The national resource for the support of children who are caring for chronically ill, injured, elderly, or disabled family members.

Best Wishes for 2021!

Year in Review

2020 was a year like no other! We here at AACY have been truly touched by the kindness and generosity shown to our program, especially in this unprecedented year.

Limited, in-person fundraising was sure to have an impact. But the support that we have received has been steadfast and frankly, more than we could have hoped, given the worldwide pandemic we are all navigating.

We are so grateful to all of the foundations, organizations, partners, vendors, businesses and individuals who supported our mission. Whether you donated funds, in-kind items, food, toys, gift cards, bikes, space, or the tremendous gift of time, we are so grateful.

We took each month as it came; with deliveries of meals and basic needs to families. Finally in October we held Trunk or Treat hosted by Palm Beach State College in Lake Worth as an in-person event - complete with a scavenger hunt and prizes! A bus tour of Lion Country Safari followed by a picnic happened in November along with the deliveries of many Thanksgiving baskets and meals. The year culminated with a December early Holiday Celebration at the Palm Beach Zoo complete with gifts for Caregiving Youth and their families. Christmas week saw the delivery of food baskets, meals, and gifts! None of this would have been possible without the amazing help of volunteers including AACY Board members and donations from the community. THANK YOU!
We extend special Holiday appreciation to the Spirit of Giving Network for providing over one hundred gifts for our youth, to Investments Limited for donating an office to store, wrap and organize gifts, the Touch a Heart Foundation members who adopted 33 of our families, Stallone’s Italian Kitchen for preparing 50 meals for our families along with gift cards from BOMAR Foundation, the Elks Club and Boca West Children’s Foundation provided bikes and oh, so many others helped!

Through every activity, our AACY Board Treasurer and Rock Star Volunteer, Debralyn Belletieri, wore many hats and engaged her multi-generation family and many wonderful friends to assist in every way possible. For sure it takes a whole community without boundaries to support Caregiving Youth and their families.

With tremendous gratitude and appreciation, we are ready to welcome in 2021!

Greater Together

We at AACY work hard to be the best we can be on behalf of those we serve.

Connie recently took the opportunity to speak to the Palm Beach County legislative delegation, in which she asked the delegation to:

1) **Ensure** that caregiving youth are recognized and supported in family caregiving, health care or education bills that appear on your desk.
2) **Support** additional funds to offset the increase in caregiving youth due to the residual effects of COVID-19.
3) **Sign on** a letter of appeal to Governor DeSantis to form a statewide Family Caregiver Task Force inclusive of caregiving youth.

While we have no assurance of what happens next, especially in this economic environment, we will continue this work to ensure that all of our kids have a voice - and that those voices become louder.

Speech Highlights:

- **AACY** is 14 years old, has served nearly 1,800 students within 32 middle and high schools in Palm Beach County
- Tutoring has become a priority due to virtual learning (78% of students remain virtual)
- Due to the work of AACY, our six-year average graduation rate is 98.3%

Recent Podcasts Featuring Dr. Connie Siskowski

We are so grateful to Jordan Hernandez, a Boca Raton High School Teacher, who interviewed Connie for his JustStart podcast.

Thank you Jordan for taking time to learn more about AACY, and help us to continue to spread our message allowing the voices of our youth caregivers to be heard.

Connie was also featured on the No Barriers of Fort Collins, CO podcast: [https://nobarriersusa.org/podcast/interview-with-connie-siskowski/](https://nobarriersusa.org/podcast/interview-with-connie-siskowski/).

AACY and No Barriers look forward to their partnership to support our Youth Caregivers!

Save the Date! Thursday, April 22, 2021
Virtual Caregiving Youth Institute Conference

Due to Covid-19, our planned conference for this year had to be postponed, but we have so much to share.

In response to our many supporters asking "What's New?", AACY will be hosting a Virtual Caregiving Youth Institute Conference on Thursday, April 22, 2021!

The theme of the Virtual Conference will be: "KEEPING CONNECTED TO CAREGIVING YOUTH."

The framework for the Virtual Conference will be: Connection, Advocacy, Research and Education, with expert presenters from each of these arenas bringing us the latest, most relevant information on the issue of Caregiving Youth.

