



Communities Connected *for Kids*

Connections - Aug. 12, 2020

Keeping us connected in this temporarily remote world



Volunteers help load a truck with school supplies headed to Communities Connected for Kids' St. Lucie County service center. About 300 bags were donated this week by the United Way of St. Lucie County to children in the local foster-care system.

Summer Swelter Can't Stop Service

ST. LUCIE WEST - High temperatures, brutal humidity and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic are no match for the passion and commitment of local volunteers.

These volunteers are spending their summer collecting school supplies, filling back packs and

getting duffel bags, care packages, masks and other valuable resources to children and families served by Communities Connected for Kids.



They include United Way of St. Lucie County volunteers who spent days in a warehouse assembling school supplies for children in foster care, and local business owner Wendy Zuniga.

Her family donated enough backpacks and pencils, paper and pocket folders to send 50 Martin County students back to school fully supplied.

And longtime CCKids partner Sunshine Health didn't miss its opportunity to help, shipping an order of supplies to eager volunteers ready to assemble and distribute to children in need.

"We were a little worried about the impact of COVID-19 on our back-to-school collections this year," said Christina Kaiser, CCKids community relations director. "But our partners in the community found a way to get it done.

"They didn't forget us."



In fact, some new partners and volunteers have come on board since the pandemic began last spring - groups like the Culture Committee of the Keller Williams Realty Group in St. Lucie West, which collected and donated duffel bags and back packs for children who have to move from one home to another.

"Every child deserves to know and feel love and know that someone cares about them," said Hany Carinha, of Keller Williams Realty. "That's why we hosted a duffel bag/backpack drive."

The Culture Committee is a group of like-minded individuals with one goal in mind: Give where you live, said Carinha, adding that she hopes the travel bags will give some comfort to children during one of the most traumatic times of their lives.

Still other groups are pooling volunteers to make sure that children and families - as well as the case managers who work with them - have enough

masks to safely weather the pandemic.

The Ocean Village Sewing Circle has sewn more than 1,000 masks since they began the project last spring, donating nearly 400 of them to CCKids.

"We've given them out to foster families, to case managers and our clients," Kaiser said. "And the group's most recent donation will allow us to add masks to the back packs of school supplies we've received."

LIVE!

Foster & Adoptive Parent Panel



Be a part of our "live" Zoom audience; register for the foster and adoptive parent panel

Join us from the comfort of your own home at 7 p.m., August 18, for a panel discussion of Foster and adoptive parents in Okeechobee and the Treasure Coast - audience participation welcome!

The discussion is a no-pressure opportunity to ask questions about foster care and adoption. There are two ways to participate: Be part of the Zoom audience by registering your email [here](#), or watch a live feed from [Facebook](#).

Registration to join the Zoom audience ends August 16.

Panelists include:

- Will Armstead, CEO of the St. Lucie County Boys and Girls Club and adoptive father of two.
- Nicole Hughes, Guardian Ad Litem Child Advocate, first time mom and adoptive parent to a teenage boy.
- Rose Bailey, a CCKIDS Foster Parent Mentor, former foster parent, and adoptive mother to eight.
- Mariel Zen, Vice President of the St Lucie County Foster and Adoptive Parent Association, former foster parent and proud adoptive parent approaching her one-year Adoptiversary.
- And current foster parents Jackie Oxendine and Belinda Pizarro, both dedicating their retirement to helping children and families work toward reunification.