

PHILANTHROPY MATTERS

Reflections on a Milestone



by Yurianna Mikolay
Executive Director
Ocean Reef Community Foundation

Last week the Foundation announced that 2017 Community Grants to off The Reef nonprofits in Homestead, Florida City and Key Largo will top \$1 million for the first time. The primary focus of the program is to serve the surrounding communities where the employees who make a “unique way of life” at Ocean Reef possible live and raise their families. Coinciding with the 10th anniversary of the All Charities effort, this milestone made me to pause to take stock.

Looking back at records, 2007 stands out. It’s the year before All Charities consolidated fundraising for the major on The Reef charities, and the Foundation’s fledgling grants program had a banner season -- more than doubling the previous season’s off The Reef grants by distributing \$200,000 to 10 charities.

Expanding Mightily

I came onboard in 2009. It was the second year of All Charities and the program was expanding by leaps and bounds, with applications pouring in as more charities became aware of the opportunity and about \$340,000 to distribute outside the gates. While it was great progress, there were so many needs and worthy projects it was almost overwhelming. We could only fund a fraction of them with what was all at once an unprecedented fortune and a pittance. The phrase “a drop in the ocean” was used. The Grants Committee had to make incredibly tough decisions that season.



This Week’s Featured Grant: YMCA Afterschool Programs (Homestead & Key Largo) “The impact afterschool programs have on kids and their families is immeasurable. The YMCA afterschool programs provides a safe place for their kids, while giving parents peace of mind as they work in order to support their families. Not only are their kids safe, but they’re having fun as well. Thank you to the Ocean Reef Community for making it possible for us to provide kids and parents with affordable, reliable afterschool options.” -Heather Vargas, Upper Keys Site Director

This dedicated, mindful group has since taken the growing responsibility and opportunity in stride. Making weighty decisions has led the Committee to well-defined, focused giving priorities. The program is well on a path to addressing root causes over reactive charity whenever possible, and always working to set the stage so that it’s possible more and more often. Practice has made for a thorough grants cycle that runs like clockwork from application to evaluation, and improves every year. Experience has brought knowledge and understanding of the needs of the communities we serve.

Touching Thousands

Commitment over time has enabled us to form relationships and become part of the fabric of those communities. Strong relationships and our unique perspective of having so many, across such a broad scope of nonprofit areas in two different counties, have led to collaboration and innovative initiatives. We are pointedly attracting new opportunities to our largely neglected region. Today Community Grants are touching thousands of lives every year, year after year, and are collectively making a meaningful difference.



Fifty Charities Reached

Thanks to your generosity in embracing the All Charities effort, this year we’ll donate five times our 2007 total to 50 charities. Last week we notified charities of grants decisions. We were able to award full funding to all of our top ranked projects, and at least partial funding to the vast majority of projects that met our giving priorities. It was such a joy to share the news that will open up exciting possibilities and change lives with the recipients. Remembering my first season, when most of the news we shared dashed hopes, this year is a remarkable contrast.

On All Charities’ tin anniversary, I am gratified to report that our Community Grants program is no longer “a drop in the ocean,” but a strong current. That big wave in our logo is starting to make sense to me for the first time.