



The CCKids Connector



Martin County Sheriff's Office teaches foster parents how to keep children safe online *New course offered to all parents*

Stuart - Parenting teens has never been a soft-pitch game. Throw in trauma and the curve-ball nature of social media, and today's foster parents are playing in a league of their own.

But thanks to the Martin County Sheriff's Office, they now have a new tool to help make things easier.

Representatives from the sheriff's office visited caregivers during last week's Martin County Foster Parent Association meeting, bringing with them a new course designed to help parents keep up with their children's safety online.

"We're here tonight to find out what your children are doing online," Corporal Brian Broughton said to the group of about 15 CCKids staff and foster parents, urging them to investigate their children's online presence.

Through the course, trainers encourage parents to check privacy settings, to know whether their children's online friends are friends in real life and to be wary of special apps designed to hide content.

"This is an important training for any parent, but there's a particular need among foster parents," said Jill Poole, CCKids Caregiver and Adoption Support Supervisor. "Children in foster care have experienced significant trauma and are more vulnerable to human trafficking and other crimes that are perpetrated online."

Any group of parents interested in learning more about online safety for their children can contact the sheriff's office and schedule a training.

For more information, call the non-emergency line of the Martin County Sheriff's Office at (772) 220-7000.

Interested in becoming a foster parent? Call Jerra Wisecup at (772) 249-3188 or visit cckids.net. Or, if you are interested in being a Volunteer Child Advocate, call Nicole Hughes at (772) 785-5804.



In the Clinic with Nurse Pam

This is the first segment of a two-part series titled, "Suicide; It's Time to Talk about it." Don't miss the final segment in the March 20 edition of The Connector.

If you or your child were visibly ill or suffered from a physical medical condition, you would seek help, right?

Yet depression, a potentially lethal medical illness, remains under-treated. The statistics are staggering: A 2009 study of high school students reported 13.8 percent of students seriously considered suicide, 10.9 percent had a plan and 6.3 percent actually attempted suicide.

The good news is that depression *is* treatable, and suicide preventable. In fact, 90 percent of youth who die by suicide suffer from a treatable mental illness like depression.

Foster children particularly are vulnerable because of trauma experienced in childhood and again through the process of being removed from home.

Recognizing warning signs and risk factors such as isolation, negative view of self, risk-taking behavior, feeling like a burden, giving things away, and a sense of hopelessness are some of the warning signs.

Seek help immediately if you see any of these symptoms in your children. Call 1-800-273-8255, and never leave a potentially suicidal youth alone. Stay with them until help arrives.

Originally from Canada, Pam became a nurse in 2011 after graduating from York University in Toronto. Her clinical experience includes emergency medicine, community nursing and sexual assault care. Pam moved to Florida with her husband (and IT wizard) Jody Boyer in 2014 and began work with Communities Connected for Kids the next year. She coordinates, assists and monitors the medical needs of children served by C.C.Kids.



Extension may make adoption more attractive to older teens

Families now have one less barrier to adoption.

The Maintenance Adoption Subsidy, once available only to adopting parents through the adopted child's 18th birthday, was extended through age 20 as of January 1.



One School, One Child program relaunches in Okeechobee

Communities Connected for Kids relaunched its One School One Child recruitment program in Okeechobee earlier this month during a meeting of Okeechobee County School District principals.

The program, which recruits foster parents from school staff, was created more than a year ago and slowly has been getting its

The move was made in preparation for the end of Florida's Title IV-E waiver to help maximize federal dollars.

But it has the added advantage of making adoption more attractive to older teens, CCKids Chief Operating Officer Cheri Sheffer said.

That's because adopted youth will now receive benefits similar to those available to them through Extended Foster Care.

Benefits in that program include financial resources and help with education and living expenses, as well as Medicaid coverage.

Until those benefits were extended to adopted youth, older teens may have opted to stay in foster care rather than finding permanent connections through adoption.

"That's a problem," Sheffer said. "Research shows that youth who have permanent connections have greater supports in navigating crisis and are more likely to succeed in life."

Locally, families of eligible young adults have been notified of their new benefits and the steps needed to qualify.

Those eligible include young adults whose adopted parents signed an initial adoption assistance agreement when they were 16 or 17, who have not yet reached age 21.

"legs," said Christina Kaiser, CCKids Community Relations Director.

"We actually started in Okeechobee, but had early successes in Martin and St. Lucie counties and turned our focus there," Kaiser said.

More CCKids staff became involved with the program, making it possible to expand into other areas.

"We are determined to reach our goal of having a foster parent in every school," said Denise Waninger, CCKids Martin County Director and program developer. "We think that educators and people who work in the schools have the heart and skill set needed to be excellent caregivers."

One School One Child is a presentation-based program. Staff and partner foster parents attend faculty meetings at individual schools and make a 10-minute recruitment pitch.

Presentations have been made to eight schools so far and produced one foster home.

"It's been a little slow to get off the ground because we're trying to sync so many different schedules and work around testing and school breaks," Kaiser said. "But we're getting there - one school and one child at a time."

Interested in a school presentation? Call (772) 528-0362.