



*Child Chat* is a quarterly newsletter of Lake Sumter Children's Advocacy Center designed to acquaint the Lake and Sumter County communities with our professional staff and their trauma-focused services to children while highlighting topical children's issues.

## The Toymakers: Crafting Joy



*Over its twenty-five year history, our Center has been immensely blessed to receive the unwavering support of many noteworthy individuals and community agencies. They enrich us and the children and families we serve beyond measure. It is our pleasure to share with you one such agency as we begin another New Year: **The Toymakers, Inc.***

A nonprofit organization founded in New Port Richey, Florida in 1982 has forged its identity in Lake County in recent years, and thousands of children in the area are the richer for its emergence. They call themselves The Toymakers, and they are dedicated to the heart-felt mission of making toys and dolls to cheer up needy, ill or challenged youths in hospitals, group homes and outpatient services programs in the Lake County area. Led by master craftsman Bill Schroeder, as many as a dozen volunteers labor assiduously over their work, asking for nothing more than to bring smiles to the faces of their unsuspecting recipients. And, mind you, these toys and dolls they so artfully create hearken back to a simpler time before digital devices and electronic games dominated the entertainment landscape. These are genuine hand-crafted wooden toys and hand-stitched dolls the likes of which your grandparents or your grandparents' parents might have treasured in their tender formative years.

Like clockwork, the toys and dolls arrive on a quarterly basis at Lake Sumter Children's Advocacy Center, as many as 140 per delivery awaiting distribution to our eager children. They come to us festooned in vivid colors that deftly match the vivid imaginations of their covetous beneficiaries—cars brightly burnished in all of the colors of the rainbow and dolls dressed fashionably in seemingly infinite hues, patterns, and materials. There are batmobiles, both large and small, and Camaros, and other conveyances resembling wheeled animals, such as gators and giraffes. And the dolls, life-like as they are, appropriately reflect the ethnic and racial diversity



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**Child Quote:** “To improve is to change; to be perfect is to change often.”  
- Winston Churchill

## From the Editor

### New Year 2023: Keeping It Positive

Each New Year offers a catalyst for reflection. We take stock of the year just passed and consider our notable accomplishments, as well as our lingering challenges. We appraise our situation of the moment and set our sights on formidable goals moving forward. Whatever the travails of the past year, we are almost invariably infused with a pervasive sense of optimism as we initiate a new chapter in the book of life. Personal goals seem eminently “doable”, and we embrace them with re-doubled vigor and indomitable conviction. We pledge to lose those ten extra pounds we annexed over the holidays. We pledge to improve our minds by reading more and perhaps even taking a class or two. We pledge to enrich our relationships with family and friends by investing more time, in both volume and quality, with them.

And, magically, the demands of work seem wholly surmountable. We commit to establishing a serviceable plan to guide our efforts with each new work day. We commit to bringing our projects to completion timely, efficiently, and effectively. We commit to co-existing in an atmosphere of peace and harmony even with the most contentious co-workers among us. Ostensibly, the soft light of the dawning days brings abundant promise that all things are possible.

Of course, while we nurture the positive spirit of our personal goals and dreams, we do so amidst an ominous global backdrop as we embark on 2023. Persistent extremism threatens the sanctity of our racial, ethnic, religious, social, and political institutions. Contrary definitions of life itself pit inveterate pro-life sympathizers against strident abortion rights activists. Divisive and intractable political ideologies engender plodding progress in our Congress. Violent regional conflicts as those in the Soviet Union and Ukraine disrupt the world order and arouse the dreaded notion of nuclear holocaust. Climate change ravages the land and unleashes a ferocity of meteorological forces heretofore unknown to modern man. And crippling world-wide inflation leaves us scrambling to put food on our tables and gas in our tanks.

