

Hope, Heart & Home
1st Quarter 2025
NEWSLETTER



WHO WE ARE !

HOPE, HEART & HOME IS A FAITH-BASED COMMUNITY COALITION RECRUITING VOLUNTEERS FROM OUR CATHOLIC AND INTER-FAITH COMMUNITY TO SUPPORT FOSTER CHILDREN IN MIAMI-DADE COUNTY.

WE **SUSTAIN AND RETAIN FOSTER FAMILIES** BY PARTNERING IN LOCAL EVENTS AND BY SERVING AS **FOSTER PARENTS, RESPITE PARENTS, MENTORS, GUARDIAN AD LITEM, PANELISTS, AND CAREPORTAL FIRST RESPONDERS.**



WE HOST MONTHLY VIRTUAL MEETINGS ON THE **SECOND MONDAY OF EVERY MONTH** WITH EDUCATIONAL GUEST SPEAKERS THAT INTRODUCE OUR CHILD ADVOCATES TO EVERY FACET OF **OUR CHILD WELFARE COMMUNITY.**

Visit us at www.hopehearthomeministry.com



HOPE
HEART
HOME





7 NEWS
MIAMI

Online service CarePortal connects needs of foster children and low-income families to groups that can help them

Hope Heart & Home Ministry enjoyed partner **CarePortal Florida**'s virtual "Community Gathering" for churches and agencies in Miami Dade this past Weds January 15. **Jovan Figueroa Jan Nunez**, and **Patty Bulack** gave an outstanding overview of the progress **CarePortal** has made in South Florida helping children in foster care.

CarePortal has served 30,520 children in Florida to date. That's 30,520 moments where a family found hope, a child felt supported, and communities stepped up to meet real needs. Across Florida, caseworkers, churches, and community partners are working together every day to keep children safe and families strong. **CarePortal** is here to help make those connections happen—quickly and effectively. Every number has a name. Every name has a story. And together, we can keep saying **yes** to helping even more.

HHH's CarePortal Response Team, lead by **Valerie Van Ostran** and **Dr. John Gentile**, continue to meet the needs of foster families requested by case managers on the **CarePortal** platform. Their mission: "Thrive over Survive!" Contact **John Gentile** at drjohngentile71@gmail.com to join our team of child advocates!



Gifts of Hope - Thank You!!



Mobilize your congregation in one central place

Explore powerful, real-time opportunities for your church to serve others and express its faith through action.

Fulfill tangible needs for vulnerable children and families and connect them with ongoing support from the faith community.



CarePortal
FLORIDA
www.careportal.org

January 25, 2025

Hope, Heart & Home *BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING*



Back Row: **Paul Czekanski** - GAL -Mentor, Kiwanis; **Kathleen Smith** - Liaison (Holy Rosary-St. Richard's; **Malvi Longoria** - GAL (St. John Neumann); **Alex Planas** - GAL Community Ambassador (St. Catherine's); **Lorenzo Cosio** -GAL (St. Louis); **Eric Schwindeman** - GAL, Mentor, Executive Director, Kiwanis; **Mary Hamel** - GAL (St. Louis); **Patty Wasserman** - Foster Mom; **Valerie Van Ostran** - GAL, CarePortal, Kiwanis (St. John Neumann); **Susan Dingle** - Panelist & CarePortal (St. John Neumann); **Marta Torres** - Director of Licensed Care & Transitioning Youth Services (Citrus FCN); **Rosie Perez- Lacayo** -Panelist (Holy Rosary-St. Richards); **Gabriel** -Miami Palmetto HS Key Club; **Santiago** - Miami Palmetto HS Key Club; **Liz and Tony Anon**- His House For Children - Lady of Guadalupe; **Panos Kourtesis** - Explore Foster Miami, One More Child (Reality Church), **Caroline Ezekwesili**, Mentor (Granada Presbyterian)

