

Philanthropic Four Come Together for Coronavirus Relief

The silver lining in any crisis is the teamwork that emerges for the greater good.

Since the coronavirus pandemic started, the “Philanthropic Four,” consisting of the Community Foundation of Collier County (CFCC), Naples Children & Education Foundation (NCEF), Richard M. Schulze Family Foundation and United Way of Collier and the Keys, have been collaborating to best serve residents and nonprofit organizations struggling during this unprecedented event.

As the community's philanthropic first responder, the CFCC re-activated its Collier Comes Together Fund, first established after Hurricane Irma in September 2017. The Collier Comes Together Fund for Coronavirus Relief is designed to complement the work of public health officials and expand local capacity to address the outbreak as effectively as possible.

The Fund provides immediate and long-term assistance for Coronavirus relief by giving grants to nonprofits that support those affected by COVID-19. Since the Fund was re-activated, \$785,000 in grants have been distributed from the Fund and donor-advised funds in areas of health, mental health, education, technology, legal assistance, housing and food.

NCEF, founding organization of the Naples Winter Wine Festival, has served as a critical lifeline and connector for non-profit organizations throughout Collier County during the pandemic. NCEF partners with community organizations and leaders on a range of issues such as help finding resources, guidance on decision-making, and identifying real needs in the community.

The safety net of services NCEF has developed over the past 20 years is fully deployed and the organizations it funds have mobilized quickly to meet demands that change almost daily. NCEF beneficiaries have joined forces to distribute meals for at-risk children and their families and have pivoted to virtual programming to serve children while Collier County schools are closed.

Despite the uncertainties of this difficult time, one thing is clear: philanthropy was built for such extraordinary moments. The Schulze Family Foundation understands this and has accelerated its response to our local community's needs. By collaborating with other funders, the Richard M. Schulze Family Foundation remains attentive to the gaps created by governmental responses to this crisis and is strategizing to ensure funds are effectively deployed within the communities we care about.

As part of this effort, the Foundation authorized an additional \$675,000 in Southwest Florida Emergency Response COVID-19 funding to support agencies in healthcare, food distribution and financial assistance. This was on top of approving hundreds of funding requests during a spring 2020 board meeting. Grantees, in many cases were given the option of converting programmatic requests to general operations grants to help ensure that we all emerge from this together

United Way also is proudly collaborating with other funders to facilitate where funds are most needed to aid hard-working families in their time of need. The organization assisted families in recovering from Irma and will be helping families recover from COVID-19 for years to come.

United Way has developed a web application that enables those in need to fill out applications and submit supporting materials electronically at home. Case managers can work remotely, at a safe social distance, to quickly and efficiently meet each household's needs, including rent and mortgage payments, utilities bills, groceries, food banks, medical bills and prescription needs.

The leadership and collaboration of the "Philanthropic Four" in identifying and addressing our community's critical needs combined with the community's kindness, gratitude and generosity will get us through this difficult time. We are proud to join together in this important cause.

(Eileen Connolly-Keesler is president and CEO of the Community Foundation of Collier County; Maria Jimenez-Lara is CEO of the Naples Children & Education Foundation; Mary Beth Geier is Florida Director for the Richard M. Schulze Foundation; and Steven L. Sanderson is president and CEO of the United Way of Collier and the Keys.)