CAFÉ of LIFE

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NEW TEAM MEMBER

A recent change to our staff involved the addition of Aida who joined as Administrative Assistant and will be performing many of the duties most regular supporters of the Café associate with longtime volunteer Dolores who "retired" this summer. Dolores left very large shoes to fill, however, Aida's passion for helping others has already made her a valuable member of our team. She's a longtime resident of Bonita Springs and her last position was with the Bonita Middle School. Pictured left to right are Tina with Vasari Cares Foundation, Dolores and Aida.



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Café of Life Contact Information

Café of Life, Inc.
P.O. Box 367794
Bonita Springs, FL 34136

OFFICE & DROP OFF LOCATION:
10540 Childers Street, Bonita Springs, FL 34135

PHONE: 239-495-9325

WEB: cafeoflife.org

FACEBOOK: facebook.com/caringsharingserving

INSTAGRAM: instagram.com/cafeoflifebonita/

CAFÉ OF LIFE WEBSITE

Like us on Facebook

Support the Café DONATE NOW

The Café of Life is a faith-based organization believing in the teaching of all great religions that one must love and assist one's neighbor in time of need. The Café is not affiliated with any particular religion or denomination. Our mission is to provide basic human needs to the very poor and hungry people of the Bonita Springs area in a manner that preserves the dignity of the client in a respectful environment and to enrich and empower people to be all that they can be.

The Café of Life, Inc. is a registered 501(C)(3) tax exempt organization. Your gifts to the Café are tax-deductable to the full extent permitted by law.

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CAFÉ of LIFE

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CHANGE

THE CAFE OF LIFE INC.

FALL 2026

Marietta Bala, Board Chairwomen: Change

Dear Friends,

Life is always evolving and change is inevitable. Change can be stressful. While it forces us into the unknown change isn't something we have to fear as it is a process for growth.

At the Café of Life, we are going through many changes. After many years of service several staff and board members are retiring. They will all be missed for their outstanding service, but there are new replacements for all of these positions. Migrant family lives have been disrupted and broken when loved ones have been forced to move leaving children without parents, income and a home, changing their lives forever. Clients grow from despair to renewal and feel empowered with new ways they provide for themselves and their families. Our scholarship students' lives have changed with graduation, and they have hope for their future.

Here at the Café, we believe in visions that are not yet realized and with a genuine commitment make way for a fresh vision of what is ahead. The loss of the old is not viewed as a tragedy but with a new sense of purpose. New people and ideas can generate a productive way to move toward better results for our mission and goals. We are proud of our achievements as an organization, and we are determined to meet the need of the community as fully and effectively as possible. In carrying out our mission, we strive for the day when no one lacks for basic resources. When dignity, justice, hope and opportunity are the reality of all, they can thrive for generations to come. In this season of change, let's anticipate God's good in every aspect of our lives. As we greet new situations with confidence, we open to the blessings that await. We are richly blessed and a blessing to others.

Thank you for joining with the Café of Life. Together we can move forward to help those in need in our community.

Marietta Bala, Chairperson
Board of Directors, Café of Life.

"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose" Romans 8: 28

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR UPDATE

The Café of Life has experienced significant positive change in recent years as it expanded many services to meet the needs of our community's less-fortunate. Thanks to the **tremendous** support received from donors and volunteers, the Café created many new programs over recent years to include: Outreach, Music, Scholarship, Transportation, Children Enrichment and Education, Legal and Immigration Services, Medical, Adult Life Skills, support to Local Schools and in Building Partnerships with many community organizations. With this growth has come an increase in staff from three to eleven and the addition of a third location, our Donation Center. It took an excellent staff, many dedicated volunteers, a strong board and lots of fabulous donors to create today's vibrant and financially strong Café of Life. It's been my sincere pleasure to have been a part of this fantastic organization, however, after eleven years it's time for the next chapter in my life – retirement in December. I value highly the experience and I have no doubt the Café will continue to thrive as it works to improve the lives of those in need.

Jeff Nichols,
Executive Director

CHILDREN SUMMER CAMPS

The Café's growth has included a significant increase in providing the opportunity for children to attend a variety of local summer camps. This past summer we sponsored 18 for the YMCA, 12 for Art-Bonita, 5 for soccer, 16 for swim lessons, and supported 12 at First Presbyterian Vacation Bible Study which enhanced their spiritual growth. These camps provide an opportunity to learn new skills, improve self-confidence and have fun that many low-income children wouldn't otherwise experience.





