

NOVEMBER 2025

# FISH LINES NEWSLETTER



*With so much to share this month, we've split our newsletter into two editions. [Please click here for the JOG N JAM Race Edition!](#)*

## COMMUNITY THANKSGIVING EVENT



Thanksgiving is a time to gather, share a meal, and be reminded of what community really means. This year, we are once again bringing neighbors together for a Thanksgiving meal filled with gratitude, joy, and the spirit of giving.

The FISH Thanksgiving Meal will take place on Tuesday, November 25, from 4-6 p.m. at the Sanibel Community House, and everyone is invited—residents, families, island workers, and friends. The event is free, offering a traditional Thanksgiving meal prepared by Jerry's Foods and served with the help of volunteers and the FISH team.

New this year, the Saint Michael's Choir will perform at 5 p.m., filling the Community House with music and holiday spirit. Their performance will add a joyful touch to an evening already bursting with gratitude, connection, and community.

"This is one of our favorite times of the year," said Maria Espinoza, Executive Director of FISH. "Thanksgiving reminds us of how fortunate we are to live in a place where people truly care for one another. Every plate served represents kindness, connection, and compassion. We're thankful to Jerry's for the delicious food, to The Community House for the venue, the Saint Michael's Choir for providing entertainment and to the incredible volunteers who make it all possible. Most of all, we're grateful to share this holiday with the people who make our islands home."

The annual FISH Thanksgiving event ensures that everyone—especially those facing challenges—can celebrate the holiday surrounded by community. Along with the warm meal, guests will enjoy friendly faces, festive music, and the welcoming atmosphere that we and our volunteers are known for.

We encourage community members to stop by, share a meal, and celebrate together. "It's a meal that carries so much meaning," added Espinoza. "In times of rebuilding and recovery, gathering as a community is what keeps us all connected." To learn more or to volunteer, please contact Merari Salinas, Food Programs Manager, at [merari@fishofsancap.org](mailto:merari@fishofsancap.org) or 239-472-4775. Updates will also be posted on FISH's social media channels.



2422 Periwinkle Way, Sanibel FL 33957  
Mailing Address: PO Box 58, Sanibel FL 33957

239.472.4775 | [fishofsancap.org](http://fishofsancap.org) | email: [info@fishofsancap.org](mailto:info@fishofsancap.org)





FISH LINES

# Thanksgiving CELEBRATION

Come join friends, family and neighbors at the table for a traditional turkey dinner with all the fixings provided **FREE** in partnership with Jerry's Foods.



*In this, and in every season, FISH is truly thankful for the unique caring spirit of our wonderful island community.*

Tuesday, November 25  
from 4–6p at

**The Community House**

SANIBEL COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION

2173 Periwinkle Way, Sanibel

with special guests, Saint Michael's  
Choir, performing from 5–5:40p

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## FISH Seeks Support Amid SNAP Program Uncertainty

As the federal government shutdown continues, uncertainty surrounds the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), which provides food benefits for millions of Americans. While it remains unclear whether funding will continue without interruption, FISH of SanCap is preparing for any outcome—hoping for the best but planning for the worst—and is calling on the community for support.

