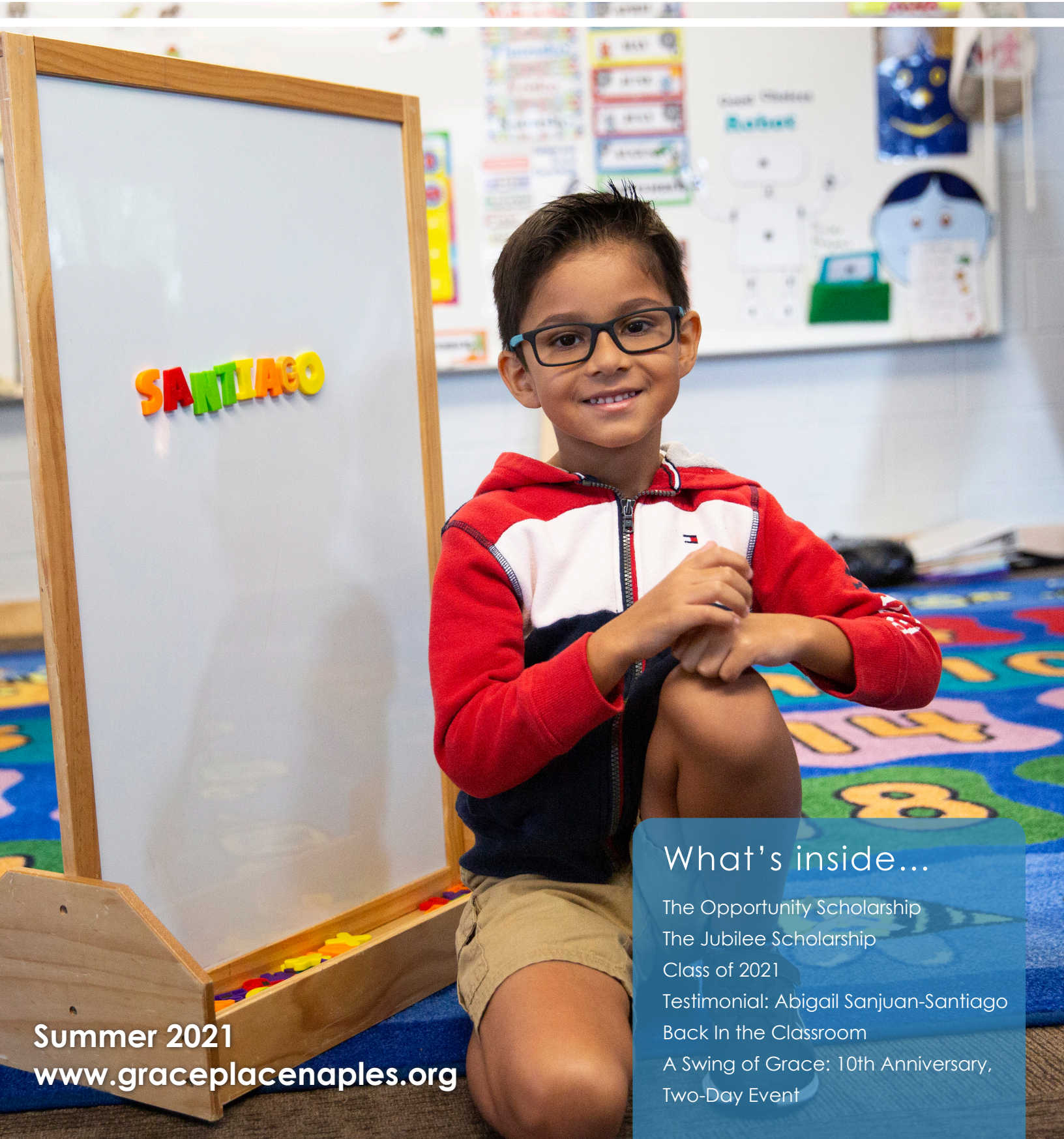




The Learning Curve

BRINGING YOU CLOSER TO THE LIVES YOU'VE CHANGED



SANTIAGO

What's inside...

The Opportunity Scholarship

The Jubilee Scholarship

Class of 2021

Testimonial: Abigail Sanjuan-Santiago

Back In the Classroom

A Swing of Grace: 10th Anniversary,
Two-Day Event

Summer 2021

www.graceplacenaples.org

CHANGING THE ODDS

Through the overwhelming generosity of our supporters, three students' lives are forever changed.

In 2014, the establishment of the Jubilee Scholarship offered Grace Place the ability to award two students per year a four-year, full-tuition scholarship to Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU) at no cost. This is an incredible gift to any young adult and their family. To the students Grace Place serves, it is truly life-changing.

