



Your passion.  
Your Collier.

# When Disaster Strikes...

...the Community Foundation of Collier County is here

Submitted by the



COMMUNITY FOUNDATION  
OF COLLIER COUNTY  
*FOR GOOD. FOREVER.*



**Evidence of destruction and piles of debris-littered streets were common sights across Collier County after Hurricane Irma struck in 2017**

**W**ho knows what tomorrow brings? A Category 5 hurricane, a new drug epidemic or health pandemic, or a mass casualty event?

The community got lucky with Hurricane Irma in 2017—if you want to call it that. Two weeks before it made landfall on Sept. 10, Community Foundation President/CEO Eileen Connolly-Keesler and Collier County Emergency Services and Management Director Dan Summers had brought several partners together over two days in August to discuss how local leaders should prepare philanthropically for a natural or human-made disaster. They were meeting with Jeff Dion, executive director of the nonprofit National Center for Victims of Crime, to establish a formal process for accepting and administering emergency and victims' assistance funds in the event of a mass shooting event to avoid fraud. The meeting was spurred by disturbing national events, with the 2016 Pulse nightclub attack in Orlando the main impetus.

"During the meeting, we discussed, 'If not shootings, what if the disaster is a hurricane?' About two weeks later, Irma was heading our way, and Collier Comes Together was launched the day before," Connolly-Keesler recalled. "It was intuitive, serendipity, whatever you want to call it."

Being at-the-ready to respond quickly to Irma's widespread disruption was a valuable lesson learned. "We don't know what the next crisis will be," said Connolly-Keesler. "But when it comes

up, you can't move fast enough. And we know they are going to continue to crop up—they won't just stop."

This is something Connolly-Keesler knows all too well. The Community Foundation has established four emergency Collier Comes Together relief funds totaling more than \$3.9 million and distributed to local nonprofits in the past four years:

- **2017 - Hurricane Irma: \$2,202,113**
- **2018 - Red Tide: \$82,500**
- **2020 - Golden Gate Wildfires: \$20,200**
- **2020 - Coronavirus Relief: \$1,631,708 (\$1,221,691 distributed to date)**

Page 2 picture- everglades blvd active fire jpg. Caption: "We wouldn't be where we are today with Irma and wildfire recovery without the support the Community Foundation has provided... I get goosebumps thinking about what the Community Foundation does to provide post-disaster recovery so people can get their lives back to some level of normalcy." - Dan Summers, Collier County Emergency Services and Management Director

The Community Foundation is the community's philanthropic first responder. It's the community convener leading the charge to make a plan for the future through collaboration.

There is no doubt about the fact that the Community Foundation is the compass for charitable giving. It works closely with more than

200 local nonprofits and analyzes local statistics, demographic trends, and gaps in social services, compiled in its annual "Vital Signs" report. The Foundation is the go-to resource for new residents who want to set up a charitable fund. They go to the Foundation to learn about key issues in the community and the nonprofits working in the areas that donors are most passionate about. "We see part of our job as educators. Our team has been working closely with our donors to make them aware of our local nonprofit's needs for the past few years," Connolly-Keesler said.

Adria Starkey, president of FineMark Bank's Collier County office, said she turns to the Community Foundation when a major crisis strikes Collier County to find out where the deepest pockets of unmet needs are. "Part of our core mission is to serve the community where we have the pleasure to do business, and the Community Foundation makes it easier for us to do it an efficient and effective way. And that's important," Starkey said. "When there's a major event, I will call the Foundation and ask, 'How can we make a difference?'"

Though we don't have a crystal ball to see the next crisis, the community needs to be prepared to strike. That's why the Foundation leads the charge to create a \$2.5 million Community Crisis and Disaster Relief Fund as part of its new Your passion. Your Collier. capital campaign. The fund will be unrestricted, so the Community





**"We wouldn't be where we are today with Irma and wildfire recovery without the support the Community Foundation has provided... I get goosebumps thinking about what the Community Foundation does to provide post-disaster recovery so people can get their lives back to some level of normalcy."**

**—Dan Summers, Collier County Emergency Services and Management Director**

Foundation board can act at a moment's notice to sudden disasters that lead to mass job losses, shuttered businesses, medical-system strains, or mass casualties.

