



February 2025

Roundtable Review

Message from our CEO

Greetings,

It is time to celebrate Black History Month! In February 1926, historian and author Carter G. Woodson, an American historian, created Negro History week. Later, Omega Psi Phi, Woodson’s fraternity, advocated for Black History Month. Eventually President Gerald Ford became the first president to issue a message to recognize a month long observance in 1976. Since then, every president has made proclamations to continue this tradition. Why is this important in the field of youth development? In a study conducted by the Regional Educational Laboratory at American Institutes for Research (REL), interventions associated with improved academic achievement for Black students include recognizing their contributions to American or world history. As a young student, Black History Month was a big deal marked by our reading literature about and dressing up as monumental Black Americans that we did not learn about in history books. Over a decade ago, Rita Pierson, a lifelong educator, gave one of the most powerful Ted Talks on education – “Every Child Needs a Champion” which has become a motto for countless educators. Historically significant Black Americans became champions that looked like me and became a beacon of hope. Growing up, my parents and the parents of my peers served as housekeepers, janitors, agricultural workers, and other menial job occupations working long hours to put food on our tables. Many of us aspired to walk in their footsteps because this is all that we knew. As I learned about Black history, I wanted to do more to make a difference for our country, standing on the shoulders of my parents. I remember reading about Lewis Latimer for the first time. He was a Black inventor who improved Thomas Edison’s original invention by patenting the use of a carbon filament making widespread use of electric light possible. I learned about Mr. Edison, but not Mr. Latimer. Being taught this history made a significant impact on my self-esteem and motivation to do well in school, consistent with the findings of the REL study. Black History Month is where I unknowingly began to believe our Kids at Hope pledge of today--“ALL children are capable of success, No Exceptions!” including me! Let us celebrate!



Teresa Bishop
 Chief Executive Officer

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Special Dates:

- National School Counselor Week 2/3-2/7
- Give Kids a Smile Day 2/7
- National Make a Friend Day 2/11
- Valentine’s Day 2/14
- Random Acts of Kindness 2/14-2/20
- President’s Day 2/17
- National Caregivers Day 2/21
- National Set A Good Example Day 2/26

Empowering The Voices Of St. Lucie County Youth

One of H.Y.P.E's primary goals is to amplify the youth voice, empowering youth with the skills they need for problem-solving in their communities, and their own daily lives. In our recent H.Y.P.E meetings and community-based proceedings, we've done just that. Our H.Y.P.E youth have continued to learn about the components of the Strategic Prevention Framework, and apply them as problem-solving tools. Our youth identified problems they face daily, including a struggle with social skills and negative communication. Planning with and responding to our coalition youth's needs, we hosted a series of interactive sessions on healthy communication, assertiveness, and social skills.

These immersive workshops were delivered, in partnership, with our senior H.Y.P.E Youth Peer Mentors, Prevention Specialists of New Horizons of the Treasure Coast, and Skip Dupree, Co-Founder of E.N.D. IT!. Northport K-8 middle school's H.Y.P.E Chapter member Terianna M., 12, spoke on the importance of these sessions: "People can be really mean, and it's hard to know what to say when someone is talking like that. I think after our sessions with Mr. Skip I know more ways to handle it." Helping youth cope with the real struggles they face daily is key to our work in prevention. Shifting and responding to the specific needs of our coalition youth is instrumental to our youth-led, adult-guided style.

In partnership with the Roundtable's St. Lucie RISE Mental Health collaborative, our H.Y.P.E Coalition Adult Advisors presented "The Youth Voice" to the Florida Department of Health's Teen Maternal/Child Health team. This presentation combines a look at our local quantitative and qualitative data on youth substance use, mental health, and teen pregnancy. Participants were also able to experience "PhotoVoice", an exhibit that contains a series of pictures and captions created by St. Lucie County youth to share their struggles, and to help the adults surrounding them learn how to better serve them.

According to the Florida Youth Substance Abuse Survey (FYSAS), many youth delinquent behaviors are on the rise in St. Lucie County. The county also exceeds the state averages for youth who report that they've verbally or physically bullied their peers. St. Lucie County youth are telling us, both in our local data and directly, that they need to be taught soft skills through mentorship. They need positive opportunities for school and community-based prosocial involvement, and accountability. Our youth, more than ever, need "the village" to listen, respond accordingly, and rally around them.



Promoting Resiliency



Lawnwood Elementary School’s Administration welcomed the Kids at Hope team to pilot the Boys Council program at their school this year. The Boys Council is an evidence-based male mentoring initiative aimed at promoting resiliency and healthy relationships among children, adolescents, families, and adults. Recognizing the importance of building and fostering healthy relationships, Kids at Hope emphasizes this framework as essential for the growth and development of all children.

A community approach is being adopted to provide mentoring, modeling, and curriculum for the boys involved. Sandy Mack, Program Manager-Children’s Services Council, and the staff at Cayuga-IGNITE have agreed to collaborate on this initiative. These mentors, referred to as Treasure Hunters, are dedicated to helping the students achieve their goals and dreams. The participants will engage in discussions and activities focused on self-respect, respect for others, effective listening, and responding thoughtfully rather than reacting impulsively.

