



Communities  
Connected  
*for Kids*



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Annual Report

# Who We Are

Communities Connected for Kids is the Lead Agency for child-welfare services in Indian River, Martin, Okeechobee and St. Lucie counties. Our services include:

- Skills training
- Residential care
- Extended foster care
- Licensed foster care
- Case management
- Post-adoption supports
- Independent living
- Adoptions

Our mission is to enhance the safety, permanency and well-being of all children in Okeechobee and the Treasure Coast through a community network of family support services. Our vision is to eliminate abuse, neglect and abandonment so all children grow to their full potential. *Despite the challenges of the 2020 pandemic, we adjusted our services quickly to accommodate for safety and moved forward with our mission and vision.*

## 2020 Board of Directors

**Kathryn Hensley, Chair**

School Board Member

**Vanessa Farnes**

Seacoast Bank

**Melanie Wiles, Vice Chair**

Boys & Girls Club of St. Lucie County

**Dr. Angie Bailey**

Indian River State College

**Pat McCoy**

Okeechobee School District

**Leslie Kroeger**

Cohen, Milstein, Sellers & Toll

**Doris Plym**

Guardians for New Futures

**Kristy Conway**

Indian River State College

**Steve Simon**

Rosenthal, Levy, Simon & Simon

**Pam Carithers**

Lincoln Park Main Street



## A Message from Carol Deloach, CEO



It was a demanding year, but we rose to the challenge. CCKids and our provider community stepped up to give the best possible services, adjusting quickly while maintaining high standards of quality and safety. In fact, 15 percent more children were adopted than in the previous fiscal year, while more children who were removed from home are living with relatives, and fewer are in group care.

Many factors played a part in these achievements. Our staff proved itself adaptive, while our network of provider agencies and the court system looked for creative new ways to serve families.

We figured out how to work and volunteer safely in the community, and we learned how much more engaged families can be when the hurdles of transportation are replaced with the possibilities of the virtual world.

You, the community, also ensured that a smooth transition of services was possible. We moved our awareness campaigns, roundtable discussions and events to Facebook and Zoom, and you followed us. We made changes to our school supplies drive and Christmas gift collection to accommodate for safety, and you responded by showering us with a record number of resources.

Everyone shined in 2020. Our staff was recognized nationally for great care and service to the community. And our finance team successfully navigated the Paycheck Protection Program, ensuring that our company would be able to end the current fiscal year in the black despite a possible 3 percent, or \$500,000, budget reduction.

Child welfare has never been for the squeamish or for those who back away from hard work. While we certainly face unknowns, all I need for confidence in this new year is to look back on 2020 and the incredible efforts made by a still-dedicated workforce and an ever-generous community.

# In 2020, We Were:

**1** Organization

*coordinating*

**23** Contracted Providers

*serving*

**1,134** Children

*And their families*



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Two brothers wait to be interviewed by News Channel 12 during one of the few in-person Forever Family segments during the year. They since have been matched to a home.

# We ensured permanency

## COVID-19 Does Not Stop the Work of Putting Families Together

Communities Connected for Kids exceeded its adoptions goal for the year – early and despite a global pandemic. 190 children were adopted from the local foster-care system during the 2019-2020 year, representing a nearly 15 percent increase over the previous year’s adoption number of 165 children.

The increase reflects a five-year trend, itself the result of recruitment efforts and an efficiency project that cut the amount of time spent in the adoption process. Still, officials were unsure how the COVID-19 health crisis would impact this year’s adoptions. As in most areas of life, video conferencing became the bridge to normalcy.

“We only had a month when we couldn’t finalize adoptions,” said Vernee Mason, program director for Children’s Home Society, the organization that provides adoption services for CCKids’ system of care. Court dates were cancelled in March, but adoption hearings resumed in April via video conferencing, she said. It was a novel approach for both adoptions staff and the courts, which had canceled all non-essential hearings due to the spread of the coronavirus.

“We went into quarantine, and we had a child turning 18 just 12 days later,” Mason said. “Everyone worked together to get him adopted via Zoom, and then we just asked, ‘Why do we have to stop?’”

Dependency judges in all four Circuit 19 counties – Indian River, Martin, Okeechobee and St. Lucie – agreed to virtual adoptions, which have continued into 2021.

**190**  
**children**  
**adopted**



The child-welfare community, friends and family roll by in a special parade to celebrate one of the 190 adoptions that took place during the pandemic.