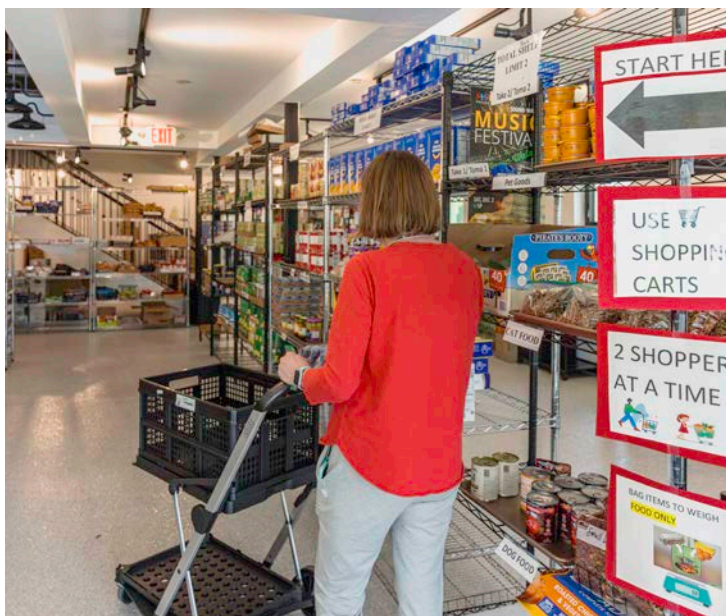


SNAP is a federal program that helps low-income individuals and families purchase food to meet their nutritional needs. Benefits are distributed monthly through an Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) card, which works like a debit card and can be used at most grocery stores and certain farmers' markets.

For millions of Americans, SNAP is more than a government benefit—it's the difference between dinner on the table and going to bed hungry. Each month, these families use their EBT card to buy essentials like fruits, vegetables, meat, milk, and bread. It helps parents pack lunches, seniors prepare simple meals, and neighbors stretch limited incomes just a little further.

Because the future of the program remains uncertain, many are understandably anxious about what's ahead, particularly with upcoming holiday meal preparation. Any delay or interruption could leave families unsure of how they'll feed their loved ones for the foreseeable future.

"We are staying optimistic that federal funding for SNAP will continue without disruption," said Maria Espinoza, Executive Director of FISH of SanCap. "At the same time, we know our neighbors depend on these benefits, and we're ready to step up if needed. FISH has always been here to fill the gaps during times of uncertainty, and with the community's help, we'll continue to make sure everyone has access to the food they need."





## SNAP Program Uncertainty cont'd

Food donations to the FISH Pantry are already down as many seasonal residents and visitors have yet to return to the islands, and certain high-demand products are becoming increasingly difficult to source.

FISH is seeking community support in three key ways:

- Food donations: Non-perishable pantry staples, fresh produce, refrigerated products and protein items.
- Grocery store gift cards: To help families purchase perishable items and household essentials not available through the pantry.
- Financial contributions: To fill potential funding gaps and support expanded food assistance if SNAP benefits are delayed.

“Every donation, big or small, helps us keep food on the table for families who may be caught in the middle of this uncertainty,” added Espinoza. “We’re neighbors helping neighbors—and right now, that sense of community means everything.”

FISH is asking island residents, businesses, and visitors to help by lending a hand during this uncertain time. Community support ensures that no one in our community goes hungry. Donations can be made online at <https://fishofsancap.org/donation-form/> — please note Food Pantry in the dedication line — or dropped off at 2422 Periwinkle Way, Sanibel between 8:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m., or coordinated by contacting Merari Salinas, Food Programs Manager, at [merari@fishofsancap.org](mailto:merari@fishofsancap.org).

Every act of generosity—big or small—helps keep meals on tables and hope in homes while families navigate this uncertain period.







FISH LINES

## Hunger in Southwest Florida is the sum of many things...

**151,000 people** unsure where their next meal will come from



**1 in 5 kids** studying in school without the nutrition they need

**1 in 12 seniors** choosing between food and medicine, rent, or utilities\*

*How can we solve this problem to make sure no one goes hungry? With a little math:*

# 2+GETHER= solving hunger

### September is Hunger Action Month.

FISH takes action every day in many ways to ease the burden of food insecurity for the residents and workforce of our community. Through the FISH Food Pantry. Through meal deliveries for seniors. Through monthly Meal Kits for families. Through Youth Backpacks with weekend meals for students.

*"Helping to feed others is the simplest & greatest example of neighbors helping neighbors."*

—a FISH Food Pantry volunteer

*Your support—with financial gifts, donated food, and volunteer hours—adds up to this:*

**Every child, every senior, every member of the workforce, every family fed.**

**Zero going hungry. 2+GETHER!**

That's math we can all get behind.