Front Row: **Dr. John Gentile** - CarePortal (St. John Neumann); **Chuck Caldwell** - Spiritual Advisor, Santa (St. John Neumann); **Diana Morrell** -GAL - Kiwanis Club of Miami); **Vanessa Akiki** - Mentor (Granada Presbyterian); **Maria Romanek** - Foster Mom (Holy Rosary - St. Richards); **Melbelina Lagos-Latorre** – Mentor (St. John Neumann)

Missing From Photo: **Joanne Pierre** (GAL); **Dr. Alecia Rodriguez** - GAL, Foster Mom, Mentor, Kiwanis; **Lauren Purba** - Website (St. Bernard); **Mary Walton**- GAL, Random Acts of Kindness, Kiwanis; **Carmenza Ortiz** - Panelist (Good Shepherd); **Lou Confessore** - Soccer Referee Program (St. Catherine's); **Leanna Roberts** HHH Hawaii - Random Acts of Kindness.

Twenty-six Child Advocates took part in the **Hope, Heart & Home** Ministry's **Board of Trustees Meeting** held January 25 at *Holy Rosary- St. Richard's Catholic Church*. Foster parents, Guardian ad Litem, Mentors, Panelists, and CarePortal First Responders from 7 different parishes were all represented.

HHH welcomed Honorary Trustees and partners **Marta Oliva Torres** (Citrus FCN), **Liz Arquimbau** (His House For Children), **Panagiotis Kourtesis** (Explore Foster Miami), **Diana Morrell**





(Kiwanis Club of Miami), and **Gabriel Vargas & Santiago Quintero** (Miami Palmetto HS Key Club.)

HHH also welcomed back veterans **Malvi Longoria** (GAL), **Patricia Wasserman** (Foster Parent), and **Joann Pierre** (GAL) to their team. Congratulations to partners **SOLO Printing** (**Lorenzo Cosio**), *Propelled In Christ Ministry* (**Kathleen Smith** & **Rosa A. Perez-Lacayo**), the **Kiwanis Club of Miami, Florida** (Diana Morrell), and the *Miami Palmetto HS Key Club* recognized by **Citrus Family Care Network** for their collaboration in 2024 supporting children in foster care.



"It's not the destination, it's the journey!" This meeting demonstrated that the companions you make along the way are the most important!

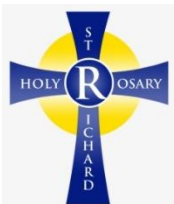


Marta Torres added:

"Thankful to be on this journey of service with such incredible company. It takes a village, and we are blessed for the heart, generosity, talent, and commitment of this beautiful village."



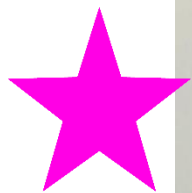
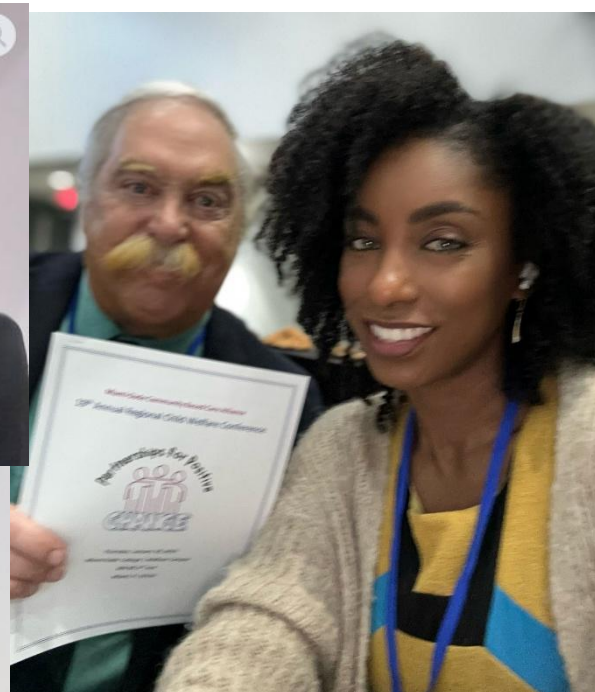
Thank you, **Father Yosbany Alfonso & HRSR**, for hosting this HHH "family gathering!"



