

# Roundtable Review

## Message from our CEO



Greetings,

April is Child Abuse Prevention Month. As a survivor, I embrace first-hand the mission of the Roundtable to be “leaders united for children” that help strengthen the safety net for vulnerable children in our community. School was a place where teachers and staff gave me opportunities to use my talents despite my arriving late to school on most days with clothes that were too small and hair undone. Miss Saxon, the school janitor, greeted us daily with warm hugs and taught me how to be a “young lady”. I also sneaked into the Boys Club in Hartford, Connecticut, home of the first club, to watch the boys play basketball through the window of the gym though girls were not allowed. Maybe I am the reason the name changed to the Boys AND Girls Club, you think? Little did the staff know that the club kept me safe from the chaos going on in my home. There, my love for sports began and led to my becoming a basketball player with great coaches and mentors in my life. Child welfare staff cooked meals in our home I did not like and held my hand as we sat together to chat about life. My neighbor’s house served as a safe haven, where I was loved and learned how to cook a good hot meal. The caring adults I encountered provided a bridge over troubled waters and helped me to recover from my circumstances. THIS is “Kids at Hope” in action. Through our IGNITE Youth Alliance and Kids at Hope Initiatives, a range of Roundtable and partner agencies work together to learn and be caring adults in the lives of our most fragile children. The outstanding work of IGNITE outreach staff and our community partnerships are featured beginning on page 2 of this newsletter. Support for those who do not have a voice to speak is paramount to positive outcomes for children. Wherever you serve, your role is key to youth success. Be a “Treasure Hunter” and believe that “All Children are Capable of Success – No Exceptions!” I am living proof.

**Teresa Bishop**  
Chief Executive Officer



APRIL IS  
**CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION MONTH**

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### Special Dates in March

- World Autism Awareness Day 4/2
- National Library Week 4/3-4/9
- Sexual Assault Awareness Day of Action 4/5
- World Health Day 4/7
- National Volunteer Week 4/17-4/23
- Earth Day 4/22
- National Youth Violence Prevention Week 4/25-4/29
- Administrative Professionals Day 4/27
- Holocaust Remembrance Day 4/28
- Children’s Day/Book Day 4/30



## Spring Break 2022!

After two long and challenging years with limited opportunities for program youth to attend pro-social events with their outreach workers, IGNITE Youth Alliance went big for [#springbreak2022](#). We wanted to offer our young men and women a break from the cloud of COVID and the losses and challenges they have experienced in the last two years. So we invited all our IGNITE youth to an action-packed, fun-filled, and educational Spring Break Holiday!

On the first day, outreach workers took youth to the Blue Cypress Conservation area in Indian River County, where they observed exotic birds, plants, turtles, and Florida alligators flying over the water on an air boat. None of the youth had ever done that before and to say they loved it is an understatement!

In addition to other recreational activities, such as roller skating, painting with a twist, bowling, movie night, beach barbecue, fishing and basketball tournaments, youth also participated in a *Day of Community Service*, at the Treasure Coast Food Bank - a new initiative headed by Dr. Sunny Booker, St. Lucie County Public Schools, in collaboration with the Department of Juvenile Justice and IGNITE Youth Alliance.



## Spotlight on Street Outreach!

### Marcus Mills – IGNITE Outreach Worker of the Year 2021!

Street outreach is a highly specialized, and increasingly acknowledged profession in the United States. In a recent National Gang Center webinar a trainer stated that there were thousands of new outreach workers entering communities across the US, and the number is increasing due to its effectiveness in stemming gang-related violence and victimization. An evaluation of the Cure Violence anti-violence program in the South Bronx found that its street outreach efforts were associated with a **37% decline** in gun injuries and a **63% decline** in shooting victimizations.

Being an effective outreach worker requires a plethora of highly specialized skills like street credibility and knowledge of local gang culture, in addition to youth engagement techniques, crisis management skills, community services, de-escalation, advocacy, and parenting skills. Not to mention having the guts to go into some of the most dangerous hot spots in the county to see their clients.

For Marcus Mills (41), a 5-year veteran outreach worker with IGNITE Youth Alliance, dispensing life lessons to youth in St. Lucie County is highly personal. He desperately wants to prevent youth in St. Lucie County from going through the same experiences he did, which caused him to miss the birth of two of his children and his freedom as he served eight long years in prison. While raised in a solid family and being a jock in high school, never really getting in to any trouble, he still was enticed by the street culture, the money, the music, the fashion, and the seemingly glamorous gang lifestyle. "I acted like I thought a black man was supposed to act according to the images that were depicted to me through the media", Marcus recalls. Discharged from the Army and returning to Fort Pierce without a clear plan for



