



Connections - November 6, 2020

Keeping us connected in this temporarily remote world



Brothers Zachery and Daniel are interviewed by News Channel 12 Anchor Liz Quirantes for an upcoming Forever Family segment. The show raises awareness for adoption and helps find homes for children and teens in foster care.

"I Thought About our Wonderful Caregivers": A Response to the Recent USA Today Series

By Carol Deloach, CEO – Like many of you, I read the recent USA Today investigative series outlining problems in Florida's child-welfare system with a heavy heart. It is a hard read, not

only because it outlines failures to children served by the state's foster care system – a system that I lead in Okeechobee and the Treasure Coast – but also because of the bleak picture it paints of the vast network of caregivers who dedicate their lives to helping children.

While the happenings in the series did unfortunately occur, we cannot and must not forget the more than a hundred foster parents in our area who provide exceptional care to children who have been abused, abandoned and neglected.



That care and commitment shows up in our system metrics; proof of caregiver strength is evident in child placement stability. In our most recent quarter, the average number of times a child moved from home to home was three per 1,000 days, below both the statewide rate (3.5) and the accepted standard of care (4). Furthermore, most of those disruptions are among teen-agers, for whom I will admit we have fewer foster-home options and who are not always stable in group-home settings.

In our community – a four-county swath that includes Indian River, Martin, Okeechobee and St. Lucie counties – 348 children receive care in their own homes, while 685 have been removed.

There are 140 foster homes for all of them, and so we work hard to identify grandparents, older siblings and other relatives who can and will help. That is where so much of the work takes place and where, once again, our metrics bear out the true picture: That the number of children placed with relatives has steadily increased while the number of children and teens living in group-care continues to decrease.

To paint a one-sided picture of foster care as presented in the USA Today series is unfair and in fact distorts the true picture: A reflection of the selflessness of all our wonderful foster parents and the quality of care they provide.

I read the series of articles, and I thought about Rose. Rose and her husband adopted 8 children from foster care and use their “down time” to mentor new caregivers so they don't get overwhelmed and quit what is already a very difficult commitment.

I thought about Mariel, who just last month used her connections as an advocate to help another caregiver obtain a specially equipped van so that her family could adopt a child who uses a wheelchair.

There's Mark, who never says no when we ask him to share his own family's foster care and adoption story and who uses his church to connect so many other foster parents to local resources.

And there's Mary, who, even a decade after closing her doors to foster care, still baby-sits for the now-adult children who once found respite in her home.

All these caregivers received thorough vetting to become foster parents. They were thoroughly screened, and their homes were studied. They attended 30 hours of training to start, and they keep their licenses up to date by meeting additional, annual requirements.

They accept phone calls from harried case managers and placement specialists at 3 a.m. They create networks to get diapers and cribs to one another before the sun rises on the next knock on the door.

Foster parents attend classes, trainings and workshops to learn how to work with biological families. They do that because they believe a child's best chance for success is to maintain family bonds and to help those families find better ways of parenting.

I will not, in any way, attempt to explain away system failures that contribute to a foster child's already heavy burden of pain and distrust. We, in this community of care, have the responsibility of caring for other people's children. We must never betray the enormity of that responsibility by taking our eyes off our three-pronged responsibility of child safety, permanency and well-being.

Human services is, well, human. It is messy, and mistakes sometimes are made. But it's also wonderful and life affirming. It strengthens families and creates new ones.

I am sad for our failures and will work hard to keep the quality of care high in our own community. But I also feel lucky to be part this system of care. I feel lucky to be surrounded by the selflessness of so many. And I am proud to bear witness to the redemptive nature of love and determination that I see every day.

If you are reading this and wonder how you can help improve our system of care and the lives of children who depend on it, please consider becoming a caregiver. Call (772) 873-7800, and ask for Jerra.

FAQ CHECK

LIVE @ 7 P.M. NOVEMBER 17

A Roundtable Discussion to
Answer All Your Foster &
Adoption Questions



Communities
Connected
for Kids

We have a FAQ Check for You: An Opportunity to Discuss All Your Foster & Adoption Questions

ST. LUCIE WEST - Foster and adoptive parents in Okeechobee and the Treasure Coast invite the community to a special panel discussion at 7 p.m., November 17.

The discussion, a no-pressure opportunity to ask questions about foster care and adoption, will take place via Zoom and Facebook Live. It's the second in a quarterly series of roundtable discussions and will have a special focus on the Okeechobee community.

"This event is designed for the person who has thought about foster care or adoption but maybe isn't ready to attend an orientation or register for a class," said Christina Kaiser, CCKids community relations director.

There are two ways to participate.

"You can sign up to be part of the Zoom audience, or you can watch from our live feed on Facebook," she said. "If you choose to join our Zoom audience, we'll send you an invitation with the link the day before the event."

Want to join our live studio (Zoom) audience? Click the [link](#) to register with your email address.