



CARING... SHARING... SERVING

**25 YEARS
OF GROWTH**

THE CAFE OF LIFE INC.

FALL 2023

Marietta Bala, Board Chairwomen: 25 Years of Growth

Dear Friends,

It's been five years since our 20th Anniversary letter. How we have grown since then!

We have been blessed in our journey as we work through God's grace to help more families living with hardships. With new innovative programs, we seek to bring an end to family's hunger and poverty and are building lives through enrichment.

Outreach has added new communities where not only basic needs are met, but also the mobile library provides books and games and even computer training during visits.

Health services are provided through many partners who teach classes in health, nutrition and dental hygiene to adults and children. The Premier Mobile Medical team provides medical and wellness exams to those with no health care.

The music program has grown with adding more students and new instruments including teaching violin to six-year-olds. Other children are enriched with camp experiences that included art and swim lessons.

Six students have been successful in advancing their education through the assistance of a scholarship, choosing studies in pre-med, nursing, veterinarian, MBA consulting, and professional welding and pipefitting. Some have

completed their studies while others are ongoing. Some women are provided tutoring so as to earn a GED. Children who are behind in class are tutored to improve their skills. A financial literacy class is available for adults through a partnership.

Immigrants seeking citizenship are assisted with paperwork and tutoring for the exam.

Through partnership with like-minded organizations, we team together to provide services that reduce duplication of efforts. Collaboration improves the way we effectively work together for the good of the community.

Each day presents us with an opportunity to grow, and we have courage to rise to the challenge. The Lord will guide us continually (Isaiah 58:11). We have the ability to visualize and create new experiences.

Our dear volunteers and donors, we cannot do this life changing work without you. We believe each and every person deserves the opportunity to build a better life and you are helping us make that a reality. Thank you for your faith in us and for all that you do on behalf of families in our community. We are one, united in God's word, and together we can help bring lives to a better place.

With Blessings and Gratitude,

Marietta Bala, Chairperson
Board of Directors, Café of Life

*"Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due
when it is within your power to act."*

Proverbs 3:27



EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REPORT

Just some ten years ago the Café had essentially one program, our daily services, two very part-time employees and no facility of its own. Yet now we have numerous programs, six part-time and one full-time employee, along with two beautiful facilities. All this growth has enabled us to provide an expansive list of services to those most in need and it's ALL thanks to the wonderful support received by the community, for our policy remains that we do not accept government funding. Programs created over the past ten years include: Outreach (distribution of food and other essentials directly into very low income neighborhoods), Enhancement (sewing, cooking and gardening instruction), Music (piano, guitar, violin and saxophone lessons for children), Transportation (client transport to daily feeding site, bus passes, gas cards & bike purchases), Vision Planning (sponsoring children for



YMCA camps, Bonita Center for the Arts camps, after school programs, Blessings in a Backpack, Post High School scholarships, legal and immigration services), Health (classes in health and nutrition, dental hygiene and on-site primary medical care). In addition to the needed funding generously provided by our supporters, lots of dedicated volunteers are essential and we are **BLESSED WITH THE VERY BEST!**

ANNUAL BACK TO SCHOOL EVENT

Our annual distribution of backpacks, school supplies, uniforms, socks and underwear to 350 children was, once again, a big success. Our partners who made this possible were the West Bay community who provided funding, the Palmira community who organized the event, and the Lee County Sheriff's Office who 1) helped transport items, 2) donated 50 backpacks with school supplies and 3) brought their ice cream van.



FROM ONE VOLUNTEER TO ANOTHER

We are blessed to be able to share our talents with the wonderful staff of Cafe of Life. No matter what the job is, driving the bus, picking up food, making and serving a meal, distributing food at the pantry, children's crafts or many other jobs at the park. We are needed. We are appreciated.

Working in the office with Outreach, stocking our pantry, bagging flour, sugar, rice, beans and yes, sometimes even dog food. Answering phones, greeting clients who are in need of a meal, accepting donations. We are needed. We are appreciated.

The staff is so grateful to have us work side by side with them. They are always there to thank us with a big smile and never let us go without telling us how grateful they are for our help.

