



**BEST**  
**FOOT**  
FORWARD®



Dear, Best foot forward



Thank you, Thank you, Thank you  
for everything you have done  
You have encourage me ~~to~~ to  
do my best and put my  
"Best foot forward" Lot

Thank you for caring



Sincerely,

The best



Dear bff thank you so much  
for doing the things you do  
for me and the others.  
Without you I would not know  
the things I know now.  
You guys shown me that  
I do have people supporting in  
school. I know I can  
all ways call bff and  
there to help! Thanks  
for bulding this program  
for kids like us who  
need a little more  
help. You guys are  
amazing.

Jessene

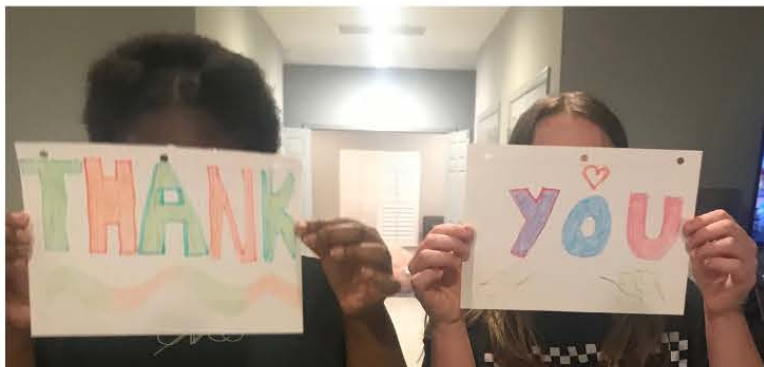


Thank you for my gift  
I really liked it! I plan  
to use it alot.

I think BFF would be  
good for any child because  
it helps ~~me~~ with reading and  
math I like that when I had  
to chang schools Mrs Luz  
came to my new school

When I work with Mrs <sup>huz</sup> ~~luz~~  
It motivates me to do better  
in class.

Janellic (5<sup>th</sup>)



thank you so very much.

I cannot thank you enough for  
everything BFF has done for me.  
I wouldn't be half the man I am now  
without the support and love from  
you. Thank you so much!



## Graduation caravan held for Palm Beach County youth in foster care

by Liz Quirantes

Tuesday, May 26th 2020



*Graduation caravan held for Palm Beach County youth in foster care (WPEC)*

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla. (CBS12) — Less than half of foster kids graduate high school and when they do, most of time there is no family there to cheer for them as they walk across the stage.

This year, with graduation ceremonies canceled, the Best Foot Forward organization in Palm Beach county- which has a 100 percent graduation rate - found a grandiose way for the children in care they serve to celebrate their incredible accomplishment.



Frank & Rita Barbieri, Debbie Ellman, Donna Biase and Kristen & Mike Burke



Jacqueline Bland, Wanda Moran, Rita Barbieri, Anita Detert and Sharon Overton



Christine Paige, Ellie Belski, Mike Belski, Robert Paige, Andrew Wetcher, Allysa Wetcher and Kimberlee Mulhare



Tony & Tara Ruberg and Julia & Chris Andrews

## Best Foot Forward Raises Over \$1,470,000 At Annual Fundraiser

**BEST FOOT FORWARD HOSTED ITS MOST SUCCESSFUL BASH** fundraising event to date, themed An Enchanted Evening, on April 22 at the Polo Club of Boca Raton. This year's honorary chairs were Patricia and Paul Kilgallon, community advocates and philanthropists. Mike Burke, Superintendent of the Palm Beach County School District was the recipient of the 2023 Champion of Children Award for his support and dedication to foster care and at-risk youth. Guests enjoyed cocktails, dinner and dancing to music by Mike Sipe Entertainment, Events and Production.



Amy & Mike Kazma



Paul & Patricia Kilgallon and Lisa & Jim Wheeler



Laura & Shaw McCutcheon



Amanda Guis, Alexis Arnone, Ernie Murphy, Jaclyn Ross, Tyler Ross, Dan Davidowitz and Ben Davidowitz

# Notables

SOCIETY | CHARITY | STYLE



**Best Foot Forward Co-founder and CEO Donna Biase, GL Homes President Misha Ezratti and GL Homes senior director of community relations, Sarah Alsofrom. Photo taken at Lotus in Boca Raton, a GL Homes community. [TRACEY BENSON PHOTOGRAPHY]**

## Best Foot Forward gives kids in foster care resources to thrive

Since its 2010 founding, the organization – the only one of its kind in Palm Beach County – has a 100% high school graduation rate with its kids.

