

Community cooperative • Feeding People. Nourishing Lives.

# FOOD for THOUGHT



250,000  
pounds of food

5,000  
households

17,000  
individuals

6,000  
children

2,200  
seniors

600  
veterans

\* 2016 Annualized

## MOBILE PANTRY on the move

The Mobile Food Pantry makes a difference to thousands of people - right where they live.

Hunger persists for thousands of families and individuals in our community. One in six people in Lee County, more than 100,000, are at risk for not eating on any given day; thirty percent of those are children.

Community Cooperative delivers thousands of pounds of food to families throughout Cape Coral, Bonita Springs, Fort Myers and North Fort Myers. The need is so great that staff plans to expand to more

locations next year.

In the past, Community Cooperative had an on-site food pantry in Cape Coral. Since the decision was made to put the food pantry on wheels, its reach is wider and more effective.

"We have tripled our numbers in Cape Coral by going mobile," said Meghan Madden, Division Director of Food Services. "We are also partnering with Lee County Human Services to help feed those in need in North Fort Myers and we're looking to expand into Alva and Lehigh Acres."

Staff and volunteers distribute approximately 40 pounds of

food per family each month at each mobile food site. This effort helps families stretch their paychecks and gives their children the best opportunity to succeed in school.

"Our mission has always been to help meet the needs of people who need assistance," Meghan. "Transportation is a significant barrier to people accessing much needed services. Now we are going to them. We are giving underserved residents critical services closer to where they live."

It's made a huge difference at Trafalgar Middle School, where the mobile food pantry arrives once a month.

"We send a text message out to all Trafalgar parents that if they need food we would be happy to take care of them," said Alvin Piotter, a seventh grade teacher at Trafalgar Middle School. Community Cooperative serves as many as 175 people - each of whom collects groceries for an entire family.

Amanda Schlicht, 12, attends Trafalgar Middle School and is one of about 20 student volunteers who work at the mobile food pantry.

"I volunteer because I like to help the community," she said. "I see smiles on people's faces when we help them." 🌱

### Important dates

- Christmas Carol Sing, First Presbyterian Church, Dec. 6
- Mina Edison Hymn Sing, First Presbyterian Church, Feb. 7
- Soup Kitchen Benefit, Sam Galloway Ford, March 9
- Empty Bowls, Alliance for the Arts, March 25

[www. CommunityCooperative.com/events](http://www.CommunityCooperative.com/events)



# Preschool PALATES

Preschool students are flipping out about fruits and vegetables.

Three years ago, Community Cooperative launched Food Literacy in Preschool (FLIP) to provide young children with the education to make healthy food choices. Nearly one in four children in the United States is considered obese before starting kindergarten.

“By focusing on this younger age group, we aim to create a generation who values fresh, healthy produce over less nutritious choices,” said Tracey Galloway, CEO of Community Cooperative. “We want to break the cycle of childhood obesity due to food insecurity and poor food choices.”

Teachers and volunteers give nutritional lessons to preschoolers from low-income families at Joseph Messina Children’s Center and P.A. Geraci Child Development Center in Fort Myers. Many of the students are trying certain fruits and vegetables for the first time.



“These children have no preconceived notions of what they like and don’t like,” said Meghan Madden, Division Director for Food Services at

Community Cooperative. “They are willing to try things that will benefit them in the long run. One of the kids favorite vegetables this year was cucumbers because they loved trying the pickles!”

Each fruit or vegetable becomes its own lesson. For example, when apples is the theme, the students sing songs or play games about apples, read books about where they come from and how they are grown, and sample different kinds for flavor, shape and color. While the children do an art project related to their produce, a healthy snack is prepared. At the end of the lesson, each child is left with a take-home bag that contains the produce, recipe for the snack and suggestions about how the academic lesson can be continued through games and conversation at home.

The FLIP program is also a good opportunity for students at Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU) to assist in a classroom setting. They plan lessons or prepare and teach the classes.

Kevin Schatz, a sophomore at FGCU, said he wanted the opportunity to teach underprivileged children “how nutritious and tasty fruits and vegetables can be.”

“By the end of the program, you could actually tell that the children learned so much of what we just taught them,” he said.

