

May 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:

- **New board member spotlight**
- **Child Abuse Prevention Month recaps**
- **Upcoming events**
- **Community spotlight**
- **Program success stories**

Welcome to our team

MCS Board of Directors



We're so excited to welcome Tony Fitzgerald to the MCS Board of Directors.

Tony is a Sarasota-based mortgage broker operating as The Mortgage Jedi through 1st Response Mortgage. Prior to lending, he spent 27 years in fire service, including marine rescue diving, offshore powerboat safety work, and Fire Academy instruction. This experience shaped how he views the world and why MCS's mission resonated so deeply with him. As Tony explains, responding to those calls created a lasting reflex: "You start seeing the world through the eyes of the child in the corner who cannot speak for themselves yet."

Beyond his service career, Tony is a John Maxwell Certified Coach, speaker, and host of the Fire Up Your Life podcast, where he works with individuals navigating post-traumatic growth and leadership. He is also the founder of the Human Advantage Institute, training business professionals on practical, responsible use of AI, and is currently authoring a book on post-traumatic growth.

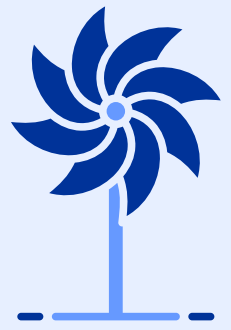
Tony was drawn to MCS because of our quiet, essential role in protecting children whose stories must remain private: "MCS does the work that keeps those kids safe when the adults in their life cannot."

He understands that MCS is often unseen by design and believes that makes telling the organization's story even more important: "My role on this board is to bring awareness through story, without ever putting a child in the spotlight."

Tony lives in Lakewood Ranch with his wife Valentina and their children. As a father himself, he recognizes that every child deserves safety, stability, and care, regardless of circumstance: "There are children in our community who need exactly the same thing my own kids need to feel safe. MCS steps into that gap every single day."

Please join us in welcoming Tony!

MCS HONORED ACROSS MANATEE FOR CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION MONTH



During Child Abuse Prevention Month, MCS was honored with official proclamations from local governments across our community, recognizing the importance of prevention, protection, and healing for children and families. Each proclamation declared April as Child Abuse Prevention Month and affirmed our community's shared commitment to protecting children and strengthening families.

We are grateful to our local leaders for helping elevate awareness and for standing alongside us in this important work. These recognitions also celebrate the dedication of our incredible teams who bring prevention to life every day. Pictured here are our prevention team at the City of Holmes Beach, our clinical team at the City of Palmetto, our Child Protection Team at Manatee County Government, and our parenting team at the City of Bradenton.

Thank you to our elected officials, community partners, and supporters for honoring this mission. Special thank you to our staff, whose compassion and expertise make a lasting difference year-round, not just in April.

Child abuse prevention is a shared responsibility, and there are many ways to get involved—by learning the signs, supporting prevention efforts, volunteering, or making a gift to help ensure children and families receive the care and protection they need. Together, we can continue building a safer future for children in our community.



APRIL: A MONTH OF ACTION FOR CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION



Throughout Child Abuse Prevention Month, our community of supporters came together in powerful ways to advance prevention, healing, and protection for children and families. We are deeply grateful to our donors, partners, and advocates whose generosity and engagement made each moment of impact possible.

We were honored to participate in Lauren's Walk in Our Shoes for Sexual Assault Awareness and Centerstone's "No Voice Unheard," standing alongside survivors and advocates to raise awareness and affirm the importance of safe, supportive communities.

The month continued with our Zumba Dance for Child Abuse Prevention at Crunch Fitness, where community members turned movement into mission, raising nearly \$600 to support MCS prevention and intervention programs.

April concluded with our highly successful Pizza with a Purpose fundraiser, which raised nearly \$9,000 in support of Manatee Children's Services. This effort demonstrated how accessible, community-driven giving opportunities can translate directly into meaningful support for children and families.