We are blessed to be a part of this amazing organization. Take a moment at the end of each day to thank God for leading us to the Cafe of Life. When I am asked why I am so involved, my answer is, if you saw what I see, heard what I hear, felt what I feel, you would understand my passion for the Cafe of Life.

Thank you to my fellow volunteers for all you do.



Signed "A Volunteer"

CLIENT STORIES

This letter comes from a mother of two wonderful boys who suffer from Autism.

This past summer, my two boys had the opportunity to experience the magic of inclusion and to advance in their artistic and speech developments. Thanks to the support provided by the Café of Life, my kids enjoyed eight weeks filled with joy, accomplishments, and a lot of smiles on their faces. Roberto, the youngest one, who has been diagnosed with selective mutism; talked for the first time to a person out of his family circle, his teacher. He performed, cooked, danced, and interacted with other kids; this is something he had never done nor experienced before.

Eduardo, the oldest one, tuned up his motor skills by performing, dancing, and cooking, he developed more concentration than usual. He also interacted with other kids; he tasted different types of food which is something he was never eager to do before.

I can't thank you enough for opening spaces for two young boys with different abilities. This opportunity has created a before and after in my entire family. It was a great experience for me to see them every morning so excited and happy about going to their summer camp. Fridays were such a special day because they used to come home so proud of themselves for every single project they completed during the week and gifted his father and me with such beautiful projects.

Thank you so much for making a difference in my children's lives and my family.

Blessings to all, **"The Delgado Family"**



Three years ago, I began to have pain on my back and waist. I thought I was having kidney issues. The medical results indicated a Fistula on my intestine. I was told I need surgery. I was in pain most of the time, I couldn't work

anymore, and I did not have any medical insurance. Without my income, our finances were so bad. I reached out to a medical program for help. After working with them for a year they said they could no longer help me and my case was closed.

I was devastated and did not have any idea where to go for help. In the meantime, my health condition deteriorated. I lost 40 pounds. The pain was

excruciating, I was not able to eat nor sleep. I was desperate and felt hopeless. The Café of Life was already working on my case. When they found out about the loss of my medical care, they immediately looked for other options for me. They reached out to Lee Health. They submitted all the required documents; they scheduled an appointment with a surgeon. Ten days later I had my surgery at no charge.

I am slowly recuperating from my 10 hours surgery. I feel like a new person. I know God has given me a second chance in life and I am very grateful to Maria, Lety, and Doctor Karla for helping me when I needed it the most. May God bless you all, at the Café of Life, for all you do for our community. I keep your organization in my prayers every single day.

Blessings to all, **"Miguel"**

Michelle waked in the office in need of help for she had been a victim of flooding from Hurricane Ian and was being provided temporary housing by FEMA until a medical issue put her in the hospital. While in the hospital, the funding for her temporary housing ended and she was homeless. Everything she owned was in a couple of suitcases and a box, and she was not in good health. We provided her food, transportation and two of nights in a hotel while we

worked a plan. Staff member Yadi pulled a near impossibility and was able to get her into St. Mathews House for a few nights during which time a room in an assisted living facility in Ft. Myers was arranged. She now resides happily there.





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SCHOLARSHIPS

In the Fall of 2021, the Café of Life started offering up to three post high school scholarships per school year to deserving low-income individuals committed to improving their education. Christian is one of

three students who has completed his program and there are currently four other students using our scholarships. The Café was able to assist Christian, who completed a Professional Welder Certification Course, with tuition, room and board, and welding helmet needed to start his new career.



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The Café of Life is a faith-based organization believing in the teaching of all great religions that one must love and assist one's neighbor in time of need. The Café is not affiliated with any particular religion or denomination. Our mission is to provide basic human needs to the very poor and hungry people of the Bonita Springs area in a manner that preserves the dignity of the client in a respectful environment and to enrich and empower people to be all that they can be.

The Café of Life, Inc. is a registered 501(C)(3) tax exempt organization. Your gifts to the Café are tax-deductable to the full extent permitted by law.