## Dear Friends:

The one thing every successful non-profit needs is passion. Passion for the cause you are championing. Passion for the people who are helping to carry out the mission. Passion to help the people you are called to serve.

Never in my 20-plus years of non-profit work have I been surrounded by so many people full of passion for helping others. I have a deep appreciation for the dedicated and hard working volunteers and staff at Community Cooperative who are the hands and feet helping to achieve our mission of ending hunger and homelessness in Lee County.



TRACEY GALLOWAY  
Chief Executive Officer

Without judgment, our passionate staff and volunteers serve as a safe haven for our friends and neighbors, helping to feed families and fill in the gaps when struggle knocks on their

door. Above and beyond is the norm for our agency and I couldn’t be prouder of the good work we do to help our needy neighbors every day.

What I hope you will find throughout this newsletter is that nothing we do is possible without

the support and partnership of the community. ***Our passion has momentum because of our community support.*** Community Cooperative could neither exist nor succeed without your support. I wholeheartedly thank you for your dedication to our mission through ongoing stewardship, donation of time and volunteerism, and fervent advocacy of our mission.

As we move forward, I invite you to join us with renewed vigor on the most important mission of Feeding People and Nourishing Lives.

Blessings,

Stay in touch with us all year! Sign up for our E-Newsletters online at [www.CommunityCooperative.com](http://www.CommunityCooperative.com)

# Art with heart

## HEALING WITH ART

Veronica Banchs knows that crayons and conversation can change lives.

The president of Blue Crayonz Inc., paints her life in strong, vibrant colors and shares her passion with those in need. She teaches an art class once at month at Community Cooperative.

“Art has always been therapeutic to me,” she said.

Veronica developed Blue Crayonz, Inc. for her 13-year-old son, who has autism and didn’t speak for the first six years of his life. She helped him find a way to express himself through art.

Helping others is at the core of her work. She knows what it’s like to feel powerless. She ran away from an abusive home at 16 and spent time cold and homeless in upstate New York before a stranger offered to help.

“A helping hand saved my life,” she said. “Now my mission is to do the same.”

She shares her experience and her optimism with her students, many of whom are homeless. At a recent class at Community Cooperative, Veronica asked about a dozen people to write down a word that represented something they were feeling. One of them wrote “hopeless.” Another wrote “depressed.” She had participants paint big, bold,



colorful strokes or pictures over the negative words. Doing so created smiles and conversation.

“Thank you for treating me like a person,” a woman said to Veronica, and hugged her, after class.

“Her encouragement is just one of the reasons her class is such a success,” said Christine Sebastian, a life coach at Community Cooperative.

“Veronica is great with the clients,” she

said. “Clients know there is no right or wrong with the pieces they create. It’s all about self-expression. The clients are able to come to class and feel welcome, relaxed and imaginative.”

Veronica knows that bright colors fill dark spaces.

“We can all lose everything,” Veronica said. “We’re all learning and growing together. You need to show people love and it really changes your life.”

# GROWING potential

There is an excitement building at Community Cooperative that has everything to do with growth – the plant kind.

With the help from a Lowes Home Improvement Grant, Community Cooperative is completely transforming its current garden into an Able Garden. Erica Klopff, owner of Edible Landscaping, is designing the Able Garden, an innovative space that makes the act of gardening accessible to everyone.

“The garden is designed for people who have limited mobility including those who are in wheelchairs,” Erica said. “People can sit on the rim of the beds because they will be designed to carry the weight of an adult so people with physical limitations can enjoy gardening. We want to make it as comfortable as possible.”

The garden, which will open this winter, will be about 60 feet long and 25 feet wide. It will produce abundant vegetables



like cherry tomatoes and greens including fresh mustards, collard greens, lettuce and kale. The garden will offer special tools ergonomically designed for people in wheelchairs or those with limited mobility.

“We are all very excited about the Able Garden,” said Rachell

Mays, Coordinator of Volunteer Services. “This garden helps our organization on many levels. It contributes fresh produce for all of our food programs, and empowers people to learn how to grow their own food, but most importantly it gives us the opportunity to include volunteers of all abilities

to help our agency.”

