

February 2026



# THE MCS INSIDER

Manatee Children's Services' Monthly Newsletter



## *Our History and Mission*

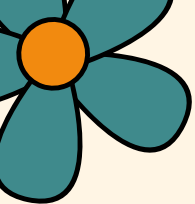
**Preventing child abuse, restoring healing, and strengthening all children and their families through advocacy, treatment, and shelter.**

Manatee Children's Services was founded in 1977 by Carol Chamberlain: a librarian, teacher, and social worker with a passion for child advocacy. Through her work in social services, Carol learned that Manatee County had a dire need for shelter to house abused children removed from their homes. She rallied a group of citizens to make the shelter a reality and, to this day, MCS continues to operate as Manatee County's only emergency shelter for child victims of abuse and the county's only Child Advocacy Center.

We provide a full spectrum of programs serving over 12,000 children and families annually. We offer programs in treatment, prevention, intervention, and residential services. Such programs include an emergency shelter, long-term group homes, mental health services, parenting education and training, forensic medical and specialized child victim interview services, support services for relative caregivers, teen pregnancy prevention, and children's personal safety. Visit our [website](#) to learn more.

### In this edition:

- **January recap**
- **How to give back this month: February events**
- **New board member spotlight**
- **Community spotlight**
- **Program and staff success stories**



# THANK YOU FOR SUPPORTING "GROOVIN' FOR GOOD!"

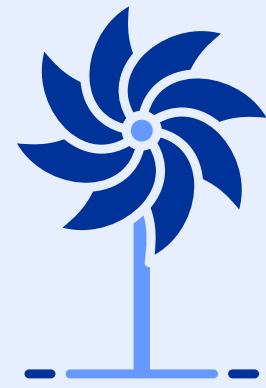


Thank you to our incredible vendors, dedicated planning committee, and more than 200 guests for making Groovin' for Good an unforgettable night! Because of you, we raised nearly \$100,000 to support our lifesaving child abuse prevention programs.

Stay tuned for our 2027 gala Save the Date announcement!



# OUR MISSION IN ACTION



## MCS AWARDED \$108,000 GRANT FROM IMPACT100 SRQ

We're so happy to have been selected as one of Impact100 SRQ's eight grant recipients for 2026! Impact100 SRQ's generous funding will support a much needed Volunteer Coordinator to facilitate therapy dog visits and ensure the children we serve will never have to face their scariest moments alone. Thank you to all of our supporters and voters who have made this incredible opportunity a reality.



## CRIME VICTIMS FUND STABILIZATION ACT PASSES THE HOUSE

Great news for children and families! The Crime Victims Fund Stabilization Act (H.R. 909) has passed the House, helping protect critical funding for Child Advocacy Centers and the victims they serve. This legislation helps ensure lifesaving services remain available for children who have experienced abuse and trauma. We are grateful to Congressman Vern Buchanan for his support and to everyone who spoke up to help make this happen.

## MCS RECEIVES \$3,844.80 FROM TARGET GIVING CIRCLE VOTES

We're excited to share that Target guests cast 124,992 votes for Manatee Children's Services through the Target Giving Circle from October to December 2025, resulting in a grant of \$3,844.80! Most importantly, guests voted to support our mission and the impact we make in the community. Thank you to all who participated!



Thank you for spreading the love.

# January Joy



Volunteer Coreen Ward led fun cooking and nutrition classes for our residential youth that quickly became a favorite. She taught the kids about healthy fats, the impact of sugar and processed foods, and how nutrition affects both the body and mind. Even our pickiest eaters were engaged, and the kids have already asked for her to return in February.

Our youth also helped design a custom American flag with the Liberti brothers of Heroic Flags for the Groovin' for Good Gala silent auction. Heroic Flags began as a teen's mission to give back and has since raised over \$30,000 for veterans, foster youth, and others in need. The flag was a standout at the gala and a proud moment for the kids who helped create it.

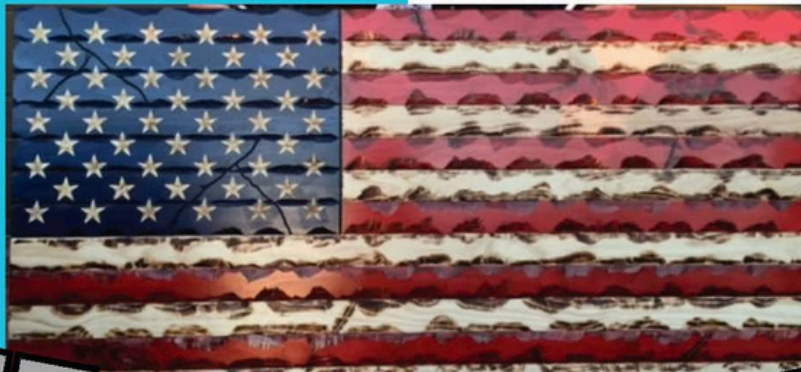


Heroic Flags were a highlight at our gala, and they sold fast! Now, you have another chance to bring one home while supporting children and families in Manatee County.

MCS has partnered again with Heroic Flags, a local, family-owned business that hand-carves each flag to honor service, sacrifice, and community. 15% of every purchase made by selecting MCS at checkout goes directly to support our child abuse prevention programs.

