



# Communities Connected *for Kids*

Connections - May 1, 2020

*Keeping us connected during the COVID-19 shutdown*



*Thank you for celebrating National Child Abuse Prevention Month with us and helping to focus a little attention on our nation's other health crisis. Sadly, it's possible that more children suffered abuse this month as tension built inside homes most vulnerable to the social and economic impacts of COVID-19.*

*In May, we will celebrate the people in our community who open their homes and their hearts – even in the midst of a pandemic – to those children. Keep following us to learn more. And if you have ever thought about becoming a foster parent, now is the time to act. Please call (772) 873-7800 and ask for Jerra.*

# Calls to hotline down, but no time to celebrate

**ST. LUCIE WEST** - Calls to the state's child-abuse registry decreased significantly in March and April. But it's no time to celebrate, warn local child-welfare professionals.

Calls throughout Florida have decreased more than 30 percent. And the statewide cumulative number of children removed from their homes because of abuse began to trend downward in March by 7 percent.

Locally, 53 fewer children were removed from home in March of this year than in March of 2019 - a significant decrease for the area.

"We were expecting this to happen when schools and day-care centers closed to stop the spread of COVID-19," said Christina Kaiser, community relations director for Communities Connected for Kids, the non-profit organization that oversees the child-welfare system in Indian River, Martin, Okeechobee and St. Lucie counties. "There just aren't as many people interacting with them who might see that something was wrong."

Kaiser said child-welfare professionals are depending more than ever on reporting from neighbors and family members.

"One thing we're sure about is that child abuse doesn't just disappear," she said.

In fact, abuse – all forms of it – is more likely to happen during times of stress and isolation. So CCKids staff are trying to keep prevention messages top of mind and make sure everyone remembers that any person who suspects a child is being abused is required by law to report it.

Case managers still visit children and families monthly via Zoom and other forms of video conferencing, and child protective investigators continue to investigate new abuse reports.

Still, more eyes and ears are needed to ensure children are safe.

Foster parents are another significant piece to the COVID-19 puzzle. Like most child-welfare systems throughout the nation, CCKids has never had enough foster homes to keep all children out of group care or to keep sibling groups together.

Now, with so many people sheltering in place and trying to keep their distance from one another, foster parent recruitment has a new challenge.

Locally, foster parents are doing the best they can to keep children safe, but more help is needed to keep up with children who continue to come into care and for the increase in intakes that may happen once the COVID-19 emergency has passed.

For now the message is the same, though more urgent: Stay vigilant against child abuse, and give a child a home by becoming a foster parent.

To report suspected abuse, call 1-800-96-ABUSE. All calls are anonymous.

And if you're interested in becoming a foster parent, CCKids and its contracted recruitment agencies are offering training classes via Zoom. Call 772-873-7800 and ask for Jerra Wisecup.



## Don't be afraid, seek medical help *In the Clinic with Nurse Lisa*

We've all seen the news stories about families separated from their ill loved ones because of limited - or no - visitation in hospitals.

For some, the fear of the coronavirus has less to do with the sickness itself and more to do with finding ourselves admitted to a hospital, suddenly isolated from our families and with only medical staff to comfort us.

For others, the fear of exposure to the virus may outweigh the desire to seek medical help for normal, non-virus related maladies.

But you must not allow fear to guide your decision-making process, especially when it comes to seeking medical help for serious injury or illness. Use proper measures to protect yourself, but do not delay. If you have chest pain, breathing problems, acute pain, you must seek help - call 911 as you would normally would.

Also, many providers are offering Telehealth as an option. If they do, go ahead and complete your appointments. When the offices do open, there may be a long wait list to get in.

For the latest information about Novel Coronavirus 2019, contact the CDC at the following link: [CDC.GOV](https://www.cdc.gov).

*Lisa McBride, RN, BSN, is a nurse care coordinator at [CCKids](#).*

## Even shuttered, caregivers keep the door open for foster children. Here's how you can help.

**St. Lucie West** – While most of us are restricting access to our homes and to each other during the COVID-19 shut down, there is one group of people in our community who keep the proverbial door open.

Foster parents are essential and on the job, serving children in the community who, amidst the stress and isolation of a statewide quarantine, continue to enter care.

Now there is something the community can do to help make that job a little easier.

Communities Connected for Kids unveiled its Adopt a Foster Family initiative today, in recognition of National Foster Parent Appreciation Month.

Organizers hope to engage community sponsors interested in creating care packages for local foster families. Sponsors can be anyone - families, individuals, church members, businesses, or social groups.



The project will match sponsors to local foster families, and CCKids staff will coordinate pick-up and delivery of the care packages.

Care packages don't have to be elaborate or expensive. Rather, they may include family games, gift certificates to restaurants or gift cards to an ice cream parlor for later in the year, when the quarantine is lifted.

Interested in helping? Email [Christina Kaiser](#) for more information and to be matched to a foster family.

If you're interested in becoming a foster parent, CCKids and its contracted recruitment agencies are offering training classes via Zoom. Call 772-873-7800 and ask for Jerra Wisecup.

## Inside the mission



*From time to time, we share internal communications in an effort to give you a more intimate understanding of our work. The following is a recent text from a young adult in our Road to Success program:*

"I know it's kinda your job and all, but thank you for not giving up on me...I know I haven't been making the best decisions but it makes me happy to know that I still have you and CCKids as a support system."