“So often we have to turn willing volunteers away because they aren’t able to do some of the heavy lifting required for much of our volunteers needs. By having the Able Garden we will be able to include community members, of all ages, with physical and mental

impairments to be a part of our good work,” Rachell said.

Erica, a Florida Gulf Coast University graduate, will do her best to make that happen. She has been designing landscapes to make gardening accessible to everyone since she graduated four years ago.

“We’re creating a space and an opportunity to empower people who may not feel like they have options to better their lives,” she said. “Not only will they be an important part of the Able Garden, they’ll learn valuable skills that will hopefully inspire them to start their own garden.”

Once the garden opens, Erica will be on site one day a week taking care of the garden and facilitating volunteers.

She’s eager to see the plants and the volunteers bloom.

“Some people feel called in nature,” she said. “They find healing working with plants and soil. We want to create a space where people find healing in the act of growing.” 🌱



To plant a garden is to believe in tomorrow.  
We believe everyone should look forward to better tomorrows.

## Purpose driven

Savannah Beltran has found a place of her own at Community Cooperative.

The 22-year-old, who has a disability that makes communication a challenge, volunteers three times a week.

“She looks forward to it,” said Kerri Brown, her caretaker since 2008. “It gives her a sense of purpose.”

It’s a win-win volunteer position for Savannah. She develops

independent skills in a busy kitchen including washing dishes and wiping down tables.

“These skills allow her to become more independent and potentially could help her get a job to support herself,” Kerri said.

Her volunteer position makes her feel empowered, Kerri said.

“Instead of people taking care of her, and doing every little thing for her, she’s learning to do things for herself,” Kerri said. “When she leaves

her house in the morning, she tells her mother that she is going to work.”

The kitchen staff and other volunteers rely on her hard work and positive attitude. Sometimes she will sit and eat her lunch with the clients or other volunteers.

“She works hard and has a great attitude,” said Melissa McCartney, Community Café Kitchen Manager. “You can tell she enjoys what she is doing. She lights up the kitchen when she is here.” 🌱





# Veterans helping veterans

## Meals on Wheels

volunteers provide daily, nutritious home-delivered meals and a friendly, safety and security check to eligible homebound neighbors who cannot shop or cook for themselves. These neighbors include senior citizens, the disabled, or chronically ill adults under the age of 60. They may receive meals short term, while recovering from an illness or surgery, or long term, to assist them while they remain safely and independently in their homes. The services provide help to more than 1,000 elderly and homebound residents annually.



Marilyn Lowe is one of 175 volunteer drivers who help deliver more than 65,000 hot, freshly prepared meals to elderly shut-ins each year. In fact, she's willing to drive four separate routes when needed.

“Once people start doing it they want to continue,” she said. “I have no intention of stopping. I love my people. I call them my people. I’ve known some going on 14 years.”

To volunteer for Meals on Wheels contact Jen Larsen, coordinator of Meals on Wheels at 239-337-1055 or [Jen@CommunityCooperative.com](mailto:Jen@CommunityCooperative.com)



Marilyn Lowe with Mayor Randy Henderson

It has always been about fighting the good fight.

Nick Romano helped launch the Bonita Bay Veterans Council a year and a half ago after he realized that veterans weren't getting enough help. The Army veteran knows what it's like to need assistance. He earned a Purple Heart when he was wounded three times in action in Vietnam.

Since its inception, the organization has helped more than 55 veterans with support ranging from rent to building ramps for their homes. The Bonita Bay Veterans Council has become a lifeline for veterans in need.

They have also become a lifeline for Community Cooperative. Recently they teamed up to help William Almore, a Navy veteran.

The 74-year-old resident of Cape Coral suffers from congestive heart failure and cancer. Rendered fairly immobile because he didn't have a motorized wheelchair, William didn't eat well and was missing medical appointments. He was living off of coffee and juice.

“I knew I could pick up the phone and call Bonita Bay Veterans Council and they



Stefanie Ink-Edwards, Jen Larson and William Almore

would help William,” said Stefanie Ink-Williams, Director of Development and Marketing at Community Cooperative, who came to know William through a referral from a Veterans' Affairs social worker.

Nick and his team found a motorized

wheelchair and had it delivered to Community Cooperative. They also wanted to make sure William had access to healthy meals so the Bonita Bay Veterans Council is sponsoring the Navy veteran's first year of Meals On Wheels which will be delivered to his home seven days a week.

