



EARLY LEARNING
COALITION
OF SOUTHWEST FLORIDA

News from The Early Learning Coalition SWFL

Fall, 2022
Here's what's happening at the ELC

[Visit our Website](#)

Tropical Troubles *Ian Comes Calling*

In September, Category 4 [Hurricane Ian](#) made a direct hit on our area. It was fifth most powerful storm to hit the U.S. High winds, pelting rain and an 8-12 foot storm surge changed the landscape in many communities. ELC offices closed the week following the storm while child care needs were assessed.



Hurricane Ian

103 preschools remained closed a week after the storm. Most have re-opened.



Martha Kebhart, Director at **The Children's Learning Center**, Fort Myers talks to members of the U.S. Dept. of Health & Human Services/Administration for Children & Families who were assessing damage and need.



Creative Coast Preschool on Pine Island. Pine Island was hard hit by Hurricane Ian. Many structures were leveled by the storm.



ABC Learning Center, Fort Myers suffered damage to their outdoor playground.

The Aftermath *Needs Assessed, Help Offered*

In the wake of the storm, our hard-hit community came together.



Extra Live United handkerchiefs made for a cool blanket!

The Lee County Tax Collector's office staff donated 48 beautiful handmade blankets and 16 disaster blankets to the Early Learning Coalition of Southwest Florida to help preschool providers in our area who sustained damage from Hurricane Ian. (Image provided by the United Way of Lee, Hendry, and Glades)



Volunteers representing the Association of Early Learning Coalitions, The University of Florida, and the United Way unload supplies to be distributed as they clean up and restock individual child care centers affected by Hurricane Ian.



Volunteers from the Association of Early Learning Coalitions, The Lastinger Center at the University of Florida and Kaplan Early Learning Company help with storm clean-up at Babyland Family Child Care Home (FCCH) in Fort Myers.

Information Central

Helping Families

Hurricane Ian displaced many families or damaged preschool centers. What to do? ELC staff visited a hurricane shelter in North Fort Myers to talk with folks about finding affordable child care services. It's just one of the many ways we reach out to help families find the resources they want. If you need assistance finding affordable care, please fill out the [form located on our website](#).



New Board Member

Welcome!

We welcome Aaron Stitt, Community Development Administrator at the Florida Department of Children and Families to our Board.

Would you like to become a member of our Board? We are looking for applicants to fill these vacant seats:

- Private Sector Business Members - Both for-profit and nonprofit. Fill out the [application here](#).
- Governor's Appointee (3 vacant seats). Receive more [information here](#).



Aaron Stitt

Paying it Forward

Museum Offers Discounted Rates

In 2022, the [Golisano Children's Museum of Naples](#) (CMON) launched new, discounted tickets for low-income families to make sure all children have access to the space dedicated for hands-on learning. CMON is on pace to see over 5,000 guests utilize the EBT discounted ticket by the end of the year.

From the cafe to the market, and even an igloo to experience the seasons, the museum

offers hours of fun and exploration for children. Jon Foerster, the chief executive officer of the museum, says they are refocusing on making sure anyone can walk through their doors no matter their income level, and that's why admission is only \$2 if you have an EBT card.

The museum also offers discounted rates at \$9 a person to military and first responders. The normal cost for residents of Lee or Collier counties is \$15 for adults and \$13 for children, but if you have a library card in either county, you can check out a pass and that will get you four tickets to the museum for free.



CHILDREN'S MUSEUM OF NAPLES

DISCOUNTED ADMISSION



Available for **EBT, WIC, & SNAP** holders

\$2 Admission Information

CMON is proud to offer admission discounts to EBT, WIC, and SNAP cardholders as part of the Museums for All initiative. Program participants will receive admission for just \$2 per person when a valid card with matching ID is presented.

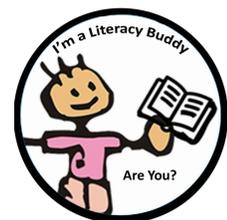
There is no limit on usage of the discount, so families may return to the museum and utilize the \$2 admission per person as often as they like!

In Partnership with:

 cmon.org  239-514-0084  15080 Livingston Rd. Naples, FL 34109

Literacy Buddy Program 2022 - 2023 Season Underway

Hurricane Ian pushed back the start of the Literacy Buddy Program, but it's up and running now, thanks to our dedicated volunteers. This is a good way for an individual or a group to instill a love of learning in a young child. The book you send, and the letter you write is



appreciated! Click the link above to find out more about the program.



Literacy Buddy sign-up volunteer, Teri Goldberg helps set up a display at Pelican Preserve during their Volunteer Fair in early November.



Signing up for the 2022 - 2023 Literacy Buddy season at the Pelican Preserve Volunteer Fair. Thank you!

Available Now *ELC 2021 - 2022 Annual Report*

The 2021 - 2022 Early Learning Coalition SWFL **Annual Report** is now available!

This report outlines all the Coalition's activities, programs, and Preschool Provider professional development opportunities for the past fiscal year. Take a moment to read it on-line, or to request a copy, leave a [message here](#).



Looking Forward *Team Effort*



Two months after the historic SWFL hurricane and one month prior to Christmas, what is happening at the Early Learning Coalition of SWFL? The same thing that was happening before Hurricane Ian and during a global pandemic, and for over twenty years before that. Our Coalition's job is to ensure that our community has access to high quality early learning programs. We receive major funding from the Florida Department of Education/Division of Early Learning, to help families find Voluntary Prekindergarten programs and full day childcare. We provide subsidies for qualifying families to assist with the high cost of childcare to enable families to work and/or go to school. We stand behind early

learning providers who contract with us to serve children and families with preschool and childcare.

Why is the Coalition charged with this work? Without early learning and childcare, families could not go to work and could not improve their lives through education and training. And without early learning experiences that build a foundation for later learning, children would go to school without many of the basics needed for educational success. Families must work to support themselves. And children need to be offered the best possible start in life to be successful in school and prepared for the workforce. It is not a stretch to say that early learning impacts all lives and all communities.

Who is behind the scenes at the Coalition as a not-for-profit organization supporting our community? A hard-working staff has managed to overcome each challenge with persistence and determination. Whatever the situation, this group understands the importance of the work here. In support of this great team is a board of directors providing leadership to govern this multi-million-dollar organization. They too have had to overcome

challenges of their own, all the while, maintaining a voluntary commitment to this agency. I am grateful for the staff and board members who join forces to support the community.

In the coming months, we will say farewell to two long serving board members, Marshall Bower, and Jason Himschoot. Both men have served us well. We will miss them and their contributions to our work. The public-private design of our board makes it possible for private sector businesspeople to join our board to support early learning in our community. Are you interested in getting involved with the Coalition? See the Coalition website for information at www.elcofswfl.org

Susan Block, CEO
Early Learning Coalition SWFL

[Early Learning Coalition of Southwest Florida](http://www.elcofswfl.org)
(239) 935-6100 | ELCofSWFL.org

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