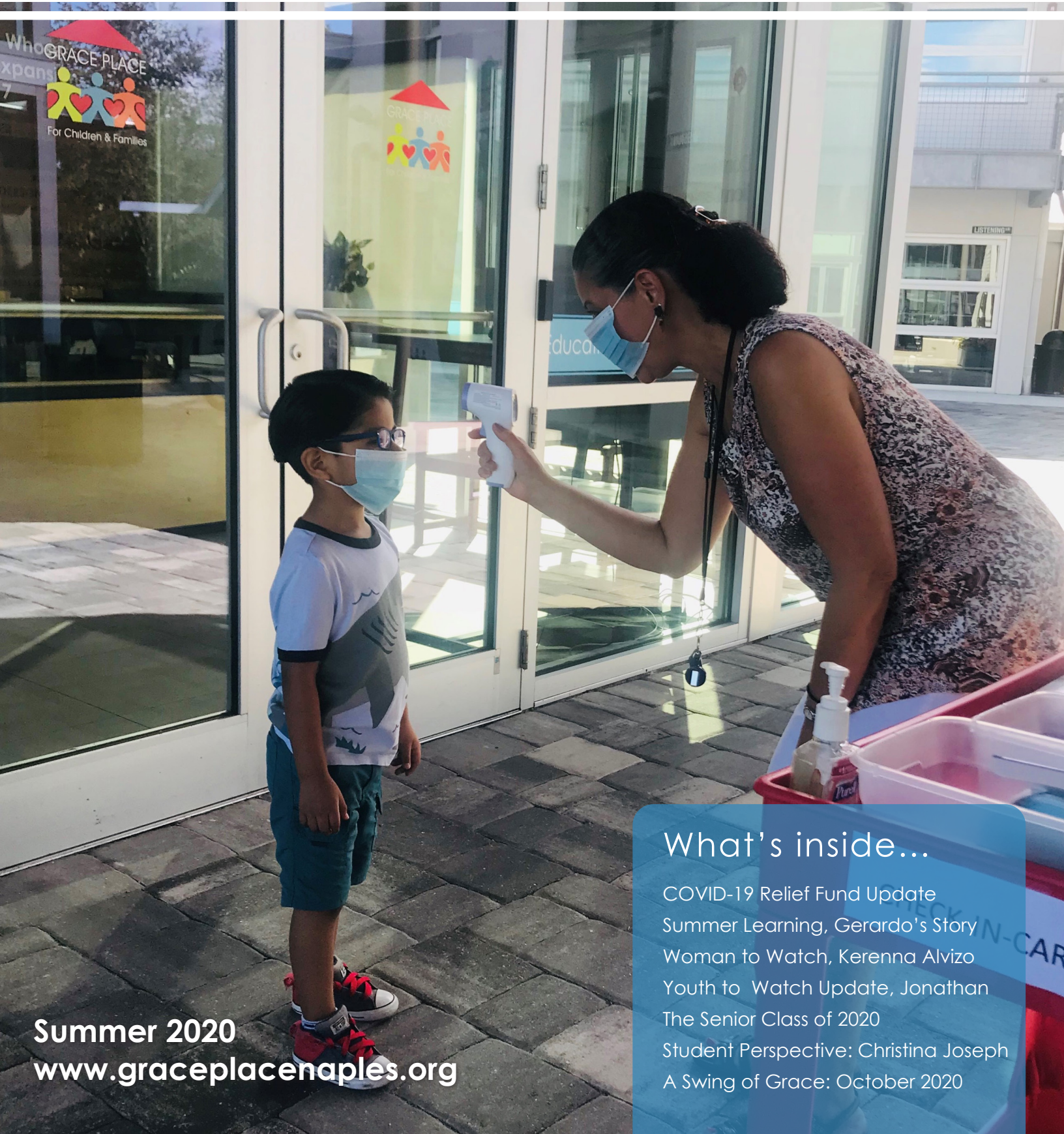




# The Learning Curve

BRINGING YOU CLOSER TO THE LIVES YOU'VE CHANGED



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Woman to Watch, Kerenna Alvizo  
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Summer 2020  
[www.graceplacenaples.org](http://www.graceplacenaples.org)



# COVID-19 RELIEF FUND

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## IMPACT UPDATE

We asked you to help support Grace Place families during the COVID-19 pandemic, and you responded. Thanks to your generosity, the Grace Place COVID-19 Relief Fund is providing emergency food, sanitation and hygiene supplies, and educational resources to some of our community's most vulnerable families.

In the short period of time between March and June, together we distributed 421,601 pounds of food (352,534 meals) to 4,656 families, and we provided 4,241 hours of virtual programming and instruction to over 450 families, totaling nearly 900 students served. We distributed Visa cards to 420 Grace Place families to help relieve some of the financial strain experienced by many as jobs were lost due to the pandemic.

