

# HAPPENINGS

**OUR MISSION: Creating safer, more productive lives for infants, children, young adults and families**

SUMMER 2021

## Resilience of Clients and Staff Shines During a Year Like No Other

In late March 2020, the world as we know it shut down due to the pandemic. The lockdown was a complete adjustment for staff and for the children living in our five group homes. HomeSafe Clinical Director Cindi Grazioso explains, "There was no time to pause or regroup for the staff. They had to make immediate changes to make sure everyone stayed safe, while maintaining structure in our kids' day-to-day lives."

Keeping clients and staff healthy became a top priority. Staff explained the virus to our kids in a way that would not scare them but would impart its seriousness. Our staff diligently reinforced proper handwashing, social distancing, and mask wearing, and everyone worked hard to keep our homes even more sanitized than normal. As a result of these efforts, fortunately only a few of the children contracted the virus, and protocols were strictly followed to contain further outbreaks.

Additionally, staff had to think about the safety of the kids even when they were not at work. They limited their contact with others,

including their own families, so as to not bring the virus in to the group homes. While they already considered themselves "family," staff regularly checked up on each other, and shared limited basic supplies like toilet paper and hand sanitizer. When a staff member did get sick and had to quarantine, others were selfless, stepping up to work extra shifts.

All of our kids attend Palm Beach County public schools, and remote learning was a huge adjustment. Because the majority of our kids have an individual education plan (IEP), the school district provided extra help to help them stay on track. Staff created a classroom-like environment (including assigned seats) in the house and a schedule which allowed for plenty of breaks and behavioral incentives so the kids stayed motivated to learn. For some kids, online learning was better for them and they excelled in their classes. For others, it took a staff member sitting next to them to keep them focused as they watched their teacher on the computer. Everyone was thrilled

when it was decided that our clients would return to in-person learning in early February.

Over the weekends, our staff had to figure out ways for the kids to have fun and unwind while in quarantine. Thanks to generous community support, HomeSafe rented slides, bounce houses, and laser tag. The kids also had fun with new roller skates, sidewalk chalk, and arts and crafts. Our staff creatively hosted spelling bees, cooking lessons, and TikTok dance parties. Everyone also incorporated mindfulness into their daily routine, practicing yoga and meditation to stay centered.

*Continued on back cover*

THANKS  
TO YOU,  
HOMESAFE  
IS GROWING

*See page 4*



**WHAT'S INSIDE: SAFETYNET | CLIENT SPOTLIGHT | RIBBON CUTTING | GOLF TOURNAMENT | SAVE THE DATE**

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# SafetyNet Reaches Out To Prevent Domestic Violence

Many Palm Beach County families are under stress like never before. For more than a year, a global pandemic has upended their lives with numerous challenges: preventing or coping with debilitating illness, losing a job, being an “essential” worker under hazardous conditions, or working remotely as their children try to learn at home. Left unchecked, stress can lead to child abuse and domestic violence, tearing families apart.

HomeSafe has more than 20 years of experience helping families break the generational cycle of abuse through the SafetyNet domestic violence prevention and intervention program, which provides individual and group therapy to parents and their children. Now, the program is expanding its reach into the community and establishing support groups to help families prevent violence at home by learning ways to better cope with stress through a pilot program called Project ReachOut. This project’s start-up phase has been made possible with a grant from the S.L. Gimbel Foundation Fund of the Inland

Empire Community Foundation, and HomeSafe more recently was awarded a grant from the Community Foundation for Palm Beach and Martin Counties to expand Project ReachOut.

The goal of Project ReachOut is to address stress-related issues which may lead to child abuse, domestic violence or other family dysfunctions before there is a violent incident, according to SafetyNet Program Supervisor Brian McCarey. Stephanie Vega, a former SafetyNet intern, has been hired to coordinate Project ReachOut, and is working to identify families who feel isolated or lack access to supportive group services. The groups will focus on topics such as stress and anger management; coping with anxiety; substance abuse and addiction in families; and separation, loss and grief.

“We know from our work with families in the community that the daily challenges caused by social, economic and physical issues are only increasing,” McCarey said. “So many families are already living ‘on the edge,’ and the pandemic in particular is causing additional

hardship and stress. Through Project ReachOut, we can help them learn how to handle stress so they can avoid a crisis in the home.”

Since its recent launch, Project ReachOut already has enrolled seven Spanish-speaking families and has received a great deal of interest from word of mouth alone. In partnership with the Palm Beach County Sheriff’s Office, the SafetyNet team has also identified a local mobile home park that experiences the highest incidents of domestic violence and child abuse in the county. The team has reached out to the neighborhood’s management team to discuss opening it up to all residents, and there has been a great deal of interest.

