

JULY 2023

FISH LINES NEWSLETTER

onward and upward
HELPING FAMILIES AND CHILDREN AFTER IAN



Regina Brown, whose name has been changed for privacy purposes, used the FISH Food Pantry prior to Hurricane Ian, when she first began working on the island. “Regina is a single mother with no relatives close by and just a few friends, since she is relatively new to our community,” says Nitza Lopez, Social Services Director. “She reached out to FISH in June 2022 requesting food services for her family. Although her Sanibel housecleaning business was doing okay, her workload was beginning to slow down for the summer season. With her daughter on school break, Regina was having difficulty affording extra meals and snacks.”

Through conversation and an intake meeting with FISH, Regina signed up for the food pantry program and the children’s backpack program which she notes was of great assistance. “Help from the food pantry allowed our family eat healthy meals while cutting down on grocery bills, and I finally felt like I was getting ahead of my expenses,” says Regina.

Hurricane Ian changed everything for Regina and her family, and she once again reached out to FISH for disaster relief assistance. The home she was renting was destroyed, and she relocated to a friend’s home, where she shared a small room with her daughter. “Due to the dreaded Hurricane Ian, work has dropped a lot; this has affected me emotionally and economically. I cannot afford the high rents in the area, so had no other option but to call upon a friend for help.”

Working together to map out a life plan, Nitza Lopez (FISH) and Regina made a list of immediate needs and goals for the future. Regina assisted with hurricane cleanup which helped bring in additional income immediately after Ian. As island residents began to return to their homes, her customers once again requested cleaning services. She also began offering services in Fort Myers on weekends and would bring her daughter with her, due to lack of childcare.

Nitza researched and provided resources for affordable housing, and Regina and her daughter were able to move into their own apartment in April 2023. As summer approached, Regina requested assistance with the high cost of summer camp so she could continue working while her daughter was being cared for in a safe, enriching program. *(continued on next page)*

2430-B Periwinkle Way, Sanibel FL 33957
Temporary Mailing Address: 15550 McGregor Boulevard, Suite 204, Fort Myers, FL 33908

239.472.4775 ~ fishofsancap.org ~ email: info@fishofsancap.org





Regina, continued



"The FISH team helped me with a summer camp scholarship for my daughter, for which I will always be grateful," writes Regina in a heartfelt note to FISH. "I thank you all very much for your great heart and help; without this scholarship, my daughter would not have been able to attend any summer camp, and I would not have been able to work. FISH is a great help to people who really need it, and they made my girl's dream come true. Thanks to this help, I have been working most weekdays on Sanibel and can pay my rent and utilities."

Regina continues with the pantry and food backpack program to help offset grocery expenses and is looking forward to increasing her customer base as folks continue to return home to Sanibel.

In addition to their Long Term Recovery program, FISH continues to offer programs representing their four major pillars – Food, Island Based Education, Social and Senior Services, and Helping Hands. For those interested in learning more about FISH, please visit their website and social media pages to see firsthand how the agency works to better the community and particularly their response to the Ian disaster

FISH HURRICANE PREPAREDNESS PACKET

Annually, FISH, the City of Sanibel, Lee County Emergency Management, and others work together to review plans and any changes for hurricane season. FISH then provides a Hurricane Preparedness Resource Packet with detailed information on where to go, what to do, and how to prepare in the event of an approaching storm. FISH and volunteers verify evacuation routes, flood zones, hotels with generators, shelters, pet accommodations, and more to update the packet annually.



To receive a free Hurricane Resource Packet, please contact the FISH Walk-In Center at 239-472-4775 or email erika@fishofsancap.org. Packets may be downloaded at fishofsancap.org, on the [Hurricane Ian Resources](#) or [Social & Senior Services](#) page.

Appointments may be arranged for those who would like a more detailed discussion on how to prepare for hurricane season.



WITH FISH HURRICANE PREPAREDNESS PACKETS

FISH is committed to the safety and well-being of our island neighbors, and hurricane season is no exception. Hurricane hazards come in many forms, including storm surge, heavy rainfall, inland flooding, high winds, etc.

It is essential to be ready before a storm approaches. FISH can help.



WEATHERING THE STORM together



Our annual **FISH Hurricane Preparedness Packet** is a valuable island resource available to anyone who requests it. The packet provides detailed information on where to go, what to do, and how/when to begin preparing for hurricane season, including:

- Suggested Do's and Don'ts
- List of Hotels
- Check Lists
- Pet Information
- Evacuation Routes
- City of Sanibel Hurricane Pass Application
- Special Needs Application
- List of Shelters/Map
- Hotline Numbers

If you or someone you know could benefit from this packet or program, please contact us. Packets can be picked up at the FISH Walk-In Center at **2430-B Periwinkle Way, Sanibel** or at our temporary office at **15550 McGregor Blvd, Suite 204, Fort Myers** and are available for download at fishofsancap.org. For a packet by mail, contact FISH by calling **239.472.4775** or email clientservices@fishofsancap.org.



neighbors helping neighbors



FISH, ST. MICHAEL'S COLLABORATE ON THE GATHERING PLACE OFFERINGS



The Gathering Place

@ St. Michael's

As part of our Long Term Recovery Program, we are offering services in partnership with St. Michael & All Angels Episcopal Church, SalusCare, Project H.O.P.E. and others at the newly renovated space called The Gathering Place, formerly Noah's Ark. FISH services at The Gathering Place will be offered on Mon., Wed., and Fri. from 10:00a-4:00p beginning July 24.

Each Monday, Social Services Director Nitza Lopez will be available to discuss disaster relief, including disaster financial assistance, youth scholarships, emergency financial assistance and more.

On Wednesdays, Senior Services Director Erika Boyles will be on-site discussing senior needs and hosting mental health services with our community partner SalusCare. Beginning August 2, FISH will provide group therapy focusing on hurricane related topics including PTSD, trauma, and loss. Laura Guarino, MA, LMHC, CBHCMS, will lead the group from 11:00a-12:30p and remain on-site until 2p for anyone who would like a mini 1:1 session with her. Project H.O.P.E. will also be available from 1:00p-3:00 offering craft therapy and open discussions on post storm trauma, including mental exhaustion, decision-making, financial fears, etc.

"It's an honor to be a part of The Gathering Place and offer services to our community in a 'resiliency hub' type collaboration," says Maria Espinoza, Executive Director, FISH. "Having a designated space on the islands to meet face-to-face with community members will allow us to provide help when and where it's needed most." Maria and FISH note their special thanks to Sue Van Oss, Director of Digital Communications & Christian Formation, St. Michael's whose vision and leadership was instrumental in getting the space ready for the community and service providers.

The Chamber Ribbon Cutting Ceremony will be held on Friday, July 21. When visiting The Gathering Place, please enter off Dunlop Road and park in the back outside the fenced-in area.





FISH, ROTARY PARTNER FOR TOOL SHED PROGRAM



Realizing many residents have lost critical tools for completing Hurricane Ian recovery repairs to homes and businesses, FISH OF SANCAP and Rotary Club of the Sanibel Captiva have partnered to launch the Tool Shed Program. The program is available to residents of Sanibel and Captiva, on a first come, first served basis.

“So many of our neighbors lost everything, including necessary tools to repair and rebuild,” says Manuela Martinez, FISH Program Coordinator. “We hope this program can help residents make necessary repairs without adding the extra expense of purchasing tools to do so.”

“The Rotary District Disaster Relief Trailer started at the Heights Center, and a few of us moved it out to Sanibel and parked it at Bank of The Islands,” says David Lowden, Bank of the Islands Vice President. “This turned out to be a valuable resource for Islanders needing tools and supplies to help clean up their properties and gut their homes. It was also a great way to show the Island community that Rotary is here to help. Many Islanders homes were completely devastated, and it was important to let folks know that we care about their needs during a critical time. Thank you FISH for keeping this spirit alive with the new Tool Shed Program.”

Using the Rotary Disaster Relief Trailer as a guide and making a few adjustments to model it similar to the FISH Medical Equipment Lending Program, the Tool Shed Program allows islanders to borrow tools they need temporarily and at no cost. No reservations are required and availability changes frequently. Tools offered may include electric drills, hammers, tool sets; shovels, mops, utility buckets; wheelbarrows, hoses, leaf blowers; chainsaws, saws, crowbars, and more.

States Rachel Tritaik, a participant who has used the Tool Shed Program, “Just after Ian, easy access to the Rotary Disaster Trailer was key. From gloves, masks and goggles to shovels, wheelbarrows and chainsaws, the trailer was well stocked, and in partnership with FISH, continues to provide resources for the Island’s recovery.”

Tools may be picked up at the FISH site located at 2430 Periwinkle Way during regular operating hours, Monday – Friday, 10:00a-2:00p. To learn more about the Tool Shed Program, please contact Manuela Martinez at FISH, 239-472-4775 or manuela@fishofsancap.org.



JOIN FRIENDS & NEIGHBORS FISH OF SANCAP FRIENDLY FACES LUNCHEON!

neighbors helping neighbors **FRIENDLY FACES LUNCHEON** **TUESDAY, AUGUST 8**

You're invited to our community-wide Friendly Faces Luncheon, offered at the Rec Center and virtually by Zoom. Scheduled for **Tues., August 8** beginning at 11:00am, the cost of the luncheon, provided by community partner Sanibel Deli, is complimentary to guests.



Guest speaker Susie Wilson, a woman living with Type III-IV osteogenesis imperfecta (OI) will discuss this rare condition and share her life experiences. She has been involved with the OI Foundation since 1992 and served on their Board of Directors for six years; she co-chairs the Tampa OI Support Group, and Chairs the Bone China Tea Fundraiser. Locally, Susie volunteers at J.N. "Ding" Darling National

Wildlife Refuge and serves as a vestry member at St. Michael All Angel Episcopal Church.

FISH provides the food, fun and friends -- all we need is you! Please consider joining us, learning from our community speakers, and enjoying conversation and games with residents and friends!

Note: Meal selections will be provided upon RSVP. Zoom instructions for those joining virtually will be provided with RSVP. Unfortunately, there will be no meal delivery for virtual participants. Future Friendly Faces luncheons will be held on the second Tuesday of each month throughout 2023.



DATE:

Tuesday, Aug. 8

TIME:

Beginning at 11:00 am

LOCATION:

Sanibel Rec Center
3880 SanCap Road
also
Virtual Zoom Call

RSVP:

To Erika Broyles, FISH
By Aug. 4
239-472-4775



JULY FRIENDLY FACES HIGHLIGHTS

We had a nice turnout for our July Friendly Faces luncheon! Our speaker was Jenn Carrolluzzi, Program Coordinator, United Way of Lee, Hendry and Glades, who introduced the ReUnite and Beesley's programs.





JULY FRIENDLY FACES HIGHLIGHTS





PROVIDING BACK TO SCHOOL ESSENTIALS



The 2023/2024 school year for Lee County begins August 10 and families are struggling to afford essential items. “Many are reporting they lost school supplies during Ian, and had to replace and replenish to finish out the 2023 year,” notes Manuela Martinez, FISH program coordinator. “Now households need to purchase supplies again, some for the third time this year, and are struggling to afford essential items”.

Items including paper, glue sticks, pens, pencils, rulers, notebooks, etc. for grades K-12 are requested, and FISH is also accepting monetary donations to ensure enough supplies are available on distribution day. FISH will also have socks, underwear, and gift cards available to qualifying households! Community members can drop off basic school supplies between 10:00am-2:00pm at FISH located at 2430-B Periwinkle Way, Sanibel or at the Sanibel Library, 770 Dunlop, during normal business hours. Additionally, Keller Williams Realty-Ashton Kirchner Group is holding a drive in Fort Myers and will donate items to FISH. For additional information, contact Manuela Martinez, Program Coordinator, FISH, 239-472-4775.

“We live on Sanibel and of course lost everything in the hurricane flood,” says a mom of four school-aged children. “When the kids returned to their alternate school after Ian, we had to buy everything all over again. Now, we’re beginning another school year and completely out of supplies. This distribution event will be really helpful to us from a financial standpoint, and quite meaningful to our children.” According to USA Today, parents were expected to spend, on average, \$660 per child last year for back-to-school items. Prices in 2022 were on average 15% higher than the previous year with an average backpack cost of \$70 and the price of a lunch box of more than \$25 according to retail analytics firm DataWeave.

In 2022, FISH assisted 312 students with essential items and the organization expects an increase in requests this year. “With inflation and hurricane recovery expenses, our neighbors are struggling to make ends meet,” continues Martinez. FISH notes most all seeking assistance claim reduced work hours or loss of employment due to Hurricane Ian as well as the unexpected financial hardship caused by the storm as the top two reasons of financial struggle.

Studies show that having the right school supplies can help children feel more prepared and less anxious as they return to school. Children that arrive equipped for the school day feel more confident in their ability to function in the classroom. Distribution to households that live or work on the islands and with children in Grades k-12 will begin on July 31. Additional financial assistance for specialized equipment, scientific calculators, SAT prep books, instruments, clothing and school uniforms, etc. may be available to those showing a financial need - contact FISH for assistance.



CONGRATULATIONS MANUELA!

Last month, the Rotary Club honored Manuela with their 'Thanks A Million' announcement, with the following message, and we couldn't agree more!

- ◇ Way to go Manuela Martinez! You are such a great addition to the Sanibel Captiva Islands Rotary Club! Thanks A Million!!! Manuela, thank you for all of her help and efforts with Hurricane Ian Recovery, for getting involved with Rotary (before she became a member), for coordinating the Rotary Tool Loan program on Island, and for being a bright light to the club. Thank you for all you do, Manuela. We appreciate you!



HAVE YOU MOVED?

If your address has changed, even temporarily, please send us your contact information so we can update your record! Please provide your updated phone number and email as well so we can stay in touch! Changes can be submitted to events@fishofsancap.org.

Let's Stay Connected

-  Update your address
-  Update your phone number(s)
-  Update your email address

FISH
OF SANCAP



COMMUNITY SUPPORT - THANK YOU CAROL

FISH could not provide the programs and services we do without the unwavering support of our volunteers! Our volunteers graciously provided over **7,400** hours of service and drove over **20,000** miles of behalf of FISH and our neighbors in 2022. Below is a testimonial from Carol Torbey (left, in our Pantry pre-Ian) about what it means to be *neighbors helping neighbors*.

When I moved to Sanibel several years ago I started to volunteer at FISH by driving people to their doctor's appointments. I made friends with a wonderful Sanibel resident that had connections to my other place I lived, Cape Cod, MA. I also volunteered in the food pantry.

After Ian I returned during the week of Thanksgiving and I saw the massive destruction and was amazed that FISH was open. I enjoyed working with a small group of volunteers for several months while we were in the early days of recovery.

When I volunteered at FISH I heard so many stories from everybody. I was amazed at the resilience of the residents and volunteers even when everyone had so much to do. Seeing Billy from Billy's Bikes bringing in many donations for Christmas was so touching. He was a symbol of resilience. He didn't give up. Instead he gave even more. So many others were, and still are, so generous with donations.

We are blessed to have such a wonderful organization on the island. Thanks for all that you do for everyone.

Carol Torbey

We are so proud of all of our volunteers and enjoy hearing your stories that highlight your efforts! Many of our volunteers continue to help us even though they are personally affected by Ian, and that has not gone unnoticed. It's heartwarming to learn what it means to you to be a neighbor helping neighbors, particularly during the impact and aftermath of Hurricane Ian.





WE NEED GREAT PEOPLE LIKE YOU!

As we move toward summer months and some of our volunteers return to their 'up north' homes, we are in need of additional volunteers to assist. Please contact us to sign-up as a FISH volunteer or to answer any volunteer questions you may have. It's a great way to connect and serve the community!

ABOUT FISH

FISH of SanCap is a nonprofit, staffed by more than 200 volunteers. Professionals staff our Sanibel site and our temporary Fort Myers location and are available Mon. through Fri. to assist islanders and visitors with an array of services and programs.

FISH is Sanibel and Captiva's only *neighbors helping neighbors* organization offering a range of human services including:

- Temporary Emergency Financial Assistance
- Disaster Assistance
- Limited Food Pantry
- Mental Health Services
- Medical Equipment Loan
- Hot Meals Program
- Friendly Faces Luncheon
- Kid's Food Backpack
- Youth Scholarships
- Referrals & Resources
- Furniture Distribution
- Tools For Loan Program
- VITA (Income Tax Preparation)





OUR VOLUNTEERS, PARTNERS & YOUTH IN ACTION!



THANKYOU!