**Please consider a gift today.**



**Suncoast**  
Credit Union

*FISH food programs are funded, in part, through grantor partnerships. The Food Pantry program is made possible by a grant from The Sanctuary Golf Club Foundation. The Youth Backpack program is made possible by a grant from Suncoast Credit Union.*

\*Source: Feeding America, Map The Meal Gap, 2023 data

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**FISH**  
OF SANCAP

food programs • island based education • senior services • helping hands & financial assistance

neighbors helping neighbors



## Help For Local Worker With Medical Emergency



While working full-time on Sanibel, a single woman suddenly faced a dental emergency that threw her finances off course. An unplanned oral surgery, post-surgery complications and lost wages from missed work quickly spiraled into late rent, overdue utilities, and car payments she couldn't cover.

"I had just enough to pay my electric bill, but that was it," she recalled. "I was embarrassed to ask for help." She cut expenses to the bare minimum, picked up every shift possible, and even sold belongings online, but the bills kept piling up.

We stepped in by assisting through our Helping Hands Rent Assistance program, funded by The Sanctuary Golf Club Foundation, and covered her rent. This gave her the space she needed to get back on her feet.

"FISH is an incredible nonprofit," she said. "They've helped me twice — once for a continuing education opportunity and now by helping me catch up on bills. The rent payment gave me the space to get back on track. I honestly don't know where I'd be without them."

## October Pink Out Picnic Recap

It was an uplifting and inspiring afternoon at the Pink Out Picnic: Health & Wellness Expo. Shades of pink filled the firehouse, accompanied by laughter, cheer, and the sharing of heartfelt stories. Breast cancer affects 1 in 8 women, and having an organization right here in our community that advocates for their needs is truly exceptional. We urge all women to prioritize their health by scheduling regular mammograms—early detection can save lives!







FISH LINES

## Suncoast Credit Union Foundation Provides \$5000 Grant

We are pleased to announce a charitable gift of \$5000 from the Suncoast Credit Union Foundation. The funds will be used for the Youth Backpack Program a year-round initiative that provides essential nutrition to children from low- to moderate-income households living or working on Sanibel and Captiva Islands in grades Pre-K through 12th. Each month, approximately 200 food backpacks are distributed to children who rely on these meals during weekends, school holidays, and summer break when school-based food services are unavailable.

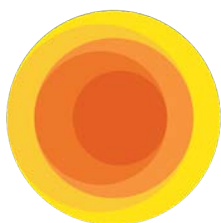
"We're so grateful to Suncoast Credit Union for investing in our youth through this generous grant," states Maria Espinoza, FISH Executive Director. "This partnership helps us ease the burden on working families and lets local kids focus on learning, growing, and just being kids. Without partners like Suncoast, this program wouldn't be possible. Their support is helping us meet real needs in real time."

Suncoast Credit Union, Florida's largest credit union, founded the Suncoast Credit Union Foundation to promote the education, health and emotional well-being of children in the community. Each time a Suncoast member uses their debit or credit card, the credit union donates four cents to the Foundation to fund local initiatives. Since its inception in 1990, the Foundation has raised and donated over \$55 million.

"We cannot overstate the importance of providing nutritious food, a basic need – for children and youth," said Jeff Kunberger, Executive Director of Suncoast Foundations. "Supporting this vital program is important to the well-being of these young people and their families. It is also critical to their success outside of the classroom and clearly supports our mission of improving lives in the communities we serve," he added.

