

FROM GULFSHORE LIFE'S CAB

STRONG FOUNDATIONS



Why are so many community leaders proud to support Naples Children & Education Foundation? The organization puts its fundraising dollars to work—a fact that's more evident since the pandemic broke out. Denise Cobb explains.

Many of us Community Advisory Board members are part of Naples Children & Education Foundation. One of the things that drives us to be avid supporters is that we can really see our contributions go to work.

Over the past 20 years, the organization's Naples Winter Wine Festival has raised more than \$212 million for Collier County's underserved children. Every year, tens of millions of dollars are awarded to deserving beneficiaries. But the money is not where NCEF stops helping, and that has become even more evident during the pandemic.

Because of the vision of the trustees and staff, and the financial support received by the generous festival attendees, NCEF has always been a local lifeline and a connector. The organization assists its beneficiaries with securing

and utilizing resources, finding ways for charities to work together and prevent overlap, and developing strategies.

In the best of times, the children served by NCEF live in challenging conditions. CEO Maria Jiménez-Lara tells us that since the pandemic, the need is growing: "Not only does the COVID-19 crisis add to their difficulties, but it has created several thousand more low-income families through job losses and furloughs."

During this critical time, it's been a great point of pride to see how the strategies and systems put in place before the crisis, have positioned the organization to be able to help local children.

In no time, NCEF was able to provide childcare for nurses and other first responders, assist second-language families in navigating distance learning and coordinate organizations so they could buy in bulk.

Thanks in large part to the \$6.8 million NCEF has committed to its Children's Hunger Initiative in the past seven years, partners such as Harry

Chapin Food Bank and Meals of Hope have been able to respond quickly to the soaring demand for food. "Harry Chapin distributed more than 100,000 pounds of fresh food in a week," Maria says. "This is normally a month's distribution."

Similarly, through the Early Learning Initiative—which has been granted \$9.5 million since 2008—our partners have been able to help thousands of Immokalee kids and parents transition to virtual learning in an area where internet access is often considered a luxury.

These are just some of the safety net of services NCEF has developed in its 20 years, which are now fully deployed. These systems allow the organizations we fund to meet demands that change almost daily.

I could not be prouder to be a part of this organization than I am right now. As Maria aptly puts it: "Our 20 years of yesterdays make it possible for us to be there for our community today." ■

Denise Cobb,
*Gulfshore Life Community Advisory
Board Chair; Naples Children &
Education Foundation Trustee*