



Summer 2026

STORIES *of* CHANGE

• CELEBRATING THE STORIES OF GRACE PLACE •

WHAT'S INSIDE



A Story of Growth
and Confidence

Meet Adriana:
From Shy Student to
Community Leader

Growing Our Impact

Future Entrepreneurs:
Dream. Build. Pitch.

Ready, Set,
Kindergarten!

THREE YEARS. ONE EXTRAORDINARY TRANSFORMATION.

FINDING HER VOICE, ONE BOOK AT A TIME



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*When I first got here,
I didn't know any
English. Now I love
reading books and I
have lots of friends.*

— EMMA

When Emma arrived in Naples from Argentina at five years old, she didn't speak any English. Wide-eyed and preparing to start kindergarten, she found herself in a classroom full of sounds she couldn't yet understand.

Today, that same girl loves English Language Arts and cannot walk past a bookshelf without stopping.

Education Changes Everything

As she learned to navigate a new language and a new school, her Grace Place teachers were with her every step of the way. Helping with homework, building reading skills and developing her confidence. Slow, steady progress.

By the end of first grade, Emma scored in the 98th percentile in both reading and math. As her English skills improved, she transitioned out of the English Language Learner program at school and continued to excel.

In August, Emma started third grade ready to soar. Research shows that students who are not reading proficiently by third grade are less likely to catch up later in school. During the 2025-2026 school year, 59% of Grace Place third graders demonstrated proficiency in English Language Arts, reflecting the impact of consistent literacy support and the progress students can make when they receive the tools they need to succeed.

A Future Full of Possibilities

Emma dreams of becoming an artist, writer, or singer. From a nervous kindergartener learning a new language to a confident student thriving in school, Emma and her family are looking toward the future with excitement.

Her journey over the past three years demonstrates what's possible when students gain the English literacy skills and academic support they need early in life.

**You can help more students like
Emma stay on track and thrive.
Visit graceplacenaples.org to learn how.**



DRIVEN BY DETERMINATION:

ADRIANA'S JOURNEY

Eleven years ago, Adriana arrived in the United States from Haiti with her parents and three siblings. She spoke very little English and was beginning a new life in an unfamiliar country. This spring, she will graduate from Florida International University—one step closer to becoming the pediatrician she has dreamed of being since childhood.

Finding Her Voice

Adriana first came to Grace Place in sixth grade after her school recommended the Academy of Leaders afterschool program to help her with English and homework. What began as academic support soon became something much more. At Grace Place, Adriana found a community that encouraged her to believe in herself, speak up, and dream bigger.

Over the years, Adriana grew into a confident leader and became deeply involved with Grace Place as a student, volunteer, employee, and mentor to younger students.

A Dream Takes Shape

With the encouragement of Grace Place staff and a trusted mentor, Adriana pursued her dream of becoming a doctor. She ultimately earned a donor-funded full-ride college scholarship through Grace Place—joining more than 40 Grace Place students who have received full-ride scholarships since 2013.

Paying it Forward

Today, Adriana is preparing to graduate from FIU and pursue medical school. But her connection to Grace Place has never ended. She continues to give back, most recently serving as a summer intern with the Family Food Distribution program, where she helped provide nutritious food to families in her community.

Her journey is a powerful reminder of what can happen when a young person is given the support, opportunity, and encouragement to see what is possible.

Click to learn more about how Grace Place helped Adriana pursue her dreams.



Adriana helps prepare fresh produce for local families while gaining hands-on experience in service and leadership.



This internship has helped me improve my communication, leadership, and organization skills, and working with families and volunteers has shown me the importance of serving others.

— ADRIANA

Grace Place's expansion will bring early learning opportunities to more families across Collier County. Transportation remains an important part of that commitment, helping ensure children can access high-quality programs and arrive ready to learn, regardless of the barriers their families may face.



THE NEXT CHAPTER

Opening Doors Across Collier County

More children. More families. More stories changed.

Grace Place is entering an exciting new chapter. Through a landmark partnership with the Naples Children Foundation, our proven educational model is expanding beyond Golden Gate to reach more children and families across Collier County while maintaining our unwavering commitment to the community that built us.

For more than 20 years, Grace Place has helped children build the literacy and language skills they need to enter school ready to learn. As our early learning programs expand, more children will have access to the strong foundation that helps them stay on track academically and thrive.

Together, We're Opening More Doors

Every good story deserves a sequel — and thanks to the generous support of the Naples Children Foundation (NCF), Grace Place is writing its next chapter. We're expanding our programs into more corners of Collier County, which means more students like Spencer and Emma will find their voice. More sixth graders like Adriana will find their calling. And more teenagers like Chery will stand on a stage and pitch big ideas. The story doesn't end here. It's just the beginning.

A Transformative Opportunity

Grace Place is entering a new chapter, one shaped by partnership, possibility, and the unwavering support of volunteers, donors, and friends like you. NCF recently selected Grace Place to lead a landmark expansion of early childhood education across Collier County. This decision reflects the strength of our model and the remarkable outcomes our community has achieved together for families who need it most.

"For so many children and families, access to quality education can be the difference—giving a child the strong start they need to succeed in school and in life," said Maria Jimenez-Lara, CEO of the Naples Children Foundation. "We are very excited about our partnership with Grace Place and proud to help expand these proven programs to reach more families throughout Collier County. Together, we are opening doors to opportunities that can truly change the trajectory of a child's life and strengthen families for generations to come."

