



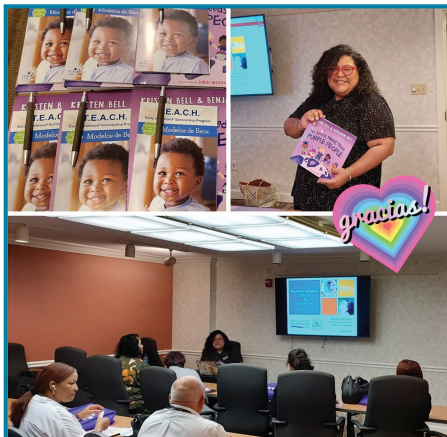
## It's Conference Season! ★★



**Lori Stegmeyer**, Chief Programs Officer, was happy to attend the Early Learning Coalition of Flagler and Volusia Counties annual early childhood conference in Daytona! She discussed T.E.A.C.H. and other programs and services offered by the Children's Forum.



**Jinan Higginbotham**, Senior Director of Outreach and Communications, was excited to represent Children's Week and attend Master Caleb's Discovery Library 2nd Annual Kids Literacy Fest alongside other amazing community partners in Tallahassee! Guests enjoyed food, music, games, free books, and more.



**Kiki Carter**, Workforce Initiatives Director, and **Martha Grant**, Workforce Initiatives Coordinator, had a lot of fun at the Florida Family Child Care Home Association Conference in Clearwater. They enjoyed providing Spanish and English presentations on T.E.A.C.H. and INCENTIVE\$ and meeting attendees in the exhibit hall.



**Martha Grant**, Workforce Initiatives Coordinator, and **Tami Fletcher**, Workforce Initiatives Specialist, had a great time at the Florida Association for the Education of Young Children Conference in Orlando. The team participated in a presentation regarding the benefits of T.E.A.C.H. and INCENTIVE\$ and answered questions on both programs.

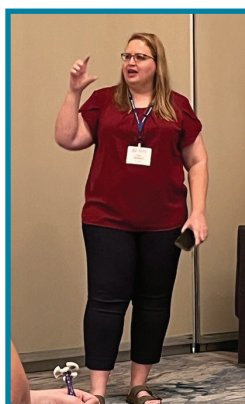




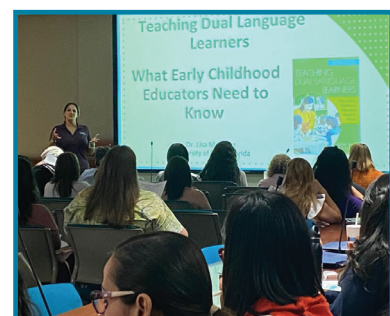
# Conferences



A large group of Forum employees had a blast at the **One Goal Summer Conference** in Tampa! They met program participants, networked with colleagues, made new friends, and educated conference attendees about our programs and services.



**Denise Bishop**, Chief Operations Officer, **Ashley Houk**, HMG Data Coordinator, **Brenda Romuald**, HMG Coordinator, and **Aly Avila**, HMG Outreach Specialist, attended the Help Me Grow National Forum in Fort Worth, Texas! The team enjoyed networking, learning from one another, sightseeing, and developing new and supportive connections across the HMG community.



**Dasiely Cruz**, Early Learning Career Center (ELCC) Director, **Flor Brito**, ELCC Assistant Director, **Leidy Sevilla**, Program Specialist, and **Sonia Corbo-D'Amico**, Professional Development Specialist, hosted a Dual Language Learners Conference in Miami! They had a great turn out and enjoyed listening to keynote speaker Dr. Lisa Lopez, eating an amazing breakfast and lunch, and spending time with early educators who expressed the value of the information they received at the sessions.





# Conferences



**Erin Smeltzer**, President and CEO, **Lori Stegmeyer**, Chief Programs Officer, **Melissa Clements**, Chief Strategy Officer, **Lisa Roberts**, ACSU Director, **Kiki Carter**, Workforce Initiatives Director, and **Jenna Brown**, Communications Director, had the best time at the Association of Early Learning Coalitions annual Training Camp in Daytona! They saw old friends, networked with one another, learned new early childhood initiatives, sang karaoke, and had a lot of fun!



**Lili Murphy**, Florida Afterschool Executive Director, **Shelby Norwood**, STEM Specialist, and **Mckenzie Coker**, Program Specialist, hosted the Florida Afterschool Inc. Conference in Orlando! **Erin Smeltzer**, President and CEO, **Evelyn Thomas**, Outreach Specialist, and **Jose Cruz-Torres**, Outreach Specialist, assisted in the fun. The conference included brunch, a variety of workshops, an evening reception, a costume contest (Florida Afterschool donned a *Wizard of Oz* theme while the Forum crew dressed as *Mean Girls* characters), a scavenger hunt, a Lights On! Afterschool lightbulb challenge, and more. Attendees had a great time learning, laughing, and connecting.





