

Happy Graduation!



Dasiely Cruz, ELCC Director, graduated from the prestigious Equity Leaders Action Network (ELAN) program that focuses on advancing racial equity in early childhood systems! Great job, Dasiely!



Griffin Romuald, son of **Brenda Romuald**, HMG Coordinator, graduated from Lincoln High School on May 27 in Tallahassee. He plans to attend FSU in the Spring of 2024. Brenda is very excited for Griffin and his future, but thinks time is going too fast. Way to go, Griffin!



Maya Williams, daughter of **Doretta Williams**, Workforce Initiatives Specialist, graduated from FSU in May 2023 with an M.S Ed.S in Clinical Mental Health Counseling. She is currently working on her Florida licensure, plans to start her own practice as a licensed clinical mental health counselor, and may seek a doctoral degree down the road. Congratulations, Maya!



Carter Wilson, son of **Heather Wilson**, Workforce Initiatives Coordinator, graduated from Chiles High School in Tallahassee on May 25. He will follow in his parent's footsteps and attend FSU where he plans to study business. Heather is grateful for everyone who came together to celebrate Carter. Best wishes, Carter, as you get ready for your next chapter!



Lisa Carson, Workforce Initiatives Specialist, celebrated her son, Connor Kennedy, as he graduated from Leon High School in Tallahassee on May 24. Connor enlisted in the United States Marine Corps and left for Paris Island on June 12 to complete his training as a Combat Engineer. This has been Connor's lifelong dream and Lisa is so proud of the incredible man he has become!

"You did it!"
2023



WHAT ARE YOUR SUMMER PLANS?



"We took my son James to the Tampa Zoo, the FL Aquarium, and the beach for his belated birthday trip. He's a December baby, but the weather was too cold so we waited until my semester was over. His favorite thing was riding the Rhino on the carousel and chasing the otters back and forth."

Courtney Lee, Workforce Initiatives Specialist



"My family took a short vacation over to Panama City Beach at the end of May for a few days. The hotel we stayed at had a small water park at the base of the building."



Trace Cooper, IT Programmer



"In terms of something to do for the summer, we have six lovely birthdays and an anniversary to celebrate. We will definitely have a busy summer! I included a family picture where miraculously, there is not snot on anyone's face."

My mom used to make the summer treat below while I was growing up in Miami. It's called a morir soñando, translating to "dying dreaming." Despite its bleak name, it's really delicious and is similar to an Orange Julius."

Laure Fiotte, Workforce Initiatives Specialist



"I kicked off the beginning of summer with a trip to Saint Simons and Cumberland Islands with my family. We climbed to the top of a lighthouse, toured an old fort, visited an awesome World War II museum, saw wild horses and tons of wildlife, and viewed ruins from mansions built by the Carnegie family. We had a wonderful time!"

Jenna Brown, Communications Director



"I'm going to be in Miami in the first week of August to visit my brother and spend time on the Miami beach Tiki Bar and restaurants and seeing the heart of the city. My brother has friends that he wants us to meet and have dinner with, so I'm excited to start the trip when it comes around."

Alexis Smith, Workforce Initiatives Analyst

Morir Soñando



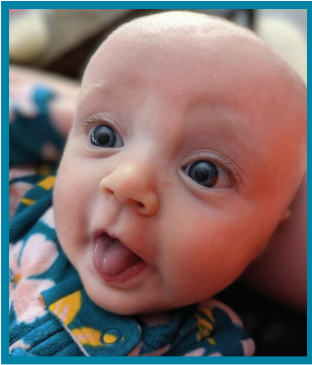
SERVINGS: 2

- 1 cup chilled Orange Juice (preferably freshly squeezed)
- 1 cup chilled evaporate milk
- 2 cups ice cubes (or crushed)
- Sugar to taste
- 1 teaspoon vanilla (optional)

Add ice and chilled milk to cup. While stirring, slowly add OJ. Sweeten to your preference and voila!

FORUM

BABy BOOM!



Trace Cooper, IT Programmer, welcomed an adorable baby girl named Olivia to his family on January 19. Olivia is a very happy baby who loves to dance with her daddy and play with her hands. Wishing you nothing but the best, Trace!



Viviana Avila, Lead Program Specialist, celebrated the upcoming arrival of her baby boy at a lovely Forum baby shower. Daniel Scott made his debut on June 1, and Viviana was more than ready to meet him. Mommy and baby are doing great. Welcome to the world of parenthood, Viviana! We can't wait to meet your little one!



