



MEDIA RELEASE

November 5, 2025

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ELC to Host First-Ever Restorative Retreats for Sarasota County's Early Educators

Our early educators have weathered storm after storm, both literal and emotional. How can they continue to pour their best into our children if they have nothing left to pour into themselves?

That's exactly why three of Sarasota's leading philanthropic organizations, Community Foundation of Sarasota County, Gulf Coast Community Foundation, and United Way Suncoast, said yes to supporting the Early Learning Coalition's new initiative: *After the Storm: Rebuilding Resilience for Sarasota County's Early Educators*.

The Early Learning Coalition of Sarasota County (ELC) will host its first-ever restorative retreats this November thanks to a \$25,000 grant from Community Foundation of Sarasota County's *Suncoast Disaster Recovery Fund*, a \$25,000 grant from Gulf Coast Community Foundation, plus a \$500 boost from United Way Suncoast. Designed as mirror-image events, one in North County and one in South County, the retreats will collectively serve 200 early educators at no cost to them.

These events are intended to help childcare teachers and directors rebuild balance, resilience, and hope following the unprecedented 2024 hurricane season coupled with the daily stressors they face in their classrooms and personal lives. Early educators from across the field will be in attendance, including those from childcare centers, family childcare homes, Head Start programs, and the Sarasota County Schools Pre-K team.

"These grants allow us to meet teachers where they are, both geographically and emotionally," says Lorrie Young, ELC's Quality Services Manager. "Our early educators nurture our youngest learners every single day, often while carrying their own invisible burdens. These retreats are about giving something deeply restorative back to them: the tools, inspiration, and peace to keep going."

The *After the Storm* retreats will provide a half-day of rejuvenation focused on emotional well-being, mindfulness, self-care, and social-emotional growth. Participants will engage with a mix of nationally recognized speakers and local wellness professionals, gaining practical strategies to combat burnout, cultivate confidence, and build their bounce back.

"As someone who has seen firsthand the dedication and heart it takes to lead a childcare center, I know how vital it is that our early educators feel supported," said Phillip Lanham, President | CEO of Gulf Coast Community Foundation. "Prioritizing their mental wellbeing and resilience is essential to ensuring that every child and every classroom can truly thrive. Gulf Coast is proud to stand beside the Early Learning Coalition and our fellow funders in supporting this important work."

"At United Way Suncoast, we pride ourselves on elevating early learning and ensuring access to high quality childcare for all," said United Way Suncoast education vice president Nicole Brown. "We're excited about supporting these retreats because our emphasis on high quality childcare has a decided focus on supporting our hard-working early learning educators. They need to know they're not alone."

The retreat will feature an inspiring keynote from Dr. Nefertiti Poyner, an early childhood resilience specialist with the Devereux Center for Resilient Children. Additional workshops include:

- Music integration with Virginia Bibler, owner of Gulf Coast Music Therapy
- Play integration with Blair Bloomston, owner of Leaders Uplifted
- Arts integration with Maria Schaedler-Luera, owner of Atomica Arts

"Resilience isn't just about recovery, it's about rediscovery," says Schaedler-Luera. "Through creativity, sensory experiences, and mindful self-reflection, educators can reconnect with their imagination, restore their calm, and rediscover the joy that first called them to teach. When teachers feel grounded and inspired, that energy flows directly into every child they nurture."

Retreat Dates and Locations for Media Coverage:

Saturday, November 8, 2025 — Carlisle Inn, Sarasota | 8:00 a.m.–2:30 p.m.

Saturday, November 15, 2025 — Venice Golf and Country Club | 8:00 a.m.–2:30 p.m.

Event details are available [here](#) and on ELC's social media channels.

The Early Learning Coalition of Sarasota County appreciates any coverage of this unique and meaningful event.

About the Early Learning Coalition of Sarasota County

The Early Learning Coalition of Sarasota County (ELC) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting the success of young children, their families, and early childhood educators. Through programs that promote high-quality early education, family stability, and workforce development, the ELC helps ensure every child in Sarasota County enters kindergarten ready to learn and thrive. Learn more at www.elcsarasota.org

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