We continue to make the most of every penny we receive. We welcomed over 220 students back to our classrooms (on-campus and virtually) for summer programs, while ensuring CDC health and safety requirements were met. Our teachers and program staff assisted Collier County Public Schools with credit recovery for middle and high school students virtually. We have partnered with Lab 24 to provide COVID-19 testing every Saturday, free of charge, to any community member until further notice. Our food pantry continues to serve over 300 families a week with emergency food relief. These are only a few examples of the vital work that is happening right now because of your contribution!

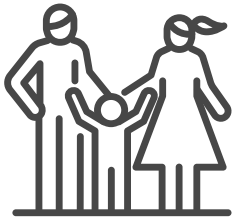
You have brought strength to so many over the past few months, during a time when so many of us are feeling vulnerable. On behalf of all of us at Grace Place, thank you for your support. You are creating positive change in our world when we need it most.

« Cover Photo: Bright Beginnings student during our new morning welcome routine of temperature testing.



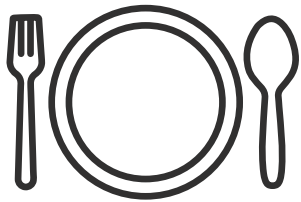
Top: The Grace Place Food Pantry  
Bottom: COVID-19 Testing

MARCH



5,106

FAMILIES SERVED



352,534

MEALS DISTRIBUTED



4,241

HOURS OF VIRTUAL  
INSTRUCTION

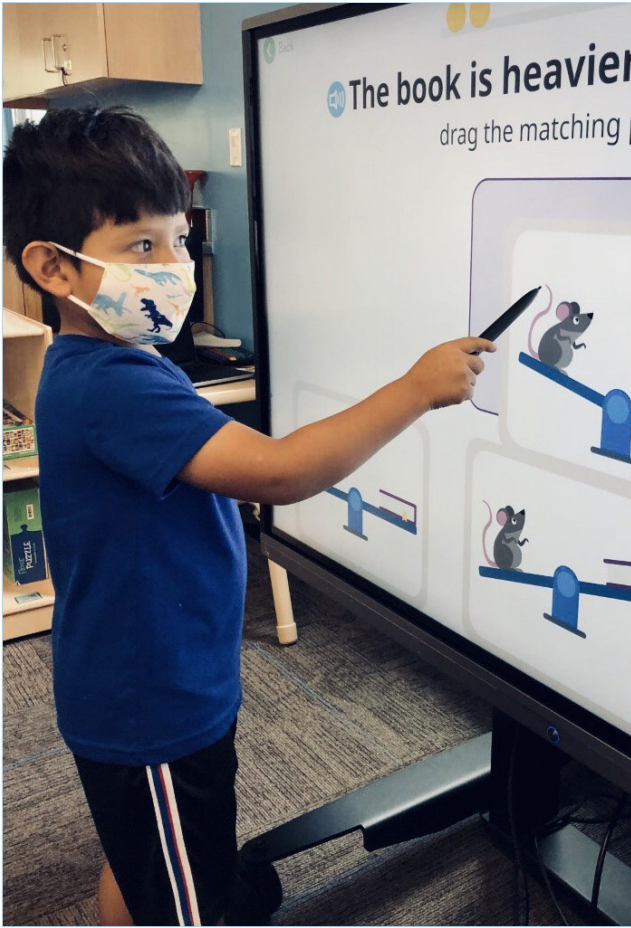
JUNE

## ESSENTIAL SUMMER LEARNING

Every parent wants the best for their child. When Luisa noticed Gerardo wasn't socializing well and was not near kindergarten ready, she knew she needed to do something. "He was having a hard time expressing himself. He was incredibly emotional and couldn't spell his name," said Luisa. "I heard so many great things about Grace Place's Bright Beginnings program, and I knew it would be best to sign Gerardo up to go."

"Gerardo came into my class not knowing any letters and was extremely shy," recalls Ms. Henri, Gerardo's teacher. "Within a short time, he'd grown leaps and bounds," Ms. Henri said with a big smile on her face. "By the end of the year, he was spelling his first and last name clearly and confidently in front of his peers," she said. After seeing Gerardo's progress, Luisa committed for the 2019/2020 school year.

This past year in the four-year-old full-time classroom, Gerardo continued to thrive. He developed his Print Knowledge, learning the difference between letters and words, letter names, and sounds. He honed his counting skills, numerical relations skills, and arithmetic reasoning skills. But when the coronavirus pandemic reached Collier County, Gerardo was still not meeting expectations in Phonological Awareness or Oral Language measures.



