

Year ends in bows and ribbon for children in foster care

- CHRISTINA KAISER
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Case managers prepare to load their cars with gifts for children in care contributed by the community.

PORT ST. LUCIE —Santa doesn't need a red nose to lead the way. He has the Treasure Coast community. Thanks to more than 100 local businesses, churches, social groups and individual families, Santa found his way to the homes of all 1,300 children in protective services -- including those temporarily living in foster homes.

"A child once asked me if Santa would find him in foster care," said Christina Kaiser, Director of Community Relations for Devereux Community Based Care. "That's always stuck with me; I think anyone who's ever coordinated a toy drive has had that at the back of her mind."

Businesses, groups and families in St. Lucie, Martin, Indian River and Okeechobee counties coordinated enough local drives to provide toys -- and in most instances,

several toys -- to every child served by Devereux Community Based Care. An estimated 3,000 toys were collected in St. Lucie County alone, Kaiser said.

Much of that came through a new partnership with **Guardians For a New Future**, a local foundation that mobilized its own supporters to help Devereux and its case-management provider, Children's Home Society, with their holiday gift drives.

Other partners included long-time supporters such as QVC, St. Andrew Episcopal Church, St. Andrew Lutheran Church, Pursuit Boats, Tropicana, Martin Memorial Health System, Berry Fresh Café, La Buona Vita, Bank of America, Tami Karol Insurance Company, the Love Doctors Charities, Seacoast National Bank, the **Children's Services Council**, Fox, Wackeen & Dungey, Sungrove Montessori, the SLC Economic Development Council and Clark Advanced Learning Center and the SLC Retired Educators.

"Many of these supporters have been helping us provide Christmas for more than a decade," Kaiser said. "They really make a difference this time of year. And we all have a brighter holiday because of it."