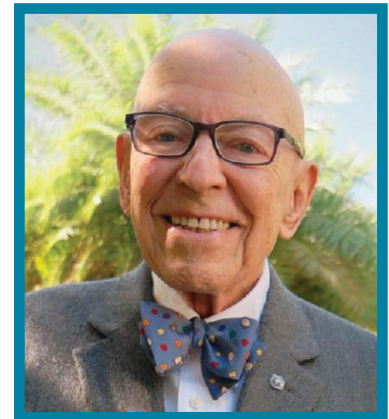




In loving memory of Dr. Wil Blechman

This issue of *Forum Focus* is dedicated in loving memory of our longtime Board Member, Dr. Wil Blechman, who passed away on September 15, 2021. Dr. Wil, as he was known to thousands, was a staunch advocate for young children and loved the work of the Forum and other organizations that focused on creating a better world for our children. He was a member of the Forum's board of directors for the past 20 years, serving as Vice Chair and Director Emeritus. He never missed an opportunity to share his passion and mentor others.



As a beloved husband, father, grandfather, humanitarian, child advocate, mentor, and leader, Dr. Wil was a man who gave of himself and cared for others. He graduated from Yale University and the Medical College of Virginia and formed an Internist/Rheumatologist medical group in North Miami Beach. He retired from his medical practice in 1994 and devoted himself more fully to issues affecting young children.



Dr. Wil was a former President of Kiwanis International, a State of Florida Health Officer, the founding president of the Florida Association for Infant Mental Health, and a Vice President of The Children's Trust of Miami Dade County. He authored and supported many programs, which benefited children and families. He was especially committed to educating legislators and business leaders on the science of brain development in children during the early years.

Among countless awards and recognitions, Dr. Wil was inducted into the Alpha Omega Alpha medical honor society in 2018 by the Medical College of Virginia. In addition, the Florida Kiwanis Foundation created the **Wil and Rachel Fund** to support Kiwanis programs and initiatives which benefit young children in Florida.

Dr. Wil lived to make a difference for others, especially in his pursuit of social justice and optimizing early environments for young children. As we mourn his loss, we continue to be inspired by his legacy. Our thoughts and prayers are with his family at this difficult time.



Forum Babies!



Courtney Lee, Registry Coach, loves being a mom to her adorable son James! He loves music class and what ever mommy is eating. He says mama, loves to laugh, and plays peek-a-boo. James, who is 9-months-old, has 7 teeth and drools everywhere. He likes to crawl backwards, stand up, and take things out of drawers. Mom says his toes are delicious and bath time is the best time of the day!



Laure Fiotte, INCENTIVE\$ Counselor and Registry Coach, delivered a beautiful baby boy on June 4. Baby Dan likes to look at his dad, gaze at bright flashing lights, and keep his mom up at night. This 3-month-old loves to eat and dislikes being hungry!



On September 10, Forum employees enjoyed an autumn-themed baby shower for **Jinan Higginbotham**, Outreach Coordinator, and her baby, Tripp. The decorations, treats, games, and gifts were perfect (and all done with masks, social distancing, and snacks carried back to offices for consumption)! We can't wait to meet Tripp! He is scheduled to make his debut in late October, but Jinan is ready now!



Welcome Newbies!



HELLO



Danni Atkins

Contracts and Grants Administrator

- Grew up in Tallahassee and attended FSU graduate school for both nursing and public administration
- Has 2 daughters and a husband of 34 years who are her world.
- Loves farm animals and dogs (more than most people), travelling, going to movies, and assisting with the care of older relatives



Dedra Ash

INCENTIVE\$ Counselor

- Is the oldest of 19 grandchildren
- Loves exploring a new drama series to watch
- Published an alphabet book that's currently available on Amazon



Jill Calhoun

Quality Improvement Specialist

- Has 2 children named Conner and Callisi (yes, her daughter is named after Khaleesi from Game of Thrones)
- Loves any and all things Disney
- Relocated from West Palm Beach to Winter Springs after she and her husband were offered jobs in that area on the same day



Laure Fiotte

INCENTIVE\$ Counselor and Registry Coach

- Likes to play games, especially trivia and The Sims
- Draws digital art in her free time
- Sells tee shirts on etsy ([TheTeesKneesbyLaure](#))



Hannah Ford

T.E.A.C.H. File Clerk

- Plays soccer for Pi Beta Phi, her sorority at FSU
- Has a pet cat named Frank
- Is studying public health and her dream job is to run a hospital



Welcome Newbies!



Brenda Miller

Quality Improvement Specialist

- Grows her own vegetables in a Community Garden
- Is a grandmother of four children including a set of twins
- Enjoys travelling to Playa Hermosa, Costa Rica



Marilyn Nations

Front Desk Assistant

- Raised Siberian huskies and sled with them
- Is from New Hampshire
- Loves to read all types of books except nonfiction



Shelby Norwood

INCENTIVE\$ Counselor

- Likes to sleep, eat, organize, and clean
- Raises chickens
- Sprained her wrist while arm wrestling a baby orangutan (running joke by her boss, Kiki)



Alexis Smith

Fiscal Assistant

- Is an artist and loves to draw
- Enjoys being a helping hand at work and is detail-oriented
- Moved to Wewahitchka with her family to care for her grandmother



April Wigsten

T.E.A.C.H. Process Specialist

- Likes to travel. The Blue Ridge Mountains is her favorite vacation tradition
- Adopted three pets including a guinea pig, rabbit, and dog
- Loves to garden



Welcome Newbies!