# We ensured safety

The rate of children abused or neglected while receiving services and after returning home continued to decrease from previous years: The rate of local children re-abused while in care was 2.75 children per 100,000 days, compared to the state average of 6.30 per 100,000. Likewise, the rate of local children who remained safe after returning home was 96.14 percent, versus 95.45 statewide.

Calls to the state's child-abuse registry decreased significantly, and the number of children removed from home began to trend downward by as much as 7% in the spring due to COVID-related school closures. Locally, 53 fewer children were removed from home in March of 2020 than the previous year. While fewer children in care is usually better, many professionals suspected the decrease was due to fewer abuse reports called in during the shutdown.

CCKids was ready. We refocused all messaging on reporting suspected abuse, emphasizing the widespread presence of stressors and the absence of teacher reports. Case managers continued monthly visits virtually or in person when necessary, and foster parents—a key piece to our COVID-19 response—kept their doors open.

**96%**  
**Safe at**  
**Home**



Children all over the Treasure Coast & Okeechobee headed back to school in late summer. Thanks to local and statewide efforts, those who opted for in-person learning, went back to school equipped with safety equipment.

We ensured well-being

5%

More children were placed with relatives, and 21 percent fewer were placed in group care than the previous year.

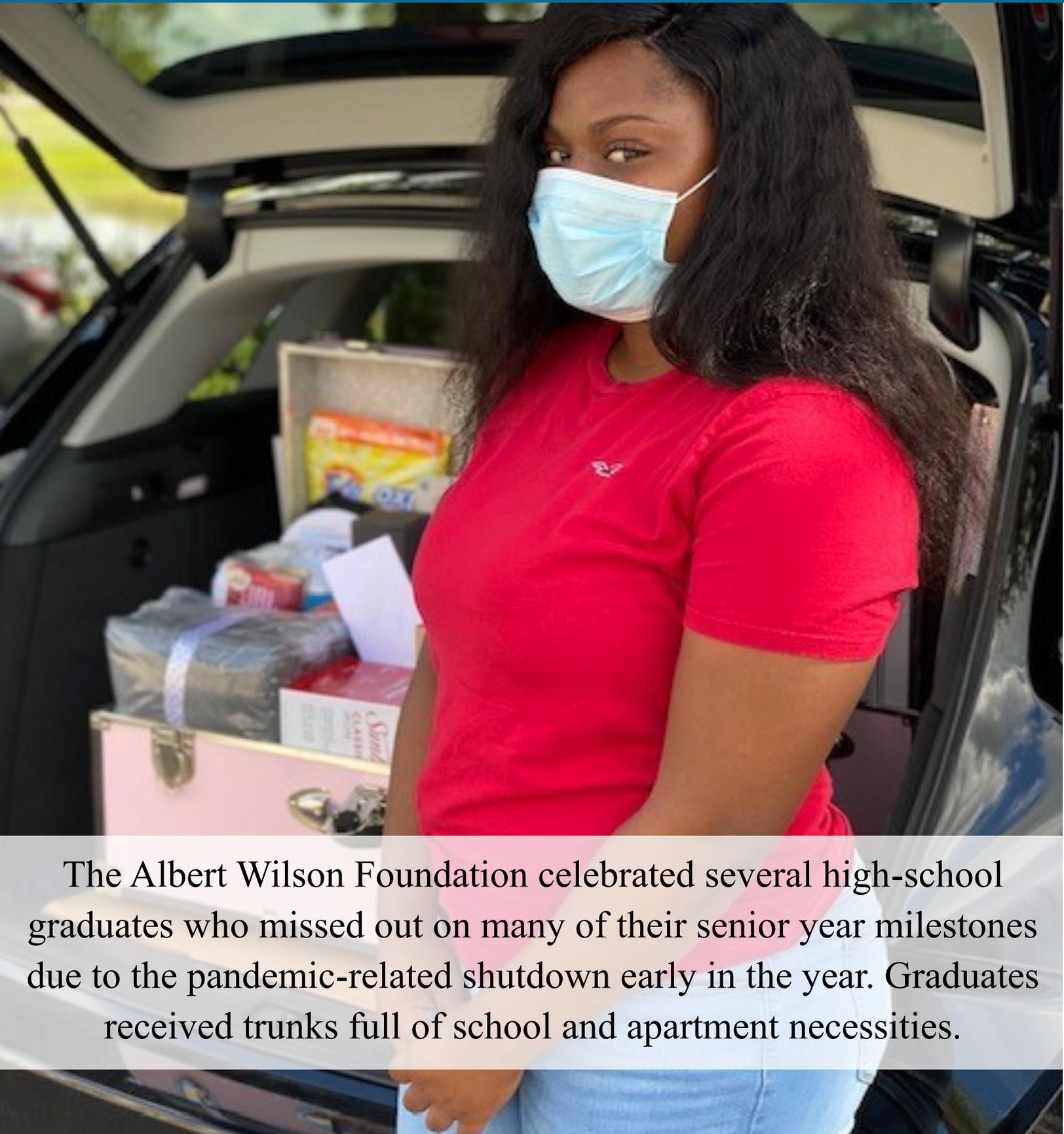


Both of these outcomes are considered measures of a child's overall well-being because it is generally accepted that children do better when they live with people they know and in home settings.

And in 2020, CCKids' caregiver support team worked hard to make sure more children were living with relatives by increasing the number of children living with licensed relatives (called Level 1 Foster Homes) from 35 to 120. This increase, combined with children placed with unlicensed family members, resulted in a 5 percent increase in children living with relatives overall.

In past years, there was no pathway to licensure for relatives who therefore missed out on many of the resources and supports available to other caregivers. That, in turn, made it more difficult for them to care for family members in the system. Licensing relatives has removed that barrier, added supports to more families and resulted in greater stability for children in the dependency system.

# Ensuring Well-Being



The Albert Wilson Foundation celebrated several high-school graduates who missed out on many of their senior year milestones due to the pandemic-related shutdown early in the year. Graduates received trunks full of school and apartment necessities.

We measure a child’s well-being in many ways including visits to the doctor or dentist, access to mental-health services and education. CCKids outperformed state targets in some of these areas including children who have seen a doctor in the last 12 months (98.3%), and young adults who achieve their educational goals (88.4%).

**88.4% met  
educational  
goals**