### ***About Suncoast Credit Union***

Suncoast Credit Union is the largest credit union in the state of Florida, the 8th largest in the United States based on membership, and the 10th largest in the United States based on its \$19 billion in assets. Chartered in 1934 as Hillsborough County Teachers Credit Union, Suncoast Credit Union currently operates 78 full-service branches and serves more than 1.3 million members across Florida. As a community credit union, anyone who lives, works, attends school, or worships in Suncoast Credit Union's service area is eligible for membership. In 2021, Suncoast Credit Union's field of membership was expanded to include public K-12 teachers, college educators, and educational support staff from all of Florida's 67 counties. Suncoast is passionate about community support. Since its founding in 1990, the Suncoast Credit Union Foundation has raised and donated more than \$55 million to organizations and initiatives that support the health, education, and emotional well-being of children in the communities that the credit union serves. For more information, visit [suncoast.com](https://www.suncoast.com) or follow us on social media: Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, and Instagram.



**Suncoast**  
Credit Union



## FISH Steps In to Support an Island Friend After Loss



Life can change in an instant. After caring for her partner through a long period of poor health, she recently faced the heartbreaking loss of her beloved companion. In the difficult months that followed, FISH of SanCap has been there to help pick up the pieces, offering comfort, care, and connection. The individual wishes to remain anonymous.

Through programs like Meals-by-FISH, Smile Boxes, the Friendly Faces luncheon and more, an island neighbor has found not only needed help but a sense of community and friendship. In a heartfelt note to Erika Arnowitz, FISH's Senior Services Director, she shared:

"Dearest Erika, 'wow oh wow' the Smile Box does just that—makes me smile. I hate to admit how much I need those smiles these days but I am hanging in there. Thank you for the lovely card after the passing of my beloved. Thank you for the support in his end-of-life care and now the support of not only me but our family. Oh, how things can change in a flash. Losing a loved one is never easy of course, but having support from FISH has helped ease the pain. The meals were helpful because between us, I wouldn't have even been able to find a spoon my head was spinning so fast. Thank you for guiding me through getting our affairs in order, those computers are hard to deal with! I never thought I would need this much support, especially those supportive phone calls and texts checking on me. Funny how the house is so noticeably quiet, but there on my desk is your Smile Box, and it makes me feel less alone and does brighten my day. We all need that in our lives. I will see you at the luncheon; it will be a big day out for me and nice to socialize, be with others. You can tell this is your passion and how you love to nurture others. Many blessings to you and FISH and thank you for being a constant support, thank you."

She's also signed up to receive assistance through the FISH holiday food and gift drive, received access to home health resources and medical equipment, and was one of the many islanders supported by FISH's post-hurricane aid following recent storms.

At FISH, we know that everyone faces hard times — whether it's losing a loved one, recovering from a storm, or simply feeling the weight of loneliness. That's why our Senior Services programs are committed to bringing connection and compassion to those who need it most.

Erika Arnowitz shares, "We hear from our seniors all the time that small gestures, like a warm meal, a simple phone call, or a Smile Box filled with thoughtful treats, bring them incredible comfort. These moments remind them that Sanibel and Captiva are special places, where neighbors look out for one another and no one is forgotten. Many of our seniors, like this neighbor, have faced incredible hardship — from enduring hurricanes Ian, Helene, and Milton to caring for loved ones through long-term illness and loss. Having a caring community and access to programs that truly surround them with support makes all the difference."





FISH LINES

- An urgent surgery leaves you **short on rent and facing eviction**
- A car repair shatters your savings and **keeps you from getting to work**
- A family member needs **at-home care that costs two weeks of much-needed wages** for food and housing

turning **impossible choices** into possibilities



\*ALICE = Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed.  
Households below the ALICE Threshold are either below the Federal Poverty Level or above poverty but not able to afford basic needs.  
Source: 2025 ALICE Report (2023 data), United for ALICE.



People right here in our island communities face impossible choices like these every day.

**But there's good news—**

*FISH of SanCap turns impossible choices into possibilities.*

Whether it's **aiding 3,718 people in need...** or **feeding 7,079 food pantry visitors...** or **making 1,515 assurance calls** to the homebound... and so much more, FISH enriches lives by *neighbors helping neighbors*. We strive for a community where all people in Sanibel and Captiva have the support they need to thrive.

