FORWARD PATHS foundation

Pathways

Vol. 1, No. 3 **November 2026**

The Cottages On Palmetto are coming soon!



Above:Representatives from HomeAid, Proformance Builder Solutions and Forward Paths meeting on site planning at the Palmetto property.

In 2025, the City of Leesburg generously donated over 1 acre of land to Forward Paths so that we could further our mission to house our community's young adults in need.

The Cottages on Palmetto will be a micro-community of homes in Leesburg, Florida designed to meet the specific needs of our community's at-risk youth.

Much like our Cottages On Grove in Eustis, the collection of homes will consist of ten 600 sq. ft. cottages that will help Forward Paths further their mission to positively influence at-risk youth and set them on a path to independence.



Artist rendering of the Cottags on Palmetto

In addition to the 10 tiny homes that will be built, the site will also have an outdoor picnic area, a storage garage, a parking lot, and a community garden where our youth will grow fruits, vegetables and herbs.

The lot is near tennis courts, future pickleball courts, Venetian Gardens, schools, and most importantly, public transportation.

Stay tuned…we'll be sure to keep you updated with our progress on this new and very exciting project!

Site Plan





Our Mission

The mission of Forward Paths is to positively influence at-risk youth and forever revolutionize their path to independence.



The Power of Giving

GIVING TODAY, CHANGING TOMORROW

Our donors are the backbone of our foundation. We spoke with a few donors about their philanthropy and their reasons for supporting Forward Paths.

"My wife and I came to know Forward Paths in 2024 after attending a city hearing when the Foundation was seeking a building variance when constructing their ten "tiny" homes community called the Cottages on Grove in Eustis, Florida.

We immediately felt this was an excellent approach to helping "aging-out" youth from Florida's foster care program and have been donors ever since!"

Bill & Sandy Davenhall, Lakes of Mount Dora, FL.

Sharon Wooten is a long-time donor and board member who has been involved with Forward Paths since its earliest days, when the organization was just beginning to take shape. "There are so many people in need, especially now. I feel a responsibility to help," Sharon says.

She helps through her time and talents, and provides financial support. "Forward Paths answers so much of what these kids need. They provide housing, food and education. I just want to help these kids".

Sharon goes on to say "I have a lot of confidence in the program. They don't take any loans – it's all pay as you go."

When asked what she'd like to see Forward Paths provide in the future, she said, "I'd like to see more growth and more housing to help more kids so that we can end homelessness for these kids".



When asked why she feels that charitable giving is important, longtime donor **Joan Saulpaugh** said, "So many people need help. I just feel it's the right thing to do."

Joan first became aware of Forward Paths through a news article that she read. She was especially interested because her fiancee's mother had been in the foster care system. She learned more about Forward Paths and wanted to help.

Through a neighbor's recommendation, Joan also volunteers with a food pantry and she said, "I also support other charities, especially those related to the military. It's so important to me to help where I can".

About future goals for Forward Paths, Joan said "Forward Paths should continue what they're doing. It's wonderful what they do to help these young people."

How can you help?

Giving is often more than a financial donation (although we are truly thankful for those!). It can be the gift of time, knowledge, encouragement, or support. Every act of giving meets an immediate need while helping build a culture of compassion, inspiring others to participate, and creating a legacy of long-term, sustainable change.

Give your time through volunteering and service. Please call us at 352-801-8631 or send an email to info@forwardpaths.org to get started.

Inspire others to join the effort. Tell your friends and relatives about Forward Paths and how they can help! Share our stories and how they inspire you to give.

Build legacies that continue beyond one individual.

EVERY GIFT MAKES A DIFFERENCE. Time becomes action, action inspires others, and together we create lasting change.

Giving Week Begins November 30

This is a great opportunity to make your donation count!

We are so excited to once again be participating in the annual giving week with Mount Dora Community Trust.