HOPE, HEART & HOME at CHILD WELFARE CONFERENCE



Hope Heart & Home enjoyed the *19th Annual Regional Child Welfare Conference* held at the MDC Wolfson campus on January 30. Three hundred child advocates came together to hear a wonderful all-day program offered by CBC's **Bryttany Stringer** and **Janice Graham**.





Hope, Heart & Home Celebrates *Family Appreciation Week!*



Foster Family Appreciation Week 2025

Coffee & Canvas

Citrus FCN Parents are invited to enjoy a light breakfast and fun painting activity (supplies provided)!

Date: Wednesday, February 12, 2025

Time: 9:00 AM - 10:30 AM

Location: Pinecrest Bakery
21657 S Dixie Hwy, Miami, FL 33170



We know famous statesmen, military leaders, even saints - that took refuge from their demanding routine to relax and paint! **Citrus Family Care Network** and the **Kiwanis Club of Miami, Florida** gave 30 parents of foster children and **Hope Heart & Home Ministry** a well-needed break Feb 12 at the Pinecrest Bakery as part of Foster Family Appreciation Week!



The parents and HHH & Kiwanis **Dr. Alecia Rodriguez, Mary Walton, and Eric Schwindeman** dabbled in some creative masterpieces while feasting on coffee & some lavish breakfast treats. Alecia's stunning self-portrait received critical acclaim! All the parents went home with gift bags and Valentine wishes courtesy of partner, **Miami Palmetto HS Key Club!**

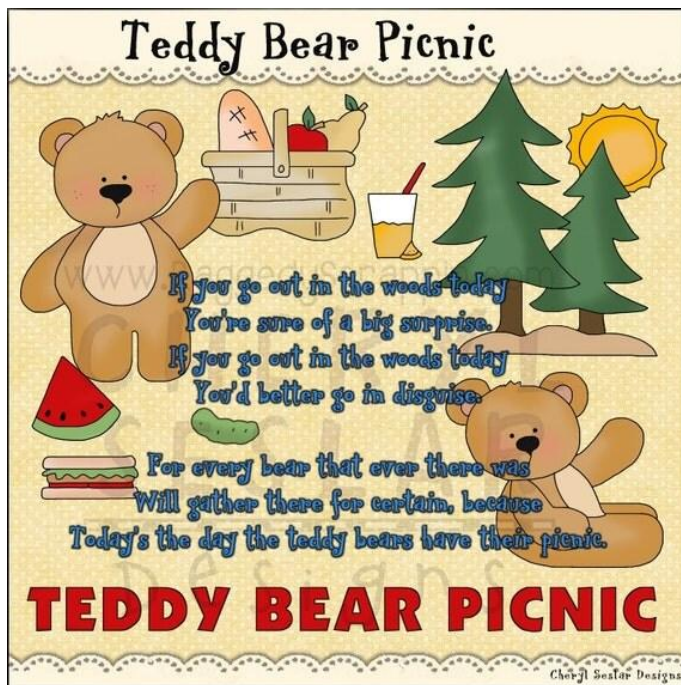
Tip of the cap to **Nadine Rolle** and her Citrus FCN crew for offering a truly unique opportunity combining comic relief and "artistic expression!"

Thank you!





HHH AT TEDDY BEAR PICNIC!



It's not every day you get invited to a **TEDDY BEAR PICNIC!** But when the call came in Feb 14, **Hope Heart & Home** Ministry's **Eric Schwindeman**, **Rosa A. Perez-Lacayo**, and **Kathleen Smith** jumped to join **Citrus Family Care Network's Kimberly Lopez** at *Holy Rosary-St. Richard's Catholic Church* for the festivities!

