



February 2026

# Roundtable Review

## Message from our CEO

Greetings,

Each year in February, we celebrate Black History Month. This year is especially meaningful, as it marks 100 years since Carter G. Woodson—an American historian and author—created Negro History Week to ensure Black history was studied, preserved, and honored at a time when it was often overlooked. Later, Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc., Woodson’s fraternity, helped advocate for expanding the observance. Fifty years ago, in 1976, President Gerald Ford became the first U.S. president to officially recognize Black History Month as a month-long observance. Since then, presidents from both parties have continued this tradition through annual proclamations.



Black History Month is more than a look back at the past—it is an opportunity to deepen understanding and strengthen community. Learning Black history helps children of every background gain a fuller picture of our shared American story. It highlights leadership, innovation, service, and perseverance, while honoring the many contributions that have helped shape our nation.

For young people, these lessons are especially meaningful. Exposure to Black educators, scientists, artists, entrepreneurs, and leaders helps youth see that success comes in many forms and through many paths. This reflects the Kids at Hope belief that *all children are capable of success, no exceptions*. When children learn about individuals who overcame challenges, worked together, and contributed to their communities, they begin to recognize opportunity in themselves and in others.

Equally important are meaningful relationships with caring adults. When families, educators, mentors, and community members share these stories with intention, they become “treasure hunters,” helping young people discover their strengths, build confidence, and develop hope for the future. These connections foster belonging, responsibility, and resilience.

At the Roundtable of St. Lucie County, this belief guides our mission. We work with caring adults, community partners, and local systems to ensure every child is supported, valued, and connected to opportunities that help them grow and thrive.

Our pledge is clear: We believe all children are capable of success.

Black History Month reminds us that when we believe in all children and intentionally support their success—no exceptions—our communities grow stronger.

*Teresa Bishop*

Chief Executive Officer

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### Special Dates:

- Chinese New Year 2/1
- Groundhog Day 2/2
- Nat’l School Counselor Week 2/2-2/6
- Super Bowl 2/8
- Make a Friend Day 2/11
- Valentine’s Day 2/14
- Presidents’ Day 2/16
- Random Acts of Kindness Day 2/17
- Love Your Pet Day 2/20
- Banana Bread Day 2/23
- Nat’l Tooth Fairy Day 2/28



# A Strong Start to 2026: What's Ahead for St. Lucie RISE

As we begin a new year, St. Lucie RISE (SLR) is building on the progress made in 2025 and continuing its work to support mental health promotion and substance misuse prevention across St. Lucie County. With strong partnerships and shared priorities in place, 2026 is focused on access to resources and sustained community impact.

**ST. LUCIE CARES** One of our first milestones of 2026 is the launch of the digital St. Lucie Cares Behavioral Health Resource Guide. First distributed in print throughout the community in 2025, St. Lucie Cares is now available online, making it easier for residents, families, and providers to access local mental health, substance use, crisis, and supportive services in one centralized location. To ensure the guide is comprehensive and as up-to-date as possible, we encourage service providers and organizations to submit their information for consideration through the "Submit a Resource" tab on our website at [www.stluciecares.com](http://www.stluciecares.com). The digital guide will be updated regularly as new resources become available, and the next print edition of St. Lucie Cares is planned for later in 2026, giving residents continued access to this valuable community resource.

Furthermore, in January, SLR convened partners for the first working meeting of the year, providing an opportunity to reconnect, share updates, and align around priorities for 2026. These convenings remain an important space for information-sharing and collaboration as partners work together to strengthen prevention and mental health efforts countywide.



As the year moves forward, St. Lucie RISE looks ahead to continued collaboration and progress toward shared goals. Thank you to our partners and stakeholders for your ongoing engagement and commitment to this work.

## **Learn more and stay connected.**

Learn about St. Lucie RISE's current focus areas and initiatives at [www.roundtableslc.org/stlucie\\_rise](http://www.roundtableslc.org/stlucie_rise), follow us on Facebook @StLucieRISE for updates and upcoming meetings, and explore local behavioral health resources through the St. Lucie Cares Behavioral Health Guide at <https://www.stluciecares.com/>.

