coast and Okeechobee.

In fact, 114 out of 142 total children available for adoption are matched to families and beginning the adoption process, said Kaiser, crediting the record percent of matches to the recruitment efforts of CCKids' adoption-service provider Children's Home Society.

"They have really worked hard to find matches for children who historically are more difficult to match," Kaiser said. "They're finding more homes for large sibling groups, older teens and children with disabilities."

Other reasons include increased awareness generated by media partners like News Channel 12 and the Forever Family program, and new match-making technology provided by companies like the Selfless Love Foundation.

Social media campaigns like #TCRings also help.

"We hope this project will help identify families for those 28 children who currently don't have a match," Kaiser said.

The campaign will begin airing videos December 1. Follow on [Facebook](#) every day to find out where TCRings next.

Learn more about adoption – and all the parts of the CCKids system of care – by visiting us at www.ckkids.net.

Pictured above are Will Havik and Isaac Ankenman of the Momentum Foundation, an organization that teaches aerial acrobatics in Port St. Lucie. Foundation vice president Angel Havik and her son were among the many local residents featured in the #TCRings project, which will begin airing December 1.

We are full - grateful, joyful and hopeful

Community embraces families this Thanksgiving season



Co-parenting dinner

Biological families joined their children and the foster families caring for them for a very special Thanksgiving dinner Saturday at the Sunlight Community Church, in Port St. Lucie.

It was the Treasure Coast's first co-parenting dinner arranged to help keep families who are recovering from crisis together during the holiday.

More than 25 people, including children, attended the dinner. The [Albert Wilson Foundation](#) supplied the turkeys, which were prepared by [Fit Fixins](#), a local business that also donated sides and other goodies.

A committee composed of [QPI](#) (Quality Parenting Initiative) members and CCKids' Caregiver Support staff coordinated the event.

"It's an opportunity for children in foster care to celebrate the holiday with their families while also demonstrating the power of co-parenting," said Jerra Wisecup, who coordinated a similar project many years ago in Georgia.

Co-parenting is a best practice championed in recent years by QPI that encourages partnership between families while children are in foster care. Research shows that co-parenting creates better transitions for children returning home and provides on-going supports to vulnerable families.

Among those at the event was Albert Wilson Sr., whose son and namesake – and now an NFL player for the Miami Dolphins – was in foster care as a teenager. He sat at a table with Rose Bailey, his son’s former foster mother.

“At first I thought everyone was against us because they took my kid,” Sr. said, sharing his story with the group. “But it doesn’t work that way – it’s OK, things happen to all of us – but there’s somebody out there got your back.”

Bailey said Albert Jr. left her home 20 years ago, but he is still part of her family. And she is part of his.

“Anybody in this world is capable of that,” she said. “We’re a village right here in this room, and we all need to pick one another up.”

Turkey Basket Give-Away

About 30 community volunteers gathered Saturday at St. Peter Lutheran Church to assemble and distribute Thanksgiving baskets to 100 local families, including those served by Communities Connected for Kids.

The project, now in its eighth year, is a labor of love for a Fort Pierce attorney who wishes to remain anonymous.

"People needed it, and we had the resources," she said, surrounded by busy volunteers and walls of frozen turkeys and Idaho potatoes.



The Albert Wilson Foundation and Publix contribute to the project, and CCKids staff members Sheila Pina and Shearon Demps identify and organize families who need a little help putting food on the Thanksgiving table.



PGA Village Appreciation Event

And like a good neighbor, CCKids was there - at the 2019 PGA Living Magazine's Appreciation Expo.

"We really want to be part of the St. Lucie West community," said Chief Financial Officer Lauren Hahn, who represented CCKids at the event. "The residents of PGA Village have embraced our mission, so we wanted to come out and show our appreciation."

The Appreciation Expo is the magazine's largest annual event. It provides local community partners, like CCKids, the opportunity to connect with PGA Village residents.
