

October 2023

THE MCS INSIDER

The official newsletter of
Manatee Children's Services, Inc.



Our History and Mission

"To advocate for and provide the resources, skills, and shelter to alleviate abuse through prevention and intervention for all children and their families."

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](http://www.MCSFL.com) to learn more.

In this edition:

- **Hispanic Heritage Month**
- **New MCS Board Member**
- **MCS in the Community**
- **Happy Memories in Residential**
- **Community Spotlight of the Month**
- **October Program Spotlight**



Hispanic Heritage Month, from September 15th to October 15th, plays a very important role here at MCS as almost 40% of our clients are Hispanic/Latinx. Our staff shared their thoughts on what Hispanic Heritage Month means to them and the work they do.

“When helping Spanish speaking families, I am able to connect and relate to them through our culture. It is special to me to be able to connect and be culturally competent with Spanish speaking families. Understanding the culture allows me to meet them where they are, and include their cultural beliefs, values, and norms into treatment.”

-MCS Clinical Therapist, Johanna Cedillo

“Hispanic Heritage Month gives us the opportunity to celebrate this wonderful population. It also allows us to acknowledge the fact that so many are hurting. We have the opportunity to work with many Hispanic people who have suffered trauma, whether it’s current, in the past, or generational. We offer Spanish-speaking therapists and a Spanish-speaking caregiver support groups who understand the challenges and celebrate their culture with our Spanish-speaking clients.”

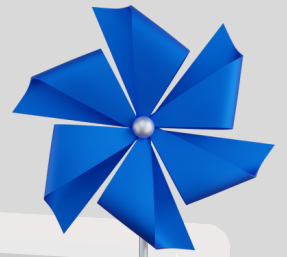
-MCS Clinical Director, Celeste Martens



“Hispanic Heritage Month reminds me of how grateful I am to be a part of such a beautiful culture and how blessed I am to be bilingual. Being able to help Spanish-speaking children and families is very rewarding, and it makes such a difference for that family or child who is still navigating how to communicate with others. You can immediately see their eyes light up, and it brings them a sense of comfort knowing someone will be able to communicate exactly how they feel. I’m appreciative every day for being Hispanic and am excited to celebrate it this month.”

-CPT Case Coordinator, Stephanie Solorzano

Welcome to our team



Kelli Martinez

MCS Board Member



Attorney Kelli Martinez was born and raised in Bradenton. In 2006, she graduated from Lakewood Ranch High School and went on to receive a Bachelor of Science in Psychology from the University of Central Florida. Prior to attending law school, she spent five years working as a litigation paralegal representing large healthcare enterprises. She earned her Juris Doctor from Stetson University College of Law in 2019.

During her time at Stetson, Kelli worked as an intern at both the 12th Judicial Circuit State Attorney's Office, and the Department of Children and Families. She also spent time advocating for abused, abandoned, and neglected children as a Guardian ad Litem.

Following law school, Kelli worked as a litigation attorney at one of the Country's largest injury law firms. Kelli thereafter began her own firm, dedicated to personalized service, aggressive representation, and quality results. In an effort to grow and continue that mission, Kelli joined the law firm of Legler, Murphy & Battaglia, LLP in 2022.

"Being a teacher and guardian ad litem gave me a passion for child advocacy," Kelli said. "I am attracted to MCS because it not only brings awareness and safety through its prevention and intervention programs, but it implements viable, long-term solutions through treatment and shelter services."

Welcome, Kelli! We know you will be a great asset to our Board of Directors and are so happy to have you as part of our team!



MCS IN THE COMMUNITY



Thank you to everyone who volunteered at our Lakewood Ranch Music on Main charity night. Although we were rained out, we had a great time. We will also have a BONUS rescheduled rain date for March 1, 2024, so be sure to mark your calendars!