**You can help FISH make the impossible possible.  
Please consider a gift today. Scan here!**



*"Hurricane Ian brought three feet of storm surge into my lower-level apartment. I lost everything, including my car. FISH was there to assist me."*

—a FISH client

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food programs • island based education • senior services • helping hands & financial assistance

neighbors helping neighbors



## In Grey Skies and Blue Skies, Thank You First Responders

We have long worked side by side with first responders, standing together through hurricanes, emergencies, and community celebrations. From delivering food and supplies in storm recovery to partnering at family-friendly events, these collaborations are built on a shared goal of protecting and caring for island neighbors.

October 28 was National First Responders Day, a time to recognize and thank the men and women who serve on the frontlines to keep communities safe. Established by Congress in 2019, this day honors the vital service of police officers, firefighters, EMTs, paramedics, and 911 dispatchers, while also remembering those who have lost their lives in the line of duty. On Sanibel and Captiva, FISH partners closely with local fire and police departments, Lee County Sheriff's Office, Emergency Management, Public Works, and other agencies to assist residents and workforce members when storms and disasters strike.

In addition to emergencies, The Sanibel Police Department also leads community workshops on topics such as safety, scams, and personal and home protection, equipping residents with knowledge to stay safe year-round. Sanibel Fire & Rescue engages the next generation through Camp Noah, where children get a hands-on look at the day in the life of a firefighter—complete with fire hose lessons, firefighter hats, truck tours, and more. The Captiva Fire Department lends support during community gatherings such as JOG N JAM, while the Lee County Sheriff's Office has partnered with FISH in the past to provide educational workshops for residents.

"FISH could not do this work alone," said Maria Espinoza, FISH Executive Director. "In grey skies, when storms or emergencies disrupt daily life, our partnerships with trusted responders are essential to ensuring neighbors have the safety, support, and resources they need. And in blue skies, when the community gathers for celebrations like JOG N JAM or youth programs such as Camp Noah, those same partnerships remind us that working together strengthens our islands in every season."







neighbors helping neighbors

# THANK YOU!

## SanCap First Responders







FISH LINES

## Sip, Shop & Support FISH of SanCap at J. McLaughlin Captiva

J. McLAUGHLIN

FISH invites the community to join volunteer hostesses Leah Winkler and Elaine Parente for an afternoon of sips and shopping at J. McLaughlin Captiva on Tuesday, November 19th from 11:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m. The event, held at The Shops at South Seas, 14830 Captiva Drive, Unit 240, will benefit FISH with 10% of all sales donated to support island neighbors in need.

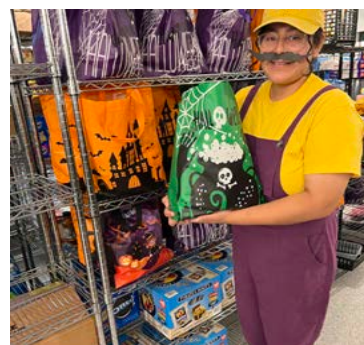
Guests will enjoy light refreshments while browsing J. McLaughlin's timeless styles and supporting the work of FISH. "We are proud to partner with FISH because of their vital role in supporting our island community," said Allison of J. McLaughlin Captiva. "From providing food and financial assistance to offering programs that promote resilience and well-being, FISH reflects the spirit of neighbors helping neighbors—a value we deeply share at J. McLaughlin."

The Sip & Shop is the next opportunity to join in the JOG N JAM celebration, FISH's annual fundraiser. The series began with the JOG on November 1st and continue with the Ben Allen Band concert on Saturday, December 6th at Tween Waters, a community beachside concert that combines live music with island spirit.

Proceeds from JOG N JAM events, including the Sip & Shop, benefit the programs of FISH—helping families, seniors, workers, and children with food, financial assistance, mental health resources, disaster recovery, and more.

## Halloween Boo Bags and Fun at the Food Pantry

Thank you for enjoying some not-too-spooky fun with us on Halloween!