Don't miss out! These one-of-a-kind flags are more than art: they're a symbol of hope and impact. Order yours today at <https://www.heroicflags.com/>.

# FUNDRAISER



**15%**  
TO MCS



**GET A BEAUTIFUL  
HAND CRAFTED  
FLAG!**

**PROMO CODE: MCS**

**SUPPORT HEROIC FLAGS MISSION  
TO HONOR THOSE WHO SERVE**

**[WWW.HEROICFLAGS.COM](http://WWW.HEROICFLAGS.COM)**

# VALENTINE'S WEEK WITH A PURPOSE

Skip the Valentine's Day rush and celebrate early for a great cause. Join us at Comida on February 10th and 11th for a special Giveback Event where 15% of all proceeds will benefit MCS.

Enjoy a delicious meal, beat the crowds, and make a meaningful difference. Your night out can help create safer, brighter futures for children and families affected by abuse.



**Comida  
& Manatee Children  
Services**

## Little Smiles Matter

15% of all proceeds are  
donated to manatee  
Children Services

**Come help us  
support a great  
cause  
February 9<sup>th</sup> & 10<sup>th</sup>**

- ✓ Award winning steaks
- ✓ Beer wine & Cocktails
- ✓ Support a great cause
- ✓ Make a difference in our community

Comidasrq.com  
(941)-324-5985

📍 open 4-10pm

1534 State St. Sarasota FL



# DECLUTTER FOR A CAUSE



FUNDRAISER FOR MANATEE CHILDREN'S SERVICES

## COLLECT ITEMS

Gather clothing, shoes, linens, towels, bags, and textiles.

## SCHEDULE

Bag items and schedule your FREE porch pickup at [JustPorchIt.com/MCS](https://JustPorchIt.com/MCS)

## WAIT FOR PICKUP

Place bags on your porch on pickup day



*Select Manatee Children's Services when booking.*

Each scheduled pickup generates donations that support MCS intervention, shelter, treatment, and prevention programs for children and families affected by or at risk of child abuse.



# COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT



For more than three decades, Gecko's Hospitality Group has been a beloved staple in our local dining scene, known not only for fresh, locally sourced food and a welcoming atmosphere, but also for a deep commitment to community impact.

Chief Operating Officer Fiona Farrell's story is woven into Gecko's history. She began her journey with Gecko's 15 years ago as an Assistant Manager. Fiona's passion for hospitality and Gecko's brought her to her current position as COO. Her growth mirrors the company's culture: one that values people, relationships, and long-term commitment.

Community support isn't an afterthought at Gecko's: it's part of their mission. Fiona stated they believe strong communities are built on the well-being and growth of our community's youth and the planet, which is why they actively seek partnerships with organizations that align with these values.

MCS is grateful to be one of these partners: Gecko's generously donated their time and funds to catering and serving food for relative caregivers at our "Grandparents as Parents" holiday programs. Gecko's will continue this partnerships by providing catered meals for monthly GAP caregiver support groups.

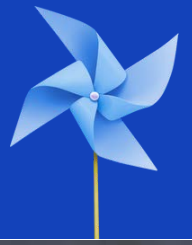
"My connection to MCS stems from a deeply personal commitment to the safety and empowerment of children," Fiona shared. "Their mission to provide support and critical services to children in crisis resonates with me, and I admire their dedication to helping families rebuild and thrive. Supporting them is not just a charitable act: it's an investment in our community's future."

Commitment to community is reflected in how Fiona and her team operate Gecko's. She shared that one of the best ways people can support both their restaurant and the causes they champion is simply by dining at their locations, sharing positive experiences, and participating in their charity events.

"Every meal enjoyed at our restaurant contributes to our initiatives," she said. "Together, we can make a lasting impact and foster a spirit of generosity that uplifts us all."



# NEW BOARD MEMBER SPOTLIGHT



Welcome to the MCS Board of Directors, Capt. Mark Morie! Mark brings nearly three decades of law enforcement experience and a deep commitment to child protection to his role on the Board. He has served with the Manatee County Sheriff's Office for almost 27 years in a variety of roles, with his most meaningful work taking place in the Child Protection Investigations Division.



Since joining the division in 2018, Mark has worked closely with professionals dedicated to investigating crimes against children and ensuring their safety. As a Lieutenant supervising the Crimes Against Children Unit, he collaborated extensively with the MCS Child Protection Team, witnessing firsthand the lifechanging impact of trauma-informed forensic interviews, medical evaluations, and coordinated multidisciplinary responses.

Mark has seen how children who feel safe, heard, and supported are able to disclose abuse — often for the first time — and how those disclosures are essential to both accountability and healing. From his perspective in law enforcement, the work of MCS is invaluable in protecting children, supporting families, and ensuring justice. His decision to serve on the Board reflects a shared belief in our mission to prevent child abuse, protect victims, and help children reclaim their futures. Mark is honored to support an agency whose compassion, expertise, and dedication give vulnerable children a voice when they need it most.

Happy Birthday



Colleen Duffy  
Susan Ford  
Kelli Geary  
Kimberly Griffin

Nadine Kilduff  
Jocina Newsome  
James Smith

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Click on links below to view our website and follow us on social media:

