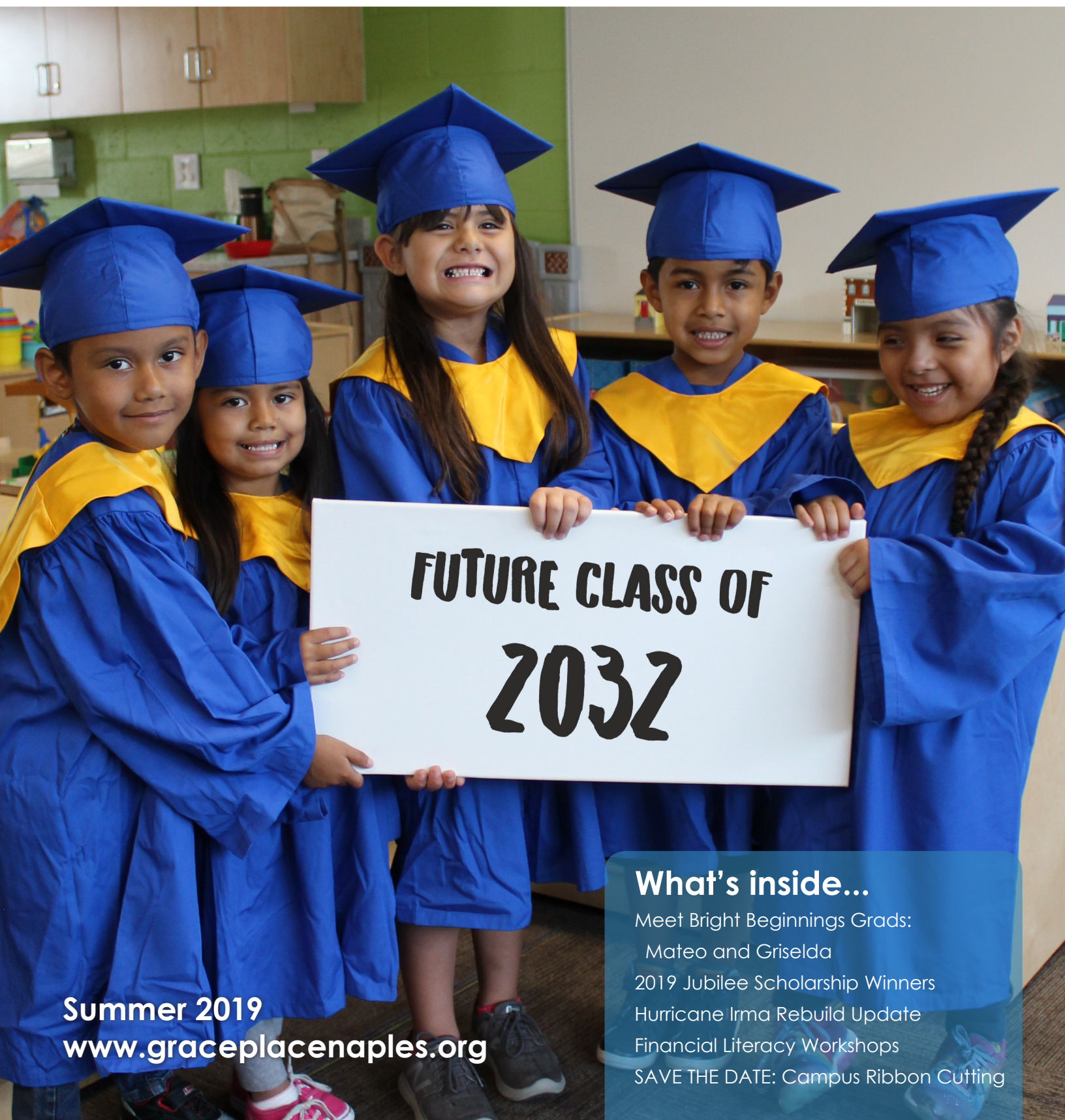




# The Learning Curve

BRINGING YOU CLOSER TO THE LIVES YOU'VE CHANGED



**Summer 2019**  
**[www.graceplacenaples.org](http://www.graceplacenaples.org)**

## What's inside...

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# BRIGHT FUTURES, MEET GISELDA AND MATEO

## *Bright Beginnings celebrates another year of success*

Over 320 individuals graduated from the Bright Beginnings program in May, including 26 rising kindergartners. Parents learned best practices for encouraging optimal development and kindergarten readiness, nutrition education, and family safety training. They developed English language skills and built financial and computer literacy skills. Children prepared to enter kindergarten ready. Griselda and Mateo were two of them.