These events reflect just a portion of the year-round work made possible through donor investment. While April brings focused attention to prevention, the needs of children—and the impact of your support—extend far beyond a single month.

We invite you to stay connected and engaged throughout the year by exploring and subscribing to the MCS Events Calendar, where you'll find upcoming donor-supported initiatives, fundraising events, and opportunities to invest in prevention and healing: <https://www.manateechildreancesservices.com/events/>

Your continued involvement—whether through event participation, philanthropic support, or advocacy—helps ensure that MCS can respond when children need safety, stability, and healing most. Thank you for being an essential partner in this work.

Check out our recap photos on the next page!





Thank you to everyone who supported Manatee Children's Services during the recent 24-Hour Giving Challenge. Because of your generosity and enthusiasm, our community came together to make a powerful impact in just one day.

During the challenge, MCS raised \$6,668 in direct donations, which was further amplified by an additional \$6,518 in prizes and matching funds, nearly doubling the impact of each gift. Together, these funds will directly support programs that prevent child abuse, strengthen families, and provide safety and healing for children across our community.

These incredible numbers represent more than financial support: they represent a shared commitment to child abuse prevention. Giving challenges demonstrate how collective generosity, especially when paired with matching opportunities, can quickly turn into meaningful resources for children and families who need them most.

For donors who want to extend their impact beyond a single day, opportunities to leverage matching funds are available year-round. A one-time or monthly gift of \$5 to \$500 may be eligible for matching funds through the Louis and Gloria Flanzer Philanthropic Trust, potentially doubling your impact to MCS! Matching eligibility is limited to first-time donors and restrictions apply, so we encourage supporters to review the Trust's terms and conditions. To explore this opportunity, visit

👉 <https://donate.flanzertrust.org/charities/>

and select Manatee Children's Services to make a qualifying gift through the Flanzer Philanthropic Trust.

Thank you for continuing to invest in the safety, stability, and healing of children in our community. Your generosity, whether during a giving challenge or throughout the year, helps ensure MCS can respond when children and families need support most.



CHARITY NIGHT

Bradentucky Bombers vs. SoFlo Ridas Roller Derby

Saturday, May 9th, 5:00-8:00 pm

Ellenton Ice and Sports Complex

5309 29th Street East Ellenton, FL 34222

RAFFLE PRIZES

**\$10 ADMISSION:
SCAN FOR TICKETS:**

**ENTER CODE:
MANATEE2026**



**\$5 OF EACH TICKET SALE PURCHASED THROUGH
CODE "MANATEE2026" WILL BENEFIT MCS CHILD
ABUSE VICTIMS AND PREVENTION PROGRAMS**



MCS is proud to be a featured charity beneficiary of the KW Suncoast RED Day Community Impact Festival, a community-wide day of service hosted by Keller Williams Suncoast. This special event brings together local nonprofits, businesses, and community members to make a tangible difference for families across Manatee County.

RED Day, which stands for Renew, Energize, and Donate, is an annual tradition where Keller Williams associates step away from their daily work to serve the communities they call home. This year, KW Suncoast is opening the event to the broader community, creating an opportunity for supporters to come together in support of multiple causes.

Attendees are invited to support MCS by helping provide essential resources for the children and families we serve. Requested items for Manatee Children’s Services include:

- School supplies such as backpacks, notebooks, pens, and pencils.
- Non-perishable snack items such as granola bars, chips, and crackers.
- Gift cards and/or monetary donations to support at-risk children and families.

The festival will also include drives for pet supplies, summer food , a women’s resource center donations, blood, and on-site dog and kitten rescue partnerships. As a thank-you to donors, a food truck will be available for attendees, sponsored by community partners.

Donations are being accepted now through May 14, and those interested in contributing early or coordinating a drop-off are encouraged to connect with the event organizers.

We are grateful to KW Suncoast and their sponsors for including MCS in this powerful day of service. We invite our supporters to join us, spread the word, and help make this day of impact count.



