



Friends of SoZo Kids Inc.

2022 Annual Report

Thanks to Friends Like You

Our mission is to connect the time, talent, and treasures of residents of The Villages and surrounding communities to meet the basic, educational, and emergency needs of children and their families living in poverty in the Ocala National Forest. We are an all-volunteer organization and 95% of funds received are used to benefit the SoZo Kids we serve. We join with FRIENDS like you to celebrate the many ways our beloved SoZo Kids have benefited from our work together in 2022.

Meeting Basic Needs

Christmas Angels Project

Christmas Wish Lists for 175 SoZo Kids plus 60 teen gifts were fulfilled through our Christmas Angels Project. Two collection days provided donors and volunteers the opportunity to be part of the festivities to ensure gift bundles were complete and ready for Santa's sleigh.

Holiday Meals

We provided the Help Agency with a grant to purchase 225 Thanksgiving turkeys and 270 Christmas hams. Your generosity provided thousands of meals for SoZo Kids and their families, making their holiday season special.

Back-to-School Bash

Friends like you helped provide 1,100 backpacks filled with a complete set of school supplies specific to the Kids' grade levels, 950 pairs of new sneakers, over 500 packs of new underwear, and thousands of pairs of new socks to start the school year. All these items were distributed at the annual Back-to-School Bash on August 6, where each child was personally fitted with shoes and received other needed items. Haircut and nail polishing stations completed the day. Because of Friends like you, SoZo Kids had everything they needed to start the school year looking good and feeling great!

Foster Kid Care Kits

Sadly, there are times when SoZo Kids are removed from their homes to the safety of foster care. Foster Kid Care Kits are a duffle bag filled with a blanket, pillow, pillowcase, PJs, a stuff animal, some clothing, and personal care items to help ease the transition. Last year we ensured that the Help Agency of the Forest always had enough of these kits on hand.

Meeting Educational Needs

Generous donors provided us with the opportunity to invest in multiple Educational Programs:

Post-Secondary Career/Education Award Program

Most SoZo Kids qualify for full tuition assistance because of their levels of poverty, but not material goods such as computers for college or tools for learning a trade. Through the Friends of SoZo Kids Career/Education Award Program, we help ensure the Kids have what they need to become successful, productive citizens with a living-wage job.

We had the pleasure of making two awards to SoZo Kids in 2022. One student was provided with a fully loaded computer for college, and the other student was given tools and supplies for turning his car repair hobby into a business.

Camp SoZo Program

With your help, we provided 200 SoZo Kids with the opportunity to participate in a three-night summer sleep-away camp experience at Camp SoZo. This program offers a healthful escape from the poverty in the Forest and offers fun activities for all as well as leadership training for the older SoZo Kids. Many SoZo Kids 'alumni' come back as counselors for the summer camp.

Little League Program

In 2022 we paid the Little League fees for 40 SoZo Kids so that they could participate in the Babe Ruth Little League program last year. This is a great opportunity for them to make new friends and develop teamwork and leadership skills.

Educational Program

Thanks to donors like you, FOSKI expanded its robotics program in 2022 at both of the Help Agency's After-School sites so that every SoZo Kid had their own robot to work with during the sessions. Kids from Kindergarten through middle school learned the basics of programming and building through fun activities using age-appropriate robots. Studies have shown that introduction of a program like robotics at an early age can be an important step for those later interested in a STEM-related career (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math).

FOSKI volunteers also added some fun educational sessions to supplement those of the Help Agency at their After-School and Summer Programs. Topics included math games, story reading, and teaching the kids how to count money to thriftily manage spending.

Nutritious Meals for After-School and Summer Programs

Unfortunately, many SoZo Kids don't enjoy dinner when they get home, compounding hunger insecurity and learning issues. Donor and volunteer support from Friends like you allowed us to provide nutritious cafeteria-style meals at each of the Help Agency's After-School and Summer Program days during the year, with over 5,000 kids meals prepared and served during 2022.

Meeting Emergency/Immediate Needs

Grants Awarded to the Help Agency of the Forest

Because of your financial generosity, Friends of SoZo Kids was able to provide over \$50,000 in grants to the Help Agency of the Forest to meet Basic, Educational, and Emergency Needs. These grants significantly improved facilities for the Kids and volunteers. The larger improvement projects included a new ice machine for Camp SoZo, new A/C unit and outdoor basketball court for the Sandy Acres After-School Program, multiple improvements at the Forest Lakes Park After-School Program, and assistance to the Help Agency for offsetting last year's high fuel prices.

Thank You for Being a Friend of SoZo Kids!

**We invite you to review our 2021 IRS-Form 990 on the website at
www.FriendsofSoZoKids.com**

Our 2022 IRS-Form 990 will be filed May 15, 2023