



Friends of SoZo Kids Inc.

2020 Annual Report

2020 – A Year to Remember Because of YOU!

Thank You to All Our Donors & Volunteers

In spite of the virus, hundreds of you rose above the challenges to help Friends of SoZo Kids meet the basic, educational, and emergency needs of children and their families living in poverty in the Ocala National Forest.

We are grateful for the many individuals, Villages, Groups, Churches, and musically inclined “Friends” of SoZo Kids who volunteered their time, talents, and treasures to make sure we had the resources to meet the needs of the Kids we serve.

SoZo Kids Club of The Villages Became a 501c3 Nonprofit

Effective March 1, 2020, SoZo Kids Club of The Villages became an IRS-approved 501c3 nonprofit known as Friends of SoZo Kids Inc. The Board of Directors has established operating bylaws and adopted new processes and procedures to more effectively live out our mission through the following programs and projects.

Angel Tree Christmas Project

You donated gifts for 212 named children (and a few of their parents) who signed up for the Angel Tree project. In addition, we collected gifts of clothing, toiletries, and toys to help make the holidays brighter for the other 1,300+ children served through SoZo Kids. Cash donations allowed us to purchase gifts for those without Angel Tree sponsors.

Christmas Ham Dinners & the Fixings

You donated many dozens of shopping bags filled with holiday meal fixings, in addition to cash to purchase hams for 200 families ensuring more than a thousand people enjoy Christmas dinner.

FRIENDS-Giving Thanksgiving Meals

With your financial support, we were able to provide 50 families, some without proper cooking facilities in their homes, with a prepared Thanksgiving dinner and all the trimmings.

Basket Fest

About 200 of you showed up over the course of four hours on November 17 for our Basket Fest & Silent Auction, where more than \$5,000 was raised to support SoZo Kids programs.

Back-to-School Bash

With your financial support, we were able to purchase more than 1,000 backpacks and provide school supplies, new shoes, underwear, clothing, and toiletries to support the 1,500 SoZo Kids relying on our help to get them ready for school.

Summer Activity Kits

Because of COVID-19, children in the Forest were not able to attend their usual SoZo Kids after-school programs, the summer day program at Forest Lakes Park, or Camp SoZo. We asked for your help, and you came through by creating and donating close to 2,000 Summer Activity Kits (arts and crafts, card game sets, and homemade sock-ball games) that gave children something fun to do and to let them know they are not forgotten.

Food Bank

Starting in March, you donated thousands of dollars' worth of food and household goods to replenish the quickly diminishing supplies at the SoZo Kids Food Bank.

Foster Care Kits

Your donations allowed us to purchase weighted blankets, clothing, PJ's, toiletries, and stuffed animals to create hundreds of Foster Care Kit tote bags given to children in the Forest when they are suddenly thrust into the foster care system.

\$16,290 in Grants awarded to the Help Agency of the Forest

Because of your financial generosity to Friends of SoZo Kids, we were able to provide 4 grants to the Help Agency to meet urgent/emergency needs or help with important projects:

- **\$4,500** grant to help with the purchase of a "new" used van for transporting children and supplies across the bumpy dirt roads in the Forest.
- **\$5,725** grant to cover the costs to remove a meth house and clear the lot next to the Forest Lakes Park community center, which is used as one of the SoZo Kids after-school centers. The lot, which was previously surrounded by a rusty barbed wire fence and littered with needles, broken glass, weeds, and other debris, has been transformed into a safe playground for the kids.
- **\$2,094** grant to purchase supplies and install new fencing around the community center property, which is now a large playground for the children.
- **\$3,971** grant to replace a burst water tank at Camp SoZo that meet EPA guidelines.

Little League

You donated enough money to help sponsor 10 Little League teams and several dozen players, ages 5-13. Money was used to help upgrade the fields, paint buildings, and purchase equipment. Some of you even volunteered to staff the food booth, teach umpiring workshops, umpire games, or coach a team. This was going to be a banner year. But COVID-19 shut the season down after just one week. We hope to be hearing "Play Ball" this coming spring.