



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Naples Children & Education Foundation Earmarks \$3.8 Million for Strategic Initiatives that Address Pediatric Vision Care, Out-of-School Programs and Childhood Hunger**

***Additional Grants to Charities Helping Collier County Children Will be Announced on March 9***

Naples, FL – February 17, 2015 –Three long-term strategic initiatives that fill fundamental gaps in children’s services will receive grants this year thanks to the generous support of those who attended the Naples Winter Wine Festival. The Children’s Vision Initiative, the Children’s Out of School Initiative and the Children’s Hunger Initiative will all receive a portion of the \$3.8 million from the Naples Children & Education Foundation (NCEF), the founding organization of the Naples Winter Wine Festival, bringing the total amount awarded for strategic initiatives to over \$42 million.

“Collaborating with partners on the ground and bridging public and private resources allow us to serve more children by placing them in high-quality programs,” said Jim Dixon, Chairman of the 2015 Grants Committee and one of the Co-Chairs for the 2016 Festival. “These strategic initiatives are the most effective way to address pressing needs in our community, and we couldn’t be more pleased to fund them year after year.”

The initiatives are the result of studies commissioned by NCEF in 2005 and 2010 that identified significant gaps in basic services for Collier County’s children. Knowing that solutions to these problems would require the resources and expertise of many in the community, NCEF convened a coalition of partners to work together in new, smart ways. These initiatives are multi-partner, multi-year projects that are fundamentally changing service delivery for the county’s most vulnerable children and providing comprehensive solutions to issues that have continuously plagued the community.

**Children’s Vision Initiative**

The 2015 Fund-A-Need, “Now You See It,” NCEF’s initiative to address pediatric vision challenges among at-risk youth, will receive \$1 million over the next three years thanks to the generous support of those who raised their paddle during the Naples Winter Wine Festival’s live auction. These donations will ensure children in Collier County’s high need schools and early childhood centers receive vision screenings by eye professionals, and when medically appropriate, receive full eye exams and two pairs of eyeglasses – one for home and one for school. Thanks to this initiative, Collier County is the first county in Florida to have a dedicated mobile unit for conducting vision examinations and dispensing prescription eyeglasses.

Through collaboration with Bonita Springs Lions Eye Clinic, Florida’s Vision Quest and Lighthouse of Collier, approximately 20,000 children a year are screened using state of the art instruments. This initiative also provides tertiary care and other comprehensive services to children with vision needs. This includes

ophthalmology services such as treatment and surgery for specific diagnosis, and summer and after school services for visually impaired children and related support services.

### **Children's Out of School Initiative**

\$1.5 million is being awarded to address a significant gap in out-of-school time program services, particularly for students in Immokalee. This strategic initiative leverages the expertise and commitment of several organizations to provide high quality, research-based programs that close the achievement gap through education during after-school, holiday and summertime hours. Partners in this effort include Boys and Girls Club of Collier County, Collier County Parks and Recreation, Guadalupe Center, The Holocaust Museum & Education Center of Southwest Florida, The Immokalee Foundation, RCMA, The United Arts Council and The Workforce Development Board. These organizations work together to provide safe, nurturing environments for children to thrive and keep up with school work. This initiative is known and recognized for developing youngsters in the area of leadership and offers innovative learning activities designed to help students not lose ground during summer months.

### **Children's Hunger Initiative**

No child deserves to grow up hungry or wonder when they'll have their next meal. To help families struggling with this issue, NCEF is committing \$1.3 million over the next three years to the "Lunch Boxes of Love" initiative, which provides nutritious food to children and their families who need it the most. A partnership between the Harry Chapin Food Bank, Meals of Hope and NCEF, this initiative utilizes large refrigerated trucks to deliver food to remote and needy sections of Collier County, in addition to creating school-based food pantries. Over the next three years, more than 4 million meals will be distributed to hungry children as a result of this commitment.

In addition to these three commitments, NCEF will hold a check presentation and celebration on March 9 to award additional grants to local organizations serving Collier County's children in need.

### About The Naples Children & Education Foundation

The Naples Children & Education Foundation, the founding organization of the Naples Winter Wine Festival, is committed to improving the educational, emotional and health outcomes of the underprivileged and at-risk children. Through its annual grants and strategic initiatives, NCEF has impacted over 40 of the most effective nonprofits in the community, providing around 200,000 children with the services and resources they need to excel. For more information about NCEF, please visit [www.napleswinefestival.com](http://www.napleswinefestival.com).

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