Lilias Batchelor and Guermithe Oge, School Counselors, have played a crucial role in the development and implementation of this initiative. Their dedication and commitment to the students earned them the Kids at Hope Ten Award for January. When asked about the importance of mentorship for these 25 young men, Ms. Batchelor stated, “I am always seeking ways to improve the school culture and prevent students from making poor choices. I did it not for recognition but out of pure love and dedication. My mission was to improve the boys’ behavior and reduce referrals.” Their efforts reflect Lawnwood Elementary’s belief that **“All Children Are Capable of Success, NO EXCEPTIONS!”**



Guermithe Oge, School Counselor and Kevin Singletary, KAH Training Coordinator



Lilias Batchelor, School Counselor and Kevin Singletary, KAH Training Coordinator



Advancing Mental Health & Community Well-Being in St. Lucie County

Spotlight on Guest Speakers: Elevating Our Mental Health Collaborative

For the past few months, St. Lucie RISE has had the privilege of hosting several remarkable guest speakers who shared invaluable insights and expertise with our Mental Health Collaborative (MHC). These presentations are designed to reduce the work in silos by fostering a collaborative impact approach to educating the MHC on local resources for mental health services. They provide opportunities for information sharing and thought-provoking discussions that strengthen our community-wide efforts.

The first presenter for 2025 was Dr. Michelle Gillard, Coordinator of Mental Health/Psychological & Social Services with St. Lucie Public Schools. Dr. Gillard delivered an engaging and educational presentation on the mental health services available to youth in the school system and how they and their families can access that care. This session attracted our largest group yet, demonstrating the growing interest and commitment to improving mental health services in our community. The group was thoroughly engaged, sparking great discussions about how to expand these efforts and ensure community-wide support for youth mental health.

We look forward to hosting more amazing guest speakers tackling topics that the group has expressed interest in. A special thank you is in order to Kristy Conway from the Guardians For New Futures' Children's Advocacy Center and Valerie Pullen from Inner Reins Counseling for their amazing presentations in November and December. These presentations not only inspire action but also deepen our understanding of innovative strategies to address mental health challenges within our community. Stay tuned for updates as we continue to bring impactful voices to the MHC, including Terri Shermett, Executive Director of PACE Center for Girls, who is presenting at our February meeting.



Dr. Gillard's presentation in January



Kristy Conway's presentation in November



Valerie Pullen's presentation in December

Advancing Mental Health & Community Well-Being in St. Lucie County



Collaborating to Amplify "The Youth Voice"

St. Lucie RISE collaborated with Kids at Hope and the Roundtable’s H.Y.P.E Youth Coalition to present “*The Youth Voice: Addressing Teen Pregnancy, Youth Substance Use, and Mental Health Challenges.*” Delivered to the Department of Health’s Maternal and Child Health professionals, the presentation focused on the rising rates of teen pregnancy births in St. Lucie County and their intersection with increasing trends in youth substance use and mental health challenges, particularly suicidal ideation and behaviors.

Key data from the 2024 FYSAS survey were shared, shedding light on the prevalence of depressive symptoms, suicidal thoughts and attempts among local youth, in addition to the lifetime use of substances. While depressive symptoms show a slight decline, suicidal ideation and attempts remain a significant concern. Furthermore, after years of decline, teen pregnancy rates are beginning to rise again. These alarming trends highlight the urgent need for targeted prevention efforts and collaborative community action.

The presentation also featured the Roundtable’s *PhotoVoice* Exhibit, an evidence-based visual project created in 2024 by youth from H.Y.P.E, the Lincoln Park Community Center, and E.N.D. It! Corporation. This exhibit was paired with a previous *PhotoVoice* project from 2019, offering a comparative look at youth perspectives over time. Despite the years between the projects, the concerns raised (regarding substance use, mental health struggles, and risky behaviors) continue to resonate with today’s youth. This powerful insight underscores the need for serious, coordinated interventions to address these challenges so that future generations do not face the same struggles.

The Maternal and Child Health professionals in attendance expressed strong interest and enthusiasm for addressing these overlapping challenges and finding ways to support local youth effectively. This presentation not only shed light on the scope of the hardships but also emphasized the importance of a united approach to creating lasting solutions. St. Lucie RISE is eager to share this critical discussion in other spaces, raising awareness about these pressing challenges and encouraging collaborative efforts to make a difference.



Champions of Prevention

Drug Free St. Lucie's Annual Champions of Prevention event was a great success with over sixty people in attendance, including school staff, parents, law enforcement, businesses, youth-serving organizations, local government, substance abuse and mental/behavioral health agencies, and more. All esteemed attendees gathered to learn, share solutions, network, and band together to share the load of substance use prevention and treatment work on the Treasure Coast.