# Tailgate party!

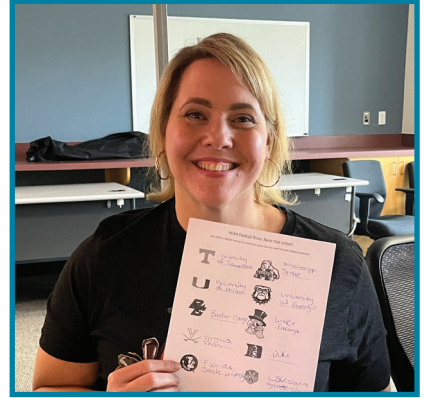
On October 6, employees enjoyed a tailgate-themed party presented by the Forum's Morale Committee! We had a great time playing games, eating delicious food, winning prizes, telling creative sports stories, and watching a funny donut on a string game! A special thank you to **Dedra Ash** and **April Scarborough**, Senior Workforce Initiatives Specialists, **Felicia Bonner**, Child Care Evaluation Services Director, **Courtney Lee**, Workforce Initiatives Specialist, **Erin Smeltzer**, President and CEO, and **Lindsey Smith**, Executive Assistant, for their help in setting up and tearing down!







# GOAL!





# Fall Fun!!!



**Courtney Lee**, Workforce Initiatives Specialist, and her family went on their first camping trip in October with their Sunday school class! They stayed right on the beach at Indian Pass Campground. James, Courtney's son, learned how to fish and enjoyed throwing oyster shells into the bay.



Emma Wofford and Sophia Adams, daughters of **Lauren Wofford**, Chief Financial Officer and **Lisa Adams**, Workforce Initiatives Director, had a great time at a cheer camp at North Florida Christian, where they are both students.

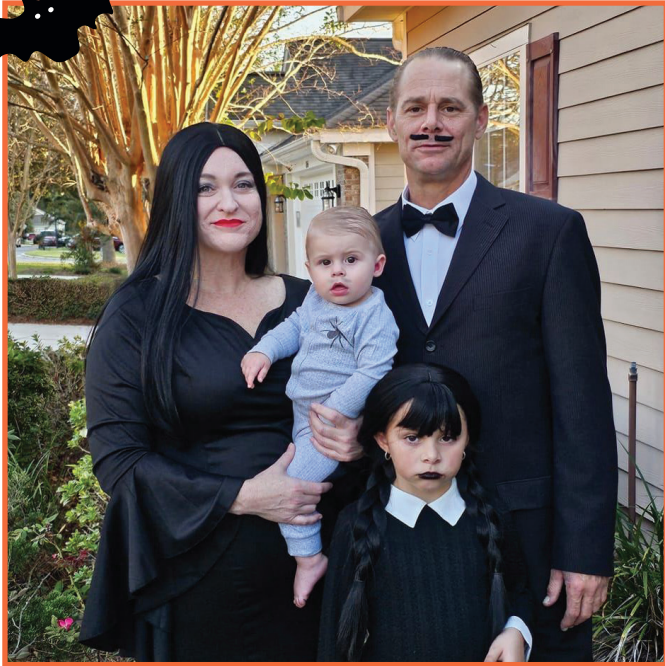


Sydney Brown, daughter of **Jenna Brown**, Communications Director, and her friends participated in pre-game cheer entertainment at Florida High, where she attends school.





# HAPPY HALLOWEEN



**Ashley Casey**, Workforce Initiatives Coordinator, and her family got in the Halloween spirit dressed as The Addams Family!



**Kathryn Sumner**, Workforce Initiatives Specialist, and her family enjoyed dressing up for Halloween as firefighters and ninjas!



James Cain, son of **Laura Cain**, Senior Workforce Initiatives Director, attended a Fall festival where he received pirate face paint. Unfortunately for Laura, James thought he could keep the paint on forever.



James Lee, son of **Courtney Lee**, Workforce Initiatives Specialist, went to a Trunk or Treat dressed as an excavator. He was happy to receive treats like lollipops and M&Ms.





# HAPPY HALLOWEEN

Many thanks to the Forum's Morale Committee for hosting a Halloween party filled with food, prizes, a costume contest (congratulations to winners [April Scarborough](#) and [Dedra Ash](#), Senior Workforce Initiatives Specialists, on their Napoleon Dynamite and Pedro duo), a touch of spookiness, and lots of fun!