FISH LINES

## Sweet Holiday Fun | Gingerbread House Workshop

In partnership with Saint Michael & All Angels Episcopal Church, we are inviting children ages 18 and under to join in some festive fun at a free Gingerbread House Workshop on Tuesday, December 3, from 2:30 to 4:30 p.m. at Saint Michael's Parish Hall, 2304 Periwinkle Way, Sanibel.

The afternoon promises candy, creativity, and plenty of laughter as kids decorate their own gingerbread houses with gumdrops, peppermints, and sweets of every kind. Supplies and snacks will be provided, making this a cheery celebration for island youth during the holiday season. This is the first year FISH is offering the Gingerbread House Workshop, and the team is excited to bring this cheerful, hands-on activity to local children.

The Gingerbread House Workshop is part of FISH's ongoing commitment to supporting island youth "in blue skies and gray," offering opportunities for connection, learning, and joy throughout the year. From weekend backpack meals to after-school programs and seasonal activities, FISH ensures that every child has the chance to thrive — no matter the circumstances. Families are encouraged to register **by November 21** to reserve a spot. Space is limited and fills quickly. To sign up, email Merari at [merari@fishofsancap.org](mailto:merari@fishofsancap.org).

**SUPPLIES  
& SNACKS  
PROVIDED**



**FISH KIDS**  
**GINGERBREAD HOUSE**





## Successful Senior Crafting Event

We had an amazing time at our special Fall Season Senior Crafting Event! Led by Erika Arnowitz, Senior Services Director at FISH, the event was an opportunity to decoupage two craft pumpkins while enjoying delicious pies and apple cider.







## Help Us Earn Our 2025 Great Nonprofit Badge

Each year, FISH of SANCAP is honored to be recognized as a Top-Rated Nonprofit by GreatNonprofits—a distinction based entirely on positive stories and reviews from people like you. To qualify for the 2025 badge, we need at least ten 4-star (or higher) reviews. Will you take 3 minutes to share how FISH has made a difference?

- Your review will be public (unless you choose to stay anonymous)
- You'll need to create a free account using your email
- We'd love to reach our goal before the end of the year!
- Leave your review here:

<https://greatnonprofits.org/org/f-i-s-h-of-sanibel-captiva-inc>



Feel free to share the link with clients, partners, friends, and family—anyone who has seen FISH in action. And if you need suggested language or have questions, just reach out. Thank you for helping us raise visibility and continue our important work in the community!

## November Friendly Faces Luncheon Featuring SHINE

FISH of SanCap invites the community to its November Friendly Faces luncheon on Tuesday, November 11 at 11:00 a.m. at the Sanibel Community House. Guests will enjoy a meal provided by Great White Grill while learning valuable information about Medicare's Open Enrollment period.

This month's guest speaker, Camilita Aldridge, Program Manager for the SHINE (Serving Health Insurance Needs of Elders) Program, will lead a presentation titled "Medicare's Open Enrollment Period." Attendees will learn about Medicare options, ways to save on Part D prescription costs, and important changes coming in 2026.

The SHINE Program, offered through the Area Agency on Aging for Southwest Florida (AAASWFL), provides free and unbiased Medicare counseling and education. SHINE's trained volunteers help Medicare beneficiaries, their families, and caregivers make informed decisions about coverage options and cost savings.

"The Friendly Faces luncheons are one of our favorite monthly gatherings," says Erika Arnowitz, Senior Services Director at FISH. "They're a time for neighbors to share a meal, learn something new, and reconnect. We're so pleased to welcome Camilita, who brings tremendous knowledge and warmth to this important topic. And a big thank-you to Great White Grill for generously providing lunch for our guests this month."

The Friendly Faces luncheon is open to all islanders and especially valued by seniors seeking connection and community. For more information or to reserve a seat at the luncheon, please contact Erika Arnowitz at [erika@fishofsancap.org](mailto:erika@fishofsancap.org) or 239-472-4775.