Watch for a "Save the Date" to be released in mid-January with specific information on how to register for this exciting event. Your participation is critical to the success and work of AACY and the Caregiving Youth Project.

Please mark your calendars for April 22, and plan to join us, VIRTUALLY!

Stay tuned for additional details.

Notable Partnerships and News from 2020!

AvalonBay Communities is extending its presence in Palm Beach County. They sponsored Thanksgiving baskets for our families and held a virtual Lunch and Learn for their employees throughout the USA to educate them about Caregiving Youth - to help them understand the children and their families that they are helping. Connie, Debralyn and Pam Perrin (AACY's Chief Operating Officer) participated with host Angela Stevenson of Avalon Bay.

The Early Learning Coalition of Palm Beach County became a new collaborating partner. They will help to identify caregiving youth among siblings of the younger children they already work with and AACY will be able to refer younger siblings of Caregiving Youth for their support.

Our partner, PsychArmor of CA, is working with AACY and others to prepare education materials for Camp Corral of NC which supports about 3,000 military youth, many of whom are caregivers.

Hosted by former AACY employee, Cara Zimmerman, MSW and sponsored by the Spirit of Giving Network, Connie participated in its early November radio show on the Forum for Non Profits. Watch for the link on our website as we kicked off National Family Caregivers Month on behalf of Caregiving Youth!

Seven caregiving youth participated in the Listening Project for the Health and Human Services National RAISE Family Caregiver Council.

Dr. Ann Faraone and Connie learned from the Florida Department of Health that our caregiving question will again be on the FL Youth Risk Behavior Survey in 2021. This 2019 survey identified that in Florida, there are more than 290,000 public middle and high school students who are caregivers.

Members of the AACY National Advisory Council met with Josh Pederson, Director of World Wide Operation for United Way and supplied him with a Digital Toolkit about Caregiving Youth - the toolkit is also available for others - contact Kelly: kelly@aacy.org.

AARP has now acknowledged college age student caregivers. Of 400 who
A recent survey conducted by the Town of Palm Beach United Way asked local non-profit agencies, what is their biggest need, related to Covid-19? Connie was glad to share what AACY was facing, and answer this important question:

Here at AACY, the negative and longer term effects of 'lockdowns', fears from some misinformation, lack of medical care, and virtual education is confronting our kids, their families and ultimately our society. The increased isolation has resulted in the need for more individual and family support. We are currently working on a campaign to educate our families about being sure that internet parental restrictions are on electronic devices as a direct result of one of our 13 year old students receiving instruction from Anime about how to commit suicide by drowning.

There is more attention to racial equity, especially as it relates to COVID and the person who is ill, without looking at the whole family and the impact on children whose childhoods have been interrupted as their roles change. Having ill family members in facilities and the inability to be with them...and the little ones not understanding why mom never came home is difficult.

Some of the comments from our team are below.

*Based on what I have heard from mentors, I would say financial – loss of jobs leading to hardship in paying for rent, food, etc. This pandemic has for sure hit a lot of our families.*

*I would have to say the following are our BIGGEST needs:*

1. **Food**
2. **Emergency Fund (rent/utilities/water)**
3. **Respite (to give our kids a break since a lot of them are doing virtual school and are in the home)**
4. **Computers**

*I feel that my families have struggled financially. The biggest issue is rental/utility/food assistance.*

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**A Look Ahead into 2021**

- Thanks to new funding partners, we will expand the Caregiving Youth Project in Palm Beach County.
- Further the four pillars of the Caregiving Youth Institute: Connect, Advocate, Research and Educate
- Continue to educate legislators to include caregiving youth in legislation and policy
- Promote our new initiative, **Sponsor a Caregiving Youth** *(Contact Beverly: beverly@aacy.org for more information)*
- Reach child caregivers in Military families
- Develop the AACY Affiliate Network and appropriate partnerships
- Create recurring revenue streams to support sustainability

This is just a few of the many tasks we are working on. We are excited for a productive, healthy, and prosperous year for AACY and all of the children and families we serve.