Well being also is measured by the extent to which children feel “normal” while in care—like starting the school year with supplies, having overnight bags to carry their belongings and receiving gifts during the holidays. In 2020, CCKids collected more than 300 backpacks of school supplies through its partnership with the United Way of St. Lucie County and merged efforts with longtime partner Guardians for New Futures to double the number of children served by a combined toy drive.

And in the spring, staff and volunteers left family goody baskets at the doorsteps of foster homes in all four counties—an important thank you to caregivers who kept their doors open to children during the worst of the pandemic.

# 2020 Highlights



No one expected 2020 to go the way it did. We celebrated the New Year with a community volunteer effort, pulling together a CCKids team to work on a Habitat for Humanity home build.



And the Martin County Fair Association treated our local foster families to a dinner and evening at the fair.

In March, we sent staff home to work remotely and quickly adapted our activities to the virtual world. We celebrated Child Abuse Prevention Month in April with a virtual Breakfast and MANicure event live-streamed on Facebook.



We also found ways to celebrate our foster parents in May by collecting goody baskets and leaving them at their doorsteps.



# Our Events Went Virtual



The COVID-19 pandemic changed the way we did business, but it didn't stop it! CCKids staff worked from home, attending meetings, events and even adoption hearings virtually. Community events and public awareness activities also moved into the virtual world. Forever Families, which airs on News Channel 12 every Tuesday at 5 p.m., continued to tell the stories of children looking for adoptive families by taping and producing news segments via Zoom.

# Annual Highlights



It was especially important to recognize caregivers this year. During a time when so many people kept their distance and stayed safely inside their homes, foster parents opened their doors and said, “Yes!” to placements. We asked the community to honor them by donating care packages. Thanks to a donation from the Kathryn A. Basile Foster a Dream Foundation, we were able to bring baskets to every foster parent.

Adoption hearings continued via Zoom, and many newly adoptive families celebrated with parades and other socially distanced events.





The faith-based CarePortal project launched December 3. CarePortal is a tech platform developed by the national Global Orphan Project to connect child-welfare professionals with churches willing to meet both tangible and intangible needs of families and children in the system of care.

CCKids' Making Christmas Bright program merged with longtime partner Guardians for New Futures this year. The combined efforts resulted in a nearly 100 percent increase in the number of children served. The drive was overhauled for safety, with case managers and support staff picking up toys at carefully scheduled appointments.



# 2020 Achievements



The Forever Family program teamed up with a local Foster Parent Association & News Channel 12 to help get a wheelchair-accessible van to a family who needed it for their adopted son.