Through this initiative, our nationally recognized Bright Beginnings Family Literacy program will launch at two new sites, and a brand-new early learning center will open at Naples Park Elementary.

These additions help address a countywide gap of 1,180 early learning seats for children under six, bringing high-quality learning within reach for more families than ever before.

"Grace Place has long been a tremendous champion for children and families in Collier County, and this new Early Learning Center at Naples Park Elementary is another example of their incredible commitment to our community. Together, we are creating more opportunities for our youngest learners to grow, learn, and thrive from the very beginning. This is The Power of We in action, and we are grateful to Grace Place for their continued partnership. When we work together on behalf of children, we create opportunities that can change the trajectory of their lives." — Dr. Leslie Ricciardelli, Superintendent, Collier County Public Schools.

Growth Without Compromise

NCF is investing in this expansion for three full years, ensuring that Grace Place's core work in Golden Gate remains fully supported. Your generosity continues to flow directly to the families you know and champion, even as our reach grows to serve more children across Collier County.

**Click here to learn more
about our expansion.**





Chery shares her vision with confidence.



Alensky presents an innovative idea.



Local business leaders serve as judges during the showcase.

BIG DREAMS, BIGGER PITCHES

Not long ago, some of these students were learning their first English phrases at Grace Place. Last week, they stood before local business leaders and entrepreneurs to present original business concepts they had spent weeks developing.

The students who once needed help finding the right word are now confidently sharing ideas and answering questions.

From Problem to Possibility

Over the course of several weeks, students refined their ideas into professional presentations.

The volunteer judges included local business owners, entrepreneurs, and professionals who listened to presentations, asked questions, and provided feedback. For students, it was an opportunity to share their ideas with adults who have built successful careers of their own.

Chery is a rising senior who has spent years building her English literacy skills through Grace Place. This year, she took her learning beyond the classroom, presenting ideas she helped develop herself.

For Chery and her teammate Jesus, the inspiration came from personal experience. As English language learners, they proposed an app that would help students improve pronunciation and feel more comfortable speaking a new language.

The concepts were impressive. Watching students present with poise and professionalism was even more impressive.

Building Confidence for the Future

Students learned how to organize ideas, solve problems, think critically, and communicate their vision to others. These experiences help students connect classroom learning to real-world opportunities while building the confidence needed to pursue college, careers, and new opportunities.

Today, Chery and her classmates are staying on track to graduate and preparing for what comes next. Opportunities like the Entrepreneurship Showcase help students see what is possible and prepare them to pursue it.

“

Creating and presenting our idea showed me that becoming an entrepreneur is something I can see myself doing.

— CHERY

Help students prepare for their futures. Volunteer today. Visit graceplacenaples.org/volunteer to learn more.



FROM UNCERTAIN TO READY

CHANGING THE STORY FOR SPENCER

Not every child gets to attend pre-school. Students who stayed home or lacked access to early learning programs can feel overwhelmed by a fast-paced kindergarten classroom, where children are expected to enter with foundational social and cognitive skills. Grace Place changes the story.

In our Summer Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) class, Spencer stood out. His teacher, Ms. Zaida, recognized immediately that Spencer was incredibly bright. However, having missed out on earlier classroom experiences, he lacked the social, emotional and academic skills necessary to navigate a hectic kindergarten environment.

The first week, Spencer could only identify 7 uppercase and 3 lowercase letters. He kept to himself and rarely engaged with other students.

Literacy in Every Activity

Classroom activities introduced him to learning, literacy and laughter! As the routine became familiar, Spencer came alive. He fell in love with outdoor observation time, finding his voice by speaking up about nature and his surroundings. During science experiments, his timid self was replaced with an eager stream of questions.

By the end of the summer, Spencer was no longer the quiet, anxious boy who walked through our doors. He started kindergarten as a confident student who can now proudly name all 26 letters in both uppercase and lowercase!

Why VPK at Grace Place Matters

Summer VPK acts as an intensive, specialized boot camp. It introduces vital classroom structures to children who need them most, ensuring no child starts their academic journey at a disadvantage. According to Teaching Strategies Gold observational assessments, 97% of 2025-26 school-year students at Grace Place are prepared for kindergarten.

Spencer's journey is living proof. Thanks to the support at Grace Place, he and his peers are no longer stepping into kindergarten at a disadvantage, they are stepping in ready to lead.

Click here to see how Grace Place's Summer VPK program helps children enter kindergarten with confidence, curiosity and the skills they need to thrive.



“

This last summer before kindergarten is the last time he is truly little. I am grateful that Grace Place has helped him be grown up and ready!

— SPENCER'S MOM



SAVE THE DATE • SAVE THE DATE • SAVE THE DATE

BEYOND the BOOKSHELF

Thursday, December 3

FEATURING
**MICHAEL
STRAHAN**



Tickets & Sponsorships Now Available!
Visit beyond2026.givesmart.com or click to
reserve your tickets and learn about
sponsorship opportunities.



UPCOMING EVENTS MARK YOUR CALENDAR

After-School in Action | Wednesday, October 21 | 3 PM

Wreaths of Grace | Thursday, November 19 | 5 PM

Beyond the Bookshelf | Thursday, December 3 | 5 PM

Tree Lighting | Friday, December 4 | 5:30 PM

Hearts of Grace | Thursday, February 11, 2027 | 9:30 AM

Visit graceplacenaples.org/events for event
details and opportunities to get involved.



Stay up to date about all
the exciting activities and
achievements at Grace Place by
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