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Shadow of poverty

June Fletcher's recent article, headlined "Top 1 percent in Naples makes 73.2 times more than the bottom 99 percent," sheds light on a very important issue.

The data showing that Naples is third in the nation for income inequality is distressing, but also presents an opportunity for the community to come together to level the playing field.

At the Naples Children & Education Foundation, for example, we are committed to providing children in need with the resources and services they need to excel. Since our inception in 2001, we have invested more than \$146 million in critical needs such as children's health, oral health, mental health, vision, early learning, advocacy and out-of-school programs.

This has all been made possible thanks to the Naples Winter Wine Festival, where every dollar raised under the tent goes to funding the grants that meet these needs. Despite this positive progress, we cannot ignore the reality that the growing need in our community outpaces charitable giving and volunteer efforts.

In fact, according to the 2015 American Community Survey, poverty has increased almost 10 percent in the past decade in Collier County, with more than half of the children identified as economically needy. Teachers, parents and youth workers report heightened stress factors — exposure to trauma, mental health concerns, poor academic achievement, loss of family — among children living in poverty. Many important organizations in this community are skillfully serving this population, but our collective support has become even more vital.

Inequality does not solve itself, so let's redouble our efforts and commit to a future where all children can flourish without the shadow of poverty.