As of October, \$93,000 had been pledged toward this emergency fund to meet a sudden surge in local needs. The Community Foundation seeks donor support to close the financial gap this year as it reaches out to donors to make the Your passion. Your Collier. capital campaign a success that will benefit Collier County today and far into the future.

Why wouldn't an affluent coastal community like Collier County—quite vulnerable to hurricanes—plan ahead? Hurricane Irma was a 400-mile-wide behemoth—the largest hurricane to hit Florida—when it made landfall at Marco Island, packing 120-mile-per-hour winds and flooding Everglades City with a 10-foot storm surge. "We can anticipate that we will get another hurricane, but we can't anticipate when it's coming," Connolly-Keesler observed. "What we really need is money set aside so we can react to it on Day 1 and not Day 30."

### Coming Together Before a Crisis

When there's a mass casualty violence event, the outpouring of financial support from well-wishers isn't always funneled directly to where it should go. That is why the foundation brought together Collier County Emergency Services and Management Director Dan Summers and Dion, of the National Center for Victims of Crime, in 2017. They drafted a resolution that establishes the Community Foundation as the depository for monies to administer the funds wisely. The foundation will provide a link on its website to the National Compassion Fund, overseen by the National Center for Victims of Crime, so that victims can apply for compensation. The Collier Board of County Commissioners approved the resolution, which Collier County Sheriff Kevin Rambosk endorsed last summer.

When it comes to large victims' assistance funds, the main issue is potential fraud—a distressing problem when impassioned donors want their dollars to go directly to community resources and victims. However, private citizens often set up GoFundMe fundraisers, Summers said, or city and county governments wind up juggling direly needed relief funds. "Not always, but on many occasions, they have been riddled with fraud, or not managed or dispersed well," he said. "One way or another, they have gotten off the rails." A methodical protocol established after 9/11 has been used several times since. "We have the framework in place to provide assistance in a very professional manner with proper administration, management, and transparency," Summers said. "I hope it never, ever, ever happens, but if it does, we've learned from other communities how best to manage these funds."

No two disasters are alike—as the pandemic illustrates—and the four Collier Comes Together emergency relief funds have come on the heels of natural disasters.

The Collier Comes Together Fund was established in close collaboration with local government, emergency management, law enforcement, and the United Way of Collier and the Keys.

These funds serve two purposes: assisting Collier residents and nonprofits and assuring donors their support reaches its intended cause. Because the Community Foundation is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization, donations are tax-deductible. The Community Foundation does not charge an administration fee for handling emergency relief funds; 100% of donations collected are distributed within Collier County.

After activating a Collier Comes Together emergency relief fund, the Foundation's board makes generous donations to it. The Foundation pulls together unrestricted donor funds and dollars from private foundations that it administers. It publicizes the Collier Comes Together fund and processes and distributes private donations that flow in from throughout Collier County, the state, and the nation.

Page 3 picture- food and water distribution jpg. Caption: In a crisis, certain needs consistently surface: basic needs such as food, water, housing, and utility assistance. "Between Irma and COVID, these disasters have shown us the need to be prepared. This community is vulnerable, and we need to raise dollars to set aside a disaster fund for whatever it is." — Eileen Connolly-Keesler, Community Foundation of Collier County President and CEO

"Between Irma and COVID, these disasters have shown us the need to be prepared. This community is vulnerable, and we need to raise dollars to set aside a disaster fund for whatever it is. It could be something in the environment or another health issue, or who knows?" she said.

"Without having a reserve set aside, we have to start fundraising from ground zero again."

A hurricane is a localized disaster that might only impact Southwest Florida; often, generous donors inside and outside the community provide assistance. The COVID-19 pandemic, however, hit every community across the globe. The pool of donations to help the local Salvation Army, local food pantries, the local healthcare system, and the residents who were suddenly out of work—those were mostly local dollars. Out-of-town donors and foundations were forced to invest in their own communities—so Collier County was on its own to create a safety net.