what to do next, he started hanging in the streets, drinking, and going to clubs with old school mates, immersing himself in “the life”. He enjoyed it. Needing money for the lifestyle and seeing the easy money his friends made in the streets, he got deeper and deeper involved. His first prison sentence did not do much to deter him from that life. “Two years was too short for me. Instead of contemplating where I made wrong choices, I reflected on why I was caught and spent my time sharpening my skills in my street trade”, Marcus says. He was only out for 4 months before he violated parole and was sentenced to another six years in prison for possession of firearms and intent to distribute. Not being able to be there for his sons’ births and experiencing them growing up without him from within prison walls, made Marcus leave his old life behind. His time in prison also taught him other lessons. “In prison you are treated like a dog, and not like a human being”, Marcus says, and he wanted that to end. He realized the importance of the little freedoms that we have all taken for granted, like being able to eat, shower and go to the bathroom when you want. BUT, most of all, he wanted to be a father for his kids.



Marcus LOVES outreach and does it whether he’s on the clock for IGNITE, coaching youth football, eating at Burger King, or shopping for clothes. “Really, anywhere I go”, he says, “Watching kids reach goals they never thought was possible, like graduating from high school, or entering college, and watching them persevere through their struggles, not give up on themselves and prove those who didn’t believe in them wrong” is the sweet spot of outreach to Marcus. “I’ve always had an affection for young people. I just love them and see myself in them”. Seeing himself in young people makes him want to reach out and guide them when he sees them

taking the wrong path. Marcus wants to be a positive father figure for the many young men in St. Lucie County who do not have one.



Diverting a youth from gang activity is a complex and challenging task. Especially, when you as an outreach worker have two hours twice a week with your mentee, and social media influence is on 24/7. The lure of street and gang culture is stronger than ever, and it continues to seduce young men and women into the life through gangster rap music, beauty, glamour, and the promise of “easy money”, which further emphasizes how critical street outreach is today.

Despite the challenges of gang outreach, you also experience the invaluable moments when a youth overcomes an obstacle and reaches a goal, and it all seems worth it. The rewarding part can be short-lived, which is why this work can also be extremely emotionally taxing and heart wrenching . “The worst moments of this job”, Marcus says, “is when you get that phone call in the middle of the night informing you that one of your youth has been killed. And you are left with that thought of could I have done more for this kid?” During his tenure with IGNITE the program has lost 9 young lives to gun violence, 3 of them were on Marcus’ case load. It’s a devastating personal loss, because you develop deep bonds with your clients, but part of an outreach worker’s job is also to provide services to families of gang violence victims. Having to comfort the parents who have lost their child and assist the family helping through the grieving process, the funeral and after, it is essential that outreach workers manage their own mental health to avoid burn out. Self-care is an area IGNITE is passionate about and we work hard to create a supportive environment for outreach workers. Staff receive training on self-care techniques, have daily check ins, and attend a bi-weekly mental health check in session with Tykes and Teens. We are constantly exploring new knowledge to help take care of our outreach workers mental wellbeing.

Being the remarkable outreach worker Marcus is, thus being awarded **IGNITE Outreach Worker for the Year for 2021**, he also has a healthy set of mental health coping skills. Most importantly, self-awareness, knowing when you are starting to break down and need to take some time off. He renews his spirit by fishing and working out, through football and life skills coaching and most importantly watching his favorite Miami-based sports teams win (need I say—Dolphins, Hurricanes, Heat).

**Congratulations Marcus Mills —Outreach Worker of the Year 2021!**

“As an adult and a Treasure Hunter, I am committed to search for all the talents, skills, and intelligence that exist in all children and youth. I believe that ALL children and youth are capable of success, No Exceptions!”



## New IGNITE Program Initiatives!

### Teen Choices

With rising numbers in teen pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases among youth in St. Lucie County, IGNITE Youth Alliance is collaborating with the Teen Choices program at the St. Lucie County Department of Health to provide sexual health education to program youth. Over the next seven weeks, program youth will participate in gender-specific workshop sessions covering topics like sexually transmitted diseases, contraception, and healthy relationships. Following completion of these workshops, Teen Choices staff will facilitate co-ed dialogues around the same issues for another seven weeks.

### IRSC Promise Program

Recently, Indian River State College announced its new and amazing Promise program that offers **free Associate Degrees for public high school graduates on the Treasure Coast**, a fantastic opportunity for Treasure Coast youth. Most IGNITE youth do not see themselves attending college and want to change that, IGNITE has developed a partnership with the Department of Recruitment and Admission at IRSC. The goal is to educate the mentors about all the opportunities available at IRSC and for them to educate and expose program youth to college life. Emily Mass, Yvonne Soto and Mercedes Liriano-White provided IGNITE with an inspiring tour of the campus and all the exciting programs they offer. Just yesterday, our first IGNITE youth enrolled in the IRSC Promise program!