The veterans organization also worked with Community Cooperative to pay for hotel accommodations for a homeless veteran who didn't want to be separated from his service dog while waiting for housing. The temporary shelter that was available while he waited did not accept pets.

“The veterans who get assistance are all profoundly grateful,” Nick said. “They all say the same thing,” he said. “They say, ‘We didn't know somebody had our back.’”

It's a relief for staff at Community Cooperative to know the Bonita Bay Veterans Council has its back.

“They are a really special organization,” Stefanie said. “Now if we have a veteran who needs anything I can pick up the phone and they will be there to make it happen.”

## At a certain age, comfort food is just knowing you have something to eat.

# COMBATING isolation

A strong area partnership helped pull a Lee County veteran out of the dark.

John Bailey moved to Florida after he retired to focus on his dream of becoming an artist.

Three years later, his wife passed away and John struggled to pay the bills. The Navy veteran and retired machine operator from Albany, New York didn't expect to face such financial hardship during his retirement years. At one point, the electric company shut off his power for lack of payment. When the Area Agency on Aging's Emergency Home Energy Assistance Program referred John to Community Cooperative for utility assistance home assessment, it was quickly discovered that John needed additional support.

The 73-year-old widow also suffers from a variety of health issues including diabetes, arthritis and back pain, which impedes his mobility.

“It's been hard,” he said. “I spend a lot of time alone.”

Once John got connected with



Community Cooperative, the quality of his life began to improve.

They quickly added him to their Meals on Wheels program so he had healthy, nutritious meals delivered to his home. The person who delivers the meals makes time to talk to John and check on his welfare.

John appreciates all of the agencies who work together to help him. As a result, he can work on his charcoal portraits of old movie stars and not think about what he is going to eat and how he will afford it.

“I don't have to feel anxious about the next meal because it's there,” he said. “It's one less thing to worry about.”

# Council of Congregations

# FAITHFUL IMPACT

You can't deny the power of community. A variety of local churches have supported Community Cooperative in a myriad of ways that have impacted thousands of lives.

"These partnerships are critical to the work we do," said Tracey Galloway, CEO of Community Cooperative. "Their support is invaluable and their acts of kindness lift up our entire community."

Marilyn Lowe, a member of the Gateway Trinity Lutheran Church, has been volunteering as a driver for Meals on Wheels for almost 14 years. She's just one of many drivers and volunteers from her Fort Myers church who volunteer their time. They also host a golf tournament every year to benefit Community Cooperative and The Children's Hospital.

"We're very involved," Marilyn said. "We bring food every Sunday at church. My trunk is full right now. We bake cookies and donate other needed items besides food. We have fun doing it. It's a good cause."

Next Level Church also provides immense support to Community Cooperative. They promote "Serve Days," which, in addition to their financial support, focuses on making a difference in people's lives. Recently more than 100 volunteers arrived on the Fort Myers campus and did everything from painting the food pantry to re-landscaping the property.



Clockwise from above: Next Level Church  
 • Gateway Trinity Lutheran Church  
 • First Presbyterian Church Volunteer Group of the Year

While the members of Next Level Church are serving, another congregation is singing. The members of First Presbyterian Church host three different Hymn Sings throughout the year to raise money and provide food donations. The volunteers also do everything from making cookies at Christmas for Meals on Wheels clients to hosting Souper Bowl Sunday to raise funds to buy needy school children school supplies and shoes.

The Rev. Paul de Jong, Senior Pastor at First Presbyterian Church, believes that giving back helps both the giver and the receiver.



"It is universally true that those in our congregation who are the most active helping others are also the most joyful people in the church," he said. "Any act of love, especially any act done altruistically, always blesses the giver. I am very thankful that Community Cooperative provides opportunities for us to serve and for us to be blessed thereby."

# With a will, THERE'S A WAY

You can make combating hunger and homelessness a part of your lasting legacy by including Community Cooperative in your estate plans. Planned gifts can accommodate your lifestyle now while securing a stronger future for Community Cooperative.

