

GIVING

How do agencies meet the growing needs in a community?

BY CAROL MCLAUGHLIN

Chief Program Officer of the Southwest Florida Community Foundation

With the ever-increasing population of Lee County, area nonprofit organizations must try to keep up with the growing demand for services. This can create obstacles for the agencies. Most of the nonprofits operate on a very tight budget, with little room for expansion.

The area's economic climate plays



a particular role in how and when an agency is able to expand. If the area's economics do not warrant expansion, nonprofits may have to curtail services or, at best, continue on the same scale of service as before.

Some agencies have managed to increase their services to accommodate the increasing demand of those in need.

Abuse Counseling & Treatment, Inc. was established in 1978 to protect, support and educate victims of domestic violence, survivors of sexual assault and their children in Lee, Hendry, Glades, Charlotte and Collier counties. In 1988, other independent shelters were moved to Charlotte and Collier, leaving Lee, Glades and Hendry supported by ACT.

ACT supports victims, survivors and their children by providing emergency shelter, a 24-hour crisis hotline, individual and group counseling, advocacy, information and referral and community education. All services are offered free of charge, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.

From providing shelter and counseling services to about 20 clients in 1978, to serving over 5,100 individuals and children last year, ACT has tried to keep up with the increasing community need.

In October, ACT expanded its non-residential counseling program to include the United Way Houses in Lehigh Acres, Estero and Bonita Springs. A counselor staffs each office for one-half day on a weekly basis. Currently, they have a waiting list at these locations. This program offers non-residential individualized counseling, based on the clients' needs, as well as group counseling in a psycho-educational setting. Counseling sessions are designed to empower the abused individuals and assist them in making healthy life choices. In this way, ACT is able to reach more clients at these locations.

Another agency that has expanded its services is the Literacy Volunteers of Lee County. With the increase in minority populations, the need for literacy classes is rising monthly. Literacy Volunteers of Lee County began in a volunteer's home in 1988. Today, it has five employees and serves 300-330 students with 95 tutors. There are 22 small groups that meet to provide adult literacy programs to either native English-speakers who never learned to read or write or to speakers of other languages who need to learn English. They have recently expanded their services to include Lehigh Acres into their service area. This expansion will help the wider community to improve employment opportunities, improve education opportunities, improve parenting skills to help children succeed in school and improve the ability for these individuals to function in society.

Lifeline Family Center, Inc. provides residential and educational programs for at-risk teens and young women in unplanned pregnancies. This agency began its operations in 1996 in a small house that housed up to eight women. Lifeline provides services without the assistance of governmental agencies. They try to provide the highest standards of life and education for their residents. They have a parenting educational curriculum to provide assistance to teenage parents and their families. Their goal is to enable the women to redirect their lives and become self-supporting within two years after the birth of their child. Lifeline has built a new facility to accommodate the growing need for transitional housing for young women in unplanned pregnancies with no place to go.

These agencies are just a few in our service area that have seen the need for their services increase. They have successfully found ways to grow their agency and strive to meet their mission. ■

PUZZLE ANSWERS

7	4	1	6	9	3	2	5	8
2	6	8	5	4	7	9	1	3
9	3	5	8	2	1	4	7	6
6	9	3	1	7	8	5	2	4
1	5	7	4	3	2	6	8	9
4	8	2	9	6	5	7	3	1
3	7	4	2	1	9	8	6	5
8	1	6	7	5	4	3	9	2
5	2	9	3	8	6	1	4	7

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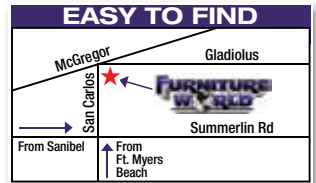
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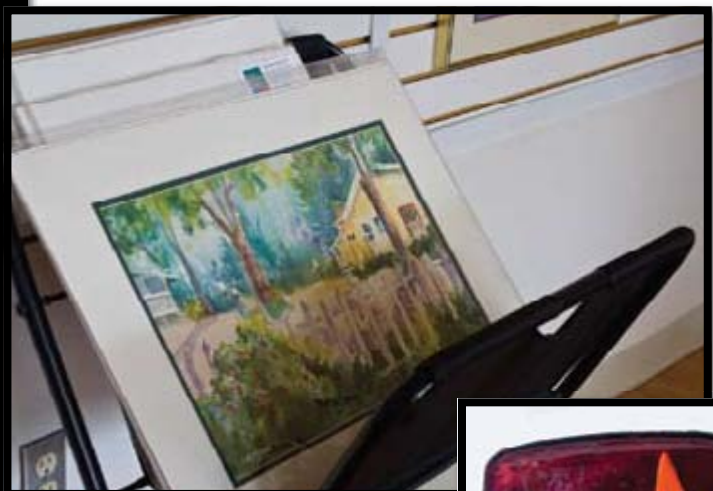
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