After a lunch of honey, candy bars, and lemonade, 100 teddy bears of all sizes piled into Kim & Rosie's cars to join week-long celebrations of **Foster Family Appreciation Week** and to go home with a child in foster care.

Those bears throw one wild party! A couple had to be helped to the car!





HOPE, HEART & HOME Partners with **MPSHS KEY CLUB!**

This Valentine season, **Hope Heart & Home Ministry** is celebrating the incredible volunteers and partners who open their hearts to children in foster care.

Our partner, the **Miami Palmetto HS Key Club** made Valentine's just a little bit brighter with 92 cake mix bags and 150 "Valentine grams" which were shared with foster families throughout Citrus Family Care Network's Foster Family Appreciation Week!

Proud to be an **Kiwanis Club of Miami Advisor** to this wonderful service organization! An amazing group of high school youth!





CITRUS FAMILY CARE NETWORK



Recognized MPSHS KEY CLUB for their collaboration in 2024 supporting children in foster care.

Thank you Gabriel and Santiago for accepting the recognition certificate on behalf of all the MPSHS KEY CLUB Family!





WE LOST A “GIANT FORCE”

Hope, Heart & Home was eagerly anticipating the date of March 10, 2025. **Trudy Petrovich**, QPI Coordinator for Citrus Family Care Network, was set to host HHH’s virtual monthly meeting. With over 35 years of experience in training and building relationships within the care system, including working with the Parent Engagement Team and advocating for children and their birth families pre and post reunification, we knew Trudy would be a phenomenal Guest Speaker.



The timing was ideal—she had recently been honored with a **Lifetime Humanitarian Hero Award** for her dedicated service to the Child Welfare System. This recognition highlighted her profound “personal commitment to foster care and adoption, which continues to drive her work and influence the field.” Excitement grew.

Then on February 18, we were saddened to learn of Trudy's passing at age 77. Tributes and testimonials poured in from across the country. A memorial service was held at Christ the King Lutheran Church on March 1, attended by hundreds of friends and families she had impacted. Her colleague, **Marta Torres** (Citrus FCN), delivered a beautiful eulogy highlighting the positive impact Trudy had on others. “We lost a giant force!”

Thank you, Trudy, for your committed service, love, time, and dedication to HHH and the Child Welfare Community. Thank you for a life of grace and kindness.



Trudy and her husband became involved in the system of care after a remark made by their son — if everyone took in just one child, you could make such a difference in that child's life. Taking his words to heart, Trudy and John spent eighteen years as foster parents, opening up their home to 300 infants during that period of time. They also decided to add to their family by adopting three girls which turned their family into a multicultural one who became strong advocates for children in the system of care.

Trudy's journey through the child welfare system began in 1989 with Love In Action, a ministry she co-founded at Christ the King whose mission is to serve children and families whose lives have been touched by the child welfare system. After becoming foster/adoptive parents themselves, Trudy and John opened their home to host a support group that met monthly for ten years to give foster/adoptive families the opportunity to connect, share and most importantly understand that they all needed to work together to best serve the children in their care.

Trudy transitioned into working for Florida's Department of Children & Families and becoming involved in the Florida Foster Adoptive Parent Association which allowed her to advocate on behalf of children and families throughout the state including at the legislative level, collaborating with many organizations to help bring about necessary changes in the child welfare system. She also has worked in different capacities for the various Community Based Care Lead Agencies that have served Miami-Dade & Monroe Counties including Kids Hope United, Our Kids and Citrus Family Care Network. Trudy also became involved in the [Quality Parenting Initiative \(QPI\)](#), a national movement that is built upon the belief that excellent parenting and strong relationships is the best way to help children thrive.



HOPE, HEART & HOME

MENTORING



MATTERS!

Hope, Heart & Home Ministry's Mentoring Program kicked off 2025 at UM's **First Star Academy** and **Genesis Hopeful Haven**. Mentor teams met with **Dr. Kele Stewart** at UM and GHH's **Mariah Vargas** to plan 1st quarter life skill sessions utilizing new formats and group presentations.