Rayvenn Martinez

Registry Coach

- Is an Irish twin with her sister meaning they were born within the same calendar year and are the same age for a month
- Everyone's first name in her family has seven letters and a "Y," so that's where the spelling of her name originated
- Has never dyed or highlighted her hair



Brian Hickey

FAN Director

- Was born and raised in Tallahassee and is a graduate of TCC & FSU
- Is married to wife Shari and has a 15-year-old son at Chiles and an 11 year-old-daughter at Montford
- Enjoys playing golf, watching the Seminoles win in all sports, and listening to live music



Paula Donaldson

HMG Contracts and Grants Compliance Specialist

- Has been in the field of contract management for 20 years
- Enjoys spending time with Earl, her husband of 32 years, and their two adult children
- Likes music and trips to the beach



Doretta Williams

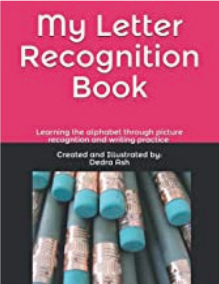
T.E.A.C.H. Counselor

- Loves to read (Maya Angelou is one of her favorite authors)
- Is a former Military brat
- Enjoys Christian and inspirational documentaries





Adventures and Accomplishments

My Letter Recognition Book
Learning the alphabet through picture recognition and writing practice.
Created and Illustrated by Dedra Ash

My Letter Recognition Book: Learning practice for alphabet
by Dedra Ash | Aug 4, 2021
★★★★☆ ~ 11
Paperback
\$5.00
prime Get it as soon as Wed, Sep 15
FREE Shipping on orders over \$25 shipped by Amazon

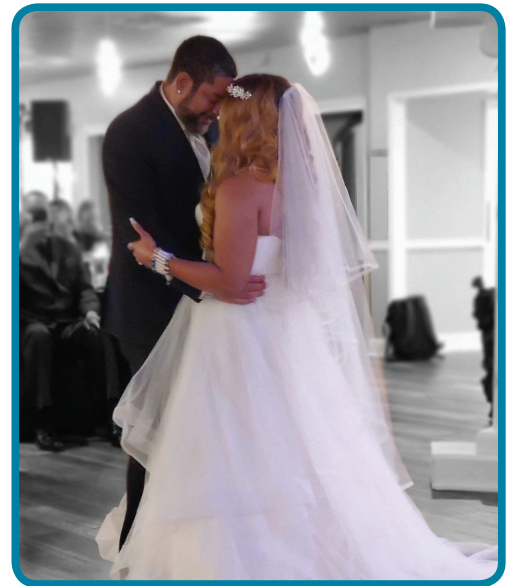
Dedra Ash, INCENTIVE\$ Counselor, authored and illustrated the *My Letter Recognition Book*, which is currently available on Amazon! As a former preschool teacher, Dedra created the materials for letters children were learning each week. It was hard for Dedra to part ways with her creations when her time as a teacher came to an end. She decided to place them all into a book and hopes it will help children who struggle with learning the alphabet.



Margot Mooney, oldest daughter of **Denise Bishop**, Vice President and Chief Outreach, Innovation, and Training Officer, left in February to teach high school abroad in South Korea. She is loving the experience and plans to sign a contract for a second year. COVID has made it challenging by restricting the opportunity for Denise to go visit, but as soon as their mandatory quarantine is lifted, she is booking her ticket to Seoul!



Connor Kennedy, son of **Lisa Carson**, T.E.A.C.H. Process Specialist, received the Scottish Rite Ribbon! He achieved this award by demonstrating Americanism, academic excellence (is in the top 25% of his class), outstanding leadership, dependability, good character, self-discipline, good citizenship, and patriotism. Connor, who is a Junior at Leon High School and a Second Lieutenant in the Marine ROTC squad, is on the Rifle team and currently holds the title of expert Marksman in North Florida. Lisa is so proud of Connor's achievements and success. He plans to continue his Military training in the Marines upon graduation in 2023.



On April 17, **Jinan Higginbotham**, Outreach Coordinator, married her long-time love, Edgar James Higginbotham, in Pensacola, Florida! The beautiful bride and handsome groom laughed, cried happy tears, ate delicious food, and danced the night away with their friends and family. Best wishes to the newlyweds for a lifetime filled with laughter, happiness, and lots of love.



Adventures and Accomplishments



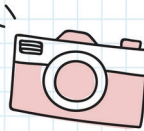
Melissa Clements, Vice President of Research, visited her husband's family in the Pennsylvania Pocono Mountains. They enjoyed visiting with family, eating at their favorite local diner, and going to the Promised Land Lake.