Jinan Higginbotham, Outreach Director, is currently eating for two. Baby girl Higginbotham is due to arrive in early November. Big brother Tripp, sister Nyla, and daddy E.J. are over the moon. Best wishes, Jinan! Your family will soon be growing by two feet!



Liz Randall, HMG Director, has another bun in the oven. Her second child, a baby girl, is due October 7. Big sister Leona and family are overjoyed for her arrival. Many blessings, Liz, to you and your growing family!



Gabriela Agosto, Front Desk Assistant, is expecting her first child: a baby boy! Ismael Luis Rivera is anticipated to make his debut in early September. Warmest wishes, Gabriela, on new beginnings as you enter this wonderful time in your life.



★ Recognitions and Achievements ★



Dasiely Cruz, ELCC Director, was invited by The Children's Trust to co-present at the NAEYC Conference in Washington, D.C.! They discussed the new A\$CEND salary supplement program in Miami, and Dasiely shared data on the workforce and how scholarships help educators to increase their knowledge and reach higher levels of salary supports. Visiting the White House, networking with colleagues, and enjoying amazing food were some of the conference highlights. Congratulations, Dasiely!



Carter Roberts, son of **Lisa Roberts**, Assessment and Coaching Services Director, was honored at his Eagle Scout Court of Honor ceremony on Saturday, May 13. This event recognizes and celebrates Scouts who have earned the Eagle, the highest achievement or rank attainable in the Boy Scouts of America program. Only four percent of Scouts have earned this rank nationally. This summer, Carter will serve on staff at Wallwood Boy Scout Camp as well as Senior Patrol Leader for the Suwannee Area River Council contingency at the Boy Scout National Jamboree in Buckley, West Virginia. Way to go, Carter!

Sydney Brown, daughter of **Jenna Brown**, Communications Director, "crossed the bridge" to the next level of Girl Scouts! The ceremony honors girls' achievements throughout the year and celebrates their advancement. She is now a Junior and looks forward to another fun year of camping, selling cookies, learning new skills, and hanging out with her Girl Scout friends.



★ Adventures and Events ★



Shelby Norwood, Workforce Initiatives Specialist, and **Jinan Higginbotham**, Outreach Director, had fun meeting amazing early educators and programs at the Early Learning Coalition of the Big Bend's Annual ECE Conference on April 29!



Tami Fletcher and **Doretta Williams**, Workforce Initiatives Specialists, presented at the Uniting for Children Annual Conference, hosted by the Early Learning Coalition of Lake County on April 22. They discussed what a T.E.A.C.H. Scholarship can do for you!



Emily Fulkerson, Workforce Initiatives Coordinator, and **Cynthia Christie**, Workforce Initiatives Specialist, enjoyed engaging and networking with early educators and discussing scholarship opportunities at the Early Learning Coalition of Manatee County's Conference on Young Children on February 28!



Jessica Long and **Lisa Carson**, Workforce Initiatives Specialists, hosted the T.E.A.C.H. table at the College of Central Florida's annual Early Childhood Conference. They enjoyed meeting new people and letting them know about T.E.A.C.H. scholarships!



Adventures and Events



Help Me Grow® Florida (HMGF) held their virtual annual meeting April 18-19. This meeting was geared towards HMGF affiliate staff and governing team members. It was chock full of rich information and professional development. Morgan Evers, CEO and founder of FINACIOUS, was the keynote speaker. Other presenters included Dr. Lisette Levy, Early Learning Program Specialist with the Department of Early Learning, Dr. Paul Dworkin, Founding Director of Help Me Grow National, Gabi Lara, Outreach Specialist for Florida Health Kids Corporation, and our very own **Erin Smeltzer**, President and CEO.



Emily Fulkerson, Workforce Initiatives Coordinator, and her mom made a trip to Hamburg, Germany in December to visit their sister/daughter, Holly, and only niece/granddaughter, Zoe. They were there to celebrate Zoe's first birthday and got to visit some of Germany's world-famous Christmas Markets. It was amazing to see the magic of Christmas through a baby's eyes!