Teens aging out of foster care are passionately building their job readiness skills at First Star Academy, preparing for bright futures ahead. Hope Heart & Home Ministry is proud to empower First Star scholars with a transformative three-part symposium, led by HHH Mentors at the University of Miami School of Law.



From mastering professional attire to refining interview skills through mock sessions, these dynamic workshops provided invaluable lessons and inspiration. Special thanks to [@cdub_esq](#) for allowing us to incorporate the “dress for success” PowerPoint into our workshop.

Genesis Hopeful Haven utilizes Mentor Couples to work with their teens. HHH has introduced four couples to their program.





Hope Heart & Home Ministry proudly congratulates our two Doctor-Mentors who will start their residences in July. **Caroline Ezekwesili** will practice psychiatry at Harvard South Shore in Boston while Vanessa Akiki will work on neurodevelopmental disabilities with children at Baylor in Houston.

HHH is most appreciative of their Mentoring acumen with scholars of First Star Academy at UM Law School for the past 2 years. They even accompanied a group field trip

(sponsored by the **Kiwanis Club of Miami, Florida**) to Zoo Miami. Caroline and Vanessa also ably served as Trustees on the HHH Board of Directors. (Coco, Caroline's pup, served faithfully as our quiet ministry mascot!) All 3 will be greatly missed!





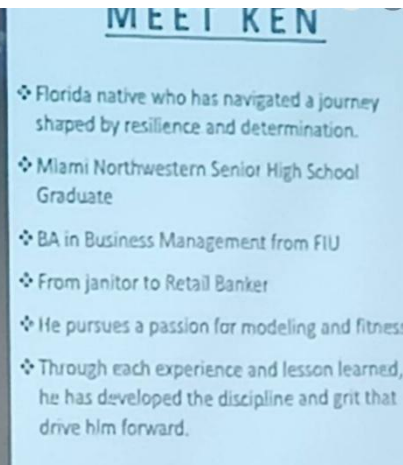
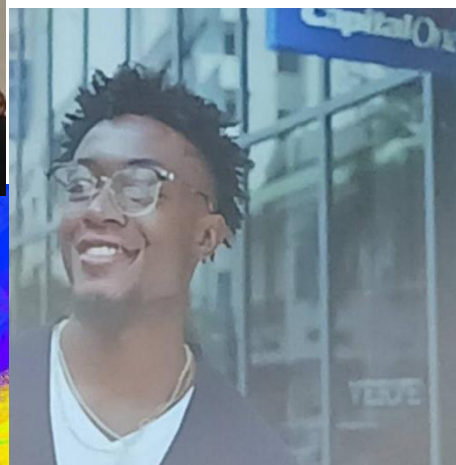
KENDRICK CLARK LIVES A MENTORING SUCCESS STORY



At their monthly meeting, **Hope Heart & Home Ministry** hosted a new powerful voice in the child welfare world, **Kendrick Clarke**, who impressed HHH Child Advocates and Partners alike with his story overcoming multiple challenges in life as a teen aging out of foster care.

He credits *Casa Valentina's* **Janice Graham** & **Alexis Adam's** and HHH Mentor **Scott Scovel** with his advancement through college and into a career in banking, with interests in real estate and fashion.

Kendrick is passionate about "giving back to teens aging out of foster care" and wants to encourage youth to **"work with as many mentors as you can get!"** His message resonated with his audience and will inspire volunteers & teens in every future setting!



CITRUS FCN RELEASES IMPACT REPORT



Congratulations to **Esther Jacobo**, **Marta Torres**, **Nadine Rolle**, **Leslie Viega**, and the entire **Citrus Family Care Network** team for their amazing 5 year run championing children in foster care - all captured in their newly released **Impact Report 2019 - 2024**! **Hope Heart & Home Ministry** honored to be included in the "unique strength and expertise" of their partnership collaborations! Looking ahead to many years together!



