

The GOOD News in the Pandemic?



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Boy, the uncertainty about what might happen in the week ahead between writing this and the paper coming out was daunting. So, I looked in the opposite direction for inspiration. Reviewing all the good the Ocean Reef Community Foundation has been able to do thanks to the community's generosity, I was actually quite encouraged and cheered – and you should be, too! Because an Ocean Reef family committed to providing up to half a million dollars in matching funds to create our COVID-19 Relief Fund, and the Foundation quickly matched the first \$100,000 so we could get to work right away, there are some real bright spots at a dark time.

Good News about School Closures

When we realized that schools would be closing, my first concern was the many children from struggling families in our surrounding communities who rely on the schools for meals and nutrition. It was a huge relief to find out that the schools in both Monroe and Miami-Dade Counties are continuing to provide to-go breakfast and lunch for schoolchildren. When Miami-Dade County did not provide meals during their spring break week, the Foundation made an emergency grant to distribute meals in the Homestead area through Communities in Schools Miami.

Next, came the announcement that lessons would now be online, and I immediately worried about the many children who do not have

computers or internet access at home. More good news! The schools in our areas are providing computers and the cable industry has stepped up to make internet access more available.

Good News about Food Insecurity

Of course, the meals provided by the schools won't solve ballooning food insecurity for the greater community, particularly with so many newly unemployed people in our neighboring areas. In Monroe County, almost half of the population works in the hospitality industry, which has come to a screeching halt. Many live paycheck to paycheck. Food pantries report that they have already broken, doubled and tripled all the records set for people in need of food set after Hurricane Irma. Our \$20,000 grant to the Star of the Sea Foundation helped it secure a match grant, which turned it into \$40,000 in food distributions throughout Monroe County.

Our food pantries are doing an admirable job to meet this unprecedented demand. It is wonderful to have such great partners, working so hard to make this happen for the community. And they could really use a hand right now, literally. Please let me know if you would like to volunteer at Upper Keys food distributions and I will be happy to make arrangements.

Good News for Moms-To-Be, Babies & Little Ones

Come to find out, there are a whopping 700 pregnant women in Monroe County at any given time ... and on top of that, food pantries don't offer baby food or formula! Through a grant to Florida Keys Healthy Start Coalition, combined with another gift given for the Key West area, the Foundation is helping to provide baby food and formula for those in need Keys-wide for eight weeks. We are also ensuring that the formula, along with diapers and baby wipes, gets to the babies



Our local food pantries sure could use a hand with food distributions! Contact the foundation to find out how to volunteer a foundation@oceanreef.com.

and that pregnant women and toddlers get safely to and from and are keeping their medical appointments. This is even more important than ever, as preemies require hospitalization and ventilators. We're helping to prevent that happening!

Good News for Those YOU May Know Who Are Struggling

Because the Foundation is unable to make grants to individuals, we are funding an Emergency Assistance Program for Households Impacted by COVID-19 through the Florida Keys Outreach Coalition (FKOC). FKOC is vetting applications and assisting families with medical care and medicine, food, transportation, childcare, communication and other essential needs and makes payments directly to the service providers.

It's important to note that FKOC has agreed to accept applications from individuals who live *or* work in Monroe County at our request so that all those who can show they work, or until recently worked, in the Ocean Reef community, are eligible to apply.

Branches is another non-profit partner that offers free financial wellness programs. They are helping folks from either area get their tax refunds and apply for unemployment benefits, forgivable relief loans and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.

This is good news for you, too, because you can help those in need by passing along these

resources. Find sharable flyers about the FKOC and Branches programs at orfound.org, and information about additional programs and resources on our Facebook page.

Good News about That Produce You Saw Rotting in the Fields on The Local News

Yes, I am proud to say we even have some good news on this front! Starting this week, the Foundation is picking up expenses for drivers and refrigerated trucks supplied by Fishbusterz Fisheries to drive to Homestead three to four days a week to pick up pallets of produce from Homestead farms and distribute it to food pantries throughout Monroe County.

Good News for Philanthropists

Right now, you can literally double your money to help us double the good news! Join us in creating good news at a terrible time and have your gift matched dollar for dollar. Take it from me, it's definitely not all good news out there and the need is not ending anytime soon ... but helping does make you feel better! Donate at orfound.org or mail your check made payable to Ocean Reef Community Foundation, with "COVID-19 Relief" in the memo line, to 35 Ocean Reef Drive, Ste. 148, Key Largo, FL 33037. Those with an ORCF Donor Advised Fund who wish to donate from their funds, and anyone with questions about the relief effort, can email foundation@oceanreef.com.