The month of September also brought donation drives from our valued community partners. The Gulf Coast Flames Travel Ice Hockey Club collected snacks for our clinical "cottage," where we provide trauma therapy to child victims of abuse. Our young clients sometimes come in very hungry as their appointment times are often immediately before or after school. Having snacks on hand helps us keep their tummies from growling and maintain their focus on healing. The Manatee Retired Educator's Association also organized a donation drive of their own with essential items such as school supplies, bedsheets, toiletries, and socks for the foster children in our residential program. We truly appreciate your help!



MANATEE CHILDREN'S SERVICES' RESIDENTIAL PROGRAM

home sweet home

Foster children in our residential program recently got some VIP treatment from our clinical staff. Our staff had so much fun celebrating birthdays, practicing hair braiding techniques, and passing down a cake recipe after one child shared that she didn't have family recipes of her own. Thank you to our clinical team members for taking the time to make these kiddos feel extra special!



Thank you to Mark Morie, Lt. at the Manatee County Sheriff's Office CSO Crimes Against Kids Unit, for your generous donation of new furniture to Our Place Group Home. This was a much-needed upgrade as our previous furniture had lots of wear and tear. We appreciate all you do for us, Lt. Morie!



COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT OF THE MONTH



EARLY LEARNING COALITION OF MANATEE COUNTY

For 14 years, the Early Learning Coalition (ELC) of Manatee County has been a valued MCS community partner. The ELC is dedicated to promoting and supporting early childhood education and care in Manatee County. The ELC seeks to ensure that all children in Manatee County have access to high-quality early learning experiences that set them on a path to success in school and beyond. These experiences include school readiness programs, VPK, childcare resource/referral services, professional development and training, and community partnerships.

“Our shared commitment (with MCS) to empowering young children and families to reach their full potential has created a partnership that continues to benefit many in our community,” said ELC Chief Executive Officer, Darrell King. “At ELC of Manatee, we believe that every child deserves a strong foundation for lifelong success. Manatee Children’s Services shares this belief, and together, we have been able to make a meaningful impact on the lives of countless children and families through our collaborative Grandparents as Parents program.”

The ELC provides subsidized childcare for our agency’s kinship caregiver (GAP) program, as well as daycare and preschool services for a select group of relative caregivers in our program.

“The GAP program serves as a heartwarming inspiration that fuels our unwavering commitment to supporting Manatee Children’s Services,” King said. “Witnessing grandparents courageously step into the role of primary caregivers for their grandchildren, often due to unexpected circumstances, is a testament to the resilience of families and the power of love. Their dedication inspires us to ensure that every child has access to a safe, nurturing environment where they can thrive, regardless of their family’s unique circumstances. It’s a reminder of the profound impact we can have when we come together to support and empower these remarkable families on their journey to brighter futures.”



OCTOBER PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT



Because of community supporters like you, our programs are able to continue breaking the cycle of child abuse for victims and families.

In recognition of Hispanic Heritage Month, we would like to recognize our Spanish-Speaking Non-Offending Caregivers (NOC) program and its coordinator, Fidelina Alvarez.

Fidelina was the agency's first fully Spanish-speaking therapist. Prior to her arrival at MCS, we would have to either use a translator for Spanish-speaking parents or refer them to other providers who also used translators to work with Spanish-speaking parents. We were meeting the needs of our English-speaking clients quite well, but not being able to fully serve Spanish-speaking clients was a huge hole for child trauma survivors who speak Spanish or whose parents speak Spanish.

Fidelina leads Spanish-speaking "Non-Offending Caregiver" (NOC) group therapy sessions, centered around evidence-based curriculum from the Washington Coalition of Sexual Abuse, provide therapeutic education and support for nonoffending caregivers and caregivers of children who have been sexually abused. Numerous clients have expressed their gratitude for these support groups, including one caregiver who gave Fidelina a homemade cake in appreciation of her lifechanging work. We are so grateful for our ability to serve this important population and our staff who work so hard to meet the needs of our Spanish-speaking families.

Manatee Children's Services, Inc.
A Child Advocacy Center
1227 9th Avenue West
Bradenton, FL 34205
(941) 345-1200
info@mcsfl.com

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

