

## MEDIA CONTACT

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### **The Florida Center's Wonder Gala: A Night of Transformation and Community Impact**

*The inaugural event raised more than \$575,000 to support early education, therapies, and mental health services.*

(January 9, 2025, Sarasota, FL) — The Florida Center for Early Childhood's inaugural Wonder Gala on December 6 at The Ora was an evening of inspiration and generosity. Nearly 300 guests gathered to celebrate the transformative work of The Florida Center, raising more than \$575,00 to support its critical programs that provide early education, developmental therapies, and mental health services to children and their families.

The evening's highlights included a poignant video presentation featuring the compelling narratives of three families whose lives have been forever changed by The Florida Center's support. Their moving testimonies underscored the profound impact of the organization's mission.

A captivating "Wonder Wall" was also on display, showcasing the faces and stories of children and families whose futures have been shaped by the organization's support. This visual journey highlighted not just the challenges these families have overcome, but also the strength, resilience, and hope that emerged as a result of the

community's generosity and The Florida Center's commitment to fostering brighter tomorrows.

CEO Dr. Kristie Skoglund spoke about the many accomplishments the organization achieved during the past year, including the expansion of its FASD (Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders) diagnostic services to the Panhandle region; bringing early childhood mental health support to nine additional preschools; launching an Early Childhood Clinical Immersion program for professionals in early childhood intervention; and extending its occupational therapy, speech therapy, and mental health services into Charlotte County.

"Our vision at The Florida Center is simple: to give every child the support they need to thrive, no matter where they start in life," said Skoglund. "This year, we are proud to have served over 4,000 children and families across our programs. Each one represents a victory—a step toward a brighter, healthier future."

Guests were entertained by rising star Allison Nash, who delivered two spellbinding performances, and the lively band Soul Sensations, who kept the dance floor packed. Silent and live auctions offered unique items and experiences, further boosting the event's success.

"This was more than a gala—it was a celebration of hope, resilience, and community," says Kate Reed, chief philanthropy officer for The Florida Center. "We are deeply grateful to everyone who attended, donated, and supported this event."

The Wonder Gala event chair was Sandy Humenik; co-chairs were Alex Zimmerman and Gretchen Bauer. Funds raised from the event will directly benefit The

Florida Center's programs, ensuring more children receive the vital resources they need to thrive.

### **Photo captions:**

- *Left to right: Eddie Pérez-Ruberté, The Florida Center's board chair; Jennifer Hageman, board member; Jeff Woodin, board member; Dr. Kristie Skoglund, The Florida Center's CEO; and The Florida Center board members Hon. Rochelle Curley, Dr. Neal Horen, and Dr. Sarah Swasey at The Florida Center for Early Childhood's inaugural Wonder Gala on December 6. Photo by Doug Arcos.*
- *Rising star Allison Nash delivered two spellbinding performances at The Florida Center for Early Childhood's inaugural Wonder Gala on December 6. Photo by Doug Arcos.*
- *Soul Sensations kept the dance floor packed at The Florida Center for Early Childhood's inaugural Wonder Gala on December 6. Photo by Doug Arcos.*
- *CEO Dr. Kristie Skoglund spoke about the many accomplishments the organization achieved during the past year at The Florida Center for Early Childhood's inaugural Wonder Gala on December 6. Photo by Doug Arcos.*
- *A captivating "Wonder Wall" showcasing the faces and stories of children and families whose futures have been shaped by the organization's support was on display at The Florida Center for Early Childhood's inaugural Wonder Gala on December 6. Photo by Doug Arcos.*
- *Left to right: Gretchen Bauer, Wonder Gala co-chair; Alex Zimmerman, Wonder Gala co-chair; and Sandy Humenik, Wonder Gala chair at The Florida Center for Early Childhood's inaugural WonderGala on December 6. Photo by Janet Combs.*

### **About The Florida Center for Early Childhood**

For 45 years, The Florida Center for Early Childhood has been the leading provider of therapeutic services, early education, and healthy development for young children in southwest Florida, offering a seamless delivery of services for the whole child and their family. Today, the

agency is nationally recognized for its early childhood expertise in various specialties. The Florida Center provides developmental therapies, mental health counseling, the Starfish Academy preschool, the Healthy Families home-visiting program, and the state's only Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders Clinic, with locations in Sarasota, Orlando and Pensacola. **For more information, visit [TheFloridaCenter.org](http://TheFloridaCenter.org).**