SafetyNet envisions enrolling 50 families in the program in the first year and to offer both English and Spanish-speaking options. In addition, HomeSafe is seeking additional funding so that the team has enough resources to further expand Project ReachOut, improve community outreach and hire staff to facilitate even more family sessions.

“The most powerful way we can reverse the trend of domestic violence is to **break the cycle of abuse before it has begun**,” McCarey said. “Through Project ReachOut, SafetyNet can achieve that goal.”

# Music Changes One Young Adult's Life

**Carlos has been a client at the Bernstein Independent Living Campus, also known as Pond Place, for a year.**

**On a scholarship application, Carlos shared his story...**

I was adopted at the age of 4 by my maternal aunt and uncle. I lived with them for about 10 years before being Baker Acted due to violent behavior. After being Baker Acted numerous times, I was told that my adoption was no longer a good placement. It was determined that I would live with my maternal grandmother.

After being placed there, I was OK for about six months and then my anger issues started again. I was Baker Acted about seven more times and a meeting was held. Staff recommended that I be placed in a residential facility. I was there for 9 months and 3 days. While in this facility, which was basically a medical locked-down facility, I was in an environment where I was forced to try a new way of dealing with my anger.

When I left this facility, I was placed with HomeSafe in the therapeutic residential group home program in West Palm Beach. Part of this program included therapy which helped me tremendously in dealing with my issues. Additionally, the group home really felt like home, and I was able to focus on getting better.

When I was in foster care, I was



told to do what I needed to do to get by. At HomeSafe, I had a strong support system and a group of mentors who pushed me to be my best. During the eight months at the HomeSafe residential group home, I found my passion for music. In 11th grade, I auditioned for chorus, was accepted, and music has been my life from that day forward! I even had a part in the school musical "Hair Spray."

In 2020, I turned 18 and aged out of the foster care system before the end of my senior year of high school. I was able to move into Pond Place, HomeSafe's Independent Living Program, so that I could graduate from Palm Beach Lakes High School. At Pond Place, I have a one-bedroom, one-bathroom apartment and I have been able to continue my studies, now finishing up my freshman year as a music major at Palm Beach State College. I've also received

very exciting news – in February, the voice faculty at FAU accepted me as a voice principal in the Department of Music's Bachelor of Music program.

Through all of my trials I have learned that you catch more bees with honey than you do with vinegar and that life is a funny thing. I realized that I was driving away the people that cared for me by not understanding how to express myself in a better way. As my behavior and attitude changed, thanks to the help I received, I noticed that more people were encouraging and supportive of my progress.

**I attribute my success to being surrounded by positive people and having a good support system these past few years. That, and my passion for music, have changed my life!**

# State-of-the-Art Specialized Therapeutic Group Home Opens in West Palm Beach



*Jayne Malfitano, president of the Harcourt M. & Virginia W. Sylvester Foundation, officially opens the Sylvester Family West Campus. Pictured left to right are: Jeff & Aggie Stoops, Rex Kirby, David Layman, HomeSafe CEO Matt Ladika, Jayne Malfitano, Laura Sylvester, Larry Gonnello, Steve Bernstein, Abby Bernstein-Henderson & Tarra Pressey*

Excitement was in the air on April 6 when HomeSafe and 50 of its supporters and friends celebrated the opening of its brand-new campus in West Palm Beach, the Sylvester Family West Campus. This innovative residential campus will provide a welcoming and safe environment for young victims of child abuse to heal from their trauma and find confidence in their future.

“This is truly a transformative time for the agency,” said Matthew Ladika, CEO of HomeSafe. “We are one of only five agencies in the state of Florida that provides a unique level of care in specialized therapeutic group homes for severely traumatized child abuse

victims. This new campus, along with future construction projects, will help us continue our mission of creating safer, more productive lives for infants, children, young adults and families.”

The Sylvester Family West Campus consists of two buildings, the Residential Cottage and the Enrichment Center, totaling 15,356 square feet. The Residential Cottage offers 12 suites where each child will have their own private room and bathroom. The Cottage also has a large kitchen, living and dining areas, therapy wing and gaming area to create a comfortable home environment. The new Enrichment Center offers music



*Matt Ladika with Nancy and Gene Beard*

and workout rooms, a multimedia lab, educational wing and has a strategically designed layout so that staff will have even better supervision of the children. The 3.2 acre site also includes a nature

trail, basketball court and gazebo which will provide for many outdoor activities.

The residential cottage will be home to 12 girls who are moving from HomeSafe's campus off Haverhill Road which was sold back in 2018. Through the sale of the Haverhill campus and because of philanthropic support from the community, it was possible to build this campus. Only through generous philanthropy will HomeSafe continue to serve vulnerable children in Palm Beach County who need us most. The Harcourt M. & Virginia W. Sylvester Foundation, for whom the campus is named, has generously supported HomeSafe and its mission for nearly 30 years.

