

Being Kind Leads to 'Beautiful Minds'

As seen in **eBELLA**
MAGAZINE
Subscribe for your copy at
www.ebellamag.com
Available at Barnes & Noble

Naples Children and Education Foundation is supporting multiple trailblazing initiatives to provide mental health treatment to children in need

A mother in Immokalee has a message for parents who have lost their children to suicide: Don't feel guilty for not knowing. It's common for parents to be unaware that their child is having suicidal thoughts. In "Marie's" case, she didn't know her own child was having these feelings, until the symptoms were detected at a routine checkup.

The child was able to get help due to new community initiatives funded in part by the Naples Children and Education Foundation (NCEF), which made children's mental health the subject of this year's "Fund a Need" campaign at the Naples Winter Wine Festival.

Nearly \$1.4 million will be awarded this year for the mental health of children in Collier County. NCEF reports that the need is crucial, stating that one in 10 young people in the U.S. will struggle with a mental health issue before the age of 10. Worse yet, at least half of these children will not receive help.

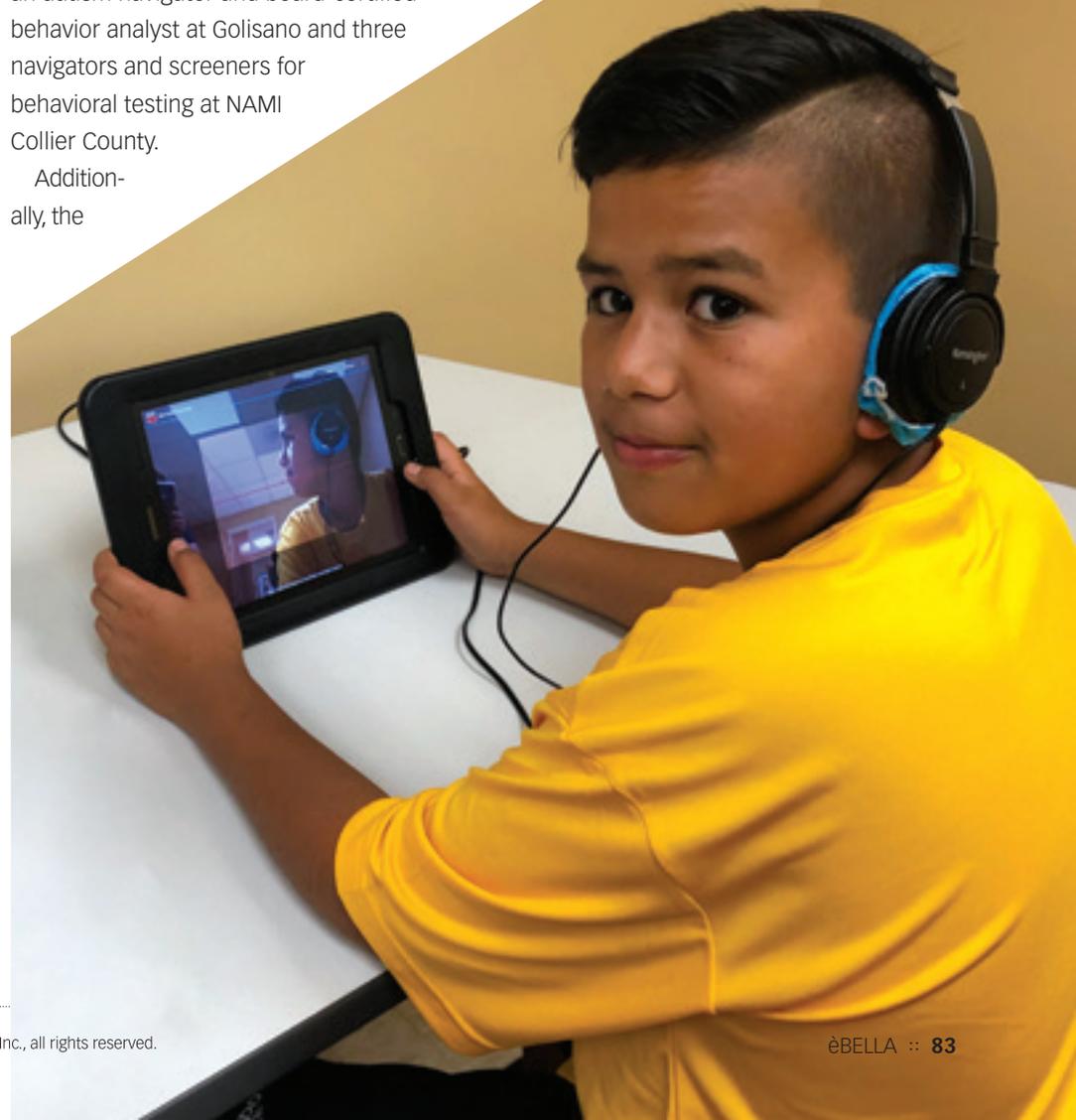
That's why David Lawrence Center, Florida State University College of Medicine, Golisano Children's Hospital, Healthcare Network of Southwest Florida and the National Alliance on Mental Illness Collier

County have created Collier County's first integrated care system for mental health under NCEF's leadership.