Lisa Roberts, Assessment and Coaching Services Director, is one of four leaders in her Girl Scout Cadette troop. She recently accompanied 11 girls from her troop on a trip to Savannah, Georgia, the home of the Girl Scout movement. They embarked on a 5-day adventure and toured the Girl Scout sites. They also visited two local forts and a lighthouse, enjoyed a dolphin tour, went on a walking ghost tour, participated in some 4-H science programs, and engaged in other activities planned by the girls themselves. This trip was possible as a result of the hard work and effort of their



Taylor Wigsten, son of **April Scarborough**, Workforce Initiatives Specialist, Quint and Sydney Brown, children of **Jenna Brown**, Communications Director, and Victoria Grant, daughter of **Paula Grant**, Workforce Initiatives Coordinator, had lots of fun and worked hard at Take Our Daughters and Sons to Work Day! The children were excited to learn more about the Forum and what their parents do at the workplace.

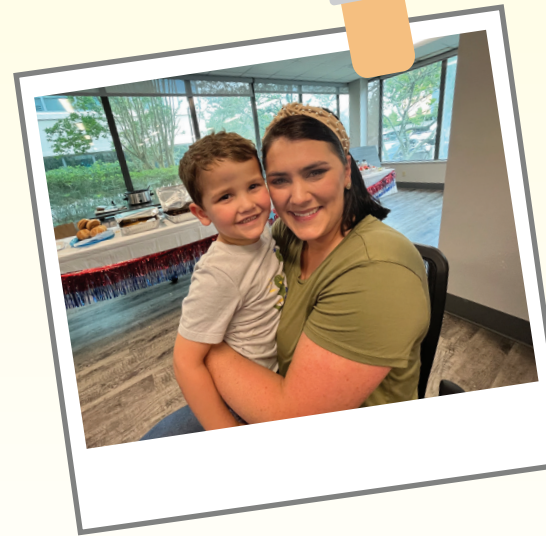
Summer

kick off

BBQ!

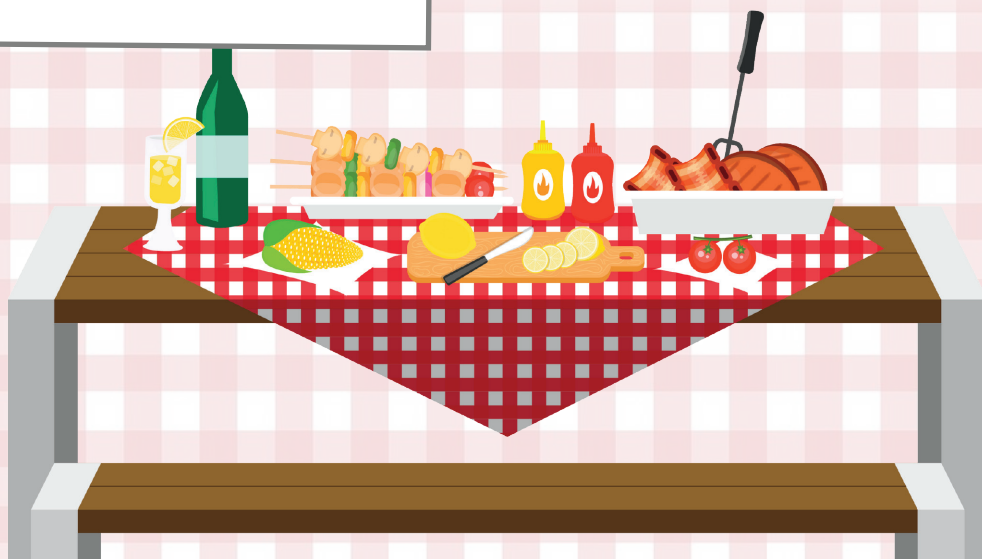
Many thanks to the **Forum's Employee Recognition and Morale Committee** for hosting a summer kick off barbecue! We enjoyed food, fun, games, and fellowship!





Kiki's coin boat sets sail!

**GOOD
VIBES**





Children's Week Florida™



Children's WEEK

Because Every Child Matters

Children's Week Florida™ is one of our favorite events of the year! As the largest event held in the state that celebrates children, youth, and advocates, Children's Week Florida™ is held each year during the legislative session. Thousands of attendees come together each year to deliver the message that every child should be healthy, ready to learn, and able to achieve their full potential.