FISH LINES

# FISH events to catch friendly faces luncheon

*open to residents, visitors,  
& island workers of ALL AGES!*



DATE **Tuesday, November 11**  
TIME **11a-1p**  
VENUE **Sanibel Community House**—2173 Periwinkle Way, Sanibel  
RSVP **by November 7**—call FISH or email [erika@fishofsancap.org](mailto:erika@fishofsancap.org)  
TOPIC **SHINE | Medicare's Open Enrollment Period**

Join us for good food, great company, and meaningful conversation at our next Friendly Faces Luncheon! Our **Special Guest will be Camilita Aldridge, Program Manager for the SHINE (Serving Health Insurance Needs of Elders) Program.**

Camilita will lead a presentation titled "Medicare's Open Enrollment Period." Attendees will learn about Medicare options, ways to save on Part D prescription costs, and important changes coming in 2026. The SHINE Program, offered through the Area Agency on Aging for Southwest Florida (AAASWFL), provides free and unbiased Medicare counseling and education. SHINE's trained volunteers help Medicare beneficiaries, their families, and caregivers make informed decisions about coverage options and cost savings.

Enjoy a delicious meal from The Great White Grill, provided at no cost by FISH. **Space is limited—RSVP early to save your spot!**



  
The Community House  
SANIBEL COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION



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food programs • island based education • senior services • helping hands & financial assistance

neighbors helping neighbors





FISH LINES

VOLUNTEERS, PARTNERS, COMMUNITY | THANK YOU!



Zion Lutheran Church generously  
donated four wheelchairs to FISH

THANK YOU!

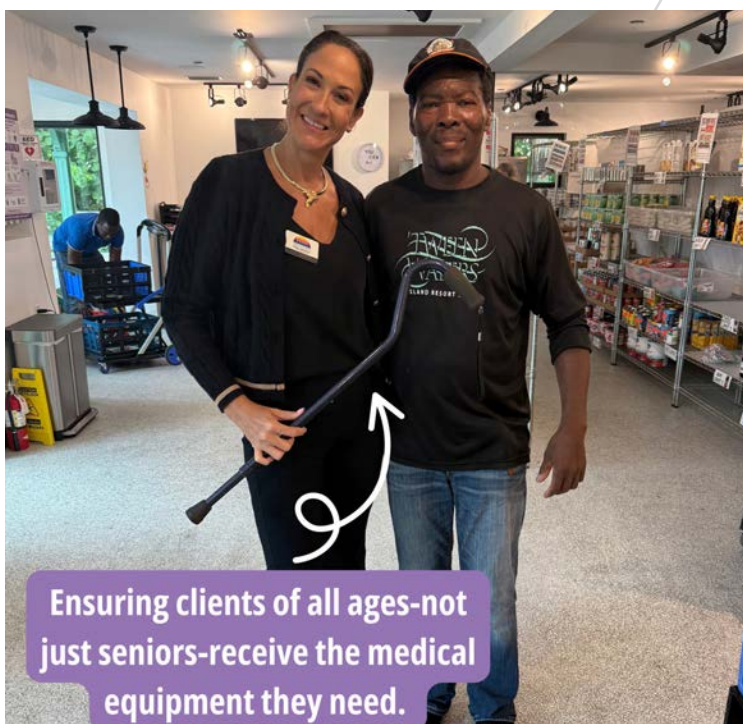
neighbors helping neighbors





FISH LINES

VOLUNTEERS, PARTNERS, COMMUNITY | THANK YOU!



Ensuring clients of all ages-not just seniors-receive the medical equipment they need.

THANK YOU!

neighbors helping neighbors





FISH LINES

**VOLUNTEERS, PARTNERS, COMMUNITY | THANK YOU!**



**THANK YOU!**





FISH LINES

**VOLUNTEERS, PARTNERS, COMMUNITY | THANK YOU!**



**THANK YOU!**

neighbors helping neighbors