



# CHILDREN FIRST

HELPING CHILDREN AND FAMILIES ACHIEVE THEIR POTENTIAL SINCE 1961



*Children from the Purple Crayon class at the Dr. Elaine Marieb Early Learning Center sing a song in Spanish, demonstrating their language arts abilities. They address the crowd with confidence and enthusiasm. There are 192 well-prepared Children First students like these who will be starting Kindergarten this Fall!*

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## CELEBRATION OF GENEROSITY: PRE-KINDERGARTEN CLASS HELPS HONOR LONGTIME SUPPORTER

**O**n April 13, nearly 50 community leaders and supporters of early childhood education gathered at Children First's *Dr. Elaine Marieb Early Learning Center* as the organization honored philanthropist Gerri Aaron. Gerri was recognized for her significant support of Children First with the unveiling of the agency's newly named *Gerri Aaron Educational Wing* for infants, toddlers and preschoolers. As a special part of the ceremony, nearly 20 five-year-old students sang a medley of songs for Gerri and guests.

Gerri briefly addressed the crowd, explaining why she supports Children First. She concluded with the following moving words:

*As a small part of this prodigious organization, my goal today is to encourage others to furnish aid and understanding for the provision of a broad foundation for life training to children here at*

*Children First. I'll leave you with a quote from Francis Bacon—"In charity there is no excess."*

Children First is truly grateful to Gerri for her leadership and support of our efforts to nurture vulnerable children and bring positive change to their families.



*Back row: Brock Leach, Lacy Ray, Jr., Philip Tavill  
Front Row: Marvin Albert and Gerri Aaron with her daughter and son-in law, Alison and Howie Madsen*

## WON'T YOU

# “Raise Your Hand” FOR CHILDREN FIRST?

Stop for a moment, and imagine yourself as a single mom with an infant to care for, but no close family or friends to ask for help. You have a college degree but are without a job and have nowhere to turn. Or imagine yourself as a grandparent looking forward to retirement, yet suddenly you find yourself as the caregiver for your preschool-age grandchildren because their parents have substance abuse issues. Or you have a child with developmental or behavioral issues that needs treatment, but it's hard enough for you simply to put food on the table.

For many of us, such stories may seem impossible to believe. But they are very real. And they are exactly the types of challenges the families served by Children First face every day.

These challenges, among others, are why we are launching the Children First **“Raise Your Hand”** campaign. This is an opportunity to close the gaps in critical services. Of course, we'll need the continued support of fundraising events and annual giving to sustain the current program, but your additional pledge to Raise Your Hand will do even more for at-risk children and their families.

The goals of our \$3.8 million campaign are simple, yet essential if Children First is to continue to meet the needs of local children and their families:

- **Extend emotional and behavioral support** to children and their families struggling with mental health and developmental issues;
- **Increase individualized classroom attention** for children attending the thirteen different locations Children First operates throughout Sarasota County;
- **Intensify family advocacy services** to help parents and caregivers gain the support and guidance needed to achieve their personal, career and educational goals; and
- **Serve more local children and families in need** by reducing the number of children on our wait list, which currently stands at more than 300.



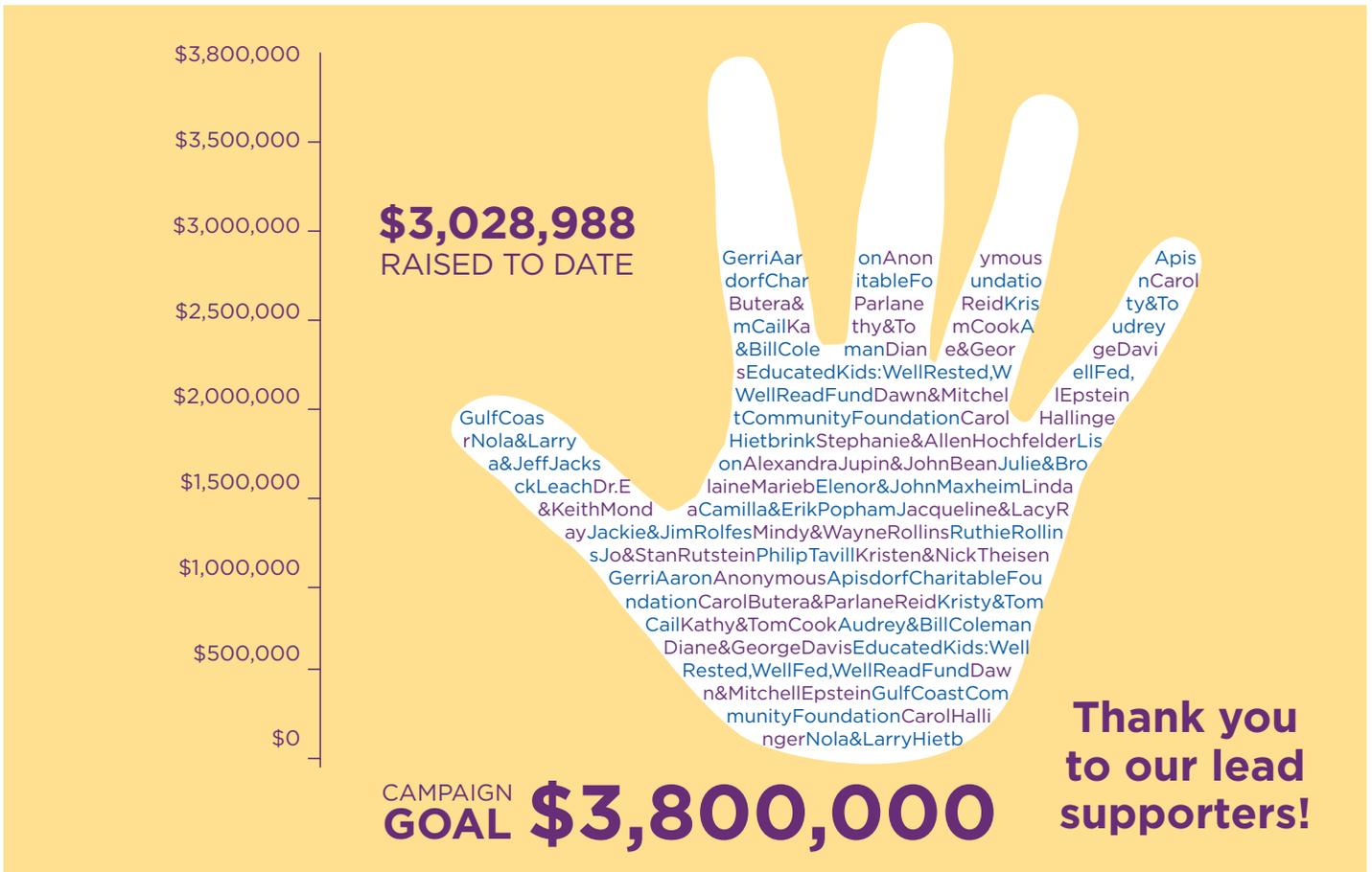
Many close supporters have already made gifts for the campaign. Those contributions are making an *immediate impact*, as you will read in this newsletter.