Griselda and Mateo started the Bright Beginnings program at Grace Place in 2016. Before coming to the program for the first time, they'd spent almost every moment of Mateo's life together, so when it came time to separate into their classes, neither one of them took it lightly. "At first it was difficult for him and me because he was never away from me. He was sad and crying for a long time in class," says Griselda. "I sometimes was afraid that we would have to leave the program because he would cry when I left him, and then I would cry."

But Mateo and Griselda persevered, they continued with the program for the next three years. During that time, Mateo developed language skills, he learned his alphabet (in English and Spanish), and he met friends, established bonds with his teachers, and mastered the classroom environment. "Now Mateo is so independent. He can write his name. He knows numbers and all the letters of the alphabet. He knows the months of the year and the days of the week. He has many friends and I see how happy he is when we are at Grace Place," remarks Griselda.

Griselda has also flourished in the program. She has greatly improved her English language skills. Her reading comprehension has improved by three grade levels. She made friends and found a support system in the other moms attending the program. She has learned about childhood development. She now knows the importance of providing a language-rich environment and building pre-literacy skills with her child. She is prepared to be Mateo's teacher.

Approximately one-half of children in Collier County are not developmentally or academically ready for kindergarten (Future Ready Collier). Thanks to Griselda and the generous individuals that support Grace Place programs, Mateo and his new friends in the Bright Beginnings program will not be part of that statistic.



# DROWNING PREVENTION

## *As summer nears, Grace Place Bright Beginnings families participate in swim and water safety lessons*

Florida leads the country in drowning deaths of children ages one to four years old, and unintentional drowning is the third leading cause of death among adults across the globe. Being able to swim is not just a fun activity; it is an essential life-saving skill.

To change these statistics, we partnered with NCH Safe & Healthy Children's Coalition and our families participated in SWIM Central. "We are thankful for Grace Place for seeing the value in drowning prevention and for helping their children and families to be safer in and around the water," said Paula DiGrigoli, Executive Director of NCH Safe & Healthy Children's Coalition. The SWIM Central program provides ten 30-minute water safety lessons over two weeks.

"I decided to take the class because I was petrified of the water," said Angelica, mom of three. "I feared putting my head underwater and swallowing water." Knowing that her fear and negative expectations could potentially catch on to her children, Angelica took the plunge. "After taking the classes, I feel more comfortable. Now, I can go to the beach and get in the water and play with my son," said Angelica proudly. "My three-year-old learned to swim before I did and always wanted me to play with him. He loves to swim, and it feels wonderful that I can experience the water with him now."

Luzmila Dubuc had a different experience. "I knew how to swim before I took the classes," she said. "I walked into class thinking I knew it all, and I didn't have to be there." Luzmila was stunned to learn about water safety. "I



thought once you learned how to swim, you were safe," she said bluntly. "Then the class showed us that accidents could happen. Your child can hit their head or faint by the pool and potentially drown. Then what do we do?" Luckily with the SWIM Central class, our parents learned all the safety measures and precautions. "Now I know better. I watch my kids more closely when they swim, and I'm better prepared," she said.

This program is possible thanks to the generous support of the Naples Children & Education Foundation, Founders of the Naples Winter Wine Festival.