Post-Irma and through the pandemic, "the Community Foundation was there as soon as the crisis hit. The Community Foundation was right there when we needed them," said Legal Aid Managing Attorney Carol A. O'Callaghan, who is helping low-income residents maneuver legal housing and consumer issues. Most importantly, the Foundation "has kept people from homelessness when it was the most critical," O'Callaghan said.

In the financial world, Starkey noted that businesses and families are counseled to save money for emergency savings to carry them through a crisis. "No doubt a year ago, in March, every business was wondering, 'How are we going to ride this out?' We really all had to be prepared," she said. "That's exactly what the Community Foundation is trying to do—to have foresight so they can be a safety net for the community."

Donor typically setup a field-of-interest donor-advised fund at the Community Foundation, but in recent years, Connolly-Keesler has been urging philanthropists to donate funds without constraints—known as unrestricted funds that can be used for any need that arises. Establishing

a pot of unrestricted funds is the precise goal of the Your passion. Your Collier. Community Crisis and Disaster Relief Fund. "COVID taught us we have to," Connolly-Keesler said.

### Community Convener

Like advocating for a county-wide mass casualty victims' assistance protocol, the Community Foundation is constantly in boots-on-the-ground discussions with county leaders and agencies, elected officials, and other foundation directors to determine what's happening and what needs to happen.

In good times, the Community Foundation is working on, financially supporting, or drumming up more support for big-picture projects, such as workforce housing, a county-wide strategic plan for arts and culture, and a regional climate change initiative. Of course, it's on top of community needs in bad times, too. Here are six examples:

■ The Community Foundation has partnered with the Naples Children & Education Foundation (NCEF) and the Richard M. Schulze Family Foundation to create a specially designed application to serve the community's most vulnerable populations. The free Collier CARES (Community Application for Resources and Emergency Services) is a bilingual mobile and web app ([colliercares.org](http://colliercares.org)) designed to connect residents in need with the essential resources and services available in Collier County.

■ The Community Foundation can react more rapidly than bureaucracy. Last March, before Gov. Ron DeSantis or local governments even declared a state of emergency due to the pandemic, Summers had requested personal protection equipment kits to be sent to Immokalee farmworkers. He couldn't do it fast enough because of formal purchasing procedures. After placing a call to the Community Foundation, their team placed the order within minutes and had the kits delivered within a few days to the Coalition of Immokalee Workers for laborers who travel in close confines by bus to farm fields.

■ At the start of the pandemic, the Community Foundation collaborated with NCEF, RMSFF, and the United Way of Collier and the Keys to identify priority needs, streamline assistance, and reduce duplication. They became known locally as the Philanthropic Four and met weekly through the end of the year to continue meeting the community's greatest needs.

■ As part of the Collier Comes Together Coronavirus Relief Fund, the Foundation established a matching challenge grant earmarked specifically for NCH Healthcare System to purchase protective equipment for its frontline medical personnel sanitizing robots.

■ The Community Foundation worked with the county to distribute federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act funds. Collier County received \$63 million in federal money for a wide range of targeted uses. The foundation distributed \$5 million to food pantries. An additional \$5 million of Collier County funds for food will be distributed by the Foundation between March and December 2021.

■ More than \$1.6 million was raised, and over \$1.2 million has been distributed so far from the Collier Comes Together Fund for Coronavirus

**In a crisis, certain needs consistently surface: basic needs such as food, water, housing, and utility assistance. "Between Irma and COVID, these disasters have shown us the need to be prepared. This community is vulnerable, and we need to raise dollars to set aside a disaster fund for whatever it is."**

—Eileen Connolly-Keesler, Community Foundation of Collier County President and CEO



Relief through 146 grants to 66 organizations, including to government. Collier County Public Schools received a total of \$85,850 for items such as air cards for students who didn't have internet access when learning moved online and gift cards for the McKinney-Vento homeless student program. The overriding majority of grants eased hunger and food insecurity. Many grants enabled teachers and nonprofits to bridge the educational and communication divide caused by the shift to all-virtual instruction and programming.