But much still remains to be done. More support is needed. If you have not done so, please join us today by raising **YOUR** hand for Children First. Together, we can change lives!

Sincerely,  
Brock Leach and Elenor Maxheim  
Co-Chairs, Raise Your Hand Campaign



**Find out how you can support the Children First “Raise Your Hand” campaign by visiting our website at [www.ChildrenFirst.net](http://www.ChildrenFirst.net) or by calling (941) 953-3877 ext. 115.**



# YOUR SUPPORT IS CHANGING LIVES TODAY!

Ms. Maria and Ms. Toni teach 4-and 5-year olds the skills they need to be successful in Kindergarten. With around 16 squirming, inquisitive bodies in the classroom, it is often difficult to address each child's individual needs. Thanks to early contributions to the Raise Your Hand campaign, a third teacher has been added to classrooms like this one, so children who need additional attention can thrive and start school on pace with their peers.

The Raise Your Hand campaign is also making an impact with the addition of Dr. Bob Nolan as Child and Family Services Manager. An experienced counselor and licensed psychotherapist, "Dr. Bob" offers specialized behavior and mental health services at each of the 13 Children First sites.

It is so exciting to see children and families making positive strides as a result of the Raise Your Hand initiatives, but there is still much



*Camilla Popham gets hugs from two students in Ms. Maria and Ms. Toni's class at a recent "Raise Your Hand" campaign event.*



*Raise Your Hand supporters applaud Linda Monda, who with her husband Keith, made a transformational gift to support the campaign.*

more to do. The campaign is already more than 75% to reaching its goal and **every gift counts!** When you raise your hand for Children First by advocating or donating, you are helping children and families reach for their dreams.

***Raise a hand, change a life!***

CHILDREN



Children First  
1723 North Orange Avenue  
Sarasota, FL 34234

(941) 953-3877

[childrenfirst.net](http://childrenfirst.net)

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“Everything in our lives was uncertain until we found Children First.” – Kim B.

## Kim's Story:



Kim never expected to find herself alone and hungry in a strange new town with her infant son, Caleb, by her side. But after leaving an abusive relationship in

2013, that is exactly the situation she faced. No job. No car. No home. And no one to turn to for help.

Bright and energetic, and with a college degree, Kim doesn't fit the profile many of us imagine when we hear about the homeless. Yet, she is living proof just how fragile the line can be between achieving success and struggling to make ends meet.

Fortunately, Kim and Caleb discovered Children First and Our Mother's House, a partner program in Venice, FL, that provides housing for single moms and their children. Working with caring staff, Kim embraced a new beginning. She found a job as a teacher's aide and enrolled Caleb in Children First's Early Head Start program. When teachers voiced concerns about his development, Kim was equipped to find appropriate healthcare services.

Today, Kim and Caleb have a new life. They have their own apartment and Kim works full time. Caleb is in preschool, learning alongside his peers. It is a life they never dreamed possible just a few short years ago.

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### Flip Flops & Fashion

Sharky's on the Pier  
November 3, 2016

### Rockin' Lobster

Sharky's on the Pier  
November 5, 2016

For information and reservations, please call  
(941) 953-5507 x 138