**By Steve Dorfman**  
Notables Staff Writer

Children enter the foster care system for any number of reasons – abuse, neglect, abandonment, to name a few. These kids did not create, nor can they control, their unfortunate circumstances.

But there’s one thing they all have in common: The day they turn 18 they’re legally considered adults.

While this used to mean instant homelessness, Florida law now enables teens to remain in licensed foster care or approved supervised “independent living environments” until they’re 21, provided such accommodations are even available.

That said, the gaps in coverage for these kids in terms of emotional and financial support can have devastating consequences.

Dropping out of high school (around 54% do).

Becoming homeless or a perpetual “couch surfer” – which happens to 40%.



**Best Foot Forward Bash Event Chairs Meryll and Ethan Bangsil [CAPEHART]**

Getting arrested – which also happens to 40%.

And the unlikelihood of becoming a college graduate – which only 3% do – makes it virtually a pipe dream.

But there’s one agency in Palm Beach County – Best Foot Forward (BFF) – solely dedicated to mitigating the long odds facing foster kids.

Founded in 2010, BFF provides one-on-one support to improve a student’s educational experience.

Among the ways the organization does so:

- Being involved from kindergarten through college.
- Meeting regularly in schools.
- Collaborating with all stakeholders.
- Bridging the gap between child welfare and school.
- Consistent support throughout the years.
- Teaching skills in test-taking, studying and organization.
- Providing individual academic tutoring.
- Communicating with schoolteachers.
- Providing remedial reading instruction.
- Teaching kids how to be one’s own self-advocate.
- Providing ongoing incentives and motivation.

The BFF program has been remarkably successful: Kids who go through it have a 100% high school graduation rate.

Of course, such services and results would not be possible

**See BFF, 2D**



**NOTABLES COVER STORIES** highlight local businesses, philanthropies, charities and individuals. Stories are sponsored. To be featured, contact Notables Editor Krystian von Speidel at [notables@pbpost.com](mailto:notables@pbpost.com).

without the contributions of local philanthropists.

For instance, GL Homes supports the BFF mission to its core. It has provided innumerable resources and services to BFF's kids, including throwing graduation parties, giving them access to the arts, and providing everything from nutritional education to career advice.

"With a laser-sharp focus on education, Best Foot Forward creates a bright future for exceptional young people aging out of the foster care system," said GL Homes President Misha Ezratti. "BFF students see the world through the lens of a productive and successful life. This high-impact, high-performance charity ensures foster children graduate high school and college at rates far exceeding the national average. Our community thrives when our children are successful."

BFF is especially excited about its upcoming fundraising gala – the annual Bash – which this year will have a theme of "The World Awaits."

"This will be a memorable evening, and we hope to raise a significant amount of money to support our important and diverse programs," said BFF co-founder and CEO Donna Biase. "Best Foot Forward is thrilled to recognize GL Homes as the 2022 Champion of Children Award recipient. Their support has been steadfast and instrumental in providing opportunities for our students to learn critical skills they need to be successful in school, work, and life. GL Homes' efforts have been invaluable."

Among the things that attendees will be treated to:

- Learning about BFF's successful programs from a former foster youth.

- Cocktails, hors d'oeuvres, dinner, dancing and silent and live auctions.

- Hearing from this year's honorary chair, Anita Detert, about her community advocacy and philanthropy.

- Seeing the aforementioned GL Homes receive the 2022 Champion of Children Award.

With tickets priced at \$200 per person, Biase cautions that "they will sell out quickly." And the evening's fundraising goal is an ambitious one: \$400,000.