There will be many opportunities to have fun and support Forward Paths. Every year we hope to surpass the previous years' donations and we hope this year is no exception.

Last year we raised over $76,000 – wouldn't it be great to get to $100,000 this year!

There will be a total of $10,000 in matching funds available on November 30. Donations between $10 and $500 are eligible to be matched — but funds go fast!

This is a great way to double the value of your donation to Forward Paths and support us as we begin another exciting project to provide housing for our youth in Leesburg.

Our $2M building campaign for the Cottages on Palmetto is now underway!

Mark your calendars!

Giving Week 2026

November 30 - December 7

Follow along with us on Facebook. We'll be updating to help guide you through the steps needed to donate for Forward Paths!



Forward Paths has a 4-star Charity Navigator rating!

• FOUR-STAR CHARITY •

Seasonal Inspirations



Denise Burry,
Executive Director
Forward Paths Foundation

We are headed into my favorite time of the year. I love this season because I long for the cooler weather and it also just happens to be the season of giving and gratitude. I am fortunate to be surrounded by caring people, including the two churches that have been home to our offices, Morrison United Methodist Church and the First United Methodist Church of Eustis. So many other surrounding churches have really been an amazing support to us, too. And for that I am grateful.

Most of my meetings are talking to people who are working on ways to make other people's lives better. We recently started hosting a "providers meeting", bringing together our area's other organizations and nonprofits that assist the homeless. They're all working in different areas with different missions, but overall, our goal is the same: to end homelessness and to give a hand up to those who need it most. Sharing space with these advocates, collaborating, and understanding the impact that they have on the lives of people in our community has been inspiring and gives me hope. These meetings have made me realize that inspiration is easy or find, even on a hard day.

I often feel empowered during this time of year. I credit it to the change of seasons, but I know it's more than that. It's a time to be thankful, to gather with friends and family, and to renew our spiritual beliefs. This time serves as a reminder to never underestimate the power of showing up, believing in someone, and reminding them that their story is still being written. Giving is more than just money. It is offering encouragement, guidance, compassion, and the opportunity for someone else to succeed. This works for everyone's benefit because as St. Francis of Assisi reminded us, "For it is in giving that we receive." I hope you, too, are inspired this season.



Mental Health Corner

by Dr. Maggie Denk, LMHC



Editor's Note: The Daniel Kids National Independent Living Conference (hosted by Daniel Kids, formerly Daniel Memorial) is an annual national event focused on life after foster care, transition skills, and independent living for youth and youth-serving professionals. This year, Dr. Maggie Denk and Denise Burry attended the conference.

The Daniel Kids National Independent Living Conference brought together professionals dedicated to supporting youth as they prepare for adulthood and independent living. The conference focused on sharing innovative strategies, practical resources, and approaches to help young people build essential life skills, develop confidence, and prepare for successful futures. It was an exciting chance to be with like-minded professionals in our field.

Attending the conference provided an opportunity to explore new possibilities for youth, including expanded access to resources, community partnerships, mentorship, and programs that promote self-sufficiency, personal growth, and long-term success. The knowledge and connections gained will help inform future opportunities to better support young people as they transition into adulthood.

For both myself and Denise, attending together also provided a valuable opportunity for fellowship, collaboration, and shared learning. Traveling together allowed us to strengthen our professional relationship, exchange ideas, and reflect on ways to bring new insights and opportunities back to the youth we serve.

A Journey of Resilience, Growth, and Hope



Since aging out of foster care and being accepted into the Forward Paths program, **Jesse Moore** has worked hard pursuing an education and working toward independence. He's laying the groundwork necessary for a brighter, successful future.

Earning his General Educational Diploma (GED®) marked an important milestone in Jesse's commitment to education and personal development. Jesse went on to complete a culinary certificate course at Lake Technical College. In addition to food safety and preparation, this course teaches essential, practical skills including teamwork, time management, and the value of consistency.