Still, in the sprit of “positivity”, I remind myself that nothing good can be accomplished without the sweet nectar of optimism. It is the “glass is half full” attitude that fuels personal goals and even makes the daunting challenges of our global malaise conquerable. Accordingly, it has occurred to me on more than a few occasions that our children represent the perfect embodiment of optimism as we face each turning New Year. Though certainly touched by the societal ills they have inherited, they seem to harbor the enduring faith, hope—and, yes, optimism—necessary to overcome them and to, indeed, propel us toward the light of better days. In fact, many of the youngest among us have already assumed the mantle of responsibility to lead us in our quest to follow the righteous path of our “better angels.” Please join me in celebrating ten young “angels” who guide us with their staunch commitment to higher purposes:

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## New Year 2023: Keeping It Positive (from left)

### The Toymakers: Crafting Joy (from p. 1)

of the communities they represent.

Our Center utilizes the Toymakers' painstakingly crafted creations in two primary ways. First, in keeping with our mission to promote recovery in the traumatized children we serve, we permit them to select from the gifted bounty of Toymaker toys and dolls at the conclusion of their first day of services with us. It is our way to reward their courage in taking that first transformative step toward recovery. After all, the recovery process can be incredibly daunting. Therefore, the ability to ease tensions somewhat by gifting colorful, fun, and whimsical toys and dolls enhances rapport development between children and practitioners and offers promise for subsequent interventions at our Center. Second, the Toymaker toys and dolls we receive are a most welcome augmentation of our annual Children's Holiday Party festivities. They can be wrapped as free-standing gifts or utilized by parents as stocking stuffers to supplement other Christmas stocking items. Each holiday season the Center is pleased not only to bestow gifts upon the children to whom we provide services, but also to all of their siblings. Consequently, some families may enjoy an unanticipated bevy of wooden cars and plush dolls around their respective Christmas trees—compliments of Toymakers.

It is important to note that many of our families, particularly in the aftermath of COVID-19, are struggling financially and, henceforth, are inordinately challenged to sponsor Christmas for their children. In some cases then, the gifts from Toymakers and our Center may be the only gifts their children receive. The fact that the Toymakers' toys and dolls are the products of selfless voluntary toil makes them ever more special. In the end, what could be more special than these gifts from the heart.

And so we thank Bill Schroeder and his dedicated Toymakers on behalf of our children for the thousands of hours they have spent behind the scenes crafting joy and bringing smiles to the faces of youths in need. We look forward to a long and fruitful relationship with our esteemed community friends, **The Toymakers!**

### New Year 2023: Keeping It Positive (from p. 1)



**Jasilyn Charger.** While growing up on the Cheyenne River Reservation in South Dakota, Jasilyn gained firsthand experience with the mental health struggles teenagers can face. She co-founded the One Mind Youth Movement to help youth who are a part of the Cheyenne River Sioux

Tribe find support and resources when they're in crisis. In addition, Jasilyn co-founded the International Indigenous Youth Council. This organization, which has chapters across the United States, provides Indigenous youth with a space to stand together as leaders on issues in the country and in their communities.



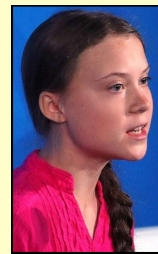
**Nicholas Lowinger.** As a teenager, Nicholas Lowinger started a community service drive to donate footwear to children experiencing homelessness. As part of the project, he started the nonprofit Gotta Have Sole. To date, the program has donated over 100,000 shoes to shelters across the United States.

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**Malala Yousafzai.** As a child, Malala Yousafzai learned in her father's school—one of the few in Pakistan that educated young girls. A girl attending school was considered a challenge to the Taliban regime's authority, and defying them made her a target. She was shot on her way to school by a Taliban gunman but survived to become a passionate

advocate for a **woman's right to education.** July 12th is Malala Day in commemoration of when Malala spoke at the UN to present education as an international human right.