# A LIFE-CHANGING GIFT:

## Three seniors receive “full ride” scholarships to Florida Gulf Coast University

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Three hardworking teens from Golden Gate City received a life-changing gift. Jean, Daniela, and Rebecca are 2019 Jubilee Scholarship winners. The Jubilee Scholarship, offered to Grace Place AP Leaders, is a four-year, “full ride” to Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU). Their journey will begin with a transformational two-week adventure at North Carolina Outward Bound this summer, before starting college in the fall. The following four years they will have the opportunity to join clubs, travel abroad, to hone their interests and skills, to develop their career goals and personal missions. They will not have to worry about how they will pay for it – for classes, for books, for food, or for all the additional resources necessary to be successful in college. For Jean, Daniela, Rebecca, and their families, this scholarship is a dream come true.



### Jean

It was a STEM summer camp at FGCU two years ago that ignited Jean's eagerness to go to college. He heard about the camp through the AP Leadership program at Grace Place. Living on the University campus for two weeks, Jean got a real college experience and met with different professors from a variety of programs. After the experience, he knew college was in his future.

At FGCU, Jean plans to earn a Bachelor's in Exercise Science before pursuing a graduate degree in physical therapy. Jean's college aspirations seem to be infectious. He's inspired his stepmom to go back to school this year.



### Daniela

Hearing the news from Grace Place that she'd been awarded the Jubilee Scholarship overwhelmed Daniela and her family. Her parents are finally getting their footing after a hard hit from the recession and not having their child's college tuition to think about has lifted a great weight off their minds.

More than the financial burden lifted, Daniela and her family are grateful she will only be a short car ride away. Daniela will be a first-generation college student, and the proximity to home is important to them.

Daniela has a passion for helping others and enjoys serving as a mentor to the young students at Grace Place. At FGCU, Daniela plans to earn her Bachelor of Science in Nursing before becoming a Nurse Practitioner.



## Rebecca

Rebecca has already begun working toward her dream of becoming a pediatric orthodontist. Over the last two years as a dual-enrolled student at Lorenzo Walker Technical High School and Florida SouthWestern College, she has earned an Expanded Functions Dental Assistant (EFDA) license, a Certified Dental Assistant (CDA) license, as well as her Associates Degree. At FGCU, she will continue the path to her dream profession.

Eventually, Rebecca hopes to own a practice that provides affordable dental services to those without health insurance. She also hopes to dedicate her free time traveling to Haiti to provide dental care to those in need.

Jean, Daniela, and Rebecca have all chosen to pursue careers in the service of others. One day we might meet Jean at his physical therapy practice, or see him on television working on famous sports athletes during a big game. Daniela may be the Nurse Practitioner at your doctor's office. Rebecca may become your child or grandchild's orthodontist, or you may read in the newspaper about all the people in need she is helping at her nonprofit clinic.

Jubilee Scholarships exist because of generous individuals that believe in offering a hand up to others. Join us in our mission to provide pathways out of poverty by educating children and families. Read more about these promising students and learn how you can get involved at [graceplacenaples.org](http://graceplacenaples.org).

## CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR GRACE PLACE SENIORS!

ALEXIA ROMO-CALZADA  
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ANTHONY PENA  
*United States Army*

ANTHONY PEREZ  
*Florida SouthWestern State College*

AZIEL DIAZ  
*Florida SouthWestern State College*

CHNABELLE CYRIAQUE  
*Florida Gulf Coast University*

CHRISTINA BRICE  
*Florida SouthWestern State College*

DANIELA PAZ  
*Florida Gulf Coast University*

ERANDENI ROMERO  
*Florida Gulf Coast University*

JACKELYN CRUZ  
*Florida Gulf Coast University*

JEAN SAGESSE  
*Florida Gulf Coast University*

JORGE DAVILA-DIAZ  
*United States Army*

LENIN BARAHONA  
*Florida SouthWestern State College*

MONICA PUENTES  
*University of Central Florida*

RALPH RAPHAEL  
*Florida SouthWestern State College*

RALPH VOLNY  
*University of Central Florida*

REBECCA PAUL  
*Florida Gulf Coast University*

VALERIA NERI  
*Florida Gulf Coast University*

VIKIANA SOLANO  
*Florida SouthWestern State College*

100% GRADUATED  
FROM HIGH SCHOOL

100% BOUND FOR  
COLLEGE OR  
MILITARY SERVICE

\$601,000 IN TOTAL  
SCHOLARSHIPS

# MARIE HAS HER HOME BACK

*Thanks to Grace Place, the United Way of Collier County, and far-away friends, Golden Gate residents are finally able to rebuild after hurricane Irma*



After her daughter experienced the catastrophic 2010 Haiti earthquake, Marie did not want to take any chances. Hurricane Irma was on her way, and Collier County was the bullseye.

