



Communities Connected *for Kids*

Connections - May 11, 2022



Nearly 100 people registered for CCKids' 2nd Annual 1K for Kids and Story Stroll May 7, at Hillmoor Lake Park, in Port St. Lucie. Those who attended the event received a free Foster Care Appreciation shirt, which is on display in many of the pictures of caregivers, staff and community friends shown above. CCKids plans to develop the event, which includes an interactive 1K trail of foster family stories and information, in future years.

Extraordinary Foster Dad Recognized for Helping Struggling Young People in Care



Port St. Lucie – Sometimes, all a child needs is an adult willing to take a chance.

Larry Lack took that chance in March of 2021, when he opened his Port St. Lucie home for the first time to children in the local foster care community. He hasn't shied away from a challenge since.

“During his first year as a foster parent, he welcomed 14 boys into his home – many of whom had challenging behaviors,” said Jill Poole, licensing and caregiver support director for Community Connected for Kids, the organization that oversees the child-welfare community in Indian River, Martin and Okeechobee and St. Lucie counties. “Mr. Lack was willing to see past what was reported to him on paper, opening up his home and heart to give these young men a chance.”

CCKids recently awarded Lack the Topaz GEM – or Going the Extra Mile – award for his dedication to foster care. The recognition is part of a series of awards given throughout the year to caregivers and employees in the CCKids community of care.

“He has shown great dedication to our youth in the very short period of time he’s been licensed,” Poole said. “He goes out of his way to show them how much he cares.”

Lack received a plaque and a \$100 gift card as part of his award. He proudly displays the plaque, but he used the gift card for the children in his home.

“I have never experienced a time in my life that I was ever abused or did not have enough to eat,” he said. “I have been blessed in my life and I wanted to do what I could to help kids that were going through traumatizing times.”

CCKids Receives Statewide Recognition for Permanency Success

Tallahassee – The Florida Department of Children and Families wanted to better highlight the things its Lead Agencies do well. So when it was time for the department's springtime quarterly event meeting, the spotlight was on CCKids and its superior permanency track record.

In fact, the nonprofit's permanency by 12 months measure - a critical measure used to assess the overall success of local lead agencies like CCKids - doubled from the first quarter of 2020 to the most recent quarter of 2022. It includes children adopted, returned home or those living with a permanent guardian.

"We've done well, so we were asked to share all the things we do here to meet and exceed performance standards," said Rusty Kline, CCKids Quality Management Director. "It's a very positive thing."

CCKids was one of two agencies chosen by the department to present during a special breakout session of the April 21 statewide QM meeting, said CEO Carol Deloach, who presented during the meeting. The meeting is held regularly to review the performance of child-welfare systems throughout Florida. The other presenting agency was Children's Network of Southwest Florida.

The invitation was particularly important because CCKids was in a completely different position in regard to permanency 24 months ago, Deloach said.

"It took about two years to turn the ship, and we did it through a commitment to permanency," she said.

That commitment includes a continuum of projects, services and improved procedures such as the Family Support Team, created to divert removals, and Rapid Family Engagement, which gives families early access to resources.

Another innovation credited with improved permanency includes the Keeping Families Connected program, which reduces the number of children who cross over to dependency from other systems.

And procedural efficiencies resulted in triple the adoptions and a significant decrease in the amount of time it takes to get them finalized.

Monthly out-of-home reviews, permanency round tables and changing philosophies regarding permanent guardianship round things out. In fact, the number of cases closed to permanent guardianship increased 221 percent from 2020 to 2021 - a dramatic improvement brought about in large part by partnerships and regular meetings with the Guardian ad Litem program and Child Legal Services.

All these innovations, efficiencies and close working relationships resulted in an increase in children reaching permanency in 12 months from 25.8 percent in the first quarter of FY 2020 to 54.3 percent in the most recent quarter.

Gyno Isn't a Four Letter Word-
In this Week's, *In the Clinic*



By Lisa McBride, RN, BSN
CCKids Nurse Care Coordinator

Did you know that by starting your gynecological health journey as a teen, you can help set the stage for a better relationship with your body!

Annual exams can help detect cancers in the early stages, increasing the amount of treatment options available to you and improving the overall survival rate if you do develop cancer.

Unfortunately, many people are still embarrassed to talk about gynecology and the well visits that protect our female bodies. But discussing this topic and bringing it to the forefront, can dispel myths, help start the conversation around a very difficult time in a woman's life and possibly help save lives!

The first visit should occur between the ages of 13-15, as this is when a girl's body will be experiencing rapid changes. The gynecologist can help explain these changes, screen for any problems, explain about sexually transmitted diseases, sexual abuse in dating, provide prevention strategies and answer any questions your teen may have.

Most teens will be more open with their doctor than with their parent/caregiver.

Below, are some links that provide additional information around this topic as well as a video series, "Under the Paper Gown," that is aimed at overcoming the "awkwardness" of that first visit.

<https://www.yalemedicine.org/news/when-do-girls-need-a-gynecologist>

<https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/dcpc/resources/features/gynecologiccancers>

And to you foster parents and CCKids caregivers out there, gynecology is a covered benefit on the Sunshine Health insurance plan, so let's start the conversations and make those appointments!

If anyone needs help locating a provider, just send me an [email](#) and I'd be happy to help!

Former Boys & Girls Club COO is New Board Chair for CCKids

St. Lucie West - Communities Connected for Kids congratulates Melanie Wiles for her new position as chair of the nonprofit organization's Board of Directors.

Wiles, the director of parish development at St. Anastasia Catholic Church and former chief operating officer of the St. Lucie County Boys and Girls Club, is taking the place of Kathryn Hensley.

Hensley served as chair for five years and is stepping down from that post to focus on other projects. She will remain on the Board.

During her time as chair, she oversaw CCKids' growth as the organization transitioned to a new name, became financially viable, instituted new program to reduce the number of children.



Wiles, who served as Hensley's vice chair, said she looks forward to serving with a team that will provide families with the support services they need.

"I am honored to serve as the chair of CCKids' Board and have enjoyed the last few years working with our Board of caring adults and dedicated staff to ensure the safety, permanency and well-being of children in our area," Wiles said.

Wiles also has served on the Treasure Coast Opioids Taskforce Education Committee and the Economic Development Council. She has been involved with youth development for more than 10 years and has an extensive background in marketing and resource development.