**Greta Thunberg.** 19-year-old Greta Thunberg is an inspirational person for students who want to reduce the effects of climate change. When Greta began protesting the Swedish government's limited action against climate change at her school, she received worldwide attention for her desire to help save the planet in any way she could. In 2019, Greta was named Person of the Year by **Time** magazine in

recognition of her work as a climate change activist. In an interview with the magazine, she discussed the importance of **environmentalism:** "We can't just continue living as if there was no tomorrow, because there is a tomorrow." Her speech at the 2019 UN Climate Action Summit was a widely acclaimed siren call to the world to get busy with aggressive environmental agendas before it is too late.



**Jaylen Arnold.** Jaylen Arnold is another young person who has changed the world by advocating for **bullying prevention.** As a child, Jaylen was diagnosed with Tourette's Syndrome, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and Asperger's syndrome. Due to his differences he was often bullied by other students at his school. Jaylen decided that

instead of fighting back, he could stand up for other children who are bullied because they are different. He started the Jaylen's Challenge Foundation, a nonprofit that educates children across the United States about how they can prevent bullying. In 2014, Jaylen was named a World of Children award honoree for his work as an anti-bullying advocate.



**Marley Dias.** At 11 years old, Marley Dias was frustrated that most children's books she saw were not culturally diverse. That's why she decided to launch the #1000BlackGirlBooks Twitter campaign to collect and donate **books that would help Black girls feel seen.** Marley was able to donate more than 9,000 books through the program, and at the 2017 Forbes' Women Summit, she said of her experience, "I'm

working to create a space where it feels easy to include and imagine Black girls and make Black girls like me the main characters of our lives." To spread the word about Marley's vision for children's literature, one can read her book **Marley Dias Gets It Done: And So Can You!**

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## New Year 2023: Keeping It Positive (from p. 2)

### MDCT Giving Week: “And the Winners are....”

In our October 2022 edition of *Child Chat*, we featured an article on Mount Dora Community Trust’s Giving Week 2022. As a brief refresher, MDCT sponsored its 3rd annual Giving Week from November 29 to December 6 to augment the coffers of participating nonprofit organizations. Twenty-nine (29) area nonprofits selected by MDCT engaged in a friendly competition for \$100,000 in matching funds and ancillary awards. The organizations were divided into three (3) categories predicated on the size of their respective annual budgets: Mega (8 orgs), Large (9 orgs), and Medium (12 orgs). Each organization invited its supporters to donate in its name in denominations of their choosing. In turn, MDCT pledged matching funds for those organizations in each category who finished in 1st, 2nd, 3rd or 4th place for the amount of funds donated in their respective names according to the following schedule:

- 1st place = dollar per dollar match up to \$15,000
- 2nd place = 75 cents per dollar up to \$6,000
- 3rd place = 50 cents per dollar up to \$4,000
- 4th place = 25 cents per dollar up to \$2,000



To sweeten the pot MDCT designated three (3) days of the week as “Golden Grant Days.” On those days it matched donations at 25 cents per dollar across all organizations until the specified daily allocation of funds was depleted, as follows: day 1 = \$5,000, day 3 = \$2,500, and day 5 = \$5,000. Furthermore, it set aside a \$5,000 award for the organization that received the greatest number of donations by the end of Giving Week.

Happily, our Center benefitted substantially from the generosity of its myriad supporters, finishing in 1st place in the Mega category and in 2nd place overall. In the process we shall receive \$59,709.62 in donated funds in addition to matching funds from MDCT in the amount of \$15,000. The total of \$74,709.62 is a most welcome windfall that shall be utilized to enhance our services to the courageous child survivors of abuse we serve. Naturally, we would like to express our utmost appreciation to Mount Dora Community Trust for its ongoing commitment to area nonprofit organizations. We feel the love! Furthermore, we wish to congratulate our Fellow nonprofits for the funds they have raised to support their own specialized services to others. Together, we make a profound positive impact in our community! And, of course, on behalf of all area non-profits, we wish to recognize our many loyal community supporters for their unflagging commitment to our causes and the thousands of lives who prosper in their pursuit.