"I left. I needed to leave my home. When the news and police tell you, you need to leave. You go," said Marie. For four days, Marie hunkered down at Golden Gate High School, which served as a shelter for the Collier community. For four days as Irma came barreling down, Marie worried about her home and all the damage that awaited her. After the storm passed, Marie's worst nightmare became a reality. Her home was inhabitable. "I had no water. No electricity. My roof was bad, and the fence blew over," Marie explained. "I had to take a shower with bottled water."

Even though her house was unsafe, Marie stayed. "I had nowhere to go," she said as her eyes watered. She could not afford staying in a hotel, let alone a new roof and repairs. "But I prayed, and I prayed, and I prayed," said Marie. "I am a strong believer that my faith will always come through." And it did.

Through the United Way of Collier County, Grace Place for Children and Families received \$1.2 million from the United Arab Emirates to rebuild and enhance our campus, to improve technology, and to help families hit hard by Hurricane Irma. "When I found out that I was getting help, I didn't know what to do. I just said 'THANK YOU, THANK YOU, THANK YOU, THANK YOU!'" exclaimed Marie. "My daughter thought it was a prank!"

Now almost two years post-storm, life is finally back to normal. "I have a new water heater, do you want to see?" asked Marie as she pulled up pictures on her phone. A new roof, a new fence, new electrical - but with the same faith, Marie continues to count her blessings. "Thank you, Grace Place and the UAE, I don't know how I will ever repay you," said Marie.

# BUILDING FINANCIAL STABILITY

*Grace Place partners with the Financial Planning Association of SWFL to bring financial literacy workshops to Golden Gate families*

Financial literacy is an essential topic not often taught to individuals, more so to those that live at or below the poverty line. During February, our adult students had the opportunity to attend Financial Literacy Workshops on campus in hopes to better understand and plan for their financial future. Volunteers with the Financial Planning Association of Southwest Florida (FPA-SWFL) dedicated their time and provided the necessary tools for our students to become more financially savvy and self-empowered.

Students like Rossana Acosta took advantage. "I was an accountant in my native country for five years," said the mom of two. "But I decided to take this workshop because, in life, you never stop learning." Rossana also explained that in her culture, it is not common for one to talk about finances or money, and that was another motivator to attend the workshops. When it comes to budgeting and saving Rossana is very knowledgeable, after all, she does have an accounting background. But topics such as credit scores, fraud prevention, and life insurance were utterly foreign to her. "Credit score is something very exclusive in this country. I did not know that if you have debt or pay a bill late, it affects your credit," said Rossana. "I was also shocked to learn how important life insurance is and having a will! Heaven forbid, my husband passes unexpectedly. I am responsible for his credit card debt." With this new information, Rossana can make informed strategic decisions regarding her finances to better her family's future.

"I am confident I speak for all our volunteers when I say we are so impressed with the participants' commitment to learn and improve how they manage their family's finances," said Renee Porter Medley, CFP®, and FPA-SWFL Pro Bono Coordinator. "The staff at Grace Place is the most effective partner FPA of SWFL has ever worked with to provide this opportunity to the families they serve."

David Kover, a local Certified Financial Planner and member of FPA-SWFL, has been involved with the pro bono efforts of the FPASWFL for six years. "The sincere gratitude volunteers receive from the attendees has made this one of the most rewarding experiences I've ever had. I feel a true sense of accomplishment in providing

members of this community with the tools they need to build their financial future," he said.

"We are truly fortunate to have a strong partnership with the Financial Planning Association of Southwest Florida," said Tara Barret, Director of Adult Education at Grace Place. "With their guidance, we have been able to offer our families the crucial information needed to provide a hand up in their journey towards financial independence. The material presented is accessible and geared towards the needs of our families, thereby making it both relevant and useful."





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