

United Way partners serve as a “Beacon of Hope” for Pine Island parents

By Jeannine Joy

Following the devastating impacts of Hurricane Ian, the team at United Way of Lee, Hendry, and Glades and its Partner Agencies have been on the frontlines, working tirelessly to assist the Southwest Florida community and connect them with resources to get back on their feet.

On Pine Island, United Way and Beacon of Hope, a United Way Partner Agency providing social services and resources to residents of Pine Island, played a critical role in helping families get back to work after the storm.

Creative Coast Preschool was damaged during the hurricane and its fence and playground were destroyed – both of which are required by law in order for the daycare to reopen.

Creative Coast is the only daycare on Pine Island and serves 33 children on the island. Many of the children’s families suffered total loss or damage to their homes. The parents rely on childcare to keep working, so it was particularly important that the daycare re-open as soon as possible.

The Beacon of Hope Pine Island moved immediately to assist Creative Coast upon learning of the devastation, and through funding from the SWFL Emergency Relief Fund; a partnership between Collaboratory and United Way; they were able to purchase new playground equipment, install a new fence, and reopen Creative Coast’s doors.

“We’ve been working with our Partner Agency, Beacon of Hope, to provide help to one on of the most crucial parts of the infrastructure of the island, which is child care,” said United Way WeCare Coordinator Nancy Del Carmen Cote. “A lot of the families on the island – especially those that work in our farms, agriculture, service, and landscaping industries – are really busy right now and need this daycare to be open.”

While there is still work to be done to bring the playground back to its former glory, the daycare is once again able to provide a safe place for children and peace of mind to parents knowing that their children are in good care while they get back to work.

“They can run, they can be children again. They have a place to release their energy, and that, to me, says it all,” said Maria Ramirez, the owner of the daycare.

Furthermore, the daycare is also bringing daycare staff back to work, providing locals with greatly needed jobs during this time of uncertainty.

This is just one example of the incredible work being done through United Way and its Partner Agencies and demonstrates the impact of the SWFL Emergency Relief Fund.

There are many more people that need help and resources. The community’s support through the relief fund is critical in helping these people get back on their feet.

“If it wasn’t for the Beacon of Hope and United Way, I wouldn’t be here today,” said Ramirez.

To learn more or to donate to the SWFL Emergency Relief Fund, visit SWFLReliefFund.org

“Your donations to the relief fund help rebuild communities and get people back to work,” Cote adds.

About the Author

Jeannine Joy is President and CEO for United Way of Lee, Hendry, and Glades.