



The CCKids Connector



Forever Family highlights foster-parent recruitment, social worker appreciation

Stuart - *Forever Family*, a national program that leverages the power of the media to help children find adoptive homes, took a slight detour from its primary mission this month to help Communities Connected for Kids highlight its need for foster parents.

"It's all connected," said Christina Kaiser, [CCKids](#) community relations director. "The majority of children go home to Mom and Dad, and we really need safe and loving foster homes for them in the meantime."

So when a few spots on the [News Channel 12](#) Forever Family segment became available, CCKids jumped at the chance to highlight St. Lucie County foster parents Mariel Zen and Jamie Franks.

Both foster moms were interviewed by News Anchor [Liz Quirantes](#) during a video shoot earlier this month at Jupiter's Busch Wildlife Sanctuary. Their stories, which include information about the local Guardian ad Litem program - another important element of the child-welfare community - will run sometime in April.

More than 720 children in Indian River, Martin, Okeechobee and St. Lucie counties have been removed from home, Kaiser said. Most of those children live with relatives, but the rest - about 250 - live in foster or group homes.

So what does it take to be a foster parent?

"It takes an open heart and a little extra space," Zen said.

This month's Forever Family video shoot wasn't all about foster parents. Since March is National Social Worker Appreciation Month, some of the interviews featured CCKids staff Caitlin Hassan and Melanie Kranker.

"We wanted to highlight the people behind Forever Family," said Gia Tutalo-Mote, Forever Family founder and director. "Social workers are all about strengthening human connections, whether that's meeting the behavioral and mental-health needs of children in foster care or helping them bond with adopted family members."

Of course, Forever Family's primary focus is finding new homes for abused, neglected or abandoned children. This month's video shoot was no exception and included interviews with a brother and sister pair.

"I love my brother," said 13-year-old Mya, whose interview is available at [News Channel 12](#). "I go where he goes."

Her brother Da'Shawn's interview, the foster-parent recruitment segment and the social worker piece, are in production and will begin airing later this month. Follow us on [Facebook](#) to watch their videos or check them out at [Forever Family](#).

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 second segment of a two-part series titled, "Suicide; It's Time to Talk about it."

Seeing risk factors and warning signs that someone you know may be thinking about suicide is terrifying, but you can save a life if you take action right away.

If you suspect that someone you know is thinking about suicide, the first step is to start a conversation. Be persistent, reinforce the message that you care and can help, try to connect any way you can and try not to be judgmental.

Focus on the person's strengths and skills, be patient and listen, and try not to overreact. Don't give advice, and, most importantly, do not minimize the situation or their feelings.

Ask some direct questions, such as, "Do you ever wish you could go to sleep and never wake up?" Or, "Do you feel like you want to escape it all?"

Never promise to keep a person's thoughts about suicide a secret. Give hope and seek professional help from your local hospital or mental-health association.

If you are a parent, it is important to keep your child in treatment and to communicate with his or her therapist. Remember, in an emergency, call the [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#) at 1-800-273-8255 or call 911.

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. She coordinates, assists and monitors the medical needs of children served by CCKids.

Road to Success travels to FIU, University of Miami

Port St. Lucie - A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step, the proverb goes.

And on February 17, four young adults and three Road to Success staff members embarked on a busy weekend with thousands of steps heading to college.

Specifically, the group headed to [Florida International University](#) and the [University of Miami](#) for two days of college campus tours.



Going to college is something that many people take for granted, said Margie Dotson, CCKids staff member and program specialist. Youth in care often don't have the luxury of dreaming "big" because they are focused on survival.

But Road to Success - a CCKids program that prepares young people for life after foster care - is changing that, one young person and one college tour at a time.



"Our focus as program staff is to help young people build a foundation in gradual steps: graduate from high school, transition to college, start a career and have a successful future," Dotson said.

"We help them identify what their success looks like and put a plan in place," she said. "Becoming successful is a lot of hard work.

"Academic success is crucial to that, and college road tours helps them to focus on their vision of college."