Hope, Heart & Home Ministry (HHH) is honored to collaborate with a diverse and dedicated network of partners who share our commitment to supporting and empowering our community. Our partners play a vital role in advancing our mission, providing essential resources, and driving impactful change across various areas of need.

Our local foundations and organizations to dedicated community leaders and volunteers, each partner brings unique strengths and expertise that enhance our collective efforts. Together, we work to address the challenges faced by youth, families, and individuals in our community, fostering a supportive environment where everyone can thrive.

Our partners, many of which are highlighted in this section, are integral to the success of our initiatives, and their collaboration allows us to make a meaningful difference through innovative programs, events, and support services. We deeply value their contributions and are grateful for their ongoing commitment to serving.

The Lucas Alvarez Foundation is supporting youth in foster care with educational and technical training.

Partners

At Citrus Family Care Network (Citrus FCN), we are honored to collaborate with a diverse and dedicated network of partners who share our commitment to supporting and empowering our community. Our partners play a vital role in advancing our mission, providing essential resources, and driving impactful change across various areas of need.

Our local foundations and organizations to dedicated community leaders and volunteers, each partner brings unique strengths and expertise that enhance our collective efforts. Together, we work to address the challenges faced by youth, families, and individuals in our community, fostering a supportive environment where everyone can thrive.

Our partners, many of which are highlighted in this section, are integral to the success of our initiatives, and their collaboration allows us to make a meaningful difference through innovative programs, events, and support services. We deeply value their contributions and are grateful for their ongoing commitment to serving.



HOPE, HEART & HOME REVIVES RANDOM ACTS OF KINDNESS CAMPAIGN



Random Acts of Kindness was founded by St. John Neumann's [Maria Jacques](#) (HHH GAL) in 2022. By leveraging small donations from friends and family, she organized a team of volunteers to conduct monthly visits to foster families. During these visits, they delivered gift cards, meals, seasonal baskets, cookies and various small presents to families. Citrus's [Trudy Petkovich](#) assisted Maria in identifying families and introducing the program to foster and biological parents in need.

With the recent loss of both champions, the Random Acts program has been reorganized under the leadership of three seasoned HHH leaders:



[Mary Walton](#), a former GAL manager and community activist, is responsible for overseeing recruitment and delivery in southern Dade.



[Bernadett Horvath](#), a peer parent and founder of *BDW & More*, a non-profit organization that distributes bottles, diapers, and wipes, is administering the program in northern Dade.



[Leanna Roberts](#), a property manager and founder of *iOrphan* is supervising the entire program. Based in Maui, she manages HHH orientation, family matches, and appointment schedules remotely. Interested volunteers should contact Leanna at leannajroberts@gmail.com



Some of the families **Random Acts** volunteers visited this quarter:



HHH NEW PARTNER: ***BUILDING KIDS FUTURE***

YOU can make a difference in the life of a child in foster care. One teen activist from Miami Palmetto HS Key Club created her own charity and collected books and toiletries to donate to **Citrus Family Care Network**.

Hope, Heart & Home congratulates **Azal Fegghi** and her foundation, ***Building Kids Future***, for their efforts in supporting children with donations. Helping one child at a time!



HHH – COMMUNITY WORK:

Hope Heart & Home Ministry continues to partner in their community work supporting children in foster care. Donations to *Children's Home Society*, basket to St. Louis *Community Festival Silent Auction*, and meeting requests through *CarePortal Florida*, during Family Appreciation Week!





Morning With Monsignor



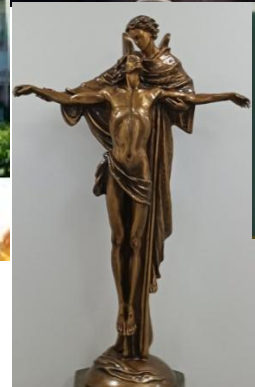
Always an inspiration to meet with **Hope Heart & Home** Ministry's spiritual advisor, **Monsignor Pablo Navarro**, Rector-President of St. John Vianney Seminary (3/7).