**Best Foot Forward Bash Honorary Chair Anita Detert**

[JENNIFER FUJIKAWA]



**Best Foot Forward Co-founder and Chief Program Officer Debbie Ellman.**

[CAPEHART]



**Best Foot Forward graduate Francis Jeune creates pencil sketch during art class at the Norton Museum of Art.** [CAPEHART]



**Best Foot Forward graduate Victoria Pagan holds a portrait she painted of artist Frida Kahlo.** [CAPEHART]

## IF YOU GO

**What:** "The World Awaits" – Best Foot Forward's annual Bash.

**When:** Saturday, April 23, 6:30 p.m.

**Where:** The Polo Club of Boca Raton, 5400 Champion Blvd. in Boca Raton.

**Admission:** \$200 per person.

**For more information:** Call 561-470-8300 or visit [bestfoot.org](http://bestfoot.org).

But then again, teaching our community's most disadvantaged youngsters to be ambitious is what Best Foot Forward is all about.

Published On: Wed, Oct 10th, 2018

Robert's Community Report | By [Robert Weinroth](#)

# AT&T Makes \$850,000 Grant to ChildNet to Help Children in Foster Care Succeed

By Robert S Weinroth

It was a day to celebrate the collaboration between our business community, non-profit agencies and our school district to help students reach their full potential.

An \$850,000 contribution from AT&T to ChildNet will help local foster care youth succeed in school. ChildNet is among 10 recipient non-profits, nationwide, to share in a grant by AT&T

of \$9.25 million in celebration of the 10-year anniversary of AT&T Aspire, an initiative to help provide access to education and training students need to get and keep good jobs.

ChildNet is the lead child welfare agency for Palm Beach and Broward counties. \$750,000 of the AT&T grant will be used to expand its Grounded for Life academic mentoring program, a collaboration with Best Food Forward (PBC) and Children's Harbor (Broward).

Over 60% of the children who age out of the foster care system fail to receive a high school diploma. The Grounded for Life program is a powerful counterbalance to a childhood often filled with abuse and neglect.

ChildNet will use \$100,000 of the grant to create an Educational Services Specialist position in West Palm Beach who will serve 300 students placed in Palm Beach County's foster care system to help them overcome barriers to success in school.

Over the past 7 years, AT&T has contributed over \$1.6 million to ChildNet to help improve educational outcomes for the students it serves.



# Empowering foster youth to achieve success



BFF ensures that all of their students have opportunities to participate in experiences such as prom and graduation. Pictured above, **David** and his BFF coaches celebrate at his graduation ceremony.

Youth in the child welfare system face significant life and academic challenges — often having suffered abuse, neglect or abandonment — and must overcome substantially more obstacles than their peers to be successful.

**Best Foot Forward Foundation (BFF)** is dedicated to improving education and future outcomes for these children and young adults in Palm Beach County. The Jim Moran Foundation supports BFF's Grounded For Life program that helps youth reach their full potential through academic advising, mentoring, advocacy and other wraparound services during high school and post-secondary education. Nearly all of the participating students are promoted to the next grade and ultimately graduate. Since it was founded in 2010, the organization has served 325 students.

**David** has been a member of BFF since eleventh grade. Each week, he met with BFF's high school graduation coach to ensure that he was passing his classes and to develop plans for further education. BFF's college coach then guided him through the process of completing college and scholarship applications, financial aid requests and more. With his coaches' ongoing, caring support, David recently graduated with an Associate of Arts degree from Palm Beach State College. He is currently attending Florida Atlantic University and pursuing a Bachelor of Social Work degree to one day serve other foster care children.

*For more information about Best Foot Forward Foundation, please visit [www.bestfoot.org](http://www.bestfoot.org) or call (561) 470-8300.*





***The 2023 BFF Bash, An Enchanted Evening, was successful beyond our wildest imagination!***

The event, held on April 22, 2023 at the Polo Club of Boca Raton, was our best fundraiser, ever. Thanks to the generosity of 500 attendees and donors and 62 sponsors, we raised **more than \$1,470,000!** These funds will be used to continue to expand our programs, increase the number of students we serve in Palm Beach County each year, and further our mission of empowering foster care and at-risk youth by providing essential support and academic guidance.

We proudly recognized our Champion of Children Award recipient, Mike Burke, Superintendent of the Palm Beach County School District, and our Honorary Chairs, Patricia and Paul Kilgallon. Perhaps the most special moment was hearing Serenity, a recent Florida Gulf Coast University graduate, tell her story of how BFF has shaped and changed her life.

