



**Best Foot Forward Co-founder and CEO Donna Biase, GL Homes President Misha Ezratti and GL Homes senior director of community relations, Sarah Alsofrom. Photo taken at Lotus in Boca Raton, a GL Homes community. [TRACEY BENSON PHOTOGRAPHY]**

## Best Foot Forward gives kids in foster care resources to thrive

Since its 2010 founding, the organization – the only one of its kind in Palm Beach County – has a 100% high school graduation rate with its kids.

**By Steve Dorfman**  
Notables Staff Writer

Children enter the foster care system for any number of reasons – abuse, neglect, abandonment, to name a few. These kids did not create, nor can they control, their unfortunate circumstances.

But there's one thing they all have in common: The day they turn 18 they're legally considered adults.

While this used to mean instant homelessness, Florida law now enables teens to remain in licensed foster care or approved supervised "independent living environments" until they're 21, provided such accommodations are even available.

That said, the gaps in coverage for these kids in terms of emotional and financial support can have devastating consequences.

Dropping out of high school (around 54% do).

Becoming homeless or a perpetual "couch surfer" – which happens to 40%.



**Best Foot Forward Bash Event Chairs Meryll and Ethan Bangsil [CAPEHART]**

Getting arrested – which also happens to 40%.

And the unlikelihood of becoming a college graduate – which only 3% do – makes it virtually a pipe dream.

But there's one agency in Palm Beach County – Best Foot Forward (BFF) – solely dedicated to mitigating the long odds facing foster kids.

Founded in 2010, BFF provides one-on-one support to improve a student's educational experience.

Among the ways the organization does so:

- Being involved from kindergarten through college.
- Meeting regularly in schools.
- Collaborating with all stakeholders.
- Bridging the gap between child welfare and school.
- Consistent support throughout the years.
- Teaching skills in test-taking, studying and organization.
- Providing individual academic tutoring.
- Communicating with schoolteachers.
- Providing remedial reading instruction.
- Teaching kids how to be one's own self-advocate.
- Providing ongoing incentives and motivation.

The BFF program has been remarkably successful: Kids who go through it have a 100% high school graduation rate.

Of course, such services and results would not be possible

**See BFF, 2D**



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without the contributions of local philanthropists.

For instance, GL Homes supports the BFF mission to its core. It has provided innumerable resources and services to BFF’s kids, including throwing graduation parties, giving them access to the arts, and providing everything from nutritional education to career advice.

“With a laser-sharp focus on education, Best Foot Forward creates a bright future for exceptional young people aging out of the foster care system,” said GL Homes President Misha Ezratti. “BFF students see the world through the lens of a productive and successful life. This high-impact, high-performance charity ensures foster children graduate high school and college at rates far exceeding the national average. Our community thrives when our children are successful.”

BFF is especially excited about its upcoming fundraising gala – the annual Bash – which this year will have a theme of “The World Awaits.”

“This will be a memorable evening, and we hope to raise a significant amount of money to support our important and diverse programs,” said BFF co-founder and CEO Donna Biase. “Best Foot Forward is thrilled to recognize GL Homes as the 2022 Champion of Children Award recipient. Their support has been steadfast and instrumental in providing opportunities for our students to learn critical skills they need to be successful in school, work, and life. GL Homes’ efforts have been invaluable.”

Among the things that attendees will be treated to:

■ Learning about BFF’s successful programs from a former foster youth.

■ Cocktails, hors d’oeuvres, dinner, dancing and silent and live auctions.

■ Hearing from this year’s honorary chair, Anita Detert, about her community advocacy and philanthropy.

■ Seeing the aforementioned GL Homes receive the 2022 Champion of Children Award.

With tickets priced at \$200 per person, Biase cautions that “they will sell out quickly.” And the evening’s fundraising goal is an ambitious one: \$400,000.



**Best Foot Forward Bash Honorary Chair Anita Detert**  
[JENNIFER FUJIKAWA]



**Best Foot Forward Co-founder and Chief Program Officer Debbie Ellman.**  
[CAPEHART]



**Best Foot Forward graduate Francis Jeune creates pencil sketch during art class at the Norton Museum of Art.** [CAPEHART]



**Best Foot Forward graduate Victoria Pagan holds a portrait she painted of artist Frida Kahlo.** [CAPEHART]

IF YOU GO

**What:** “The World Awaits” — Best Foot Forward’s annual Bash.

**When:** Saturday, April 23, 6:30 p.m.

**Where:** The Polo Club of Boca Raton, 5400 Champion Blvd. in Boca Raton.

**Admission:** \$200 per person.

**For more information:** Call 561-470-8300 or visit [bestfoot.org](https://bestfoot.org).

But then again, teaching our community’s most disadvantaged youngsters to be ambitious is what Best Foot Forward is all about.