April Wigsten, T.E.A.C.H. Process Specialist, enjoyed an annual summer vacation to the Blue Ridge Mountains with her family. One of her favorite traditions is visiting Expedition: Bigfoot and Mercier Orchards. She grew up by the ocean, so it's nice to explore the beauty that North Georgia has to offer.



GOOD VIBES



Jenna Brown, Communications Director, visited the Big Apple with her children, sisters, nieces and nephews! They survived a totally confusing subway system and did touristy things like Brooklyn Bridge, Central Park, the Statue of Liberty, Times Square, the Empire State Building, museums, and much more.

Lisa Roberts, Assessment and Coaching Services Project Manager, along with her siblings and their families, ventured to Wilmington, North Carolina to help her dad clean out her childhood home before moving him to an assisted living facility. She enjoyed spending time with her 8 nieces and nephews who range in age from 1-21, as well as her sisters and brother and their spouses who live in MA, PA, and NC.



Bridget Mooney, youngest daughter of **Denise Bishop**, Vice President and Chief Outreach, Innovation, and Training Officer, started her second year of college in August at TCC. This is Bridget's first year of in-person classes. Let's face it, the mask must match the outfit!



Quint and Sydney Brown, children of **Jenna Brown**, Communications Director, were excited for their first day of school at Florida High! Quint is now in 6th grade and Sydney is in 2nd grade.



Brian and Taylor Wigtsten, children of **April Wigsten**, T.E.A.C.H. Process Specialist, were all smiles as they headed off to their first day of school at Florida High! Brian went into the 8th grade and Taylor started 4th grade.



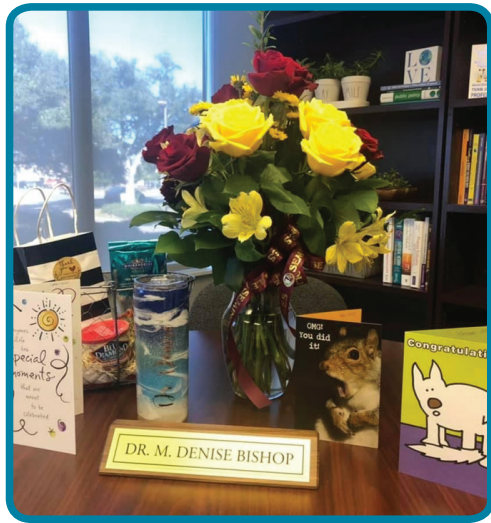
Carter and Sydney Roberts, children of **Lisa Roberts**, Assessment and Coaching Services Project Manager, were off to fresh start for their first day of school! Carter entered ninth grade at Lincoln High School, while Sydney started sixth grade at Swift Creek Middle School.



Adalynn and Tristen Wulfekuhl, grandchildren of **Lori Stegmeyer**, Director of Workforce Initiatives, were happy to start their first day of school! Adalynn began 5th grade at DeSoto Trail Elementary School, and Tristen started 7th grade at Montford Middle School.



Graduations



Denise Bishop, Vice President and Chief Outreach, Innovation, and Training Officer, graduated with a Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) in Ed Leadership and Policy Studies from Florida State University. There was no formal ceremony, but she felt the support regardless.

Congratulations!



Alexandra Goldberg, Help Me Grow Florida Statewide Director, graduated with a Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) in Educational Leadership from the University of New England in Biddeford, Maine! The commencement ceremony was virtual due to COVID unfortunately, but she was able to take some graduation pictures in her cap and gown.



Aliyah Bonner, daughter of **Felicia Bonner**, Child Care Evaluation Services Director, graduated from Chiles High School! She is currently attending Florida A&M University and is majoring in pre-vet science.



Forum Happenings



Congratulations on Your New Role!



Melissa Castro
T.E.A.C.H. Team Lead



Tami Fletcher
T.E.A.C.H. Team Lead



Martha Grant
T.E.A.C.H. Team Lead



Evelyn Thomas
T.E.A.C.H. Outreach
Specialist



Lolita Hawkins
INCENTIVE\$ Counselor



Cathy Hall
Contracts and
Grants Manager



Paula Grant
Registry Coach

hello
FALL



Children's Forum Shirts!

Did you know that you can order Children's Forum polo shirts directly through Your Logo Now, our local Tallahassee vendor? Your Logo Now can also embroider the Children's Forum logo on other clothing items, such as your favorite jacket, hat, or button-down shirt. Shirts can be shipped to our employees who work remotely or in our Miami office.

Children's Forum polo shirts range in price from \$22.98-\$24.98.



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Meridian Cotton Blend Polo

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for more details
about this polo.

Contact:

Please contact the owner of Your Logo Now or visit their store for pricing and more information.

Physical Address: (behind Bumpa's Restaurant) 2778 Capital Circle NE Tallahassee, FL 32308

Phone: 850-325-1644



Are you interested in ordering a V-Neck Children's Forum t-shirt?

If so, please complete a brief form at <https://forms.gle/UvxsRcn3qh8oKQpJ8>. The Forum places orders for t-shirts through a local vendor, but they require a minimum order of 12 shirts to process.

Shirts are \$15 and include an all-white version of the Forum's logo and tagline printed on the left chest.

More information about the t-shirts can be found at <https://bit.ly/3f9seTo>.