

Manatee Children's Services, Inc.



Building Independent Living Through Transformative Upgrades

Manatee Children's Services (MCS), a Child Advocacy Center dedicated to breaking the cycle of child abuse, provides a full spectrum of programs serving over 16,000 children and families annually. Its mission is to advocate for and provide the resources, skills, and shelter to alleviate abuse through prevention and intervention for all children and their families.

Their initiative, Building Independent Living Through Transformative Upgrades, is to fund kitchen and laundry room renovations for the MCS residential program which houses 18 beds for foster children who have been removed from their homes due to abuse or neglect. The \$110,500 will be used to support project management, contractor fees, and labor and materials costs. The initiative and its impact would be sustained for up to 40 years with this upgrade of electricity, plumbing, flooring, cabinetry, and appliances.

The goal of this initiative is to transform the MCS Emergency Shelter into a more child-friendly, safe, and spacious environment where traumatized children can gain pride and achieve mastery in independent living skills. The current kitchen and laundry room are in dire need of remodeling as the facilities are over 40 years old, with the associated potential health and safety risks. Many of the children in the program have already experienced inadequate access to healthcare, lack of access to healthy foods, poor living conditions, fire hazards and nonfunctioning appliances, so creating a safe and functional environment is the highest priority. In addition to being safer and more functional, the remodeled areas would empower children to complete living tasks together using new high-quality commercial equipment in spaces designed to hold many children at once.

Learning to cook increases a child's vocabulary, enhances fine motor skills, boosts literacy, and introduces them to scientific and mathematical concepts. Cooking also helps children and teens learn to set goals, plan, and understand budgeting. Children who cook are more likely to eat nutritious foods and gain self-confidence in their skills. Most importantly, completing chores together as a household creates strong family bonds. Achieving these results will lead to transformational change not only in the lives of the foster children, but also in the community. When children feel physically and emotionally secure, their odds of healthy development and successful futures increase. As a result, they exhibit fewer at-risk behaviors later in childhood and adulthood. Investing in foster youth means helping strengthen support as children learn to become productive members in society.