

20 YEARS
GRACE
PLACE
FOR CHILDREN & FAMILIES



EDUCATIONCHANGES**EVERYTHING**.COM

2024 A Swing of Grace
Registration NOW Open
(see back cover for details)

Volunteers Needed

Give Back to Your Community

CHOOSE YOUR AREA OF INTEREST:

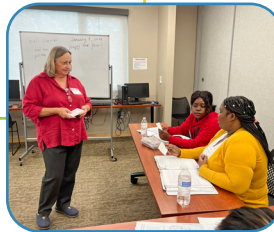
Spring Needs

- Food Pantry Assistant
- Classroom Assistant (Preschool, Elementary, Middle School)
- High School Tutor
- Work From Home Office Helper



Summer Needs

- Food Pantry Assistant
- Adult English Teacher
- Summer Camp Helper
- Summer Kindergarten Readiness Assistant
- Work From Home Office Helper



Qualifications/Expectations

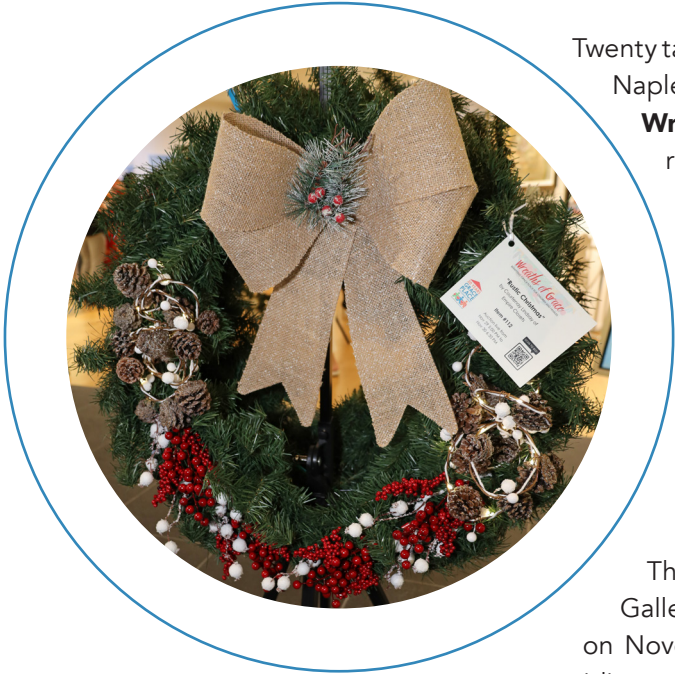
- Minimum Age 16
- Commitment 1X per week or more for 3 months
- Background check required
- Passionate about Grace Place ❤️



For information or to get the process started contact Melisa Mast at 239.255.7275 or email melisa.mast@graceplacenaples.org

Wreaths of Grace

A Festive Fusion of Design and Charity



Twenty talented interior designers from the Interior Design Society (IDS) Naples showcased their skills by crafting unique holiday wreaths, **Wreaths of Grace, to benefit Grace Place.** The wreaths each reflected diverse themes such as Traditional Holiday, Florida Orange, and Coastal Modern. The designs not only added a festive touch but also spoke to the rich creativity present in Naples' local design community.

Adding a Grace Place personal touch, student parents in our Bright Beginnings program added to the auction with their dazzling Grinch-themed wreath. The community responded with enthusiasm, as the Grinch wreath alone garnered over **\$400 in auction bids.**

The Wreaths of Grace were displayed at the East West Fine Art Gallery in Mercato during the Christmas Tree lighting ceremony on November 29. The wreaths were auctioned online for 24 hours, providing a convenient and accessible platform for community members to contribute to the cause.

IDS Naples hosted a celebratory gathering at the gallery, bringing together designers, Grace Place staff, and Board members. The event not only showcased the artistic talents of the designers but also emphasized the spirit of giving back to the local community.

Courtenay Lindsey, the immediate past president of IDS Naples and a Wreath of Grace designer, expressed, "Naples looks for ways we can get involved with the local community. This was the perfect partnership for our members to be able to show off their design talents, get into the holiday spirit, and benefit a great local organization. New designers have already expressed interest in participating next year."

The Wreaths of Grace not only served as a festive prelude to the holiday season but also marked the beginning of Grace Place's 20th Anniversary Celebration. The year-long series of celebrations and fundraising events planned for 2024 promises to further strengthen the bond between our community and Grace Place. Thank you, IDS Naples, East West Fine Art Gallery and participating designers.

Below Pictures: IDS Designers posing with their Wreaths of Grace.