# ST. LUCIE CARES

## BEHAVIORAL HEALTH RESOURCE GUIDE



YOUR LOCAL CONNECTION TO  
MENTAL HEALTH, SUBSTANCE USE,  
AND WELLNESS SUPPORT  
THROUGHOUT ST. LUCIE COUNTY.

## ABOUT

**St. Lucie Cares** was developed by the St. Lucie RISE Mental Health Collaborative, an initiative of the Roundtable of St. Lucie County. Our goal is to simplify access to behavioral health services and ensure that every resident, from youth and caregivers to community providers, has a trusted place to find help.

Born from community feedback and collaboration, this resource guide reflects the needs, voices, and values of St. Lucie County. It's designed for anyone who may feel overwhelmed or uncertain where to start, providing straightforward pathways to support.



[WWW.STLUCIECARES.COM](http://WWW.STLUCIECARES.COM)





# Mothers at Hope: Building Balance Together

At our most recent Mothers at Hope gathering, moms came together in a space rooted in encouragement, understanding, and connection. The focus of the meeting centered on navigating the many stressors of motherhood by strengthening healthy thought patterns, practicing positive behaviors, and leaning into the power of community support. Through open and honest conversations, mothers explored the importance of recognizing their limits and the power of accepting help when it is needed, reminding one another that asking for support is a sign of strength, not weakness.

We were honored to welcome two incredible guest agencies, Mustard Seed Ministries and TOPWA, who shared valuable resources and insights to support families in our community. Their presence reinforced an important message for our moms: they are not alone, and help is available. Access to information, services, and trusted partners can make a meaningful difference in a mother's journey toward stability and well-being.



We are deeply grateful to every mother who showed up, shared space, and continues to choose growth, healing, and hope for themselves and their families. We also extend sincere thanks to ALPI's George W. Truett Family Services Center and Kelly Santos of the Children's Services Council of St. Lucie County for their continued partnership and support. Because of these collaborations, Mothers at Hope remains a welcoming place where moms feel seen, supported, and cared for.

We look forward to our next Mothers at Hope meeting on February 19th from 4:00–5:00 PM at ALPI's George W. Truett Family Services Center, where guest speakers from Better Together and the Children's Services Council will join us to share the many resources they offer to families in our community.

Together, we are building balance and hope; one meeting at a time.



# H.Y.P.E Youth Lead the Way in Environmental and Community Care

Youth across Fort Pierce Central and Northport K-8 have been actively exploring one of H.Y.P.E.'s (Helping Youth Pursue Excellence) Core Values; Environmental and Community Care. Through meaningful discussion, critical thinking, and action-focused planning, youth examined the real challenges impacting St. Lucie County's natural habitats, animals, and people, and reflected on how environmental issues directly affect the health and well-being of their community.



Through thoughtful conversations, youth shared their perspectives on why these challenges exist and, more importantly, how they can play a role in being part of the solution and prevention. These discussions highlighted the compassion, responsibility, and leadership our youth bring to the table when given the opportunity to be heard and empowered.

As a direct result of this learning, H.Y.P.E youth took the lead in planning two community environmental cleanups, turning values into action and inviting families and community members to join them in making a difference.

The first cleanup will take place on Saturday, January 31st, 2026, from 12:30–2:00 PM at Fort Pierce Jetty Park (2098 Seaway Drive, Fort Pierce, FL 34949). Participants will meet at the large pavilion at 12:15 PM for a group photo. The second cleanup will be held on Saturday, February 28th, 2026, from 12:30–2:00 PM at Sportsman's Park (201 NW Prima Vista Blvd, Port St. Lucie, FL 34983), with the same group photo meetup time and location at the pavilion.

Both cleanups are open to H.Y.P.E youth and their families. Trash bags, pickers, gloves, and light refreshments will be provided, and youth can participate in a friendly trash collection contest, where the person or team who gathers the most trash will win a prize.

These youth-planned events reflect what happens when young people are empowered to care deeply about their community and environment, change follows. We are incredibly proud of our H.Y.P.E youth for leading with purpose, compassion, and action as they work to create a cleaner, healthier St. Lucie County.