## **Safety—**

Out-performed state expectations in the maintenance of safety plans for all children under in-home supervision.

Transitioned the Keeping Families Connected initiative to the virtual world and prevented 81 percent of children served by the project from entering foster care.

Assembled Safety Support Team meetings via video conferencing and prevented 43 percent of children staffed through the program from being removed from home.

Facilitated four cycles of in-service training for 207 CCKids staff and child-welfare professionals throughout the area.

Ensured a continuation of quality standards throughout the pandemic and maintained national accreditation.

## **Permanency —**

News Channel 12, through our partnership with the Forever Family program, produced 14 television segments to help find adoptive homes for children and recruit foster parents. Out of those children, six have been matched and one placed in pre-adoptive homes.

Increased adoptions by 15 percent.

## **Well-Being —**

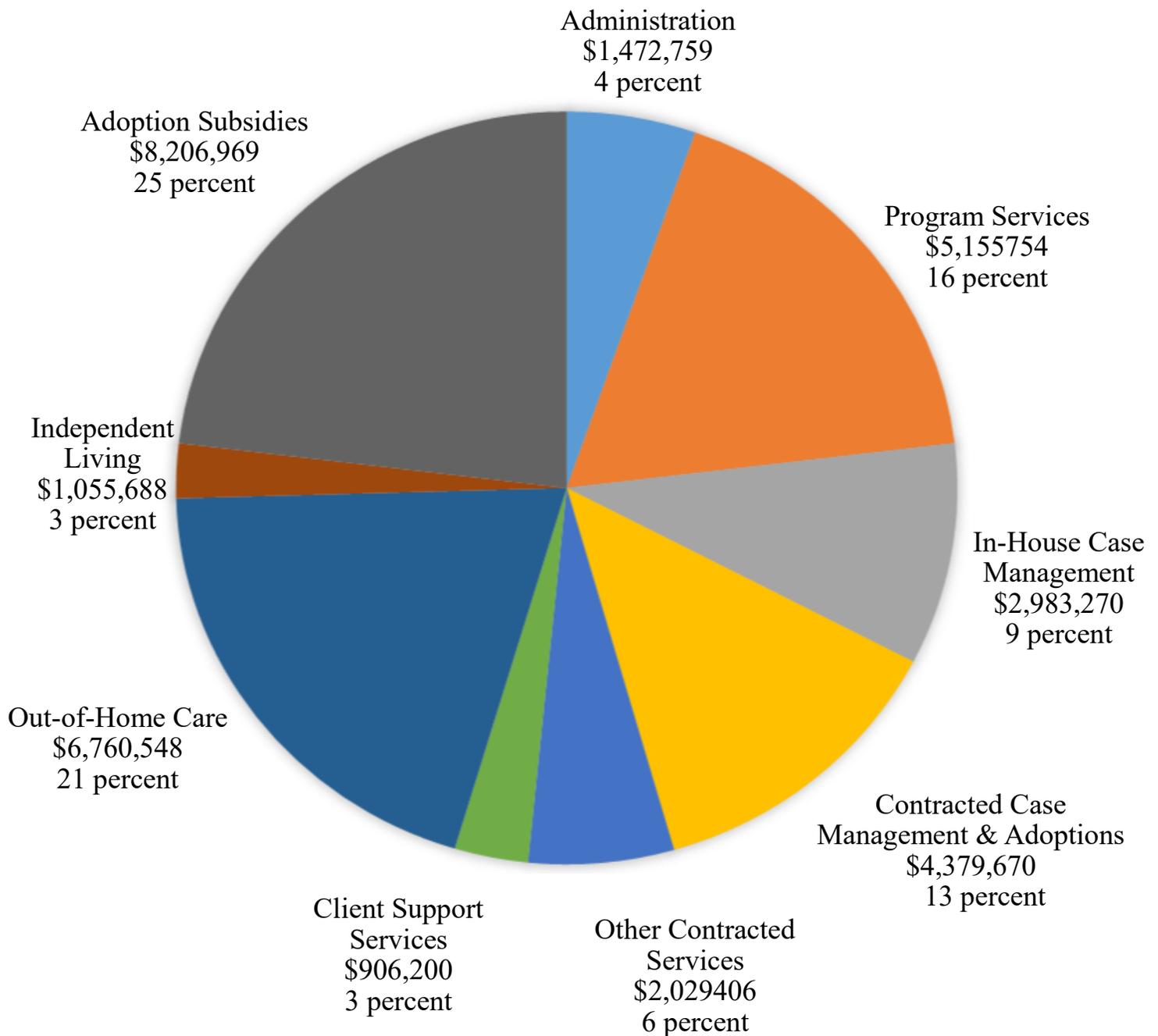
Increased the number of children living with licensed relatives from 35 to 120, and increased supports to those caregivers.

