

# Life in Naples

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*The sun rises on a New Year*





Cheerful encouragement at every turn for the students at Pathways Early Education Center in Immokalee. *The Scholars*

## Preparing Children for the Path Ahead

by Karen Coney Coplin



Naples, Florida has been my home for exactly one half of my life; and yet, it was only last year that I was introduced directly to the Pathways Early Education Center of Immokalee. Making up for lost time, I can tell you that, visually, the Center is impressive and inviting; colorful and creative. My inner child saw this on a guest tour as a welcoming and wonderful place.

Perhaps you'll, one day soon, see for yourself, too!

This remarkable organization celebrated its 60<sup>th</sup> year serving the largely agricultural community of Immokalee, located in the northeastern most part of Collier County. Since 1964, Pathways Early Education Center has provided high quality early learning and child care resources to help Immokalee's children enter kindergarten eager, prepared and ready to learn. Given these deep roots, this organization truly is a local pioneer of championing the power and promise of early education.

Its mission of caring for the most vulnerable populations in an under resourced community is based on science: a child's well being, present and future, is best served when kids start quality childhood programs at a young age. Consistently, research shows that this is a smart investment. A developing child's mind is fertile ground to open up the potential to a world of opportunity rather than limitation.

Pathways' programs help make dreams become realities because our youngest children are sponges ready to absorb, grow and learn. Without early learning opportunities, research has shown time and again, programs begun later in life are far more costly to administer; and are less likely to achieve the same levels of measurable success as with small children.

We all win when our community's children thrive.

Currently, babies as young as one month old and children up to 5 years of age are part of the current enrollees at Pathways Early Education Center. Tied to this is another important component: proper nourishment for every meal of the day,

including an after school snack. And the very youngest are served by being in a safe, supportive place while their family members work.

There are many ways to help Pathways continue its mission and expand service to the Immokalee community.

Coming up this month is a signature fundraising event, Star Light, Star Bright, to be held on January 15, 2025, at the Royal Poinciana Golf Club. Individual tickets are \$450; a table of 8 (if available) is \$3,000. To inquire about tickets, please contact Jacqueline Ferrigno Brown at [jacqueline@pathwaysearlyeducation.org](mailto:jacqueline@pathwaysearlyeducation.org) or call her at [239.261.1774](tel:239.261.1774).

This event is a gathering of friends new and old, great food and drink with the backdrop of a classically beautiful Naples setting. Featured this year is the Brighter Future Photo Project in collaboration with Brian Tietz, a local photographer portraying today's Pathways students as tomorrow's future career leaders.

This Project is just one tangible and important reminder of the important "life's work" for Pathways teachers, students, staff, supporters, and everyone else believing in a brighter future for our communities.

If you are not able to attend the Star Light, Star Bright event, please consider otherwise supporting the Center. There are many giving opportunities including an ongoing \$2.25M campaign.

**The goal: to serve more children in Immokalee.** This includes a generous matching pledge of \$750,000 in place from the George & Cindy Rusu Family Foundation for all new/increased gifts.

Please call or visit the website: [pathwaysearlyeducation.org](http://pathwaysearlyeducation.org) for other opportunities to help Pathways continue to innovate, serve and nurture their students; the campaign website is: [pathwaysearlyeducation.org/brighterfuture](http://pathwaysearlyeducation.org/brighterfuture) through all of this, the future of Pathways is bright indeed!

*Please contact Karen at [NaplesKCC@gmail.com](mailto:NaplesKCC@gmail.com) with suggestions for future article coverage, which is often centered on charitable organizations in Naples and the programs/services these groups offer.*

*Additionally, for more vignettes about life in Naples, give her a follow on Instagram @Naplesbythenumbers.*