Join Us for a

**H.Y.P.E**  
HELPING YOUTH PURSUE EXCELLENCE

**COMMUNITY  
SERVICE  
HOURS  
ALERT!!**

# Park Cleanup!

## Sportsman's Park

201 NW Prima Vista Blvd, Port St.  
Lucie, FL 34983

We will meet at the big pavilion for a  
group picture at 12:15pm.

**H.Y.P.E YOUTH AND FAMILIES  
WELCOME!**

**Saturday,  
February 28<sup>th</sup>, 2026  
12:30pm-2:00pm**

### Contest

Collect trash and  
compete to see  
who gathers the  
most. Winner  
gets a prize!

Trash bags,  
pickers, gloves,  
and light  
refreshments  
provided.

**SIGN UP TODAY**



Roundtable  
of St. Lucie County  
LEADERS UNITED FOR CHILDREN

[www.RoundtableSLC.org/HYPE](http://www.RoundtableSLC.org/HYPE)

ST. LUCIE COUNTY  
**Children's**  
SERVICES COUNCIL  
Our Children · Our Community · Our Future



# Refresher Training at Manatee Academy

Before students returned from Winter Break, the staff at Manatee Academy participated in a Kids at Hope Refresher Training focused on strengthening relationships through empathy. At the request of the school's administrative team, the session centered on how empathy can be intentionally used to build trust, connection, and meaningful relationships with students. More than 100 staff members attended the training.



The training highlighted the Second Universal Truth of Kids at Hope: *"Children succeed when they are surrounded by adults who create meaningful, sustainable, and caring relationships with them."* This powerful belief reinforces the understanding that every child needs at least one caring adult to support their hopes, dreams, and success.

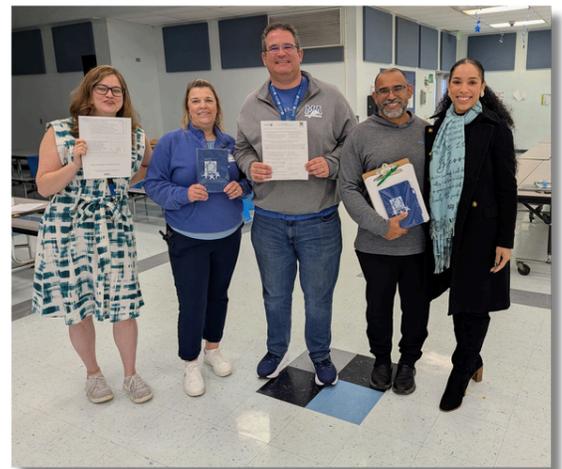
During the session, staff reaffirmed their commitment to the Treasure Hunter's Pledge: *"As an adult and Treasure Hunter, I am committed to search for all of the talents, skills, and intelligence that exist in all children and youth. I believe all children are capable of success—no exceptions."*

Empathy was clearly defined, and staff were provided with practical, everyday strategies for demonstrating empathy in classrooms, hallways, and school interactions. The training emphasized that empathy is not just a feeling, it is an action that shapes school culture and student experiences.

At the conclusion of the session, participants were asked to identify one specific change they would make as a result of the training. Responses reflected a strong commitment to growth and compassion, including:

- *"I will use more positive words when addressing difficult situations with students."*
- *"I will practice greater patience in my daily interactions."*

This refresher training reinforced Manatee Academy's dedication to creating a school environment where students feel seen, valued, supported, and believed in, because when children are surrounded by caring adults, success becomes possible.



# Teen & Young Adult Substance Use Trends, Risks, and Practical Prevention

## What we're seeing (and why it matters here)

Across Florida (and locally), youth substance use patterns continue to shift—often toward products that are easy to conceal, heavily marketed on social media, or mistaken as “safe.” Local partners are also emphasizing the ongoing danger of fentanyl in the illicit drug supply, especially in counterfeit pills. ([stlucie.floridahealth.gov](http://stlucie.floridahealth.gov))

Substances teens and young adults are often drawn to:

### 1) Vapes (nicotine + THC):

- Nicotine vapes are popular because they're small, easy to hide, and come in appealing flavors. St. Lucie County schools have flagged youth vaping as a local concern and provide prevention info for families. ([St. Lucie Schools](#))
- THC vapes/carts can look like nicotine devices. Illicit or unregulated products can carry additional health risks.