In particular, we gratefully acknowledge the contributions of two Board members who were especially instrumental in fundraising on behalf of our Center. Mary Clark set the tone for us in the MDCT Giving Week with an extraordinarily generous early donation. Mary, may your kindness be reciprocated ten-fold! Additionally, Ryan Parent coordinated a hugely successful fundraiser in advance of Giving Week that ultimately propelled our Center to 1st place in the Mega category. Ryan, thanks so much for all of your efforts!

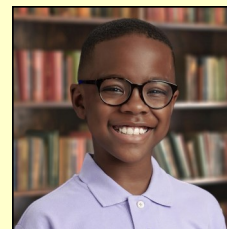
### Bids 4 Kids 2023 is Coming!

This is a friendly reminder that the 2023 edition of our annual Bids 4 Kids fundraiser is fast upon us! As was the case last year, we shall invite in-person competitive bidding at our by-invitation gala event at the Savannah Center in The Villages on Saturday, March 11, as well as online bidding by our many community friends. Please refer to our Center website at [www.cac4kids.org](http://www.cac4kids.org) for details as the scheduled date approaches. Thank you!



**Sophie Cruz.** When she was just five years old, Sophie Cruz gained national attention when she gave Pope Francis a letter asking him to advocate for undocumented immigrants like her parents living in the United States. In her letter, she shared, “I have a right to live with my parents. I have a right to be happy. Immigrants just like my dad feed this country.

They deserve to live with dignity. They Deserve to live with respect. They deserve an immigration reform.” Since then, she has been a young advocate for immigration rights and has spoken at Supreme Court rulings, the Women’s March, and other events across the country.



**Orion Jean.** 11-year-old Orion Jean founded the Race to Kindness Foundation in 2020. That year, his organization held a Race to 100K Meals event that provided over 100,000 Free meals for families across the country. In 2021, Orion was named TIME magazine’s Kid of the Year for his life changing humanitarian work. He

wrote his first book, titled A Kids Book About Leadership, to inspire kids to lead with kindness. Currently, the organization is holding a Race to 500K Books, which hosts book donation drives and free children’s book fairs where families can find and take home books.



**Param Jaggi.** Param Jaggi is a young inventor who changed the world through his passion for environmentalism. When he was just 16 years old, he created the Algae Mobile—a device that can convert carbon dioxide emissions from vehicles into oxygen. He was recognized on the Forbes 30 Under 30 list for his contributions to creating clean, sustainable energy. He inspired younger and older students alike

when he confidently proclaimed, “At 19, I think I can change the world.”



**Abigail Lupi.** When 10-year-old Abigail Lupi visited her grandmother in a nursing home, she became aware of the silent struggle with loneliness many nursing home residents face. To support and comfort these residents, she founded the CareGirlz organization. CareGirlz helps nursing home patients in New Jersey feel loved and less alone by matching them with young volunteers. “I like to brighten up people’s days and help them have a fun time,” Abigail said in

an interview with The Inspire a Kid Podcast. “If I do my best, they’ll have a smile on their faces by the end.”

**Note from the Editor:** I most gratefully acknowledge content contained on the website [www.Waterford.org](http://www.Waterford.org), the source of the preceding inspiring stories. May these stories, in turn, inspire you as you pursue your personal, professional, and global goals in 2023. Best wishes to all for a prosperous New Year from your friends at Lake Sumter Children’s Advocacy Center!





# Holiday Happenings



December 16<sup>th</sup> was an exciting day at the Lake Sumter Children's Advocacy Center. The staff anxiously prepared for the arrival of Santa and Mrs. Clause and the children who were specifically invited by Santa.

Santa's community Elves even helped by providing gifts and goodies for the children including their siblings.



The Christmas party was just getting started and the



center had an unexpected party crasher! In the spirit of the season, Grinch didn't want to be left out of all of the party fun. Santa's Elves' and all the children loved the Grinch and all his antics.



The center would like to say "THANK YOU" to all who provided and helped to make this a very successful holiday event!