In the face of unexpected and sudden financial challenges due to the shutdown, uncertainty, fear, and safety protocols that the pandemic hurled at them, many nonprofits struggled to keep their lights on and doors open as they worked feverishly to pivot and devise new ways to support their clients. As the Philanthropic Four, the Community Foundation, NCEF, the Schulze Foundation, and the United Way of Collier and the Keys collaborated in an unprecedented move. Foundations typically fund specific programs, but as it became obvious that nonprofits' resources were drying up, the grantors switched gears to provide financial assistance for operational costs.

The Schulze Family Foundation moved up its scheduled board meeting to immediately distribute \$3 million in grants. NCEF, which had record-breaking attendance and proceeds from its 2020 Naples Winter Wine Festival, issued \$20 million to 43 organizations.

### Philanthropic First Responder

In a crisis, certain needs consistently surface: basic needs such as food, water, housing, and utility assistance. During a community crisis, the Community Foundation buys gift cards for nonprofits to distribute to their clients for food, household supplies and staples, and medicine. Starkey's staff at FineMark worked overtime to process gift cards for the Community Foundation after the pandemic's onset. "The Community Foundation had the money, and we had the gift cards," Starkey said.

Hurricane Irma, the red tide crisis of 2018, and the pandemic led to serious financial hardship when businesses suddenly closed, and thousands grappled with lost wages and jobs. In addition to basic needs, the Community Foundation seeks innovative ways to keep the community moving forward. For instance, during the pandemic, it supported out-of-work fishing guides by giving a \$7,500 grant to the Captains for Clean Water's initiative to pay guides to clear debris out of local waterways. It was a win-win for the environment and the guides.

And then there are other needs that can't be foreseen.

The pandemic shed light on the technological gap because organizations suddenly needed

to connect with their clients virtually. Several organizations, such as the STARability Foundation, which works with physically and intellectually disabled residents, received grants to create and deliver online programs, while others received technology assistance, including Friends of Foster Children Forever and Collier Senior Resources.

Given the long haul of economic hardship, evictions have become a significant issue in the pandemic. There have been 634 eviction notices filed in Collier County since April 2. The Community Foundation provided a grant to the Legal Aid Service of Collier County to hire a staff attorney to handle the mounting eviction and debt-collection cases. From August 2020 to the end of January, Legal Aid experienced a 265 percent increase in eviction matters over the same period the year before. The caseload includes a significant increase for the disabled and seniors, who "don't have the same capacity to move as other clients do," said O'Callaghan, managing attorney. Seniors and the disabled may rely on family and friends to help them move on short notice, while a non-disabled renter "typically has much more ability to pack and move out quickly," she noted. Nonetheless, they all face legal challenges, including paying back overdue rent.

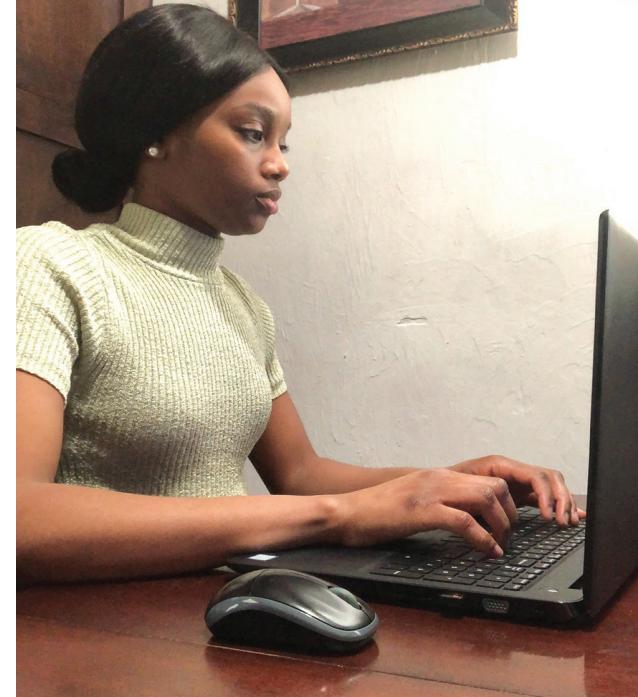
For Hurricane Irma, the Community Foundation partnered with several organizations, including the Schulze Family Foundation and Collier Building Industry Association, to build the \$2.2 million Collier Comes Together relief fund. Money was distributed to 27 nonprofits, aiding 4,146 hurricane victims. Because of its size, Irma wrought havoc in just about every corner of the community.

