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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Naples Children Foundation \$8 Million Investment Aims to Transform Early Learning in Collier County

NAPLES, Fla. — [July 8, 2026] — The Naples Children Foundation (NCF), the founding organization of the Naples Winter Wine Festival, today announced a transformative three-year initiative to expand and strengthen early learning opportunities throughout Collier County. The effort is made possible through an \$8 million investment generated from the extraordinary success of the Festival's landmark 25th Anniversary year and represents one of the most significant commitments to early childhood education in the Foundation's history.

The initiative was developed in response to growing concerns from families, educators, employers and providers across Collier County about limited access to quality early learning opportunities and the increasing need for school readiness support before children enter kindergarten. Florida Chamber Foundation Report shows Florida's economy loses nearly \$5.4 billion annually due to the childcare crisis.

"Early learning is one of the most important investments we can make in the future of our community," said Sue Bieker, NCF Grant Committee Chair. "This initiative is focused on ensuring more children in Collier County have access to high-quality early education experiences that prepare them to succeed in school and in life."

Expanding Access to Critical Supports

The largest portion of the investment will focus on expanding access to high-quality early learning opportunities across Collier County.

To lead this work, NCF will partner with Grace Place for Children and Families because of the organization's strong track record delivering high-quality educational programming and experience operating innovative family-centered learning models.

In partnership with Grace Place, NCF will expand the Grace Place Family Literacy Model® Bright Beginnings program, a flexible part-time early learning and family literacy model designed for families who may not yet be ready for full-time preschool programming but want their children to benefit from structured early education experiences and kindergarten readiness support.

The expansion will establish additional program sites across Collier County. Grace Place's multilingual staff and integrated approach to parent engagement and literacy make the organization uniquely positioned to successfully scale the program. Programming will begin in August 2026 and will provide 190 additional students with programming.

Additionally, NCF will partner with Grace Place and Collier County Public Schools to launch a new high-quality, accredited early learning program at Naples Park Elementary School. Unlike the Bright Beginnings expansion, the Naples Park program is designed to increase the overall

number of high-quality early childhood education seats available to families across Collier County.

The program will serve a broad mix of families, while ensuring that low-income families have access through scholarship support. By bringing an accredited early learning program directly onto a public school campus, the partnership will help expand access to quality early education and strengthen kindergarten readiness for more children in the community.

Grace Place was selected as a key implementation partner because of its proven ability to deliver high-quality educational programming, engage families consistently, and collaborate effectively with schools and community partners. Programming at Naples Park Elementary is expected to begin in January 2027 and will serve 92 additional students.

Investing in Quality and Workforce Support

In addition to expanding access, the initiative includes targeted investments to increase kindergarten readiness, support behavioral health within early learning environments, enhance literacy instruction and provide greater support for families as children transition into kindergarten.

NCF will also invest in professional development opportunities, workforce support, career pathway development, and staff retention strategies to help early learning providers recruit and retain highly qualified educators while elevating the early learning profession across Collier County.

“For 25 years, the Naples Children Foundation has helped transform the lives of children in our community,” said Sarah Zaiser-Kelly, SVP Grants and Community Impact. “This investment continues that legacy by strengthening the foundation of learning at the earliest and most important stage of development.”

About the Naples Children Foundation

The Naples Children Foundation, the founding organization of the Naples Winter Wine Festival, creates transformational change and improves educational, emotional and health outcomes for vulnerable children in Collier County. Through its annual grants and strategic initiatives, NCF has impacted nearly 90 of the most effective nonprofits in the local community, providing 385,000 children with the services and resources they need to succeed. Through bold investments, collaborative partnerships, and data-driven solutions, NCF supports programs that ensure every child can thrive. NCF's unique approach, which bridges public and private resources, has become a blueprint for how to transform a community – one issue at a time.

About Grace Place for Children and Families

Grace Place for Children and Families is a nonprofit organization in Naples, Florida that helps remove barriers to opportunity by providing free, family-centered English literacy programs. By supporting every member of the family, from infants through adults, Grace Place strengthens English skills, academic success, and pathways to college and careers, enrolling over 1,300

students each year. Discover more at graceplacenaples.org, follow @graceplacenaples on social, or schedule a campus tour to see the impact in action.

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