



Communities Connected *for Kids*

Connections - September 15, 2021



CCKids and Guardians for New Futures is gearing up for this year's Christmas toy drive. Want to help? Scroll down to find out how you can be a holiday hero like members of the local Florida Highway Patrol, seen in the picture above during the 2020 gift drive.

Okeechobee and Treasure Coast Lead Region in Wish Fulfillment

Port St. Lucie – Okeechobee and the Treasure Coast leads Florida's Southeast Region in the number of wishes fulfilled

through CarePortal, an online tool that connects faith communities to the needs of children and families receiving child-welfare services.



More 150 people, including 101 children, have had their needs met through the system since it launched in Indian River, Martin, Okeechobee and St. Lucie counties in January. Since that time, 39 out of 49 – or 80 percent – of requests have been met by a local network of 18 churches.

That compares to a 77 percent fulfillment rate for the entire Southeast Region, which includes Broward and Palm Beach counties as well as Okeechobee and the Treasure Coast.

“It didn’t take long for our case managers to realize the value of using CarePortal,” said Christina Kaiser, community relations director for Communities Connected for Kids, the agency responsible for child-welfare services in Okeechobee and the Treasure coast and one of the agencies using the tool.

Since rolling out the system, nearly 75 percent of all case managers and supervisors have been trained to use CarePortal and have made requests for items ranging from bunkbeds to rent and daycare assistance.

“This system is so much more than a wish-fulfillment tool,” Kaiser said. “It literally is keeping children safe by ensuring that they are placed in the most appropriate setting.”

Beds, for example, often make the difference between a child being placed with a relative and having to go somewhere else.

“If Grandma is willing to keep her grandbaby, but she needs a bed – and we can’t move the child until there’s a bed – that’s where CarePortal comes in,” Kaiser said.

A case manager submits a request in CarePortal, which is then sent to a network of nearby faith organizations. The responding organization – usually a church – then makes arrangements to get the items to the right place.

Since January, \$130,504 in requests have been fulfilled throughout the region. Of that, about 30 percent – or \$38,001 – has been fulfilled in Okeechobee and the Treasure Coast.

**Know Your Local Health Department -
In This Month's, In the Clinic**

By Lisa McBride, RN, BSN



What does your local health department do and what resources are available to you?

Many people are not aware of all the programs and valuable information that is just waiting for you from your local health department. Most have great online websites with pertinent news about your community, ways to stay safe and updates on local events that may affect your surrounding environment.

Here are just some of the programs local health department's provide to their residents and the contact information and websites for those serving our area:

Immunizations & vaccinations, teen health, school health, food & nutrition, environmental—think Zika prevention/mosquito control/algae reports, healthy communities programs,

Dental clinics-Martin County has a dental hygienist that goes to select schools in the district, infectious diseases, and Covid resources, testing and vaccination sites.

Get to know your local health department by contacting one of the numbers below:

- Indian River County DOH: indianriver.floridahealth.gov, 772-794-7400
- St Lucie County DOH: stlucie.floridahealth.gov, 772-462-3800
- Martin County DOH: martin.floridahealth.gov, 772-221-4000
- Okeechobee County DOH: okeechobee.floridahealth.gov, 863-462-5800

CCKids, Guardians for New Futures, Want You to Find Your Inner Santa



Port St. Lucie - Communities Connected for Kids and Guardians for New Futures will once again combine forces to bring holiday cheer and Christmas magic to children in the local foster care system.

To make that happen, we are looking for businesses, social groups and churches to participate in this year's toy drive.

The project provides gifts to more than 1,000 children in Indian River, Martin, Okeechobee and St. Lucie counties who have been abused, abandoned or neglected and who are currently receiving services through the child-welfare system. Participation is simple:

- Ask for a list of children's names and gift wishes by contacting the project coordinator at christina.kaiser@cckids.net.
- Organize a toy drive with your employees or members.
- Call us when you're ready for a pick up - we'll come to you!

Guardians for New Futures is a nonprofit organization that helps meet the unfunded needs of children in foster care. A longtime partner to the child-welfare community, the Guardians often leveraged its own toy drive to help fulfill gift wishes not met through CCKid's own Making Christmas Bright project.

The two groups joined their collections in 2020 to reach more children and families.

For more information about the project, or to sponsor a toy drive, please email christina.kaiser@cckids.net or text (772) 528-0362. For information about the Guardians, including registration for the upcoming Child Summit, click [here](#).

This program is for children and families served by the Judicial Circuit 19 Dependency System. If you are reading this and wondering if there are other Christmas resources for families in the general community, or if you are a caregiver looking for additional help, please see the following flyer from the Salvation Army:

The Salvation Army Angel Tree Christmas Assistance Program

Providing toys and clothes for children in need



This program is only for residents of Martin, St. Lucie, and Okeechobee counties with household incomes below 150% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines.

To qualify, applicants must provide the following:

- Photo ID
- Birth Certificates OR shot records for children age 12 & under (born after 12/25/2009)
- Proof of Income [SSI/SSDI Letter, four weeks worth of paystubs, unemployment benefits letter, OR SNAPs (food stamps) eligibility letter]
- Proof of residency (Lease OR utility bill OR government letter)

**Registration opens 9/6/2021 and must be completed online.
Scans or photos of documents will be accepted.
Limited to the first 600 families who qualify.**

**St. Lucie & Okeechobee counties: salvationarmystlucie.org
Martin County: www.salvationarmymartin.org**

Need assistance? We are happy to help!
St. Lucie & Okeechobee counties: 772-288-1471 x 101
Martin County: 772-288-1471 x 201



The Salvation Army of Martin, St. Lucie & Okeechobee Counties
Salvationarmyflorida.org/martincounty