Caregivers **Amos Bender,** a Forward Paths house parent, and **Lou Brown** (volunteer and former board member) have supported Jesse with care, encouragement, and growth opportunities. Amos monitors daily activities and acts as a surrogate parent and mentor. The support that Amos provides each and every day is truly invaluable. Lou has taken Jesse to church and piano lessons, fostering spiritual growth, musical learning, and personal enrichment. Their involvement shows how caring adults can help young people build confidence, explore their interests, and prepare for future independence.

Longer term, Jesse hopes to continue his education, attending college to study game design or animation, learning new skills to utilize his creativity in new areas. These fields bring together imagination, technology, and problem-solving, skills that are helpful in most any work environment.

From earning his GED® and completing culinary training to considering game design and animation, Jesse has much to celebrate. His story shows that aging out of foster care does not limit a person's drive and potential. Determination, access to education, and caring support help young adults like Jesse recognize their strengths, follow their passions, and build meaningful futures.

As he looks toward college and considers his future, Jesse is taking another step toward shaping a life defined by his own interests, ambitions, and dreams.

Our Garden is Changing!



We are so thankful to **Leadership Lake County** for providing Forward Paths with a grant to update the garden at the Cottages on Grove with new raised beds! Work is nearly completed; we have the beds filled with soil and replanting is underway. The youth have selected individual beds that they are planting and will maintain throughout the season.









Gardening is not just a pastime; it's a powerful educational tool. Scientific research shows it enhances brain development, motor skills, sensory awareness, and problem-solving abilities. Moreover, it promotes healthy habits, empathy towards nature, and a profound understanding of interconnectedness.[1]

[1] https://kidsrkids.com/prairie-hills/2023/10/16/cultivating-young-minds-the-educational-benefits-of-gardening-with-kids/#:~:text=Cultivating%20Young%20Minds:%20The%20Educational%20Benefits%20of%20Gardening%20with%20Kids



A Joy of Kids Fuels Her Passion



LOUISE MacCALLUM

"I enjoy kids and almost grown-up kids and of course the little ones," said **Louise MacCallum** when asked about why she gives her time and talents to the Forward Paths Foundation.

Louise and her husband Lee decided to retire and move to the Leesburg area in 2019 shortly before the major Covid shut down. Prior to that move they lived for a brief period in Dover, Delaware and prior to Dover a long time in Staten Island, New York. While there Louise and Lee had two wonderful sons, Keith and Kevin, both of whom are married and between them have ten children.

On top of raising children, Louise worked as a High School Teacher, Administrator and Assistant Principal, while Lee pastored the local Olivet Presbyterian Church on Staten Island for 35 years.

Having two boys and working at a local high school, Louise was always involved in activities involving youth and young adults. Seeing them grow, prosper, and become successful adults was her calling and passion. She provided nurturing, guidance, and discipline (as Assistant Principal), all reflecting her loving and caring personality.

As they moved to Central Florida, they joined First Presbyterian Church in Wildwood and Lee served as Interim Pastor. While there Louise heard about Forward Paths and in late 2021, she became a volunteer. Having volunteered in many areas from client mentoring, front office receptionist, HMIS ((Homeless Management Information System) expert to Volunteer Coordinator for the East Side of Lake County plus she is in the Leesburg office several mornings each week to welcome visitors.

Pathways asked her two questions about her story with Forward Paths. The first was, why have you remained so active with FP for the last 5-6 years? She said that "she believes in the mission and work of the organization, appreciates the people that she works with, it is a good place and most importantly a great way to give back to the community." The second question was what do you see as a need for FP in the future? "Volunteers! They play particularly important roles in the success of the program as well as in the success of our client's lives."

Volunteer Meetings Please Join us!

On odd months we meet in Leesburg (in the Morrison Community Center on the Leesburg campus) on the first Wednesday. (Jan, Mar, May, July, Sept, Nov)

On even months we meet in Eustis (the Fellowship Hall at First United Methodist Church) on the first Wednesday. (Feb, April, June, Aug, Oct, Dec.)