# Roundtable Networks

## NETWORK MEETING DATES:

**Child & Adolescent Health:** Chair: Tricia Goulet, Email: tricia.goulet@flhealth.gov

**Healthiest Weight:** TBD. Chair: Stefanie Myers; Email: stefanie.myers@flhealth.gov

**Infant Mortality:** Bi-monthly on fourth Friday at 1pm. Chair: Sonya Gabriel, Email: sonya.gabriel@flhealth.gov

**Teen Pregnancy Prevention:** Monthly on third Thursday at 2:30pm. Chair: Sonya Gabriel, Email: sonya.gabriel@flhealth.gov

**SafeKids/Unintentional Injury:** Monthly on first Thursday at 10am. Chair: Ronda Cerulli; Email: ronda.cerulli@flhealth.gov

**Drug Free St. Lucie:** Monthly on second Thursday at 11am. Chair: Casey Wood; Email: cwood@nhtcinc@onmicrosoft.com

**Academic Success:** Monthly on first Wednesday at 1pm. Chair: Debbie Hawley; Email: debbie.hawley@bbbsbigs.org

**Bridges to Prosperity:** Monthly on third Wednesday at 10am. Chair: Canieria Gardner, Email: cgardner@incbiz.org

**Child Welfare:** Monthly on third Tuesday at 2:30pm, Co-chairs: Carol Deloach, Nathan Peterson, Bob McPartlan, Heather Parker; Email: Elisabeth.eugene@cck.net

**Safe Neighborhood:** Monthly on third Wednesday at 2pm. Co-Chairs: Dr. Sunny Booker/Commander Carmine Izzo; Email: despinosa@roundtableslc.org

**Lincoln Park Advisory Committee:** Bi-monthly on fourth Thursday at 12pm. Email: ksingletary@roundtableslc.org

**Youth Leadership St. Lucie:** Bi-weekly on Wednesdays at 5:30pm. Email: kreid@roundtableslc.org



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*“There can be no keener revelation of a society’s soul than the way in which it treats its children.” - Nelson Mandela*

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## Our Board Members

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- ◆ Terissa Aronson, St. Lucie Chamber of Commerce
- ◆ Tom Bakkedahl, 19th Judicial Circuit—State Attorney
- ◆ Rosetta Bartell, Housing Authority of Fort Pierce
- ◆ Linda Bartz, Board of County Commissioners
- ◆ Brian Bauer, CareerSource Research Coast
- ◆ Ann Berner, SE FL Behavioral Health Network
- ◆ John Bolduc, Port St. Lucie Police Department
- ◆ Sean Boyle, Children’s Services Council
- ◆ Michael Davis, Department of Corrections
- ◆ Carol Deloach, Communities Connected for Kids
- ◆ Wayne Gent, St. Lucie Public Schools
- ◆ Debbie Hawley, Steering Committee Chair
- ◆ Brian Hester, St. Lucie County Sheriff’s Office
- ◆ Diane Holey-Burney, Fort Pierce Police Department
- ◆ Curtis Johnson, City of Fort Pierce
- ◆ Diamond R. Litty, 19th Judicial Circuit—Public Defender
- ◆ Tony Loupe, Early Learning Coalition of St. Lucie County
- ◆ Robert McPartlan, Department of Children and Families
- ◆ Heather Parker, Guardian ad Litem
- ◆ Jessica Parrish, United Way of St. Lucie & Okeechobee
- ◆ Nathan Peterson, Department of Juvenile Justice
- ◆ David Pickett, City of Port St. Lucie
- ◆ Nate Spera, St. Lucie County Fire District
- ◆ 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

# Our Board of Directors

## 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.

### CHAIR

Lisa von Seelen, Healthy Start Coalition of St. Lucie County

### VICE-CHAIR

Tony Loupe, Early Learning Coalition

### SECRETARY

Sean Boyle, Children's Services Council

### TREASURER

Jessica Parrish, United Way of St. Lucie & Okeechobee

### PAST CHAIR

Vacant

### STEERING COMMITTEE

Debbie Hawley, St. Lucie Public Schools

### AT LARGE

Heather Parker, Guardian ad Litem

[www.RoundtableSLC.com](http://www.RoundtableSLC.com)

## Roundtable of St. Lucie County, Inc.

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### ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE:

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## OUR INITIATIVES:

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- ◆ **Marcus Mills, Senior Outreach Worker**
- ◆ **LaKenya Ruffin, Outreach Worker**
- ◆ **Markesha Brockington, Outreach Worker**
- ◆ **Lee Davis, Outreach Worker**
- ◆ **Michael Johnson, Outreach Worker**

### **Kids at Hope & Youth Leadership St. Lucie**

- ◆ **Kevin Singletary, Project Coordinator**  
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