The Grace Place Approach

Fostering Reading Proficiency and Educational Success in Golden Gate Communities

Reading proficiently by the end of third grade has been adopted nationally as an important educational milestone. It is at this point that students begin to shift from “learning to read” to “reading to learn”. Without the ability to read instinctively, students in fourth grade and beyond will struggle to master more complex subject matter they will encounter. This, of course, has educational implications for middle school, high school, and post-secondary, but it may also negatively affect one’s ability to achieve in the workforce.

In the United States, two-thirds of fourth graders are not proficient readers—meaning they are not scoring high enough on their standardized reading assessments. The results for low-income students are even worse—4 out of 5 are not proficient.

To move the needle towards this important milestone, it will take a collective effort. School districts are the primary drivers, but after-school programs, communities, and families play an important role as well. At Grace Place, our primary mission is to educate children and families in the Golden Gate community and more specifically to improve their literacy skills. Seventy percent of families who participate in Grace Place programs speak a language other than English at home, which adds a barrier to gaining reading proficiency.

In our elementary after-school program, staff use creative methods to support literacy growth. First and foremost, it is the strong, caring relationship between staff and students that makes Grace Place a safe and inclusive environment. These relationships create a space for children to learn and grow. Also, staff are adept at including literacy in everything they do from time on the playground, during mealtime, during enrichment classes, and of course through explicit literacy instruction.

Literacy instruction takes many forms. Students rotate through learning centers each day which allows those with varied learning styles to excel. Online curriculum from Footsteps to Brilliance, homework help, phonemic awareness activities, and guided reading groups are common stations in the learning centers. In addition to



Elementary students pictured with a book donation.

5 PILLARS OF EARLY LITERACY



*National Reading Panel

the literacy lessons completed in the classroom, Grace Place employs a reading specialist who meets with students in small groups for more targeted interventions.

Since Grace Place subscribes to the belief that parents are the child’s first teachers, the staff also provides training and resources for families to support their children’s at-home learning. By participating at Grace Place, each of the families is able to grow their home libraries. This additional out-of-school time instruction gives Golden Gate families the support they need to accomplish reading proficiency, leading to improved outcomes in graduation rates, postsecondary attainment, and eventually improved economic outcomes through career advancement.

Golden Gate Middle School Principal

Advocates for After-School Programs Amid Challenges

Dr. Jennifer Knutowski



In addition to overcoming post-pandemic achievement gaps and disruptions following Hurricane Ian, Dr. Jennifer Knutowski, principal of Golden Gate Middle School, faces another significant challenge.

A significant number of Golden Gate Middle School students are English Language Learner (ELL) students and arrive in the United States with limited proficiency in both their native language and English, which is seldom spoken at home. Dr. Knutowski actively encourages families to seek additional opportunities for their children and themselves to build confidence in speaking and reading their new second language. She strongly advocates for after-school and summer programs, recognizing their potential to make a significant difference for students who are not yet achieving at grade level.

The Grace Place after-school program incorporates literacy into every aspect of its four-day-a-week schedule. Josh Edel, Middle School Program Manager, states, "Whether it's homework help, a new STEM project, or playing sports, language learning occurs every day. Throughout the school year, we collaborate closely with Golden Gate Middle School teachers and counselors to ensure our students' continuous progress."

Parents of middle school students are taking note of their children's improvement. According to Paola A., the mother of an 8th-grade student, "My son Ares's reading has significantly improved since he started the afterschool program at Golden Gate Middle School, and he is enthusiastic about attending this session's Choice Academies. His favorite Choice Academy is '2nd

Language Learning' because he has a passion for being bilingual."

Academics, wellness, and self-esteem are the cornerstones of the program, with a strong emphasis on literacy, personal responsibility, and making positive choices. Dr. Knutowski believes that after-school programs like Grace Place also play a crucial role in keeping students engaged and motivated.

"Students always benefit from additional academic support and develop advanced social skills by attending an after-school program. Plus, their homework is completed before dinner, allowing for quality family time," she adds, emphasizing the practical benefits of after-school programs.

Enrollment in the Grace Place Middle School after-school program has grown by 20%, from 136 to 156, and average attendance has increased by 80% in the last year.

Language proficiency is often cited as a key factor in high school graduation and career success.



"Whether it's homework help, a new STEM project, or playing sports, language learning occurs every day."

– Josh Edel



Clay Jones

Leading the Path to Citizenship from the Front



Clay Jones with his students.

Clay Jones - veteran fighter pilot, retired CEO and Fortune 500 Corporate board member has taught citizenship preparation classes at Grace Place for the past six years. His story inspires us and his students.

In 1967, facing uncertainty as a high school senior, Clay heeded his father's advice to study engineering and join the ROTC program at the University of Tennessee Knoxville. Although he excelled academically, he shifted his major to political science and later became an officer in the Air Force.