Gerardo using one of the Smart Boards made possible through the generosity of the United Arab Emirates.

[READ MORE](#)





Gerardo with his completion certificate for Summer VPK

Luisa continued to work with Gerardo at home. Thanks to her own experience in the Bright Beginnings program, Luisa felt prepared to be his teacher. When she learned that for the first time, Grace Place would be providing a summer VPK program, she decided to enroll Gerardo so that he could continue his preparation for kindergarten.

“Gerardo has grown over these eight weeks in the summer program,” reports Mr. Josiah, Gerardo’s teacher this summer. “Continuing education over the summer is extremely beneficial for our children entering kindergarten in the fall. Preventing the summer slide

is important every year, but especially this year, when the kids have been out of the classroom for so long.”

“Gerardo is a perfect example. The difference in his assessment from the beginning of the summer to now is motivating. He is mastering his letters, his math skills remain strong, and this summer, he was able to bridge the gap he was having in phonological awareness,” said Mr. Josiah. “The time he’s had in the classroom this summer is going to make all the difference this school year.”

Thanks to your generous support, Gerardo and his classmates are better prepared for kindergarten this fall.



A delicious dessert available at Mexicanísimo's Snack

Kerenna and her husband had been working and saving to start their own business for years. Kerenna believed this could be the hand up they needed. With guidance from Grace Place staff, Kerenna completed her application and was awarded a grant for her new business! Kerenna and her husband were finally able to make their restaurant fully operational, realizing their dream of owning a family business.

Today, Kerenna puts her English language skills to work greeting and serving her customers as the proud Co-Owner of Mexicanísimo's Snack in Golden Gate, specializing in artisanal ice cream and popsicles.

**What gave you the idea to start your business?**

*The idea came from many years in the business, my husband has 26 years of experience in the artisanal ice cream and popsicle business.*

**What do you hope to achieve through your business?**

*We want to achieve financial success and stability. We want to be able to provide a better quality of life for our son, and one that will lead to much better educational opportunities than we had. We want him to be able to go to university and to achieve more than we have.*

**Have you applied any of the skills you've developed at Grace Place to your business?**

*Oh yes, many. My English language skills, things I learned in the computer classes, also time management. I have made many friends that have helped me while starting the business.*

**Do you have advice for others wanting to start their own business?**

*Dreaming is free. Set a goal and go over the obstacles to accomplish what you want. In short if you want it, you can do it!*

## WOMAN TO WATCH:

*Entrepreneurial Bright Beginnings Student, Kerenna Alvizo, Awarded MicroGrant for New Business*

Kerenna enrolled in the Bright Beginnings program at Grace Place for her son Angel. She wanted to give him an environment to make new friends. Angel is an only child, it was important to Kerenna that Angel had a place where he could learn to share and develop his social and emotional skills, while she could learn about being a first-time mother.

Over the next two years in the program, the pair flourished together. Angel made friends. He developed essential social and behavioral skills like listening, working in a group, conflict resolution, and identifying and expressing his emotions. He developed language skills and honed his fine motor skills. Kerenna learned best practices in parenting; she learned about Angel's development and how she could best support his growth and learning. Her second year in the program, Kerenna took language and digital literacy classes, significantly improving her English language skills and giving her the confidence to take on new challenges.

A few months ago, the Bright Beginnings program brought another opportunity into Kerenna's life when a Grace Place team member informed the class of a grant application through a Grace Place partner organization. Grace Place has a long partnership with MicroGrants of Southwest Florida who provide grants to people with low income but high potential. The awards are to help people who want to improve their long-term ability to increase their income.



## Q & A

Kerenna at her restaurant

## YOUTH TO WATCH UPDATE

JONATHAN OLIVA-INFANTE

In the last issue of *The Learning Curve*, we featured graduating senior Jonathan Oliva-Infante as a Youth to Watch. Now we are updating you with some exciting news. Jonathan will be attending Florida State University (FSU) this fall! In addition to scholarship funding from FSU, Jonathan was awarded a Grace Place Scholarship, Bright Futures Medallion Level Scholarship, the Naples Women's Club Roberta Barr Scholarship and a Southwest Florida Forum Club Scholarship. Still aimed at changing the world someday, Jonathan will be studying political science.



Jonathan with his mother and older brother, Bryan Oliva-Infante, Grace Place and FGCU Alumnus, 2015 Jubilee Scholarship Award Recipient



# CLASS OF 2020

The bright and smiling students on the opposite page are celebrating. Despite a global pandemic, they are the seventh consecutive Grace Place senior class to achieve 100% high school graduation and 100% college enrollment for the 2020/2021 school year. They achieved this milestone against much adversity. Not only the recent and unique challenges caused by COVID-19, but the many obstacles that surround intergenerational poverty.