HHH has had the privilege of benefiting from his years of support, prayers, and wise counsel. Monsignor played a crucial role in establishing HHH as a new faith-based community coalition in 2018, marking the first initiative of its kind within the Archdiocese of Miami to assist children in foster care.

Monsignor addressed our June 2024 meeting, continuing his engagement with the child welfare community. He conveyed profound appreciation for the advancements HHH has accomplished through collaboration with new partners and the introduction of events and services aimed at supporting children.

Monsignor's message to HHH Child Advocates: "God bless the work you do. Continue your commendable efforts for our vulnerable children!"





ALLISON & ROXY = PARENT ENGAGEMENT



Thirty-seven Hope Heart & Home Ministry Child Advocates learned more about the **dignity of birth parents** from Citrus Family Care Network's Parent Engagement Unit manager, **Allison Schild** and peer specialist **Roxy Llarena** at HHH's monthly virtual meeting held March 10. Both speakers advocated for reducing emphasis on uncommon negative incidents and improving communication and focus on **co-parenting** between foster and biological parents in Miami's child welfare system.

They also announced the introduction of a much-needed program this year aimed at increasing engagement from fathers in the prevention process. When it comes to protecting children and supporting families, the statistics provide compelling evidence. "Our prevention programs are effective — they are keeping families united."

The presentation was highly informative for all participants. We extend our gratitude to Allison & Roxy!



why it matters

These results mean less trauma, more stability, and safer communities.

Citrus FCN's Prevention work proves that with the right support, families can thrive.



The Power of Parents: Stronger Together

the power of prevention



Parent Engagement Unit: Citrus FCN's Parent Engagement Unit and engagement for birth parents involved in the child welfare system. Engagement Manager and Peer Specialists with lived experience provide empathetic support and facilitates communication between birth parents and foster parents. In addition to direct support for parents, the unit focuses on positive and collaborative relationships, aiming to enhance reunification and the dignity of birth parents. This initiative exemplifies Citrus FCN's commitment to family reunification, fatherhood engagement, and strengthening positive child welfare outcomes.



CITRUS FCN OUTLINES CONSOLIDATION STEPS



Many thanks to **Esther Jacobo** and her team at **Citrus Family Care Network** for sharing their transition plan for our case management services at the CBC Alliance's System Update Meeting, March 20. Some 75 stakeholders joined the virtual meeting.

Hope Heart & Home Ministry shares the confidence placed in Citrus FCN and **Marcel Rivas** to implement a new **COST-EFFICIENT** but **SERVICE-PROFICIENT** system of care for our child welfare community in Miami Dade & Monroe counties.

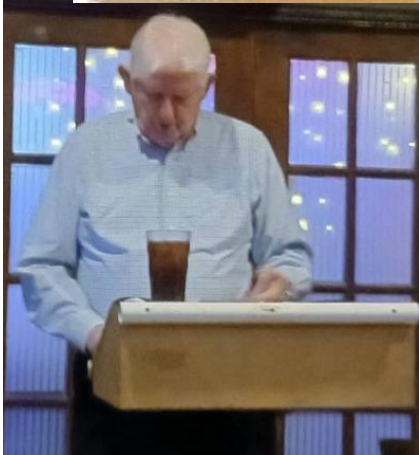
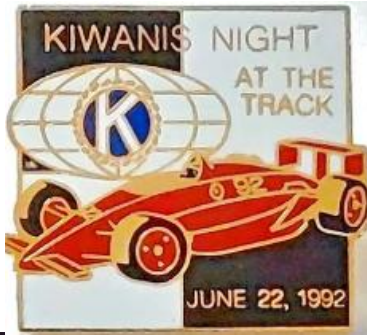
Thank you, **Janice Graham** and **Bryttany Springer**, for scheduling this session! More definitive information will be outlined in our next 2nd Quarter 2005 newsletter!



