



Boys Town Hosts Youth Mental Health Action Summit

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West Palm Beach, FL– Boys Town South Florida hosts its first *Family Community Action Summit* bringing together experts to discuss youth mental health and solution-driven action. “We are living in different times. Children and families are struggling with many issues, including the effects of the pandemic and non-stop social media pressure. As a result, our youth are experiencing a dramatic rise in mental and behavioral health issues”, said Bethany Lacey, Executive Director of Boys Town South Florida.

Through a panel discussion including Dr. Mary Claire Mucenic, Director of Behavioral and Mental Health Services at the School District of Palm Beach County; Dr. Diane Kelly Andreou, Director of the outpatient Behavioral Health Clinic at Boys Town South Florida; Dr. Lisa Williams-Taylor, CEO of the Children’s Services Council of Palm Beach County; and the Honorable Judge Luis Delgado, who presided in the Juvenile Division for six years, and has recently moved to the Circuit Civil Division with the 15th Judicial Circuit of Florida, the panel moderator Derek Harris, attorney with Carlton Fields and Boys Town South Florida board member; lead a very important discussion about the crisis of youth mental health in our South Florida communities as well as across the country. With the increase of youth mental health cases even before the pandemic, children and young adults are experiencing more mental and behavioral issues than ever. According to the CDC, the suicide rate in 10- 24-year-olds has risen 60% since 2007. Suicide is now the second leading cause of death in that age group.

The Action Summit is the perfect platform to recognize Boys Town South Florida’s Family of the Year; Bella age 15 and her mom Elissa (featured in picture attached). Due to years of facing bullying in elementary and middle school, living in isolation during the pandemic, which has led to having intrusive thoughts, Bella needed help to cope with anxiety and that is when her mom contacted Boys Town’s outpatient Behavioral Health Clinic. After a few

therapy sessions, Elissa realized that Boys Town is the same organization that offers Primary Project at some of the elementary schools within the School District of Palm Beach County, which helped Bella when she was 5 years old to ease her transition into kindergarten. Almost eight years later, Bella once again was able to find help at Boys Town South Florida, this time with Dr. Steve, a pediatric psychologist who Bella admires and nicely shares “I am very grateful to Dr. Steve for teaching me coping skills that I will be able to take with me to college and well into my adult life...”

The purpose of the Family Community Action Summit is to raise awareness about what needs to be done to create a movement through local partnerships of stakeholders in order to support more children with their mental health challenges; be it in the public or private sectors, nonprofit organizations, or government led efforts, the more parties we can identify to join this efforts, the more. A big thank you to Florida Power and Light, the presenting sponsor of the Action Summit, to everyone who attends it.

About Boys Town South Florida

Boys Town South Florida has been providing life-changing care for more than 60,000 area children since 1991. Our prevention and intervention programs are part of the Boys Town national network and include the organization’s research-proven methods, to help children develop socially and emotionally, overcome traumas and create healthy relationships to keep the family unit together through the right care, at the right time, in the right way. South Florida services help more than 3,000 children and 1,000 families a year. You can find more information about Boys Town South Florida online at www.Boystown.org/south-florida.

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Photos attached and captions are below:

- 1) Boys Town South Florida’s Family of the Year, Bella and her mom Elissa
- 2) 4 Panelists, moderator with Bethany Lacey, ED
- 3) Board members with Bethany Lacey

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