Post-military service, Clay enjoyed a lengthy career at Rockwell Collins, contributing to groundbreaking projects that shaped defense systems and airline travel. Upon retiring, Clay and his wife, Debbie, sought meaningful engagement and found it at Grace Place. Impressed by the mission and the expansive campus, Clay discovered his calling when he learned about adult education classes.

Blending his education in political science with a passion for civics, history, and politics, Clay became a volunteer citizenship teacher. For six years, Clay has maintained a remarkable 100% success rate among over 80 students who have gone on to complete the citizenship process. While not all students pursue U.S. citizenship due to its challenges (including a 25-page application and \$750 fee), Clay emphasizes the importance of their journey. On the first day of class each semester, he has his students share their name, country of origin, and motivation for becoming a U.S. citizen, with a common response being a deep love for the United States and a desire to officially be a part of it.

Clay's commitment extends beyond teaching. He instills in his students the power to shape the country's future. His dedication to empowering individuals on their citizenship journey exemplifies the spirit of community and service at Grace Place.

Clay has maintained a remarkable 100% success rate among over 80 students who have gone on to complete the citizenship process.

Cookies and Conversation

A Recipe for English Language Learning Success



Above Pictures: Donors, volunteers and staff converse with adult students.

Learning a new language can be a challenging journey, filled with the ups and downs of mastering pronunciation and grammar.

Recently, 34 Bright Beginnings student parents participated in “Cookies and Conversation” with English-speaking staff members, donors, and volunteers - offering them a valuable opportunity to practice conversational English in a relaxed and supportive setting. Held twice per year, this event is a cornerstone of our language education initiatives.

In preparation, students practice answers to a series of “everyday” topics ranging from their favorite restaurant to a recent movie they watched or their plans for the weekend. This ensures that the conversations are not only beneficial for language development but also enjoyable and relevant to the participants.

In a format reminiscent of speed dating, each conversation lasts for five minutes before a bell signals the rotation to a new conversation partner. This dynamic approach keeps the interactions lively and allows students to practice the same materials with various guests.

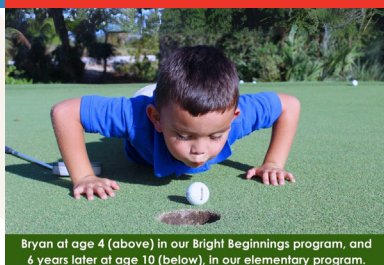
Student Vanessa P. shared that “she did not want to participate at first “due to her shyness but after the event “she sees that she can hold a conversation in English and feels much more comfortable engaging with native English speakers.”

Hillary Thomas, Director of Family Literacy, emphasizes the significance of real-time correction in language learning. “Conversation lessons allow students to make mistakes and correct them in real-time, essential to achieving fluency. When a student successfully uses a new language in conversation with a native speaker, they’re empowered with a newfound confidence that may follow them through other areas of life.” Creating opportunities for real-life language practice not only accelerates language acquisition but also fosters a sense of community among our students. That is the Grace Place way.



Mark Your Calendar

**COMING
SOON**



Bryan at age 4 (above) in our Bright Beginnings program, and 6 years later at age 10 (below), in our elementary program.



education changes everything

12th Annual *A Swing Of Grace*

BENEFITING GRACE PLACE FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Tuesday, May 7, 2024 - Bonita Bay Golf Club



Golfers will enjoy an exhilarating day of golf at the prestigious Bonita Bay Golf Club, where lush fairways and scenic landscapes set the stage for an unforgettable tournament experience.

2024 A Swing Of Grace Committee

Nita Rapp, Co Chair
Cesar Taveras, Co Chair
Jim Bosscher
Mark Barber

Keith Cody
Lisa Ewell
Ramona Knight
Moiria Lardakis

Elaine MacIntosh
Diane McGrath
Russell Peterson
Dana Weeks

Schedule

11:30am: Arrival and box lunch

1:00pm: Shotgun start, scramble format

5:30pm: Cocktail hour and dinner

Cocktail reception with silent auction, followed by buffet dinner, live auction, and a keynote address by a Grace Place student.

Tickets

\$1,400/Foursome

\$350/Golfer

Use of the driving range, putting green, locker rooms, golf cart fees (two carts per foursome), boxed lunch, buffet dinner and auction.

Grace Place seeks equitable futures for Golden Gate families through education. Over 1,000 students enroll in programs annually, including early intervention family literacy programs for pre-kindergarten students, and their parents, afterschool and summer programming for K-12 students, college and career access programs, and adult education classes. In addition, the organization operates a food pantry that serves over 300 families a week.



Register Online at grace2024.givesmart.com or scan the QR code.

If you need assistance registering, please call Kim Buehler at 239.255.7219.

4300 21st Ave. SW Naples, FL 34116 | 239.255.7200 | GracePlaceNaples.org