Next Steps		Transition Plan – Minimizing Disruption		
Job Fair for Transitioning Staff	• March 20, 2025	Case Transfer Process <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strategic case reassignment to ensure continuity of care Coordination between outgoing & incoming FCMA's to prevent service gaps Regular communication with families and caregivers to keep them informed 	Collaboration with Selected Agencies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Weekly transition meetings with Family Resource Center, Wesley House, and The Village South/WestCare Data and case file handoff protocols to ensure seamless information sharing 	Monitoring & Support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Citrus FCN will oversee the transition timeline and process Dedicated transition team will assist staff, families, and youth with questions Ongoing assessments to track progress and quickly respond to challenges
Transition Planning & Training	• April – June 2025			
Contracts' Effective Date	• July 1, 2025			



KIDS NEED KIWANIS!



Hope Heart & Home Ministry's most prolific partner in championing children in foster care, the **Kiwanis Club of Miami, Florida**, held their orientation meeting March 4 for 20+ recreational charities as they roll out the parameters of their annual Zee Grants. These grants have historically pumped over \$2.4 million into the charitable community of Miami. Treasurer **Chuck Little** and President **Bruce Ross** hosted the gathering that included HHH & Kiwanis **Dr. Alecia Rodriguez**, **Mary Walton**, and **Eric Schwindeman** who joined Citrus Family Care Network's **Nadine Rolle**.

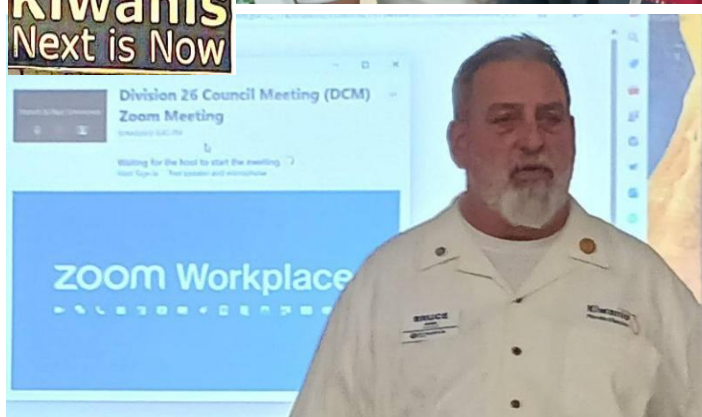


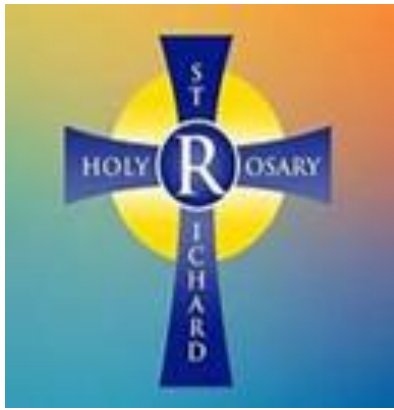


Hope Heart & Home Ministry enjoyed a festive night with 70 Kiwanis at their monthly District Council Meeting, hosted by the **Kiwanis Club of Miami, Florida** at the German American Social Club, March 24. Great inspirational talk by Florida District Governor **Tommy Mills** and roll call of community achievements helping children in foster care! Congrats to **Bruce Ross** and **Diana Morrell** for a wonderful gathering of local Kiwanis, CKI, and Key Clubbers.



Kiwanis
Next is Now





All Things Are Possible



Hope **Heart** & Home Ministry is delighted to congratulate **Holy Rosary-St. Richard Catholic Church** in Palmetto Bay, our most dedicated parish partner, on the inauguration of their new Pre-School campus. The new school is one of several pioneering initiatives introduced by **Father Yosbany Alfonso**.