The United Way of Collier and the Keys

received a \$50,000 Collier Comes Together grant for its 211 hotline and Volunteer Collier. "We coordinated information and referral needs with the county and all first responders, managing over 7,000 calls in the first week alone," United Way of Collier and the Keys President/CEO Steve Sanderson reported. "Resources from Collier Comes Together were vital to help us keep up with the demand."

Summers has worked in emergency management for 32 years, which includes two decades in North Carolina. He said he is often awestruck at how the Community Foundation has led the way following local disasters. "We wouldn't be where we are today with Irma and wildfire recovery without the support the Community Foundation has provided. There are certain things local government does well – debris removal, the restoration power, and working with FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) on lifeboat services. For so many people, what we do, and FEMA does, is just a band-aid," Summers said. "I get goosebumps thinking about what the Community Foundation does to provide post-disaster recovery so people can get their lives back to some level of normalcy."

The Community Foundation's ability to act quickly to disperse funds to help those in need return to that normalcy isn't luck. Connolly-Keesler explained, "During COVID-19, the CFCC team has made a concerted effort to educate and connect donors to this community's needs. As a result, we've seen many of our donors increase their giving for nonprofit operations. We know our community is passionate about supporting the causes they care about and recognize the need to be prepared for whatever the future may bring."



**CFCC grants supplement the support of Legal Aid Service of Collier County attorneys and staff, including paralegals, Marie Sannon and Vanessa Acevedo, who handle the mounting eviction and debt-collection cases caused by the pandemic.**



## Your passion. Your Collier. **is Funding Targeted Community Needs**

A few years ago, the Richard M. Schulze Family Foundation undertook an initiative with the Community Foundation and 30 other community partners to listen and respond to our community's needs. Together, we completed a comprehensive Community Needs and Assets Assessment, which paints a clear picture of our residents' obstacles and gaps in support services.

As a direct result, the Community Foundation has launched the \$15.5 million **Your passion. Your Collier.** campaign to directly tackle six identified fields of significant concern: mental health and substance abuse, housing and hunger, education and employment, seniors and veterans, environment and accessibility, and crisis and disaster relief.

"Studies are pointless unless we follow them up with action," said Community Foundation President/CEO Eileen Connolly-Keesler.

However, she emphasizes that the Community Foundation has no intention of tackling these issues alone. "We are responding to what the community, government, and nonprofits have said they value and care about. We're just the conduit to make sure the projects happen the way they're supposed to happen." The goal is to have the donations or pledges wrapped up by the end of the year. "Nothing can move forward without the community's support," she said. "It's a community effort."

### Follow your passion!

Contact us for more information

Eileen Connolly-Keesler  
President/CEO  
ekeesler@cfcollier.org

Julie Howe Van Tongeren  
VP of Development  
jvantongeren@cfcollier.org

Call us at 239.649.5000 or visit  
[YourPassionYourCollier.org](http://YourPassionYourCollier.org) to learn more.

## The Community Foundation: 35 Years of Connecting Passion With Purpose

The Community Foundation of Collier County is THE catalyst for change for nonprofit collaboration. For the past 35 years, we have been connecting people to causes that matter, growing their charitable legacies, and funding nonprofit organizations to improve the quality of life in Collier County, distributing over \$35 million in grants and scholarships by the end of our 2020 fiscal year.

We hold more than \$250 million in assets and have distributed over \$200 million in grants to nonprofit organizations and community programs since 1985. Find out how the Community Foundation assesses the pulse of the social services in Collier County each year with its "Vital Signs" report, provides a comprehensive nonprofit directory, and convenes passionate financial advisors, donors and much more at [cfcollier.org](http://cfcollier.org).



COMMUNITY FOUNDATION  
OF COLLIER COUNTY  
*FOR GOOD. FOREVER.*

1110 Pine Ridge Road, Ste. 200 | Naples, FL 34108  
239-649-5000 | [cfcollier.org](http://cfcollier.org)