The Mental Health Initiative, which began in 2012, and is now known as "Beautiful Minds," has been awarded more than \$9.5 million. The funds have supported multiple services and positions, including a full-time child psychiatrist at David Lawrence Center, an autism navigator and board-certified behavior analyst at Golisano and three navigators and screeners for behavioral testing at NAMI Collier County.

Additionally, the

Beautiful Minds Initiative helps fund psychologists who are embedded in the Healthcare Network of Southwest Florida — which serves 60 percent of the children of Collier County — for its integrated care system.



A young patient uses a stress screener at The Center for Child Stress & Health at the FSU College of Medicine in Immokalee.

COURTESY OF THE FSU COLLEGE OF MEDICINE



In this holistic system, pediatricians and psychiatrists work together to give children well-rounded care. If a mental health need is identified during a child's routine checkup, the child can be evaluated by a doctoral-level psychiatrist that day — no secondary location or appointment necessary.

"On a national level, if a physician refers someone out, 80 percent of the people will not go," said Dr. Elena Reyes, the director of the Center for Child Stress & Health at FSU's Immokalee Health Education Site. "...We've been able to turn those figures around where 80 percent actually come back."

This is because, as Reyes explained, there's no stigma surrounding the mental health checkup when patients see it as just a routine part of their primary care visit.

"The brain isn't separated from the rest of the body," Reyes said. "Behavioral health, physical health, it's all one. To serve all of that under one roof becomes extremely important."

The Healthcare Network pediatrics clinic in Immokalee is taking integrated care a step further. Partnered with FSU College of Medicine's Center for Child Stress and Health, it has created a device to make it easier to identify

potential mental health risks in the pediatric setting.

While in the waiting room, children and their parents are asked to fill out questionnaires on a hand-held kiosk to evaluate depression levels, behavioral and emotional difficulties, and the number of "adverse childhood experiences," or ACEs, that the child has been through.

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention identifies 10 ACEs, broken up into three categories: abuse, household challenges and neglect. Examples of those experiences include prolonged separation from parents, sexual

A child from an NCEF program plays at Meet the Kids Day, a kick-off to the annual Naples Winter Wine Festival where donors meet the children who benefit.

CREDIT: PETER FALENCIK

abuse and incarceration of a close family member.

The studies found that the more ACEs one has experienced, the higher the risk for both mental and physical health issues, even leading to a shorter life expectancy. On average, people with six or more ACEs die 20 years earlier than their less affected counterparts.

If the patient is younger than 12, the parent will fill out the questionnaires on the kiosk; if older than 12, both child and parent complete the questionnaires before being seen by the doctors.

"If the child has had a significant number of adverse childhood events and they're showing signs of distress — either

behavioral problems or emotional ones — this would be an indication that there are high levels of toxic stress," Reyes explained.

If there's a positive screen, a psychiatrist will go in, educate the parent and child and determine if mental health treatment is warranted.

The Immokalee Healthcare Network pediatrics clinic has been piloting the kiosks, with more than 2,500 patients successfully screened. Starting this summer, the kiosks will be deployed to all Naples clinics in the network.

The kiosks have already detected major health risks in the community at a potentially lifesaving level, as in the case of "Marie."

If it hadn't been for the kiosks, she wouldn't have known her child was depressed.

"A child came in who had suicidal ideations," Reyes said. "They were going through a lot and were thinking of suicide. We were able to detect that in the screening, got the child to hospitalization and got them the help that they needed."

Furthermore, stories like this break stigma within the community. Now, screening a child's mental health can be as common and "normal" as screening blood sugar levels.

"If you get screened, you can find out if there's something going on and you can get help, too," Reyes said. ☺

NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness)

Collier County is dedicated to improving the quality of life for adults, children and families affected by serious mental illnesses. We provide innovative education, support, and advocacy programs and services for over 16,000 individuals in Collier County annually. Our vision is to ensure that all persons with mental illnesses receive the help they need in developing resilience, and are assisted in working toward their recovery.

KNOW THE RESULTS

2,227 – Annually, the number of Collier County children screened, assessed, and/or educated through HUGS
1,167 – The total number of first responder graduates of CIT (Crisis Intervention Team) training

1,957 – Total attendance for NAMI Collier's various Support Groups
5,385 – Annually, the number of visits made to NAMI Collier's Sarah Ann Center



CONTACT INFORMATION

NAMI Collier County
 6216 Trail Blvd., Building C
 Naples, FL 34108
 239-260-7300
<https://www.namicollier.org>

FACEBOOK
 NAMI of Collier County

DONATIONS ACCEPTED ONLINE AT
<https://www.namicollier.org>