*Click here for
Facebook event*



YOU'RE INVITED

JUNE 13TH | 7:30 PM

PREMIER SPORTS CAMPUS
AT LAKEWOOD RANCH



30% OF EVERY TICKET GOES BACK TO MCS

Join us June 13 at 7:30 PM for a Sarasota Paradise match at Premier Sports Campus and turn your night out into something meaningful.

30% of every ticket goes directly back to MCS.

Want to sponsor an MCS family or a foster child for tickets to an experience they'll never forget? Contact kristap@mcsfl.com.

Grab your crew, bring the energy, and let's fill the stands for a cause.

COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT

Goodwill
MANASOTA



For more than 40 years, Goodwill Manasota has served the Manasota region by transforming community donations into opportunities for individuals who are underserved, underrepresented, or disadvantaged. Guided by their mission, “Changing Lives Through the Power of Work,” Goodwill Manasota provides job training, career coaching, employment placement, and access to six Community Resource Centers open to the public at no cost. Nearly 90 cents of every dollar generated is reinvested directly into these mission programs. Last year alone, they served 7,527 individuals and helped 1,296 people secure employment, while also supporting environmental sustainability through reuse and responsible recycling.

Goodwill Manasota’s commitment to opportunity is what inspired their partnership with MCS. As Melissa Carman, Vice President of Engagement, shares, “Manatee Children’s Services is there for the youth that need them most. It is such an impactful organization and we are grateful to be able to assist in any way we can.” She notes that many children arrive at MCS with very little, and that basic necessities should never be an added challenge. “One of those challenges should not have to be what they might wear or how they might be able to secure something as simple as a backpack or shoes.”

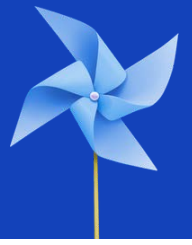
Through this partnership, Goodwill Manasota provides gift card donations, allowing children to access essential items from their locations with dignity and choice. Beyond immediate needs, the partnership extends to workforce support. “We are also able to provide employment support, helping connect those served by Manatee Children’s Services to our full range of workforce programs—ultimately changing lives through the power of work,” Carman explains.

Goodwill Manasota emphasizes that employment is a cornerstone of long-term stability. “Stable employment is one of the most direct pathways to family stability, and Manatee Children’s Services supports individuals and families working toward that goal. Our partnership reflects a shared commitment to strengthening that connection.”

Community support makes this work possible. Every donation or purchase at Goodwill Manasota directly fuels their mission; the average donation generates more than three hours of job training. To learn more or get involved, visit experiencegoodwill.org. We are grateful for Goodwill Manasota’s partnership and their continued commitment to strengthening families and changing lives—one opportunity at a time.



MCS PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT: PREVENTION



As Child Abuse Prevention Month comes to a close, we are reminded that prevention is not just about awareness; it's about early support, trusted relationships, and helping children heal before trauma shapes their future. "Laura's" story is a powerful example of how prevention happens every day at Manatee Children's Services.



Laura had witnessed domestic violence between her mother and stepfather and experienced physical, emotional, and verbal abuse herself. When she first began working with TRUTH Advocate Janie Garza, the effects of that trauma were visible. Laura struggled to make eye contact, communicate with her peers, or form friendships at school.

Janie began with small, intentional steps: teaching Laura basic peer communication skills and allowing her to practice them slowly and safely. With time and consistent support, Laura began to gain confidence and connect with others. Janie also helped link Laura and her family to therapy, addressing the deeper wounds caused by abuse and supporting their path toward healing together. Through advocacy and support, the family was able to move away from Laura's stepfather and into a safe, independent home. Over time, Laura learned to socialize, make eye contact, and build meaningful friendships, showing what is possible when children receive early, compassionate intervention.

Laura's journey reflects the heart of child abuse prevention: when we listen early, act with care, and surround children with support, we can change the course of their lives. This is the impact your support makes possible every day.



Emma Andrews
Justin Burney
Chrislande Charles
Jennifer Dyer

Britney Guera
Stacy Kabel
Kalicia Rozier
Julie Smith
Chasity Vannatter

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