As our community of supporters knows, the families we serve make up the backbone of Collier County. Mothers and fathers work long hours at strenuous jobs and still live below the federal poverty line. Most of our families live in households with incomes below \$34,000, a third of what the ALICE Report* states is needed for a family of four to survive in Collier County. This year, through the generosity of anonymous donors, we celebrate the addition of the Opportunity Scholarship, an additional four-year, full-tuition scholarship to FGCU. Meet this year's recipients of these prestigious honors.



Bellenstz Forvil

2021 JUBILEE SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENT

Bellenstz Forvil emigrated to the United States from Haiti's capital, Port-au-Prince, in 2017. Despite the widespread violence and danger the city held, it was also home to his dearest family and friends, and he was sad to leave. But in his own words, "the choice had to be made so I could have a better life."

By the first semester of his junior year, Bellenstz balanced two jobs, afterschool sessions on college and career preparation in the LEAD (Leaders Empowered to Achieve Dreams) program, volunteering, soccer, and track, with his household responsibilities. Still, he managed to maintain a 3.6 GPA and had learned to speak English fluently.

Bellenstz is debating pursuing either a civil or automotive engineering degree at FGCU. He wants to "help build a more efficient and safer world for people to travel."

Eduardo Cruz

2021 JUBILEE SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENT

Eduardo was too young to remember his first visit to Grace Place. He was brought by his mother, Ilse, when he was just a toddler. They were one of the first families in our Bright Beginnings program. Eduardo returned to Grace Place in middle school when he joined the afterschool program at his mother's insistence, and he has been thriving with us ever since.

A dedicated LEAD participant in high school, Eduardo received further academic help in core subjects and attended college and career readiness workshops throughout his four years in the program. In May, he graduated with a 3.6 GPA, and next year he will be a first-generation college student. Ilse is thrilled.

Eduardo plans to study computer science at FGCU, with the hopes of developing new software systems that streamline processes and "make people's lives easier."



Davion Thermilus

2021 OPPORTUNITY SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENT

Davion is a self-proclaimed "chameleon," blending well in many different groups and activities. In high school, he served as Vice President of both CORE, a drug prevention club, and Rotary. He was a member of CROP, a college readiness club, and Mock Trial. All the while maintaining a rigorous academic schedule of AP, Honors, and AICE level classes.

But where he found his inspiration was working with the younger students in his community while participating in LEAD at Grace Place. In them, he saw himself, and discovered that helping those in times of need "gave him the strength."

At FGCU, Davion plans to work towards achieving his doctorate in psychology with the aspiration to one day start a nonprofit of his own that provides counseling and aid to at-risk families.

**According to the United Way of Collier County and the Keys ALICE Report, it takes a household income of more than \$75,000 for a family of four to survive in Collier County. Demographic information above is from collierschools.com and aspe.hhs.gov.*

GRACE PLACE

Schoen Family Complex

CONGRATULATIONS CLASS OF 2021!

AFRIANEY CHARELUS
Florida Atlantic University

BELLENSTZ FORVIL
Florida Gulf Coast University

CHANDEL JEAN-DENIS
Project Search Internship Program

DANIELA GONZALEZ
Florida SouthWestern State
College

DAVION THERMILUS
Florida Gulf Coast University

EDUARDO CRUZ
Florida Gulf Coast University

GABRIELA LAZARRE
Florida Atlantic University

JERRY PIERRE
Florida SouthWestern State
College

JOEL RIVAS
Entering the Workforce

JOSE AMAYO
Entering the Workforce

JOSE ARIAS OCHOA
Project Search Internship Program

LURIA GUSTAVE
Florida SouthWestern
State College

MARCD A BERTEAU
Florida SouthWestern
State College

MIRALDO AUGUSTE
Entering the Workforce

NICOLAS GUANOTOA
Military

PAULO CHOLIMA
Entering the Workforce

RODOLFO LOYOLA
Indiana State University

SAINTALISE NICOLAS
Entering the Workforce

SYNTHIA MURAT
Lorenzo Walker Technical College



GRACE PLACE ALUMNA REFLECTION

Guest Contributor, Abigail Sanjuan-Santiago, 2017 Jubilee Recipient

When I was a freshman in high school, college wasn't even in my plans, mainly because no one from my family had ever gone to college before. My future plans centered around finding a job and helping my aunt with my nine-month-old cousin, who had just been diagnosed with Epilepsy.

Sophomore year, I heard about an organization called Grace Place on the morning announcements at school. They needed volunteers, and I needed volunteer hours to graduate, so I signed up. I could never have imagined at the time that decision would be what led to the desire and opportunity to go to college.

Over the next three years in the LEAD program (then AP Leadership) at Grace Place, I was introduced to new experiences and ideas that got me thinking differently about my future. I attended special STEM camps and college visits. I discovered a passion for working with kids and began to dream about becoming a teacher. Suddenly, college was the only path I saw for my future.

In 2017, I won the Grace Place Jubilee Scholarship, offering the opportunity to attend college at no cost. This was a dream come true for my family and me. In those four years at University, I discovered myself. I put into action my innate desire to help those that could not help themselves, leading me to meaningful volunteer work with FGCU Farmworker Alliance and FGCU Zuni New Mexico projects. While advocating for human rights and aiding at-risk communities, I found my purpose.