Recognized nationally by the Quality Parenting Initiative for excellent service to families.

Increased traffic to CCKids website, expanded social media reach & managed ongoing COVID communication plan with staff and community.

# Financial Report

## Communities Connected for Kids—FY 2020



This table and the pie chart on the preceding page represent income and expenses for FY2020, which ran from July 2010 through June 2020.

**INCOME**

DCF	<b>\$33,059,716</b>
Other	<b>\$272,667</b>

<i>TOTAL INCOME</i>	<i>\$33,332,383</i>
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**EXPENSES**

Administration	\$1,472,759
Program Services	\$5,155,754
In-House Case Management	\$2,983,270
Contracted Case Management	\$4,379,670
Other Contracted Services	\$2,029,406
Client Support Services	\$906,200
Out-of-Home Care	\$6,760,548
Independent Living	\$1,055,688
Adoption Subsidies	\$8,206,969

<i>TOTAL EXPENSES</i>	<i>\$32,950,264</i>
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Net Surplus	\$139,414
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# Our Funded Providers



In this stock photo, a case manager meets with a young boy and his family to discuss progress on a family safety plan.

### **Adoptions**

Children's Home Society

### **Behavioral & Psychological**

Shanlis

Suncoast Mental Health

### **Case Management**

Children's Home Society

### **Counseling Services**

ADAP Counseling

### **Family Support**

Behavior Basics

### **Foster Homes**

4Kids of the Treasure Coast

Camelot Community Care

Mount Bethel Human Services

Neighbor to Family

Place of Hope

Real Life Children's Ranch

### **Parenting & Safety Management**

Boys Town

Hibiscus Children's Center

### **Residential, Shelter & Group**

2 Welcoming Arms

Children's Home Society

Hibiscus Children's Center

### **Translation Services**

Translations USA

# Thank you!



Thank you to our many donors and volunteers, including all those who made masks for our children, families and staff.

*The following is a record of contributions made from July 1, 2019, through June 30, 2020:*

**\$15,000-\$10,000**

Foster a Dream Foundation

**\$9,999-\$5,000**

Foster a Dream Foundation

**\$4,999-\$750**

One Simple Wish

**Up to \$750**

Albert & Judith Hogg

David Gallup

Edward Albritton

Ellen Romanko

Fred and Ada Gipp

Janet Timoteo

Joyce Santamaria & Renee  
Dodson

Kenneth Newman

Lois & Robert Decarlo

Mary Sanders

Scott's Automotive & Golf  
Repair

Tammy Ann Eiseman

The Auer Family Trust

**In kind**

Acentria Insurance

Angela Boling

Ashley Minton Law

Berry Fresh Café

Bonnie Gechtberg

Boys & Girls Club of SLC

Clarke Inst. for Learning

Comfort Cases

Dee Meeley

Denise Natalizio

Doris Plym

Dr. Angie Bailey

First Presbyterian Church PSL

First United Methodist

Florida Highway Patrol

GFNF4Kids

Hometown News

Imagine School

It's My Very Own

Jamie Averett

Kappa Kappa Iota

La Buona Vita

Lakes of Tradition

Lavender Life Farm

Lil' Feet/SLC Fire Rescue

Lois Romaine

Lucy Kranker

Machesko Marie

Martin Health System

Melanie Kranker

Michael & Christina Kaiser

Olive Garden, Tradition

Pat & Sue Cunningham

PSL Centennial High School

PSL High School JROTC

Pursuit Boats

Retired Educators SLC

Rosenthal, Levy, Simon, Ryles

SMARTS

Sparemakers Bowling League

St. Andrews Episcopal

St. Andrews Episcopal Acad.

St. Andrews Lutheran

St. Lucie Gardens

Steele Shears Salon

Sungrove Montessori

Synovus

Tavaris Williams

TC Builders Association

The Grove Church

The Knit Wits

Translations USA

Tropicana

United Way of SLC

Unity of Fort Pierce

Wendy Zuniga Family



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## Safety. Permanency. Well Being.

To learn more about Communities Connected for Kids and our system of care, please visit us at [www.cckids.net](http://www.cckids.net) and follow us on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.