There are many ways to include Community Cooperative in your estate plans, including through your will, revocable trust, retirement plan, or life insurance policy. We recommend you speak to your financial and tax advisors to find the best option for you and your circumstances. Your financial advisor can help you meet your philanthropic goals while finding the best tax advantage for your estate and your heirs.

To include Community Cooperative in your will, you will need Community Cooperative's Tax ID number and address, which can be found in the sample language below. Please consult with your estate attorney to add this information to your will.



## To give a portion or the residuary of your estate:

*I hereby give, devise and bequeath [all or a specified percentage] of the rest, residue, and remainder of my estate to Community Cooperative, Inc. Tax ID Number: 59-2602772, a nonprofit corporation organized and existing under the laws of the state of Florida, and with current business address of 3429 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd., Fort Myers, FL 33916, to be used for its general purposes.*

To request additional information, or if you have already included Community Cooperative in your estate plans, please let us know! Please contact Stefanie Ink-Edwards at [Stefanie@CommunityCooperative.com](mailto:Stefanie@CommunityCooperative.com) or 239-461-2802.

# PARTNERING for PETS

Community Cooperative and The Gulf Coast Humane Society have a special relationship that allows the homeless and Meals on Wheels clients to keep their pets healthy and safe.

"We don't want to separate people from their pets," said Jennifer Galloway, executive director, of Gulf Coast Humane Society. "We help them to stay together longer."

The Humane Society has developed a variety of programs to keep these vital relationships intact including providing spay and neuter services. This program keeps pets healthy while reducing the number of stray animals on the streets. Through this special partnership with Community Cooperative, staff at the Humane Society will pick up the pet from housebound Meals on Wheels client and provide necessary medical services and then return the pet to their owner.

"Most people benefit enormously from having a pet," she said. "There is so much research about how pets prevent loneliness, keep blood pressure down and prolong our lives. If we can help provide the medical care



Asa and his dog Jobe

and the food, it's a win-win for everyone involved."

They also provide any of their excess pet food to Community

Cooperative which is in turn given to the needy clients and their pets.

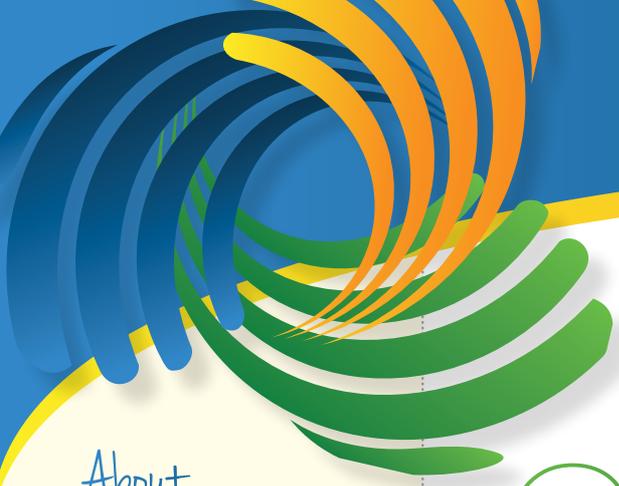
"We often have clients choosing to feed their pets before they feed themselves," said Ashley Dino, Coordinator of Homeless Services at Community Cooperative. "People are so happy when we are able to assist them with pet food. They love their pets and want the best for them just as much as we do."

Recently, one of Ashley's homeless clients was very hesitant to let the Humane Society neuter and vaccinate his beloved dog because he was scared they would take his dog away.

"We convinced him to let us give the dog medical care and spend the night with us so he could heal properly," Jennifer said. "We returned him to the owner the next day."

Their emotional reunion reinforces the power of these relationships and the importance of protecting them.

"They love each other," she said. "Our goal was to keep them together as well as all the other pet owners who love their animals."



# Unexpected rewards

## About Community Cooperative

Since 1984, Community Cooperative has worked to end hunger and homelessness in Lee County with headquarters in Fort Myers, satellite offices in Cape Coral and Fort Myers Beach, and mobile services throughout greater Lee County. Clients range from elderly shut-ins to homeless families and individuals, the working poor and children. In addition to serving upwards of 200,000 meals each year through Community Cafes and Meals on Wheels, it provides homeless and comprehensive life coaching services, and supplies more than 350,000 pounds of food to the needy through emergency mobile food pantries and the Growing Healthy Kids School Pantry Programs. The agency partners with United Way, Harry Chapin Food Bank, Lee County School District and regional community foundations as well as with community and service groups, churches, businesses and other support organizations.