Through determination and hard work, and with the support and guidance of the LEAD (Leaders Empowered to Achieve Dreams) program (formerly AP Leadership), they are prepared and excited for their futures. The LEAD program would not be possible without your support. Thank you for investing in our community's future leaders!



Christina on the FGCU campus.

younger students working as an AP Leader. Now I am a high school graduate and a proud recipient of the Grace Place Jubilee Scholarship to Florida Gulf Coast University.

This organization has changed my life in ways too numerous to mention, and I hope it remains able to continue giving opportunities to children like myself. Thanks to this Scholarship, I will be able to complete my first four years of college fully funded, the first step to my Doctoral Degree in Physical Therapy. I am excited for this new challenge and I look forward to coming back and sharing my experiences with the students in the program.

Visit our blog at [graceplacenaples.org/blog](https://graceplacenaples.org/blog) for more stories and perspectives from the Class of 2020.

## STUDENT PERSPECTIVE

BY CHRISTINA JOSEPH, JUBILEE SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENT

My name is Christina Joseph. I am 18 years old and a recent graduate of Golden Gate High School. I was born in Key West to two Haitian immigrants and eventually moved to Naples after a string of hurricanes that devastated the Keys. My family moved over five times before finding a home in Golden Gate. That's when Grace Place found me.

During my time at Grace Place, I gained a mentor that helped me throughout the college application and scholarship process. I made deep and lasting friendships. I got to be a mentor and give back to the



CYNTIA MARCELIN  
Florida SouthWestern  
State College



JAVIER ROSABAL  
Florida Gulf Coast University



JOANNA VALCIN  
Florida State University



FRANCESCA JOSEPH  
Merrimack College



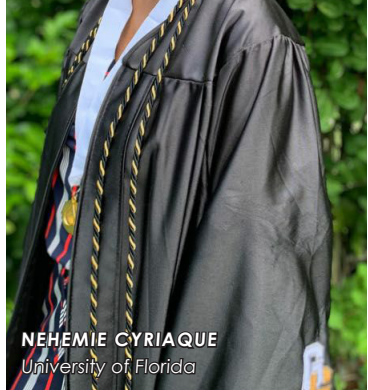
AMANDA ANUY  
Florida SouthWestern  
State College



SHELNIMAR ALDAJUSTE  
Full Sail University



BIWIDLYNE CALIXTE  
Florida SouthWestern  
State College



NEHEMIE CYRIAQUE  
University of Florida



KAREN TREJO  
Florida SouthWestern  
State College



JONATHAN OLIVAINFANTE  
Florida State University



DAPHNIE PHILLIPE  
Lorenzo Walker Technical College



ANNETTE SANJUAN-SANTIAGO  
Florida Gulf Coast University



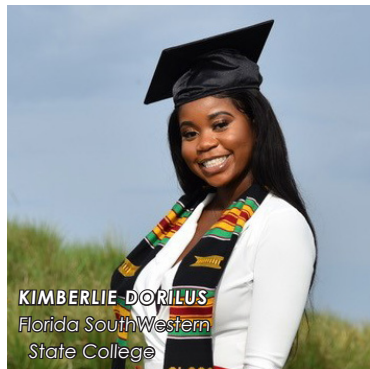
NELLY PEREZ  
Florida Gulf Coast University



CHRISTINA JOSEPH  
Florida Gulf Coast University



DJOULIA JEAN GILLES  
Florida SouthWestern  
State College



KIMBERLIE DORILUS  
Florida SouthWestern  
State College



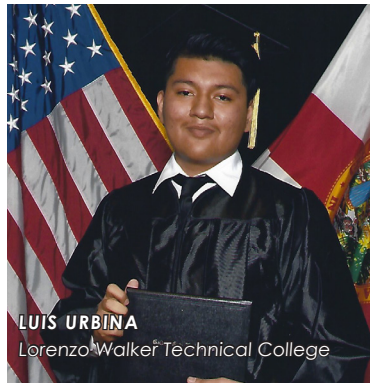
WOOD KELLY FORVIL  
Florida SouthWestern State College



WIDJINALIE PALISSIER  
Florida Gulf Coast University



DANIELLA NOEL  
Florida SouthWestern State College



LUIS URBINA  
Lorenzo Walker Technical College

Student name and college of enrollment listed with photo. Photos supplied by students.





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# THE NINTH ANNUAL *A Swing of Grace* OCTOBER 31, 2020 THE CLUB AT THE STRAND

*Grace Place students (and brothers)  
Sebastian and Christopher*

**\$225 Per Golfer | Registration at 8 am | [GracePlaceNaples.org/ASwingOfGrace](https://GracePlaceNaples.org/ASwingOfGrace)**