Join the Volunteer Corps!

Are you looking for a way to give back? We would love to have you.

To learn more about volunteering with Forward Paths Foundation, please contact our Coordinators,

Louise MacCallum (Leesburg) 352-801-8631

Lori Welch (Eustis) 407-625-3794

or send an email to: info@forwardpaths.org

Building Systems to Support our Future



GORDON WILLIAMSON

Gordon Williamson became involved with Forward Paths because "I believe that the young people we support are so important to the future and the support that we provide is so critical. We're providing opportunities that allow them to excel, that help them to make good decisions, become independent and lead meaningful, successful lives."

In the 3+ years since he's been volunteering with Forward Paths, Gordon has become known as the guy who never says no. He supports technology (network and camera systems, personal computers and emergency management), helping to provide a safe and secure environment for our youth. He is always willing to jump in and help wherever it's needed.

Gordon moved to Central Florida when he was 14. After completing his education, he spent 26 years as a Radio-frequency Engineer working with cellular phone systems and as an Engineering Manager. He volunteered for 20 years with the Lake County Sheriff's Department working with large-scale communication systems, later joining the department as technical support for 5 years. But that's not all. He's also a Registered Nurse and a Commercial Pilot.

One of Gordon's concerns for Forward Paths is how the current economic climate may impact donations. "I hope that we're able to continue to provide the quality of support that we've always provided. I'm confident that Forward Paths will do everything possible to continue the good work to help build strong futures for our youth."

2026 Annual Luncheon





To all who were able to attend our annual luncheon, thank you! This was a very successful fundraiser for us and we very much appreciate your support. We hope you had a wonderful time – and maybe we caught your happy smiling face in one of our photos below!



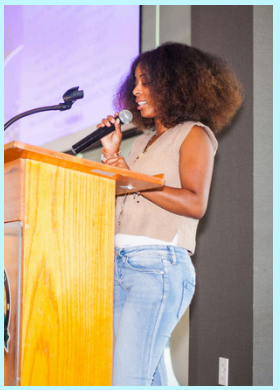


















A Diploma, a Job, a Home: Why All Three Matter

Housing, education, and employment aren't three separate problems for homeless youth —they're one deeply connected challenge. Research compiled by Youth.gov makes the relationship clear: young people who have a high school diploma and are enrolled in school or employed at age 21 are significantly less likely to experience homelessness than those without those markers.

Yet the data also reveals how steep the climb can be for those who've aged out of foster care. On average, former foster youth who experience homelessness remain homeless for 27.5 months — nearly 8 months longer than peers with no foster care history. That's more than two years of instability, compounding at every turn: missed school, lost jobs, worsening health.

These numbers aren't just statistics. They are the difference between a young person finding their footing and losing it entirely. The good news? When communities show up, outcomes change. Stable housing creates the foundation for everything else — education, employment, and ultimately, independence.

As the year comes to a close, your year-end gift to Forward Paths Foundation helps provide exactly that foundation for youth in Lake County who need it most. A home is where a forward path begins.

Read more on **Youth.gov** – Child Welfare System & Homelessness

Thank You to **Morrison United Methodist Church** in Leesburg and **First United Methodist Church** in Eustis for their very generous support of our mission!


Morrison United Methodist Church


First United Methodist Church

We are also very grateful to **Lake Cares** and **St. Vincent de Paul Food Pantries** and **Modern Schoolhouse** who provide food for our youth each month. Their support makes a huge difference in the lives of our youth.

Correction: In our last issue we failed to identify the source for the Rain Technique described in the Mental Health Corner. Psychologist Tara Brach popularized this method, which is based on a framework first introduced by meditation teacher Michele McDonald. Our apologies for the oversight.

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Donate Now!

MISSION
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FORWARD PATHS foundation

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