



Season of Sharing: Where do you go when you need help in Sarasota?

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Posted at 6:01 AM

The Glasser/Schoenbaum Human Services Center, a partner in the Herald-Tribune's Season of Sharing campaign, can help connect you

SARASOTA — Say you're struggling with rent, utilities, child care or the sort of routine demands that so many of us take for granted. Who do you call, where do you go, how do you get help, where do you start?

For many people the answers come by word of mouth. For others it could be a social worker, your child's guidance counselor, synagogue, mosque or church, or a short text or phone call to the United Way Suncoast 2-1-1 non-emergency crisis helpline.

In Sarasota, the pathway to help often involves the Glasser/Schoenbaum Human Service Center, a campus that houses more than 20 nonprofit health and human service agencies that help low-income and at-risk adults, children and families.

It's also one of the largest organizations in Sarasota County that helps to distribute money from the Herald-Tribune's Season of Sharing campaign.

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A nonprofit partnership with the Community Foundation of Sarasota County and other media, Season of Sharing initiative extends short-term financial relief to families struggling with rent, utilities, child care and the sorts of routine demands so many take for granted. Since its inception 20 years ago, SOS has received more than \$20 million from donors to help less fortunate neighbors in Sarasota, Manatee, Charlotte and DeSoto counties.

The Community Foundation allocates almost \$2 million to six different area nonprofits in Sarasota County that help distribute the funds.

Glasser/Schoenbaum processes about \$750,000 of that funding.

Although you cannot connect with Glasser/Schoenbaum directly for help, the nonprofit receives the majority of its referrals for SOS campaign from the 2-1-1 hotline. The service is available all day, every day for financial assistance, health programs, crisis support and more. That referral service can help connect you to an organization, many of which are housed on Glasser/Schoenbaum's campus.

"All doors are open, regardless of which door you may come through," said Christina Russi, community liaison for Glasser/Schoenbaum. Russi works directly with caseworkers and other service providers to distribute SOS funding that is used for rent, utility and car repair assistance, transportation, child care, food vouchers or other crucial expenses to help families get back on their feet.

SOS funding is used in tandem with other sources, including from the federal and state government. While those grants have certain income criteria, SOS does not and has more flexibility in terms of who can be helped.

"We don't discuss various percentages of poverty, we just help," Russi said.

If you are eligible for SOS funding, you are allotted \$1,000 every 12 months. Most recipients of SOS funding don't need it again the following year, said Kameron Hodgens, Glasser/Schoenbaum's CEO.

As an executive of a nonprofit, Hodgens splits her time between those at the very top of Sarasota's socio-economic ladder and those trying to hang on to last rung. Donors are often surprised to hear that over half of school children in Sarasota County are eligible for free or reduced lunch programs. Others are shocked at the difference a few hundred dollars can make.

On the other hand, those seeking help don't always see the advertisements, the fundraising efforts, the scores of profiles in the newspaper.

"Oftentimes," said Hodgens, "they just feel the relief."