### MAILING ADDRESS:

Community Cooperative  
P.O. Box 2143  
Fort Myers, Florida  
33902

### MAIN OFFICE FORT MYERS:

3429 Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd. Fort Myers, FL  
33916

### FORT MYERS BEACH OUTREACH:

100 Chapel Street,  
Fort Myers Beach, FL  
33931

### CAPE CORAL OFFICE:

4506 Del Prado Blvd. S.,  
Cape Coral, FL 33904  
(Scheduled to Open  
Early 2017)

239-332-7687 (SOUP)  
www.Community  
Cooperative.com

**G**iving back as a volunteer gave Rachell Mays her professional life back. Almost seven years ago, she turned her volunteer hours at Community Cooperative into a full-time position.

Near the end of 2009, she lost her job at a Fort Myers advertising agency after the company downsized. But she didn't want to stop moving forward.

"I heard you could get a job through volunteering," said Rachell, 42, who grew up in Fort Myers. "I had passed by Community Cooperative so many times. I finally decided to volunteer. I attached my resume to the application."

When she began volunteering in the beginning of December 2009, she felt discouraged about being unemployed. But a few hours after her first shift, her mood changed.

"It put me in a better spirit," she said. "Not only was I helping somebody but being here was helping me."

At first she volunteered Tuesdays and Thursdays. Then she began putting in longer hours during special events. She volunteered anywhere she was needed. Three months later, she was offered a job as an executive assistant.

A year ago, she was promoted to coordinator



of volunteers and outreach.

"We are so lucky to employ Rachell," said Tracey Galloway, CEO of Community Cooperative. "She is a great advocate and resource for our volunteers. She has a passion for her job and our mission that is contagious."

Rachell encourages others to volunteer at

Community Cooperative, especially if they are feeling down.

"You just never know," she said. "When I walked through the doors for the first time I loved the energy and the people. There is not a department that I can't go to and jump in and help. Sometimes it all works out."

I believe everyone has a *Soup'er Hero* inside them waiting to be discovered.

# Become a volunteer

Here are some ways you can volunteer your talents at Community Cooperative:

## Community Cafes, Markets & Mobile Pantries

Prepare and serve meals • school lunch prep • clean up

Monday - Saturday, Fort Myers and Fort Myers Beach; Multiple shifts available

Help distribute food at Community Markets and Mobile Food Pantries throughout the county - contact for schedule

## Meals on Wheels

Prepare, package and/or deliver meals to elderly shut-ins

Monday-Saturday, delivery routes throughout Lee County

## Able Garden

Monday-Saturday

## Outreach & Special Events

Teach Food Literacy in Preschool or Café Education Classes- monthly

Be a part of the Cold Weather Street Outreach team - as needed

General administrative assistance

Other special events & outreach scheduled throughout the year.

For more information on how to volunteer visit our website at [www.CommunityCooperative.com](http://www.CommunityCooperative.com), or contact Rachell Mays at 239-332-7686, ext. 100 or [Rachell@CommunityCooperative.com](mailto:Rachell@CommunityCooperative.com).



