



## Place Of Hope Earns Two Recognitions From Florida's Children First

### Executive Director Charles Bender Named Child Advocate Of The Year; David Sarris Of Villages Of Hope Named Youth Advocate

Florida's Children First honored its most noteworthy and dedicated advocates at a special reception on Oct. 3. Among those recognized were Place of Hope Executive Director Charles Bender as Child Advocate of the Year and Villages of Hope resident David Sarris as Youth Advocate. Both men were celebrated for their contributions to ensuring the safety and development of the state's foster children.



Charles Bender

The reception for exceptional child advocates was held at Phillips Point Club, Top of the Point in West Palm Beach. Other honorees included Linda Coffin of The Heart Gallery of Palm Beach County; Dan and Cindy Walls, foster and adoptive parents; and Tashana Shields, a former foster child, now university student.

Bender has led Place of Hope in Palm Beach Gardens since its inception in 1998. The foster care campus has grown to feature several programs and locations, including Villages of Hope of Palm Beach Gardens, a smaller campus and program for foster children who age out of the system at 18 years old; JoAnn's Cottage of Palm Beach Gardens, a maternity home for young mothers and pregnant young women; and Place of Hope at the Haven Campus, the newest extension of Place of Hope in western Boca Raton.

"So many people are on the front lines of protecting and caring for Florida's children, so I share this recognition with my colleagues, staff, board members, foster parents, donors, volunteers and the legions of Place of Hope supporters," Bender said. "At Place of Hope, we are blessed to have several villages of people all dedicated to this mission, so I accept this award for all of us. A special thanks goes to the children because they have to be brave enough to accept the change and help that is being offered to them. Often, they are the strongest soldiers in this fight for their own futures."

Sarris is one of those soldiers. A former foster child, Sarris, 19, currently resides at Villages of Hope and works at Treasures for Hope Charity Store, which benefits the programs at Place of Hope. He is attending Palm Beach State College, pursuing a career in psychology, and shares his story with those in child welfare authority and other children in foster care, motivating them to do their best.

"What compels me to share my story is simple ... you can't reach out to someone if you remain silent. When I was in foster care (before coming to Villages of Hope), I felt like I didn't have a voice. If I can be that voice for a youth in the system who feels like he or she doesn't have a voice, I will take that opportunity," Sarris said. "I will share my story so that those that are wearing the shoes I once wore can feel like they are not alone."

*Based in Palm Beach Gardens, Place of Hope is a faith-based, state-licensed child welfare organization that provides family-style foster care (emergency and long-term); family outreach and intervention; maternity care; safety for domestic minor sexually trafficked victims; transitional housing and support services; adoption and foster care recruitment and support; hope and healing opportunities for children and families who have been traumatized by abuse and neglect. To learn more about the programs and services of Place of Hope, visit [www.placeofhope.com](http://www.placeofhope.com) or call (561) 775-7195.*

*For hours, directions and information on how to donate to Treasures for Hope, 3540 Northlake Blvd., Palm Beach Gardens, FL 33418, visit [www.treasuresforhope.org](http://www.treasuresforhope.org) or call (561) 691-8881.*



David Sarris