SUPPORT TO LOCAL SCHOOLS

As part of our growth over the years, the Café has increased our support to three local schools. This includes sponsoring 300 students for Blessings in a Backpack's weekend food supplement program. We provide funding for the Bonita Springs Charter School's Resource Center which includes: school supplies, water bottles, headphones, underwear and socks (pictured). Additionally, we assisted Spring Creek Elementary School with their athletic program fundraising efforts, provide bicycles to students at Bonita Middle School, and support the Lee County Migrant Parent Advisory Committee. The schools give back to the Café by hosting food drives.



SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS



Another example of the growth of the Café is our Scholarship Program which offers up to $6,000 to six students per year to pursue post high school educational opportunities. The program reached a new milestone this year when two recipients graduated with undergrad degrees, Enrique with pre-med and plans to attend medical school, Emilio in Engineering and will pursue a master's degree program. We are very proud of their accomplishments and know they will have successful careers, and at some point, will be able to give back by helping other low-income youth obtain their educational goals. We currently have six students in our program working on various degrees.

BACK-TO-SCHOOL

Our annual Back-to-School event included the distribution of backpacks, school supplies & uniforms to nearly 250 children. In addition, children's eye screenings from the Lion's Eye Center, school physicals from Premier Mobile Health Services, along with mugs and pillows from Coldest were provided. We thank our supporters: West Bay Charitable Foundation, Vasari community, Palmira community, our many volunteers, Lee County Sheriff's Office and Bonita Springs Mayor Gibson.



CLIENT STORIES

Claudia - I am a native of Mexico where I was a licensed psychologist. After immigrating to the US and many years away from my profession while raising my two autistic children, this year I decided it was time to reconnect with my career, update my knowledge, and begin again. I reached out to Cafe of Life for guidance on revalidating my university studies. With their support and that of the Mexican Consulate, I began the process. Today, I hold my partial revalidation document that provides me a new beginning.



I continued my journey by completing a Diploma Program with the Mexican Association of Thanatology, dedicating an entire year to learning how to support people through grief. I then completed a Business Plan Program for Mexican women living abroad, offered by the Mexican Consulate.

Through that experience, I began developing a dream that now feels closer than ever: an online Thanatology Coaching project focused on supporting the Latino community and anyone who needs guidance and companionship through grief and life's many changes.

I didn't have all the answers when I started. I simply took the first step. I asked for help, kept learning, prepared myself, and trusted the process. Today, I share my story to remind you of something I have learned along the way: It is never too late to begin again. It doesn't matter how much time has passed or where you are today. Take the first step, believe in your dreams, and keep moving forward. Because when we truly believe in what is possible, we discover that the sky is the limit.



Gloria - As a senior resident of Bonita Springs for seven years living without retirement savings or family nearby, I had resigned myself to relying on Social Security and working full-time for the rest of my life. I was grateful to be in good health, have a stable job, and receive SNAP benefits to make ends meet. That changed when I lost both my job and SNAP benefits at the end of 2025. After months of an intense job search, including falling victim to an employment scam that resulted in identity theft, I realized I needed to ask for help. The financial burden was impacting my health, past-due bills were mounting, and my pets and I were facing food insecurity and the threat of homelessness.

After researching local assistance programs, I found the Cafe of Life, which truly became a lifeline for me. My case manager, Yadi, guided me through the application process and provided invaluable emotional support. The dedicated staff and volunteers at the food pantry have provided wonderful meals, and I have also received essential assistance with rent, utilities, fuel, and job placement into a part-time role that I enjoy. Thanks to the Cafe of Life and the generosity of local donors, I am now on a path back to financial stability and look forward to a brighter future. I will be forever grateful for their kindness and support.

Client Challenges – our clients are experiencing new financial and emotional strains due to affordability challenges which has led to more families living in cars, or on the street. Our goal is to provide basic needs and connect them with resources to support greater stability. In doing so, we are providing food and hygiene items, access to showers and laundry services, and for those living in their cars, gas gift cards. For those clients impacted by stronger immigration enforcement which has led to increase deportation, we are helping find support for family members remaining here, and in some cases providing funds to allow family members to return to their native country where they have a support network.