Things to be mindful of and watch for: sweet/fruity smells, unfamiliar USB-like devices, increased irritability/anxiety, frequent bathroom breaks.

### 2) Cannabis products (especially high-potency forms):

Today's cannabis often includes high-THC concentrates (“dabs,” “wax”) and edibles, which can feel “normalized” to teens. Florida trend reporting continues to track youth marijuana use as a key indicator. ([YMAWS](#))

What to be mindful of and to look for: sudden drop in motivation, red eyes, changes in friend groups, increased appetite, “gummy/candy” packaging not purchased by the household.

### 3) Counterfeit pills (the biggest immediate danger):

Many teens think they're taking a familiar medication (like anxiety or pain pills), but counterfeit pills can contain fentanyl. The DEA warns that “fake pills” are widespread and a significant share tested contain potentially lethal amounts. ([DEA](#))

## Key Message to continually communicate to youth:

**'If it didn't come from a pharmacy and a prescription in their name, it's not safe.'**

### 4) Alcohol (still common—and risky):

Alcohol remains a frequent entry point to risky behavior and can combine dangerously with other substances. Even when overall teen use is down nationally, alcohol is still a major driver of accidents and impaired judgment. ([AP News](#))

Be mindful and lookout for: missing alcohol at home, smell on breath, secrecy, “sleepovers” with vague plans.

### 5) Stimulants (misuse of ADHD meds):

Some teens misuse stimulants for studying, weight loss, or partying—often shared among peers. This can worsen anxiety, sleep problems, and heart risks (especially when combined with caffeine/energy drinks or alcohol). ([SAMHSA](#))



# DRUG FREE ST. LUCIE

Drug Free St. Lucie Coalition’s Annual Meeting and Champion of Prevention Awards Ceremony will be held at the Kight Center for Emerging Technologies – IRSC, located at 3209 Virginia Avenue, Fort Pierce, FL 34981. Date pending.

Nominate your favorite 2026 Prevention Champion. What organization, business, individual or program has made a significant impact on preventing and reducing youth substance use in St. Lucie County? Nominate them!

Click the QR code below and nominate your favorite Champion of Prevention!



## Our Funders:



## Our Board Members

- Terissa Aronson, St. Lucie Chamber of Commerce
- Tom Bakkedahl, 19<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit - State Attorney
- Brian Bauer, CareerSource Research Coast
- Ann Berner, SE FI Behavioral Health Network
- Sean Boyle, Children’s Services Council
- John Bolduc, St. Lucie County Sheriff’s Office
- Michael Broderick, City of Fort Pierce
- Joseph Cracchiola, Department of Corrections
- Carol Deloach, Communities Connected for Kids
- Thomas Epsky, United Way of St. Lucie & Okeechobee
- Adrienne Huggins, Steering Committee Chair
- Jeff Lee, St. Lucie County Fire District
- Diamond Litty, 19<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit - Public Defender
- Tony Loupe, Early Learning Coalition of St. Lucie County
- Erin Lowry, Board of County Commissioners
- Robert McPartlan, Department of Children and Families
- Leo Niemczyk, Port St. Lucie Police Department
- Judge Anastasia Norman, 19<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit - Judge
- Heather Parker, Guardian ad Litem
- Nathan Peterson, Department of Juvenile Justice
- David Pickett, City of Port St. Lucie
- Dr. Jonathon Prince, St. Lucie Public Schools
- Robert Ridle, Fort Pierce Police Department
- Clint Sperber, FL Health Department - St. Lucie County
- Peter Tesch, Economic Development Council
- Dana Trabulsky, State Representative
- Andrew Treadwell, Indian River State College
- Lisa von Seelen, Healthy Start Coalition of St. Lucie County
- Rosetta Washington, Fort Pierce Housing Authority

## 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.

## 2025-26 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 CHAIR:

Adrienne Huggins

### AT LARGE:

David Pickett, City of Port St. Lucie

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

## Roundtable of St. Lucie County, Inc.

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### Drug Free St. Lucie

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