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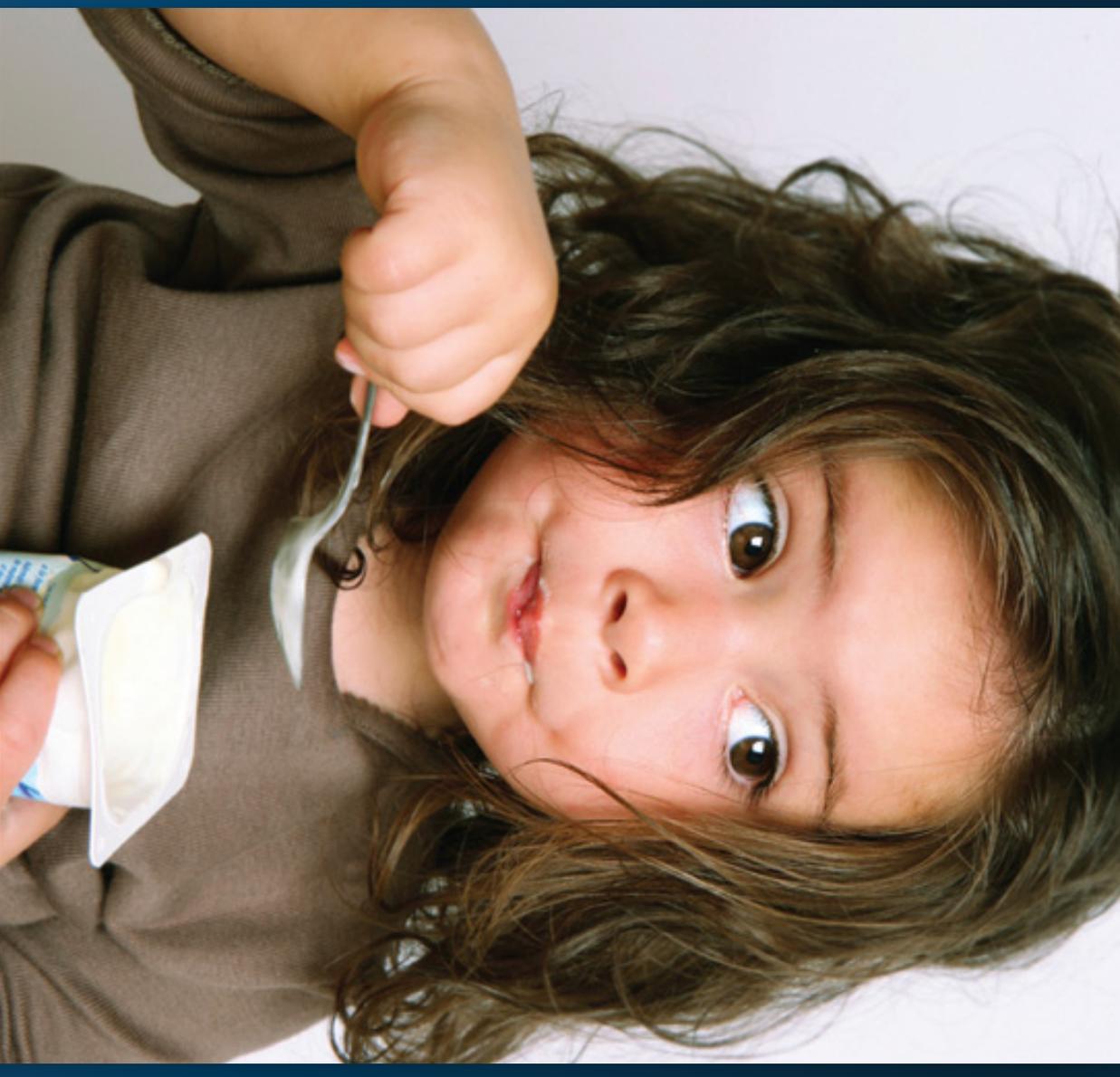


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1. Shoppers browse through handmade ceramic bowls at the Empty Bowls event
2. Boston Red Sox centerfielder, Jackie Bradley, Jr, volunteering
3. University of Miami (FL) students spent fall break volunteering
4. Sam Galloway Ford presents a check for \$25,000 in Support of Summer Drive for Hunger
5. Dr. Ralph Garramone and his staff at Becoming Cosmopolitan: Havana Nights
6. Guests paint Andy Warhol inspired soup can art at Masterpiece Mixers fundraiser
7. Soup'er Hero 5k Run Best Costume winners, Capt. America and his sidekick Allie
8. Charlotte and Lily Miller with friend wrapping Christmas gifts for the Adopt-A-Family project
9. Michaelene Beaudin, Myra Stewart and Bob Simpson at the Annual Soup Kitchen Benefit.



P.O. BOX 2143 • FORT MYERS, FLORIDA • 33902



*Innovators in the fight to end  
hunger and homelessness in our community.*



Community Cafés & Markets • Growing Healthy Kids Programs  
Meals on Wheels • Social & Educational Resource Centers

239.332.SOUP (7687) | [CommunityCooperative.com](http://CommunityCooperative.com)