

# Report details impact of winter wine festival

**SPECIAL TO FLORIDA WEEKLY**

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Fifteen years after the inaugural Naples Winter Wine Festival, social, educational and health-care gaps among children in Collier County have narrowed dramatically, according to a report from the Naples Children & Education Foundation.

NCEF is the founding organization of the annual wine festival. Titled "Filling in the

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# NCEF

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Future,” the report shows the impact of grants made possible by festival proceeds and of the seven strategic initiatives the festival funds.

“In a county with no independent, tax-based, public financial support for children’s social services, our community relies on the support of those who attend the Naples Winter Wine Festival and give substantial sums to improve children’s lives,” Maria Jimenez-Lara, CEO of the NCEF, says. “Our research tells us that we’re changing outcomes for at-risk and underprivileged children, and it’s imperative that we continue filling this critical void.”

Driven by independent studies commissioned by NCEF showing gaps in basic social services for Collier County’s kids, the foundation has made philanthropic investments in more than 40 local organizations. NCEF grants help improve the lives of nearly 68,000 children with access to enriching after-school and summer programs; advocate for more than 47,000 children with shelter, crisis counseling, mentorship and other basic essentials; educate

nearly 36,800 children through early childhood programs; and promote healthy living by providing critical medical services to 37,000 children county-wide.

In addition, seven multi-partner, multi-year strategic initiatives have made a dramatic difference in closing service gaps and improving outcomes for children. According to “Filling in the Future,” over the past five years, the number of Collier County children entering kindergarten “on grade level” has increased by 42 percent; school suspension rates have decreased by 65 percent; the graduation rate for at-risk youth has improved by 20 percent; and juvenile arrests in Collier County have been reduced by 62 percent.

The seven initiatives are:

■ **Children’s health care** (est. in 2006) – 107,150 pediatric visits have been completed in a culturally competent setting. Before this project, Immokalee children had to travel to Naples and Fort Myers for primary and specialty health care.

■ **Children’s oral health** (est. in 2006) – 94,000 at-risk and underprivileged children have visited the NCEF Pediatric Dental Center, and 3,000 children have been screened through a mobile clinic. This initiative allowed for the uninsured and those on Medicaid to access pediatric dentistry

without having to travel out of the county for basic dental care.

■ **Children’s mental health** (est. in 2007) – \$6,500,000 has been spent on identifying and alleviating children’s mental health issues through the integration of primary and behavioral health services. Children in need can now access mental health care that was otherwise not available countywide.

■ **Children’s early learning** (est. in 2008) – 1,250 children from birth to age 5 have gained access to high quality teachers and affordable, education-focused care. This in turn has impacted the number of kindergarten students entering school “ready to learn.”

■ **Children’s hunger** (est. in 2011) – \$3,030,000 has been allocated to Harry Chapin Food Bank of Southwest Florida and Meals of Hope to alleviate food insecurity (the fear of not knowing where your next meal will come from). Thousands of families to date now rely on centralized and consistent food distribution centers that provide nutritious food.

■ **Children’s out-of-school time** (est. in 2012) – 8,000 children have participated in innovative programming to close gaps in education during after-school, holiday and summertime hours. This initiative has elevated test scores, improved school

attendance and increased the number of high school graduates and the number of graduates that go on to post-secondary education.

■ **Children’s vision** (est. in 2012) – 20,000 children have been screened for vision problems and 7,000 pairs of glasses have been distributed to children in need. Teachers and administrators report great improvement in academic performance, behavior and classroom participation, thanks to children being able to see properly with their new eyeglasses.

“We take our role seriously as the largest funder of social services in Collier County,” Susie McCurry, chair of the 2017 NCEF Grant Committee. “When given the right

tools, children have a remarkable ability to overcome difficult odds. We will continue working to ensure that every child gets the opportunities they deserve to succeed in life.”

The 2017 Naples Winter Wine Festival: “Bright Sunshiny Day” takes place Friday through Sunday, Jan. 27-29. Attendance is limited to 580 guests. Ticket packages start at \$10,000 per couple.

For more information, call Barrett Farmer at 514-2239 or email barrett@napleswinefestival.com. ■

