



Communities Connected *for Kids*

Connections - July 15, 2020

Keeping us connected in this temporarily remote world



The community of Vatalia and several other Tradition neighborhoods donated new and gently used bags to children in foster care this month. Pat Cunningham, seen here, and his family coordinated the drive to ensure children have durable luggage when visiting family or moving into new homes. Thanks to this and other recent donations, CCKids now has enough luggage to serve children for the next six months.

Despite pandemic, more kids adopted in 2020

ST. LUCIE WEST - With July comes the beginning of a new fiscal year for Communities Connected for Kids and the opportunity to review the successes and challenges of the past 12 months.

The number of children finding adoptive homes reached 190 - a 13.7 percent

increase from the previous 12-month period and a 45 percent increase over the 2020 goal of 131.

That's right! Even in the midst of a statewide shutdown, the good work of finding adoptive homes for children did not slow down.

In fact, Communities Connected for Kids and its adoptions provider, Children's Home Society, exceeded the annual adoptions goal - a negotiated agreement with the Department of Children and Families - several months earlier than the July 1 deadline.

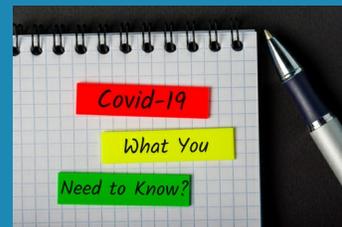
Much of that had to do with the quick and creative thinking of the local child-welfare community, which adapted many of its activities to the virtual world in an effort to keep the COVID-19 pandemic from slowing things down.

With the exception of March – the only month when all court dates were cancelled – adoptions continued to happen throughout the spring and into early summer.

More than 20 adoptions had been finalized via video conferencing by the first week of June, and another 16 – 13 virtually and three in person – were scheduled through the end of the month.

Our COVID-19 Response Update

CCKids decided in late April to keep offices closed and maintain a remote workforce into the summer, a decision now proving prudent as cases of COVID-19 spike anew throughout the nation and in our state.



We continue to follow the lead of the Department of Children and Families and take a gradual approach to reopening, but it is unlikely that we will return to the offices in full measure before the end of summer.

Despite this, services have continued uninterrupted, but with adjustments. In fact, providers in CCKids' system of care are reporting increased engagements with the families they serve. More families are able to schedule and keep appointments, and case managers and other service providers are getting more face time with their clients due to the convenience of video conferencing. Systems throughout the state now are looking at what tasks can remain virtual even beyond the pandemic.

In related news, the state's 2020-2021 budget was signed last week by Gov. Ron DeSantis, who vetoed \$1 billion in line-item expenses to compensate for reduced revenue caused by the COVID-19 outbreak and subsequent state shutdown.

Vetoed items include \$5 million to the Office of Child Welfare, \$200,000 to the Forever Family project, \$500,000 to the Heart Gallery and \$200,000 to Hands of Mercy Everywhere. The Department of Children and Families' budget, from

which Communities Connected for Kids receives its funding, remained largely untouched.

Likewise, CCKids' Board of Directors approved a tentative 2021 budget with few changes from the previous year.

Independence doesn't come easy, but it's possible with the Red, White & YOU!

St. Lucie West – CCKids is celebrating the independence of young adults in foster care this month with Red, White & YOU. The social media campaign is designed to raise interest for fostering teenagers - teenagers like Antonia Fede.

This young lady was in foster care for many years, becoming angry and disillusioned with the system.

But she never gave up.

Antonia was adopted in April just before her 18th birthday. She graduated high school with honors and was accepted by several colleges and universities. She decided to remain local and attend Indian River State College so she can enjoy life with her new family.

Follow us on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#) throughout July as we bring you stories of success from young people leaving foster care and beginning exciting new chapters in their lives.

If you are interested in becoming a foster parent to a teenager, call (772) 873-7800, and ask for Jerra.



Inside the mission



From time to time, we share internal communication in an effort to give you a more intimate understanding of our work. Today we share this note, written by someone who benefited from a community donation:

" I just wanted to say you are all doing a great job and following up with a beautiful mission.

"I fostered my grandchild and picked her up from a shelter in Fort Pierce when she was barely three years old. (She had been given a handmade blanket). I remember and will always treasure that blanket.

"I continued to push forward until I adopted my little girl who will be 8 years

old. Thank you, and may God bless all committed to this selfless act of love."