Jayne Malfitano, president of the Harcourt M. and Virginia W. Sylvester Foundation, shares, "We have supported HomeSafe because they have made a tremendous impact improving children's lives. Now, more than ever, these children need help."

The ribbon-cutting event also included the presentation of a \$125,808 donation from West Palm Beach-based Verdex Construction, the general contractor for the project.

"As a past president and current member of the HomeSafe Board of Directors, I wanted to do everything we could to let the agency direct its budget to helping these children and not on construction costs," said Rex Kirby, president of Verdex.



*Nicko McBrain, Iron Maiden drummer, tunes a new drum set in the music room.*

In addition to this new campus, HomeSafe has plans to build an additional new campus in West Palm Beach, and much-needed renovations to the group homes on its Lake Worth and Boca Raton campuses. **The excitement continues!**



*Above left: Verdex Construction, the general contractor for the new facility, donated back \$125,808 in saved construction costs. Above right: Clients now have the privacy of their own bedroom and bathroom. Bottom left and right: The new residential cottage includes a spacious living room, open kitchen, and dining room.*

Event photos by Tracey Benson Photography

# Players get Back on Course to Support HomeSafe!

On June 7, play resumed for HomeSafe's annual Charity Golf Tournament after its cancellation last year due to the pandemic. Sixty-four players, from beginners to skilled, enjoyed a beautiful morning of golf at the exclusive Royal Palm Yacht & Country Club in Boca Raton.

Thanks to the leadership of tournament chairman Bill Burke, president of Paradise Bank, and tournament ambassador Cathy Zumkehr, the event raised more than \$62,000 for programs that provide hope and healing for our clients.



*Joe & Kimberly Scaggs, Fern Schmidt & Jim MacCutcheon*

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*Teri Kennedy was the ladies division winner for both longest drive and closest to the pin*



*Chris & Jayne Malfitano with Matt Ladika*



*Chris Williams – winner of the longest drive for the men's division*



*Steve Bernstein, Matt Ladika, Dr. Craig Moskowitz & Mike Hahn*



*Winning ladies team – Teri Kennedy, Jayne Malfitano, Michelle Bernardo, Jori Farrell*



*Paradise Bank team – Dave Englert, Bill Burke, Dennis Gavin & Ward Kellogg*



*Winning mixed team – Paul Crissy, Andrew Eisnitz, Andy Trunk & Dawn Kraus*



*Danielle Rosse & Rochelle LeCavalier warm up before play*



*Verdex team - Lisa King, Rex Kirby, Richard Tambone & Frank Guerra*



*Tournament Chairman Bill Burke and HomeSafe CEO Matt Ladika*



*Winning men's team from BV Group – Ed Ventrice, Josh Blaine, Billy Marino & Bill Hough on tee*

*Event photos by Tracey Benson Photography*

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## COVID Update

*continued from front cover*

The biggest struggle for our clients was not being able to have personal visits with their families, something they looked forward to each week. Thankfully, Zoom meetings allowed for the kids to eat a meal with their family, open gifts that were mailed, or just visit one on one. Our therapists made sure our kids never felt alone because they knew that the interaction with their family is vital to their healing. This also held true for those clients who were in the process of being adopted. Zoom allowed for that process to continue and adoptions to be finalized. Thankfully in April, in-person visits were able to resume for all the group homes.

A year and a half later, we are grateful for vaccines and to be getting to the other side of the pandemic. We thank our donors who supported our COVID-19 Relief Fund which helped HomeSafe purchase PPE, activities for the kids, and other unexpected items. And finally, we are eternally grateful to our staff for working tirelessly through it all – continuing therapy sessions, maintaining daily structure and routine, and helping our kids navigate the stress of quarantine. Through it all, the HomeSafe family put the kids first and did what we always do: help our kids heal and find confidence in their future.



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HomeSafe

Guardian Society recognizes individuals, foundations and corporations who have made lifetime gifts of \$50,000 or more.

**HomeSafe celebrates our newest Guardian Society members!**

### The Frederick A. DeLuca Foundation Rebecca and Roberto Vargas

To view the list of Guardian Society members or to learn more about HomeSafe's major and legacy giving societies, please visit [HelpHomeSafe.org](http://HelpHomeSafe.org).

For more information about the Guardian Society, please contact Laura Barker, Director of Individual Philanthropy, at (561) 383-9829 or [LauraBarker@helphomesafe.org](mailto:LauraBarker@helphomesafe.org)



**SAVE THE DATE**  
JANUARY 29, 2022