# Fall Recipe

## Tomato Pie - from Mary Mac's Tea Room

Submitted by **Jessica Cherry**, Senior Human Resources Director

### Ingredients:

- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 medium sweet onions, thinly sliced
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 1 box Ritz crackers
- 2 (28-ounce) cans diced tomatoes, undrained
- 2 cups mayonnaise
- 1 1/2 cups grated extra sharp Cheddar cheese
- 1 cup grated Parmesan cheese
- 3 tablespoons chopped fresh basil



### Instructions:

1. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees Fahrenheit. Grease a 13 by 9-inch baking dish with olive oil or butter. Heat the 2 tablespoons olive oil in a large skillet over medium heat; add the onions and cook, stirring occasionally, until soft and translucent, 4 to 5 minutes. Add the salt and pepper to taste, remove from the heat, and set aside.
2. Crush 2 sleeves of Ritz crackers by hand or in a food processor. Reserve 1/2 cup of the cracker crumbs for the topping. Place half of the remaining cracker crumbs in the bottom of the baking dish and pour 1 can of the diced tomatoes, with juice, over the cracker crumbs. Layer half of the sautéed onions on top of the tomatoes, and repeat the layering process using the rest of the tomatoes and onions. Sprinkle the remaining half of the cracker crumbs over the tomato mixture.
3. In a bowl, combine the mayonnaise, Cheddar cheese, Parmesan cheese, and basil. Spread the mixture over the layers and sprinkle the reserved 1/2 cup cracker crumbs on top. Bake for 30 to 40 minutes, until the top is golden brown.

**Note:** *Once you dig into this casserole, it isn't the prettiest dish on the table. Don't let that stop you from trying it because it's absolutely delicious!*





# Baby Showers and Sprinkles



**Gabriela Agosto**, Gold Seal Analyst, enjoyed a baby shower with her boyfriend, Angel, on their upcoming arrival! Guests wrote well wishes for the parents-to-be and enjoyed games, food, and fun. We can't wait to meet baby Ismael who arrived in September.



On October 24, a Donuts and Diapers baby sprinkle was thrown for **Jinan Higginbotham**, Senior Outreach and Communications Director, to help prepare her for baby Nevaeh. We wish you nothing but the best, Jinan. We wonder if Nevaeh will look like her big brother Tripp!







# Baby Boom!



**Gabriela Agosto**, Gold Seal Analyst, delivered her first child, a baby boy named Ismael Luis Rivera on September 1! Ismael weighed 7 pounds and was born at 12:57 a.m. Congratulations, Gabriela, on your bundle of joy and welcome to the wonderful world of parenthood.



**Jinan Higginbotham**, Senior Director of Outreach and Communications, delivered a baby girl named Nevaeh at 8:33 a.m. on October 27. Best wishes, Jinan, on expanding your family and welcoming even more love into your life.



Mabel Elizabeth Randall, daughter of **Liz Randall**, Help Me Grow Director, was born September 25! She weighed 6 pounds 14 ounces! Best wishes, Liz. May your growing family be blessed with great memories and great fun.







# Celebrations & More!



**Doretta Williams**, Workforce Initiatives Specialist, recently flew to Miramar to celebrate her daughter, Sara, and son-in-law Josh's baby shower! She will now have a total of 4 grandchildren. In addition to this excitement, Doretta's other daughter, Maya, passed the National Clinical Mental Health Counseling Exam on her first try. Maya will begin her new job in January 2024. Both Sara and Maya are FAMU alumni, and Sara is a pharmacist.



**Lisa Roberts**, Assessment and Coaching Services Director, was honored as the Community 11 (encompasses 9 counties- Franklin, Gadsden, Jefferson, Lafayette, Leon, Liberty, Madison, Taylor, and Wakulla) recipient of the Appreciation Pin from the Girl Scouts of the Gateway Council! This award recognizes a registered adult Girl Scout's exemplary service which has had a measurable impact on one geographic area of service and helps reach and surpass the mission-delivery goals of the area in support of delivering the Girl Scout Leadership Experience. Way to go, Lisa!



## Happy 2nd Birthday!

**Jinan Higginbotham**, Senior Director of Outreach and Communications, and **Colleen Groot**, Fiscal Specialist, celebrated the second birthdays of their babies! Jinan's son, Tripp, loved his dinosaur-themed party.



Daisy, **Colleen's** dog, enjoyed her special day eating bones and donning a birthday hat.

**HAPPY BIRTHDAY**

## New Forum Homeowners!



Congratulations to **Dasiely Cruz**, Early Learning Career Center Director, and **Martha Grant**, Workforce Initiatives Coordinator, who recently purchased new homes! In addition to buying a home, Dasiely made a big move from Miami and now lives in Ft. Pierce. She loves her half acre lot and additional space. Martha, who lives in Tallahassee, has enjoyed changing the inside and outside of her home.



home sweet home







# United Way Week 2023



Many thanks to the Forum's Morale Committee for hosting various workplace campaign events to benefit United Way of the Big Bend! We had a lot of fun while supporting a great cause. The events included Bingo with lots of cool treats, a raffle and silent auction with some awesome prizes at the Forum's Halloween party, a fall festival with games and snacks, and more.