Today, I am a graduate of Florida Gulf Coast University. I graduated with honors and a bachelor's degree in Social Work, with a minor in Political Science. As I begin my first year of graduate school this year, working toward a Master of Social Work at the University of South Florida, I look back at where my journey to higher education began. I truly would not be where I am today without the support from Grace Place. Thank you.



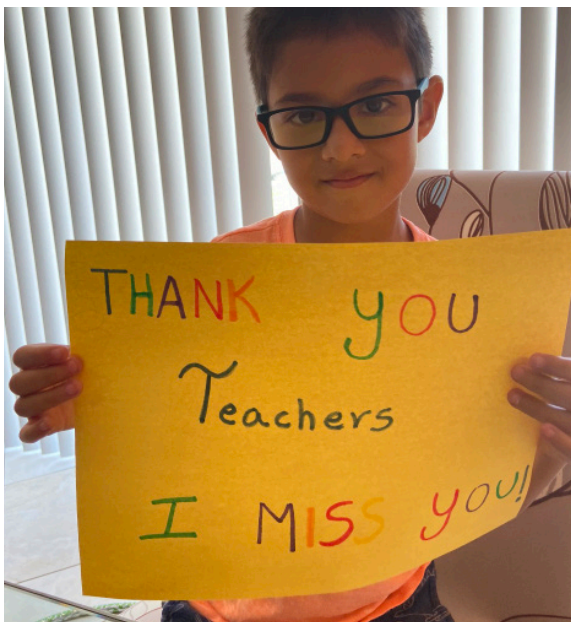
Abigail at her graduation from Florida Gulf Coast University.

BACK IN THE CLASSROOM

Jeanett and Santiago

Jeanett and her son Santiago have been enrolled in Bright Beginnings since the day she heard about the program three years ago. While visiting the park, she overheard a fellow mother talking about a wonderful class she was taking with her child at Grace Place. "The woman was so passionate about how much the program was helping her and her daughter and insisted Santiago and I try it out," Jeanett recalls. "I hadn't thought about enrolling Santiago in any school before kindergarten, but the woman's positive enthusiasm convinced me to sign us up...that day."

The first year in the program, they blossomed. In Beginnings 101, Jeanett learned about Santiago's development and how to support him best as he grew. She found a support group in the other parents and was introduced to learning English. Time in his early childhood classroom helped Santiago develop his social and emotional skills to flourish in a classroom setting. He discovered a love for books and numbers.



By their second year, they were thriving. Santiago was achieving or exceeding all developmental milestones, and Jeanett was experiencing quick gains in her first year of intensive English classes as part of the four-day-a-week Beginnings 201 course. They were succeeding together.

Then half-way through the third quarter of their second year, COVID-19 shut down the Grace Place campus. However, even the pandemic didn't stop Santiago and Jeanett from continuing to thrive together at home. They were some of the most active students on the class message boards during the lockdown, sharing photos and videos of completed assignments and sharing encouraging words. They attended every Zoom meeting and never missed an assignment. "I knew how important it was for Santiago and me to keep practicing everything we'd learned. Thanks to Grace Place, we had plenty of material to keep us busy learning together," reports Jeanett.

When they returned to the Grace Place campus in August, Jeanett and Santiago were ready to make their third year the strongest. Now at the end of the school year, the pair are unstoppable. Santiago has begun to read, and



Jeanett has grown 2.25 grade levels in English reading comprehension. They have also become catalysts for education at home.

When Jeanett and Santiago return home from Grace Place, they deliver the "Daily Report" to their family. First, to Elizabeth, Santiago's grandmother who lives with them, and then again to Dad when he returns home from work. "We love Grace Place. Jeanett and Santiago have learned so much! And Jeanett is always sharing what she's learned with us. She teaches us about parenting, child behavior, and other things like what we should all be eating to stay healthy. And she speaks more and more English every day," reports Elizabeth.

This year, when Santiago starts kindergarten, he will be more than prepared to succeed in school, and our Academy of Leaders program will be ready to help him continue to succeed. Thanks to Jeanett's decision, she is ready to guide him through his years of schooling and life.



Far left: Santiago during quarantine for COVID-19, Middle left: Santiago back in the classroom, Above: Santiago at Preschool Graduation.

CLASS OF 2034



92.3%

of full time four-year-old students demonstrated kindergarten readiness by the end of the academic year.



GRACE PLACE



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Register Online Now at
graceplacenaples.org/ASwingOfGrace

A Swing of Grace

Two-Day 10th Anniversary Event

OCTOBER 29 & 30, 2021
THE CLUB AT THE STRAND



**KICK OFF THE SEASON WITH TWO DAYS
TO CELEBRATE ONE GREAT CAUSE!**
BENEFITTING GRACE PLACE FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES