

MARCH 2024

FISH LINES NEWSLETTER

onward and upward

2023 Community Impact



FISH OF SANCAP continues to fill the gaps for the residents and workforce of Sanibel and Captiva. As the we have grown over the years, our scope of service has evolved and broadened within our community, including providing Long-Term Recovery services to survivors of Hurricane Ian.

The journey home after Hurricane Ian has been long and challenging for everyone. We continue to navigate obstacles and search for new ways to help the island community move forward. In addition to disaster recovery, we offer programs representing our four major pillars – Food, Island Based Education, Social and Senior Services, and Helping Hands. From our food pantry, educational workshops, scholarships, and senior programs for dignified aging-in-place, to providing emergency help with expenses and disaster relief, FISH truly offers something for everyone.

FISH impacted the lives of many island residents through their programs, but perhaps one of the biggest successes we saw in 2023 was the POD furniture distribution in partnership with United Way Gifts In-kind. The program, available to Sanibel and Captiva Island residents and workforce, distributes furnishings, appliances, doors, windows and more to those in need on the islands. “We are pleased to partner with United Way to offer this valuable program to our community members, many of which lost everything due to Hurricane Ian,” says Maria Espinoza, Executive Director, FISH. “This program helps alleviate the financial pressure and emotional stress for community members who need to replace everything, from smaller items like dishes and utensils to larger furnishings, windows and doors. It’s a very meaningful program that our community appreciates each month.”
In 2023, FISH distributed 1060 pieces of furniture to Ian survivors.



2430 Periwinkle Way, Sanibel FL 33957
Food Pantry Address: 2422 Periwinkle Way, Sanibel FL 33957
239.472.4775 ~ fishofsancap.org ~ email: info@fishofsancap.org





2023 Community Impact continued

In addition to the POD success, in 2023, FISH answered over 24,000 service requests for island neighbors. They are proud to report 86% of every dollar spent went to FISH programming. Other important impacts include:

- 5,486 visits to the Food Pantry and 896 holiday food baskets
- 2,983 reassurance calls to seniors and homebound islanders
- FISH Social Services provided 5740 instances of case management
- Seniors and homebound residents received 2983 reassurance calls and 208 'smile boxes'
- Hurricane recovery services and supplies totaled 4018 instances and 745 hurricane preparedness packets were distributed
- 285 children received holiday toy assistance and 217 children received much needed school supplies
- FISH volunteers provided 10,603 hours of service equating to an impressive \$311,834 and drove 24,000 miles on behalf of FISH and community members



“The islands’ residents and workforce report ongoing struggles with repairs to their homes, replacing livelihoods, emotional and behavioral health and remaining financially stable, particularly since Ian,” continues Espinoza.

Espinoza oversees the programs and strategic plans of the organization, supports the FISH team and serves as the point of contact for the organization within the broader community. She continues to spearhead the efforts of the FISH Long-Term Recovery program, joining many local, regional and state coalitions and groups to assist survivor’s with recovery from the state’s costliest natural disaster and one of the most impactful storms in US history. She also serves as Vice Chair of the Lee County Long Term Recovery Group.

“In addition to our response to Hurricane Ian, FISH is actively meeting the needs of the community even during blue skies. As we have for over 40 years, FISH remains committed to the betterment of the islands and the southwest Florida community by assisting one neighbor at a time,” continues Espinoza.





2023 impact FACTS



5,740
INSTANCES OF
CASE MANAGEMENT



1,408
MUCH NEEDED
MISCELLANEOUS
ITEMS
DISTRIBUTED

2,983
REASSURANCE
CALLS
TO ISLAND SENIORS

208 
SMILE BOXES
CHEERED SENIORS



10,603
VOLUNTEER HOURS



5,486
FOOD PANTRY
VISITS



896
HOLIDAY MEALS
DISTRIBUTED



1,060
FURNISHINGS DISTRIBUTED

295 
INSTANCES OF
FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE



24,000
VOLUNTEER MILES

285 INSTANCES OF
HOLIDAY TOY
ASSISTANCE 



745
HURRICANE PACKETS
DISTRIBUTED &

 **217** CHILDREN RECEIVED MUCH NEEDED
SCHOOL SUPPLIES

4,018
HURRICANE RECOVERY
SERVICES & SUPPLIES PROVIDED

Please consider FISH as your island nonprofit partner.

86% of every dollar spent goes directly to our over 30 programs and services. Together, we will continue to make an impact, remove obstacles, fill in the cracks, and help individuals recover from the storms of life—
[neighbors helping neighbors.](#)



Florida Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster



FISH is a 2024 Associate Member of the Florida Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster!

Through their cooperation, communication, coordination, and collaboration, VOAD members foster effective delivery of services to communities affected by disasters.

Due to our disaster related services, we have been awarded the associate level. This allows us to access local, regional, and national partners resources to allow us to respond in the case of a disaster. For example, being a VOAD member allowed us to have access to the State Warehouse which had furniture inventory to deploy to Sanibel/Captiva.

For more information, reach out to our Disaster Administrative Director, manuela@fishofsancap.org.

We're Excited to Partner with CHR!



Save the Date!!

We are excited to partner with Community Housing & Resources (CHR) for their Spring Community Event on March 27th. Guests will be making spring bouquets - open to CHR residents and the island community!

Visit the CHR office located at 900 Casa Ybel Road, #7, from 11:30-1:30. Pizza will be provided! Email info@sanibelchr.org with any questions or call 239-471-1189





Here Comes Peter Cottontail! Easter with FISH!



With help from Bank of the Islands, FISH OF SANCAP, the islands' neighbors helping neighbors organization, will have Easter Bunny gifts to distribute this season!

Bank of the Islands is hosting an Easter bunny basket gift drive to benefit families that FISH serves. The drive will begin Feb. 22 through Mar. 15. Unwrapped, unopened toy donations for ages 0-18 will be accepted at 1699 Periwinkle Way, Sanibel during the Bank's regular operating hours. Suggested items include small toys and sweets, Peeps® and colorful tooth brushes, coloring books, etc.

"This seasonal drive is a great addition to the essential year round collection of contributions for the FISH Food Pantry. We encourage islanders to drop off non-perishable food items as well as donated Easter basket toys," says Greg Blurton, FISH Board Member and Bank of the Islands, V.P.

For families served by FISH, under-employment and lost income from the hurricane disaster is the main reason their struggles continue. Due to ongoing repair and rebuilding expenses, these individuals have become 'house poor'. House poor, by definition, means individuals spend too much on housing expenses relative to income. As it relates to hurricane survivors, it means the cost of repairing or rebuilding homes leaves little money left for living expenses, paying bills, or savings, resulting in debt accumulation for the duration of their long-term recovery.

By providing Easter basket toys, neighbors can breathe a little easier knowing that their children will receive a gift or two Easter morning.

In addition to specialty items for gift drives, Bank of the Islands collects items for the FISH Food Pantry year-round. Food pantry items should be new, unopened and non-perishable. FISH sees firsthand how the rising cost of food products coupled with disaster related expenses is affecting their Food Pantry participants. Many Pantry users report they are concerned about living expenses as a whole since the hurricane, since so many have made unexpected, unbudgeted out-of-pocket payments to remediate or repair their homes.

"This is a particularly difficult time for our community for so many reasons – long-term recovery from Ian, inflation, and cost of gas and supply shortages," says Merari Salines, Community Outreach Manager. "We're thankful to Bank of the Islands and others that support our holiday and food pantry programs."

If you or a family you know is in need of assistance for the Easter holiday and/or in need of food assistance, please contact Merari at FISH at 239-472-4775 or merari@fishofsancap.org.



Friendly Faces Luncheon with J.N. Ding Darling

Islanders, friends and family are invited to the community-wide FISH OF SANCAP Friendly Faces Luncheon, scheduled for Tues., Apr. 9 beginning at 11:00am.

Sanibel Deli provides lunch, complimentary to all guests. Monthly luncheons are held at the Sanibel Recreation Center, 3880 Sanibel-Captiva Road, each 2nd Tuesday of the month. A virtual option is also available. Reservations and meal choices are required by Fri., Apr. 5 to Erika Broyles at FISH at 239-472-4775.

Space is limited and FISH requests RSVPs as soon as possible to guarantee attendance.

Ann-Marie Wildman, Executive Director, 'Ding' will discuss how the refuge survived Hurricane Ian and their recovery efforts.

Wildman, a former FISH board member, uses her experience in the corporate world to work as the Executive Director of the "Ding" Darling Wildlife Society. In 2009, Ann-Marie moved to Sanibel, where she continued to represent artists and set up fine art shows in Maui and New York. Her involvement with the "Ding" Darling Wildlife Society began as a supporter and board member and later as a part time turned full time staff member overseeing The Nature Store and developing their online presence and ultimately moving into the area of Donor Development and Philanthropy. Today Ann-Marie uses her entrepreneurial skills to help build and develop programs, implement budgets, manage grants and coordinate special events in her position as Executive Director.



Says Wildman, "The refuge is part of the largest undeveloped mangrove ecosystem in the United States and world famous for spectacular migratory bird populations. From free programming like walks in nature to photography to scholarships to urban outreach through a mobile classroom and our April 20th Conservation Carnival at Lakes Park, we will feature the many ways that "Ding" Darling is a big part of the community. We hope to see you at the FISH Friendly Faces luncheon!"



From their website:

J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge welcomes all. Whether it is your first time visiting or you bike through every day, Ding has something for everyone!

The best place to start is the FREE Visitor and Education Center. There you can get information and brochures, visit the Nature Store, explore our exhibits and visit America's best restrooms. Exhibits feature information about our ecosystems, the work of Jay Norwood "Ding" Darling, migratory flyways and a hands-on area for children. For more information, visit [J.N. Ding Darling](#)



Josie Floerchinger Dedicates Time to FISH



Josie has volunteered for FISH for 2 years. After living in Iowa for 60 years and retiring from the teaching profession, Josie moved to Sanibel, and wanted to find a purposeful way to be part of her new community involving one-on-one interactions. The Food Pantry was the perfect fit.

In the past two years, she's learned so much about our community through the various experiences she's had volunteering at FISH, including: volunteering at the Food Pantry on a weekly basis, helping out at the furniture distribution, spreading joy at the holiday outreach programs, and calling Sanibel/Captiva residents in regards to the Long Term Recovery Application.

"It is so heartwarming to witness their gratitude and know that their day has been made a little less stressful. Over the years of seeing them on a weekly basis I have developed a relationship of friendship, trust and mutual respect." -- Josie, on working with clients at our Food Pantry.

Soon after Hurricane Ian, Josie volunteered in the supply tent outside the FISH building. Many residents came to get various cleaning supplies. Josie reported that some would make comments such as, "I have never had to do this before," and she and the volunteers would respond, "this is here for all of us as a community. We are all in this together. We need to help one another in order to get back to normal."

While making calls regarding the Long Term Recovery Application, Josie heard many residents comment, "I don't need any assistance at this time, but I want to thank you for taking the time to call and ask me how I am doing. I really appreciate it." To Josie, these brief but significant interactions are all part of building a foundation for a strong community.

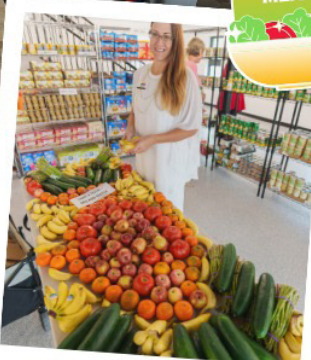
FISH is helping to build a strong community that is resilient and can overcome the challenges we are faced with by "neighbors helping neighbors".

For those interested in volunteering with FISH, please [complete our inquiry form](#) and we'll get in touch as soon as possible!

Thank you, Josie, for helping our neighbors!



PROVIDING FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE



CREATING ACCESS TO FOOD



SUPPORTING SENIORS



2024

VISION BOARD



ISLAND-BASED EDUCATION



RECOVERY AND REBUILDING



NEIGHBORS HELPING NEIGHBORS





We Need Great People Like You!

We're always in need of additional volunteers to assist with our programs and events. 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. - 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
- Long-Term Recovery
- 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 & Team in Action





Our Volunteers, Partners & Team in Action



THANK YOU