***Thank you to everyone who contributed to making the Bash such an overwhelming success!***

**[CLICK HERE](#) to see the video recap of the BASH!**

2023  
**BFF**  
*Bash*  
*An Enchanted Evening*

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# 2023 BFF Bash

*An Enchanted Evening*

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**Best Foot Forward 9080 Kimberly Blvd. Suite 10 Boca Raton,  
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ChildNet is contracted with the  
Department of Children and Families  
in Broward and Palm Beach Counties.

December 11, 2023

To Whom It May Concern:

Please accept this letter as a sign of ChildNet's enthusiastic support of Best Foot Forward, a local nonprofit agency dedicated to improving the educational outcomes for children in foster care. As the Community Based Care lead agency in Palm Beach County, responsible for administration of the local system of foster care and related services, ChildNet has repeatedly seen Best Foot Forward participate in and lead strong community partnerships that allow for the greatest chance of success for youth in foster care.

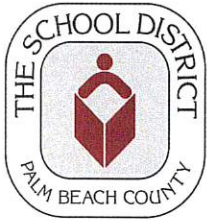
Best Foot Forward has identified a crucial local need and developed innovative solutions for meeting it. Children in foster care have experienced trauma that leads to immense challenges in school and life. Best Foot Forward intelligently and sensitively recognizes and attends to them. Their programs allow children to thrive as they work towards the goal of reading comprehension, high school graduation and post-secondary success by providing one-on-one intervention and advocacy on behalf of the abused, neglected and abandoned children of Palm Beach County.

The Children of Palm Beach County are fortunate to have such a dedicated agency and such effective programming available to them. ChildNet very much looks forward to continuing, and expanding, our work with them in the future.

Sincerely,

*Larry N. Rein*

Larry N. Rein  
CEO and President



**THE SCHOOL DISTRICT OF  
PALM BEACH COUNTY, FL**

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ERICA WHITFIELD

July 28, 2022

Debbie Ellman, Co-Founder  
Donna Biase, Co-Founder  
Best Foot Forward Foundation  
9080 Kimberly Boulevard, Suite 10  
Boca Raton, FL 33434

Dear Ms. Ellman & Ms. Biase:

As Superintendent, it is my pleasure to write this letter of support to the leadership and efforts of the Best Foot Forward Foundation. Over the past years, the Best Foot Forward team have worked tirelessly with students in Palm Beach County and as a result of this ongoing support, dedication and commitment, it has impacted and enriched their lives and future in a very positive way.

It is my honor to highly recommend Best Foot Forward as a partner in Palm Beach County. The Foundation's ongoing efforts have been widely recognized by the many commendations it has received on the impact it has made. The dedication to the student starts right at the beginning when the team researches the student's background, including academics, behavior, etc., to best assist their individual needs before actually entering a school campus and start working with professionals at the school site. Once the team meets, they arrange the student's schedule, the individual support needs for the student, and eventually a working plan for the student's life.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to provide the Best Foot Forward Foundation this letter of support and official recommendation.

Sincerely,

Michael J. Burke  
Superintendent



**THE SCHOOL DISTRICT OF  
PALM BEACH COUNTY, FL**  
3300 FOREST HILL BOULEVARD, C-316  
WEST PALM BEACH, FL 33406-5869

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ERICA WHITFIELD

December 17, 2021

To Whom it May Concern:

I am pleased to write this recommendation on behalf of the Best Foot Forward organization. Best Foot Forward has worked with the Palm Beach County School District in serving a very important purpose, providing innovative programs to help children in foster care.

In the course of this meaningful collaboration, the organization has developed excellent relationships within the District as well as with administrators in our schools. Best Foot Forward's approach focuses on teamwork and student support, thereby having a definitive, positive effect on children's success in school.

The professionals at Best Foot Forward display strong leadership and a firm commitment to the students they serve. Their dedication to children is evident in every program they provide, leading to successful academic outcomes and achievements for this vulnerable population.

I am confident that Best Foot Forward will continue to make a difference in the lives of foster youth in our schools, and I look forward to working with the Best Foot Forward team in the future. If you would like any additional information, you are welcome to contact me.

Sincerely,

Frank A. Barbieri, Jr., Esq.  
School Board Chairman