

Celebrating Black History Month With Our Partner Dr. Brook Bello of More Too Life

This month, while celebrating Black history, we are proud to recognize the work being done in our community to create a more equitable future for all. Every day, Dr. Brook Bello works to build a stronger Florida, and nation, to bring the diverse aspects of our community together. We are proud to call Dr. Brook a friend and partner! She is the Founder, CEO and Executive Director of [More Too Life](#).

Dr. Bello is an author, thought leader, justice advocate, actress, techie, and ordained minister. More importantly, she is a survivor and champion against human trafficking. From her life experiences, she was determined to help others overcome and survive similar circumstances. Out of her life experiences, she became even more motivated to successfully become the Founder and CEO of More Too Life, Inc, an Open Doors Outreach Network Provider. More Too Life offers prevention and awareness events, technical training, and resources to assist service providers, teachers, educators, advocates, and law enforcement in the fight against human trafficking.

Dr. Brook Parker-Bello
Motivational Speaker | Pastor | Human Trafficking Victims' Advocate
Author | Survivor Champion | Actress
Google Next Gen Policy Maker

Recipient:
Presidential Lifetime Achievement Award

As seen on:
OWN | CNN
FOX NEWS channel | BUSINESS INSIDER

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She is also the Founder of Youthiasm® a faith-based ministry to ignite empathy and honor. She is the author of several successful books and digital copies for educational curriculum platforms aimed at the prevention of sexual exploitation and gender.

Dr. Bello has spoken alongside presidents, prime ministers, and fellow change-makers, at universities, large conferences, and federal agencies. Aside from holding a Ph.D. in Pastoral Clinical Counseling, she was recognized with the Lifetime Achievement Award from President Barack Obama and White House, the Advocate of the Year Award from Florida's

Attorney General Pam Bondi, and Governor Rick Scott, named by United Way Worldwide as a Hero for her work and most recently was named by Google as a Google Next-Gen Policy Leader 2017-2020, 2019 Department of Justice ATF Division Victim Advocate of the Year. She

is an expert consultant for the US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Title X Clinics; Population Affairs National Human Trafficking Training with Global Centurion. Dr. Brook has been on the special advisory Council for NOVO.org.

Proud Trivia: Dr. Bello is the great-grandniece of Vada Watson Somerville, the relentless civil rights leader, first Black Dental Surgeon in California from the USA and only female and Black in the graduating class, co-founder NAACP LA Chapter, and builder/owner of the Famous Dunbar Hotel on Central Ave, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vada_Somerville.

She is the creator of "Coming Home" the first interactive app and adaptable online mentoring management system for anyone who needs mentoring, case management or supportive resources globally, Cominghome.app. Recently, Dr. Bello has partnered with Chance Glasgow, co-creator "Call of Duty" Carlos Wallace and David Waldenburg to build a "VR EVAL" and the world's first VR/AI Machine Learning Platform for, mentoring, educating and providing counseling in a virtual environment that relaxes all the senses and transports the users. The purpose is the human need for anonymity for victims of trauma globally giving access to those that need it. Also, the ability to avoid racial and other biases common in today's world as interviews are done via an avatar. Dr. Bello is also a graduate of the Masters Series of Distinguished Leaders of Skinner Leadership in Washington, DC.

Connect with [Dr. Brook on LinkedIn](#), and stay connected with us at [The LibFund](#).

The Need For Families Is At Critical Mass

This year, the [Heart Gallery of Sarasota](#) is featuring twice as many "waiting" children and more that are within 24 months of aging out than in previous years, due to the effect of COVID-19 shutdowns on the foster care system.

For children who might have found a family, the closing of courts made termination of parental rights impossible, "match" meetings with hopeful adoptive parents were cancelled and training and home studies for potential adoptive parents were stopped. The result was less children featured on the Heart Gallery through 2020, less families becoming licensed, making it impossible for these children to be placed in a stable loving environment.

While isolation and detachment placed these children in more danger of abuse and neglect that would go unnoticed, the length of time they were forced to stay in an unhealthy situation was extended.

Under normal circumstances, children spend on average 2.5 years in foster care before they are adopted, but children languish longer due to closing of government agencies and further delays in legal proceedings. By the end of 2020, the courts and the lead agency had made some adjustments and were able to release children to the Heart Gallery, but the need to recruit more families is more critical now than ever.

[Help us today!](#)

Florida Ranks #3 in Human Trafficking

Open Doors Statewide Director, Robyn Metcalf, wrote an opinion article where she talks about trafficking in Florida. She states that Florida has the third-highest rate of human trafficking reports to the National Human Trafficking Hotline.

While most victims are female, men and boys are also trafficked regardless of geography, age, sexual orientation, race and socioeconomic status. One in five victims is a child, and the average age that exploitation begins is 12 to 14.

Florida has some of the strongest laws against human trafficking in the country. Survivors of trafficking now have their voices heard in policymaking, advocacy, awareness and direct services. With support and outreach, sex trafficking of children continues to increase throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. There are no specific answers to why the increase, but agencies like Voices for Florida and More Too Life continue to find answers. Be vigilant, get educated and report any suspicious behaviors.

[Be an advocate!](#)

Foster Care & Abuse Rates Rise

Many families found a silver lining having the opportunity to spend more time at home with their children during shutdowns due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However; shutdowns translated to an increase in drug use and the need for foster parents and adoptive families did not stop.

“We tend to see that when there’s a rise in drug use there’s also a rise in adoptions,” said Vernee Mason, of Children’s Home Society, the agency responsible for overseeing adoptions. Child abuse and neglect reports have been down since the start of the coronavirus pandemic, adoption officials said, but that’s not necessarily a good thing.

Sherri Gonzales is the regional executive director for [Children’s Home Society of Central Florida](#). “You know our physical offices may be closed, but our services have continued and have never stopped,” Gonzales said.

Children’s Home Society helps 10,000 children a year in Central Florida and helps with hundreds of adoptions. Like most essential services during the pandemic, their frontline workers had to make some adjustments to provide parent child interactions, as well as sibling interactions on virtual platforms.

Calls to the abuse hotline, Gonzales said, dropped significantly when the lockdown started in March. “That necessarily really doesn’t mean that that makes kids safer, it really means eyes weren’t on the kids, so that’s where we saw fewer reports being called in,” Gonzales said.

[Make an impact!](#)