## Bingo Winners!



## FALL FUN FESTIVAL 🍁🍁🍁



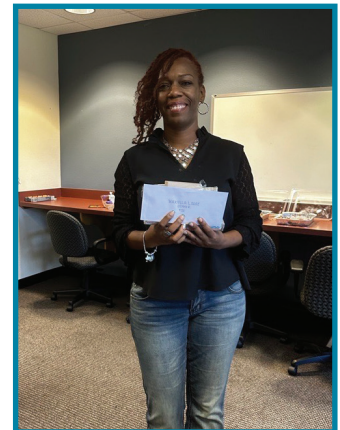
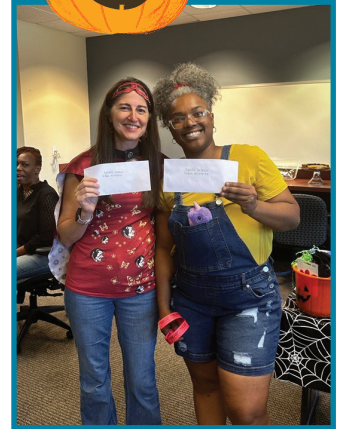
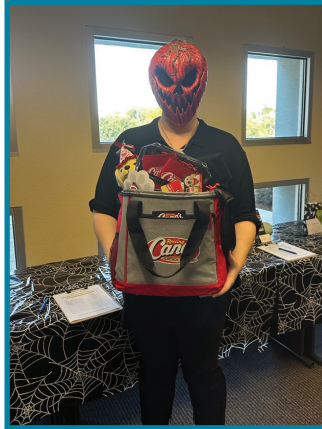




# United Way Week 2023



## Halloween Raffle & Silent Auction Winners!



★ Congratulations on the following employees for guessing the correct answers:

**Guess the total  
amount of  
candy in the jar:**

**Total: 68 pieces**

**Closest guess:**

**Martha Grant**, Workforce  
Initiatives Coordinator, 67

**Second closest:**

**Wioleta Gaddy**, Contracts  
and Grants Coordinator, 72



**TV and  
Movie Trivia:**

**Nostalgic Movie Trivia:**

**Brian Hughes**,  
Help Desk Coordinator

**2000s Cartoons:**

**Olivia Giusti**, Workforce  
Initiatives Specialist

**Netflix Shows:**

**Trace Cooper**, IT Programmer





# Welcome Newbies!



## Ashley Houk

HMG Data Coordinator

- Has a son, Seth (who is a freshman at UCF), and owns two dogs, Winston and Doc
- Loves to read; her favorite authors are Nicholas Sparks and Taylor Jenkins Reid
- Grew up in North Carolina, lived in Indiana for three years, and moved to Florida 19 years ago



## Jessica Cherry

Senior HR Director

- Has been married for 21 years to her wonderful husband, Jay, and they have one perfect 15-year-old son named Jacob
- Is the middle child in a set of fraternal triplets
- Loves to cook, can/preserve food, and travel, especially to the mountains



## Rhiannon Castillo

Workforce Initiatives Analyst

- Is in her 4th year at FSU studying Digital Media Communications
- Enjoys her role as a weekly radio DJ for WVFS 89.7FM
- Was born April 20th and her zodiac sign is Taurus



## Elisabeth Dozier

Workforce Initiatives Specialist

- Met her sisters when she was 40
- Auditioned for *Interview With A Vampire* as a child
- Grew up in Florida and now lives in Colorado



## Olivia Giusti

Workforce Initiatives Specialist

- Became a Tallahassee transplant in September 2023 when she moved from Lake City, FL
- Has been skydiving and wants to go again
- Is passionate about art history and literature



## Jose Cruz-Torres

Outreach Specialist

- Has a 4-year-old pit bull/lab mix named Willow
- Enjoys eating at Masa and Osaka, local restaurants in Tallahassee
- Likes to run, play tennis, and sleep in

## FORUM WINTER CALENDAR 2023-2024

### DECEMBER

Monday, December 25th - Christmas Holiday  
Tuesday, December 26th - Christmas Holiday  
Wednesday, December 27th - Christmas Holiday  
(*Flex Holiday*), the Forum will be open  
Friday, December 29th - New Year's Eve

### JANUARY

Monday, January 1st - New Year's Day  
Tuesday, January 2nd - Day after New Year's Day  
Monday, January 15th - Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Day