



NAPLES CHILDREN & EDUCATION FOUNDATION COMMITS \$1 MILLION TO BENEFIT UNDERPRIVILEGED AND AT-RISK CHILDREN IN THE AFTERMATH OF HURICANE IAN

NAPLES, FL (December 13, 2022) – The Naples Children & Education Foundation, founders of the Naples Winter Wine Festival, today announced that it has allocated \$1 million to several of its collaborative nonprofit partners that were hardest hit by Hurricane Ian and are facing growing demand for services.

“The devastating effects of this hurricane continue to disrupt our nonprofit partners’ services while they are experiencing dramatically increased needs from children and families who are still enduring storm impacts,” said Valerie Boyd, NCEF Chairman of the Board. “This emergency allocation provides a range of essential services, primarily mental health care, meals and some critical structural repairs. The Board’s desire was to strengthen and focus on our regional nonprofit partners which have operations in the areas that were the most impacted by the storm.”

In tandem with the financial aid, NCEF also has created a Community Response Navigator position to coordinate hurricane recovery efforts and improve overall crisis response, thanks to a generous grant from the Collier Community Foundation. Duties include managing and coordinating aid distribution; coordinating advocacy efforts; and building collaborations that will strengthen future disaster preparedness and relief efforts for the entire region.

“Helping children cope with the mounting stress from the storm’s aftermath and recovery is one of the greatest ongoing needs,” said Maria Jimenez-Lara, NCEF Chief Executive Officer. “Among other tasks, the Community Response Navigator will work with our mental healthcare providers to ensure that children experiencing stress and anxiety receive coping skills support as well as organizing support services for children and families in the hardest hit areas.”

To fill the new role, NCEF has hired Astoria Aviles, whose background includes nearly two years as NCEF’s grants coordinator. Aviles has a Master’s degree in global challenges from the University of Edinburgh and a Bachelor’s in English (magna cum laude) from the University of Richmond.

Three of NCEF’s collaborative partners in its Mental Health Initiative, the David Lawrence Centers for Behavioral Health, Golisano Children’s Hospital and Healthcare Network, received emergency allocations, as did Naples Community Healthcare System, St. Matthew’s House, Youth Haven, and Harry Chapin Food Bank. To assist with the growing needs of the community, the Golisano Children’s Hospital grant has been designated to hire more personnel to provide services to a greater number of children. Funding also will include a specialized program that will equip pediatricians from Collier and Lee Counties with additional resources to help children cope with the long-term stress and trauma they are experiencing.

“This emergency funding demonstrates NCEF’s commitment to our area’s most vulnerable children,” said Armando Llechu, Chief Officer of Hospital Based Care for Lee Health. “Sadly, the

mental health of our region's children was already in crisis even before COVID-19 and before Hurricane Ian. The incidence of pediatric hospitalization and suicide were already rapidly increasing. The storm's aftermath is causing a variety of health concerns throughout the region – physical risks, such as infections, contaminants, debris and unsafe environments, and mental issues, including anxiety, depression and PTSD.”

Jimenez-Lara noted that panelists at NCEF's recent Healthcare Summit voiced urgent concern about children's mental health because of continued stress from the pandemic, overwhelmed parents, and the added trauma from Hurricane Ian, which made landfall in neighboring Lee County on September 28, 2023, impacting everyone in Southwest Florida.

These are among the factors that motivated NCEF to designate its Healthcare Initiatives, with an emphasis on Mental Health, as the beneficiary of its annual Fund a Need call to action during the 2023 Naples Winter Wine Festival, set for February 3-5, 2023, at The Ritz-Carlton Naples, Tiburón. Support for the Fund a Need appeal, dubbed “Healthy Mind, Body & Soul,” is not limited to just Festival guests. Members of the entire community also are encouraged to support this life-changing effort. To make a gift, please contact the NCEF office at 239-514-2239.

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About Naples Winter Wine Festival

One of the world's most prestigious charity wine auctions, the Naples Winter Wine Festival offers a weekend of unforgettable memories. Guests enjoy world-class food and wine during intimate private dinners and are invited to bid on once-in-a-lifetime travel and wine experiences in an electrifying live auction. Since its inception in 2001, the Festival has raised nearly \$244 million, making a profound difference in the lives of hundreds of thousands of children in Collier County.

About Naples Children & Education Foundation

The founding organization of the Naples Winter Wine Festival, the Naples Children & Education Foundation (NCEF) is improving the educational, emotional and health outcomes of underprivileged and at-risk children in Collier County. Through its annual grants and strategic initiatives, NCEF has impacted more than 50 of the most effective nonprofits in the community, providing over 300,000 children with the services and resources they need to excel. NCEF's unique approach, which emphasizes collaboration between organizations and bridges public and private resources, has become a blueprint for how to transform a community, one issue at a time.

For additional information on the Naples Children & Education Foundation or the Naples Winter Wine Festival, contact Lisa Juliano at lisa@napleswinefestival.com or 239-514-2239.