We are incredibly thankful for the Forum crew who dedicated their time to assist with Children's Week Florida™ events. From helping to hang children's artwork at Celebration of the Hands, volunteering/decorating at the Advocacy Dinner & Awards Ceremony, distributing lunches at Children's Day at the Capitol, reading to children at Storybook Village/Legislator Lane, and everything in between, they helped to make Children's Week a success.

Thank you!





Children's Week Florida™





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JAN 14-19, 2024



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childrensweek.org



Welcome Newbies!



Christel Aaron-Johnson

Workforce Initiatives Specialist

- Loves listening to the spoken word and attending poetry nights
- Enjoys visiting Niagara Falls
- Has a 2-year-old daughter named Kaidynce



Christina Bassett

Program Support Specialist

- Treasures kayaking and being on the water
- Is a "foster failure" to two cats and two dogs
- Trains in weightlifting and has recently hit the 500lbs club



Liz Jimenez

Workforce Initiatives Specialist

- Dotes on her two nephews (ages 6 months and 8 years)
- Enjoys board games, flowers, traveling and anything tech
- Actively volunteers in her free time



Tanya Keech

Senior Specialist

- Loves to bake goodies
- Is a mom to four grown children - three sons and a daughter
- Has lived all over the United States, but mostly in Florida



Amy Maters

Program Support Specialist

- Resides in Casselberry, FL with her husband, Evan, and their two dogs, Willow and Murphy
- Loves all things Disney, visits Disney World often with friends and family, and owns an obscene amount of Minnie Ears
- Lived in Illinois most of her life and does not miss the snow



Bridget Mooney

Outreach Analyst

- Studies English Literature/ Creative Writing at FSU
- Has visited Canada, France, the Bahamas, China, Japan, and South Korea
- Is a huge Swiftie; come find her if you want to talk Taylor



Evelinda Perez

Quality Improvement Specialist

- Has worked with non-profit organizations for more than 25 years in the early childhood education profession
- Is a T.E.A.C.H. Scholar
- Enjoys moving and dancing to ZUMBA to release the wiggles



Erika Pope

Workforce Initiatives Specialist

- Indulges in reading and writing
- Plays bass guitar and will soon be part of a cover band
- Is a makeup and skincare nerd





Welcome Newbies!



Lindsey Smith

Executive Assistant

- Is married to husband Derek and has two boys, Zane and Drake, two dogs, Mello and Molli, and recently got two ducks named Bone Crusher and Dirt Bike
- Values time outside and exploring the trails in her neighborhood
- Celebrates "Icee Fridays" with her children to enjoy a special treat and the end of the work week

We also welcome the following employees to the Forum:

Roman Komirniy

Fiscal Senior Specialist

Sydney Hackney

Fiscal Analyst

Taylor Henley

Workforce Initiatives Analyst



Kathryn Sumner

Workforce Initiatives Specialist

- Is a certified Speech Language Pathologist
- Started running with her dog for him to lose weight, but now they both love it
- Read 80 books last year; her favorite books are *Daisy Jones & The Six* and *Pride & Prejudice*



We're also excited to have Workforce Initiatives intern, **Jay Brown**, for the summer before he heads to college in California this fall. Good luck, Jay!



Tia Walton-Walker

Research and Special Projects Director

- Has seven sisters
- Is a beach bum at heart
- Favors traveling and learning about new cultures



Hello!





Office Announcements



Shout Outs!



"Shout out to the entire **Assessment and Coaching Services Unit** team for their herculean effort this assessment season!"

- **Melissa Clements**, Vice President of Research



"A BIG SHOUT OUT to the **Early Learning Career Center team, Flor, Ivonne, Yolanda, Leidy and Sonia**, for an amazing job for the first six months of our contract. We have been super busy providing support to our community and spending down our funds. WAY TO GO LADIES! I am humbled and proud to work alongside such an amazing group of dedicated professionals. Let's keep the momentum going!"

- **Dasiely Cruz**, ELCC Director



Christel Aaron-Johnson, Workforce Initiatives Specialist, has luck on her side. She won the Employee Recognition and Morale Committee's May Giveaway (Marshall's gift card) and was the chance drawing recipient of Water World tickets and gift basket benefiting United Way of the Big Bend. We think Christel will be a future Florida Lottery winner!



Congratulations to **Paula Donaldson**, Contract Compliance Specialist, who was the recipient of the Mother's Day gift basket, courtesy of the Employee Recognition and Morale Committee.