Several presentations and training sessions were conducted by nationally renowned experts in the substance use prevention field covering an array of important topics:

Yamila Rollan Escalona, Founder-Yaya Por Vida, spoke about the importance of diverse representation in relation to working in substance use prevention. Ms. Rollan's presentation demonstrated the importance of accommodating the languages and cultures of the individuals we serve. Statistically, in St. Lucie County, people of color are experiencing addiction and mental health issues at higher rates. Employment of individuals with similar cultural backgrounds and spoken language is crucial to breaking down barriers to treatment for these individuals.

Kristina Clark, Founder-KM Clark Consulting Group presented on the changing landscape of marijuana potency, and the impacts of legalization on our county's youth and individuals struggling with addiction. All individuals working in the field of substance use prevention need to be informed on how to navigate this landscape. During this training, all attendees were active in providing solutions and actionable ways to proceed in the Drug Free St. Lucie Coalition's work.

Jerria Martin, Executive Director-Drug Free Communities of Dallas County and nationally esteemed CADCA trainer, presented on the intersection between mental health and substance use, and the importance of having youth voices thoroughly represented and heard in all substance use prevention coalitions. St. Lucie County local data and youth-direct reported qualitative data sources were reviewed and provided insight into the substance use and mental health issues impacting local youth. Action steps were then explored and committed to by each sector of our coalition to combat the sources of the issues our youth reported experiencing.

The Champions of Prevention Annual Meeting and Award Ceremony was an important day of recognizing the excellence in our community, eye opening education, and brainstorming actionable next steps for tackling the issues both happening today and those on the horizon in St. Lucie County.

Congratulations again to our CHAMPIONS OF PREVENTION WINNERS! (Page 7)



CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR CHAMPIONS OF PREVENTION WINNERS!



SCHOOLS: Cindy Bridges, Lindsay School of the Arts AND Chauntell Rivera, St. Lucie Public Schools

HEALTHCARE ORGANIZATIONS: Agape Behavioral Health

YOUTH-SERVING ORGANIZATION: Project LIFT, Rashard Alston

LAW ENFORCEMENT: Deputy Garland Heath, St. Lucie County Sheriff's Office

LOCAL AGENCY WITH EXPERTISE IN SUBSTANCE ABUSE: Drug Abuse Treatment Association

OTHER ORGANIZATION INVOLVED IN REDUCING SUBSTANCE USE: Tykes & Teens, Trust Program

PARENTS: Timothy & Melanie Trewyn, Remember For Change

HONORARY AWARD: Jovil Wharton, Drug Free St. Lucie Project Coordinator (2021-2024)



Champions of Prevention Awards



Casey Wood, DFSL Chair, Jovil Wharton, Program Manager, Opioid Abatement Program-DOH, and Teresa Bishop, CEO-Roundtable

Our Funders:



Our Board Members

- ◆ Terissa Aronson, St. Lucie Chamber of Commerce
- ◆ Tom Bakkedahl, 19th Judicial Circuit—State Attorney
- ◆ Brian Bauer, CareerSource Research Coast
- ◆ Ann Berner, SE FL Behavioral Health Network
- ◆ Sean Boyle, Children's Services Council
- ◆ John Bolduc, St. Lucie County Sheriff's Office
- ◆ Joseph Cracchiola, Department of Corrections
- ◆ Carol Deloach, Communities Connected for Kids
- ◆ Thomas Epsky, United Way of St. Lucie & Okeechobee
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- ◆ Leo Niemczyk, Port St. Lucie Police Department
- ◆ Heather Parker, Guardian ad Litem
- ◆ Nathan Peterson, Department of Juvenile Justice
- ◆ David Pickett, City of Port St. Lucie
- ◆ Dr. Jonathan Prince, St. Lucie Public Schools
- ◆ Clint Sperber, FL Health Department - St. Lucie County
- ◆ Peter Tesch, Economic Development Council
- ◆ Dana Trabulsy, State Representative
- ◆ Andrew Treadwell, Indian River State College
- ◆ Lisa von Seelen, Healthy Start Coalition of St. Lucie County
- ◆ Rosetta Washington, Fort Pierce Housing Authority
- ◆ TBD, 19th Judicial Circuit-Judge

Roundtable of St. Lucie County, Inc.

Our Mission:

To sustain a team of county and business leaders who mobilize resources to improve the education, health, safety, nutrition and care of all children in St. Lucie County.

Our Vision:

We envision a community where county leaders, businesses and residents are united to provide all children of St. Lucie County the resources they need to thrive, be successful and achieve their full potential.

2024-25 Executive Committee

CHAIR

Heather Parker, Guardian ad Litem

VICE-CHAIR

Carol Deloach, Communities Connected for Kids

SECRETARY

Ann Berner, Southeast FL Behavioral Health Network

TREASURER

Nathan Peterson, Department of Juvenile Justice

PAST CHAIR

Tony Loupe, Early Learning Coalition

STEERING COMMITTEE

Adrienne Huggins

AT LARGE

David Pickett, City of Port St. Lucie

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Drug Free St. Lucie

- ◆ TBD

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