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LUMINARIES MARTIN COUNTY

# M.I.S.S.: Providing a support system

By Jacklyn Holfelder For Luminaries

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Operations manager Ruth Orenstein, executive director Schonna Green, board member Leonard Villafranco and administrative assistant Nina Reid.

M.I.S.S. of the Treasure Coast, known simply as M.I.S.S., is a nonprofit organization that provides housing and a multitude of support services to single women who are homeless with children.

Schonna Green, founder and executive director, says it's something that can happen to just about anybody: people displaced by hurricanes, those who went through a period of unemployment or those whose marital status changed without leaving them a financial safety net are just a few examples of situations that have driven mothers to become residents.

However, housing is just a small part of what M.I.S.S. provides to these families.

Each woman participates in a variety of empowerment programs that enhance parenting and money management skills, offer access to food and hygiene pantries and afford them supportive counseling and permanent housing assistance.

There is even an on-site G.E.D. program, because many residents lack the transportation to deliver them to a school or center offering the course.

The goal of everyone involved with the nonprofit, from board to staff, is to prepare the residents to move on in a way that prepares them to succeed.

Self-sufficiency is taught in a variety of ways — all aiming at boosting self-confidence and independence.

That even includes food. Elisabeth's Garden now operates on the grounds of Butterfly Garden, one of the M.I.S.S. residential facilities, providing fresh food to residents.

In 1999, a grass roots initiative to provide housing for homeless women and children led to the purchase of a four-unit apartment complex, known as Hope Park.

Now, M.I.S.S. provides services for 163 people a year. Today, there's the Butterfly Garden residence in Stuart, Sammy's Landing in Port St. Lucie and a single-family residence also in Port St. Lucie called Success House.

Board member Leonard Villafranco says the women who live at M.I.S.S. pay a program fee — this is not a freebie.

"We give a hand up, not a handout," he adds.

Referrals come from a variety of nonprofits and agencies, including DCF, SafeSpace, Mary's Shelter, 211, and the M.I.S.S. website.


Members of the community and volunteers love the way the residents work toward improving their skills and chances for a better future.

The Grandparent Program meets three times a week for children's activities and tutoring and The Women's Club of Lost Lake of Hobe Sound contributes lunch and craft projects for the children twice a month.

To learn more about this positive and empowering nonprofit, visit [MISSInc.org](https://MISSInc.org) or call 772-781-4063.

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