

ARTICLE BY LINDA S. HOPKINS

THE UNSEEN

LOCAL CHARITABLE ORGANIZATION, PALMETTO
DUNES CARES, UNVEILS REAL NEEDS OF AREA
CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Would it surprise you to know that there are children living on Hilton Head Island who go to bed hungry? Would you be shocked to learn that many infants born in the Lowcountry die because they lack safe sleeping accommodations? Would you be concerned about children living in houses on the verge of collapse? What about children and teens who are still struggling socially and emotionally after the pandemic-induced isolation?

These are just a few issues that came to light as Palmetto Dunes Cares grants chair, Lisa Mullins, and her committee reviewed grant applications from area nonprofits and began contemplating how to distribute charitable funds collected over the past year. Of the 31 all very worthy organizations that applied, 20 were awarded grants from Palmetto Dunes Cares, addressing a broad range of needs that affect children and youth including food security, safe sleep, infant care, home repair, mental health services, and more.

"Our goal is to make an impact in the lives of our youth and to protect our environment," said Teresa Carroll, communications and marketing chair for Palmetto Dunes Cares. "As it turns out, 100 percent of our grants this year, totaling \$61,350, went to organizations that serve young people under the age of 18. Even the environmental agencies who received grant money are serving youth through their programs," she explained.

OUT OF SIGHT

Carroll, a retired educator, is deeply touched by the extent of need that exists here. "I spent part of my career in inner-city schools. What a lot of people don't realize, especially on the island, is how many situations are at the level that you would expect to find in large urban areas," she said. "Hunger is vast."

According to Sandy Gillis, executive director of The Hilton Head Island Deep Well Project, the high cost of housing is part of the problem. "People are having to spend so much of their income just to make rent, then they are coming up short in some other areas," she said. "These are people who are part of our workforce and people we depend on."

One of the biggest areas of need is food, an issue that is exacerbated in the summertime. According to Gillis, over 50 percent of children attending Hilton Head Island schools qualify for free and reduced-price breakfast and lunch programs. "In



Palmetto Dunes Cares recently donated 100% of their 2023 grants to organizations that serve young people under the age of 18. Some of these generous grants went to The Children's Center and the Outside Foundation, pictured here.





the summer when they're out of school, that's two meals a day that now have to come out of the family's budget. It's a time when more children are susceptible to either being hungry or eating unhealthy foods," she explained. "It's why a grant from Palmetto Dunes Cares is so important to our pantry."

Backpack Buddies, the signature program of The Hunger Coalition of the Lowcountry, also a Palmetto Dunes Cares grant recipient, is another important food distribution program, helping to close the gap by providing healthy snacks to schools to send home with children from low-income families.

Bluffton Self Help and Second Helpings are additional agencies distributing food to families in need that will benefit from Palmetto Dunes Cares grants.

"No one organization can do it all. But when we can build a network of help, as my granny used to say, 'that's when you're cooking with gas,'" Gillis said.

But food insecurity isn't the only issue affecting area families and children, and Palmetto Dunes Cares is pitching in to help alleviate a host of other problems.

"A lot of nonprofits are coming up with new initiatives that are addressing the changing needs of our youth—mental health, for one, which is huge, in particular for the teenage years," said Claudia Gant, Palmetto Dunes Cares vice chair and grants committee member. Volunteers in Medicine is launching a pilot program to broaden the scope of mental health support for kids in classrooms, and Palmetto Dunes Cares is on board to help. "This is one of the few times I have ever seen mental health being addressed. Children really suffered a lot through the COVID lockdowns," Gant said.

Palmetto Dunes Cares also zeroed in on the Child Abuse Prevention Association's Safe Sleep program, which provides free portable cribs along with education for parents and caretakers of newborns to spare them the potential heartbreak of Sudden Infant Syndrome (SIDS) or Sudden Unexpected Infant Death (SUID).

Along similar lines, they are supporting The Children's Center's Bright Beginnings infant program, which helps educate parents on what to do and what to look for at various stages of development from the time a child is born.

Other grantees include Hopeful Horizons, an organization that helps victims of domestic abuse secure emergency shelter and safe housing; Lowcountry Legal Volunteers, which offers legal protection and helps mitigate custody battles; Family Promise of Beaufort County, which provides transitional housing for homeless families with children; and Hilton Head Regional Habitat for Humanity, whose home repair program helps make necessary improvements for health and safety.

Getting kids outside is another important focus that addresses both the environmental and youth sides of Palmetto Dunes Cares' mission. The Outside Foundation is just one of the organizations providing opportunities for kids to learn about and interact with the natural environment.

"It's not always obvious who needs help," said Pamela Caywood, Palmetto Dunes Cares committee member. "A person in a kayak in a bathing suit and a T-shirt may be a child who doesn't have a stable home environment, and now they have someone showing them positive attention for a day and possibly sparking a new interest. Sometimes it is just these basic ideas that can have an important impact."

"We are neighbors helping neighbors. For those of us blessed to live here, it's more than just a resort and a vacation place. It's a community, and we have to help each other," Gant said.

If you feel a little tug on your heart and would like to join these efforts to shore up area nonprofits who are providing services to families and children, please consider a donation through Palmetto Dunes Cares. They will make sure it is put to good use! 📌

Palmetto Dunes Cares is a charitable organization whose mission is to support local youth and enhance the natural environment in the greater Hilton Head Island area through grants and scholarships. It is organized by residents of the greater Palmetto Dunes community, which includes Leamington and Shelter Cove but does not exclude others who might wish to get involved. To learn more about their programs and committees or to make a donation, please visit pdpoa.org/community/pd-cares or contact them at info@palmettodunescares.org.

COMPLETE LIST OF PALMETTO DUNES CARES 2023 GRANT RECIPIENTS

1. Arts Center of Coastal Carolina's Adaptive Arts Program
2. Bluffton Self Help
3. Child Abuse Prevention Association (CAPA)
4. Coastal Discovery Museum
5. Family Promise of Beaufort County
6. Friends of the Savannah Coastal Wildlife Refuges
7. Heroes on Horseback
8. Hilton Head Audubon Society
9. Hilton Head Regional Habitat for Humanity
10. Hilton Head Symphony Orchestra
11. Hopeful Horizons
12. Lowcountry Legal Volunteers
13. Neighborhood Outreach Connection
14. Sea Turtle Patrol HHI
15. Second Helpings, Inc.
16. The Children's Center, Inc.
17. The Hilton Head Island Deep Well Project
18. The Hunger Coalition of the Lowcountry DBA Backpack Buddies of Hilton Head Island
19. The Outside Foundation
20. Volunteers in Medicine Hilton Head Island