

Act4Me acts for the children

By: CHARLOTTE MILLER
cmiller@islandernews.com

Because they believe all children, including those with developmental delays, deserve the right to progress to their highest potential, three Key Biscayne women recently started a nonprofit organization that will help kids do just that. Act4Me helps families of children with developmental delays cover the cost gap left with most insurances and ensures continued treatment.

Although it's only a few months old, Act4Me is ready to launch some fundrais-



Photo courtesy Act4Me

Maida Berberian-Bignon, Martha Poulat and Luzma Iruretagoyena have formed Act4Me, a nonprofit organization to help children with developmental delays.

ing events. "We will start locally because that is our network," said Maida Berberian-Bignon, co-founder and president. "We will be doing some cocktail parties and breakfasts, and get the schools and the kids involved."

Recently, the Kid to Kid Giving campaign began, with several Key Biscayne children selling lemonade and collecting money for the organization.

"Every little bit counts," said Berberian-Bignon.

Most of the children Act4Me acts for have severe developmental delays as a result of conditions like cerebral palsy, muscular dystrophy or brain strokes.

Additional therapies can cost families up to \$25,000 a year, sometimes more. To further complicate matters, many insurance companies limit coverage once a child reaches age 3.

"Most children can be covered under 'early intervention,' but after age 3 limitations kick in. Therapies as a whole are not well covered," explained Berberian-Bignon. "Therapy needs to begin at birth or shortly thereafter, and it needs to continue way beyond age 3. Most children need 6-9 hours a week beyond what most insurances allow."

Co-founder Martha Poulat knows from experience just how crucial early and constant care becomes. Her 6-year-old son, Andres, has West Syndrome, a type of epilepsy. Andres had a stroke that destroyed the left part of his brain. Doctors were unsure if Andres would ever learn to walk or talk. With the proper therapies, Andres's right brain is learning to compensate for the left side.

"From that point on, we saw some hope," said Poulat.

Andres took five hours of therapy a day in addition to other home activities de-

signed to stimulate the brain.

"Therapy was the right approach. He would not be what he is today without that chance to access therapy."

Poulat was inspired by her family's story to become part of Act4Me,

"Not everyone is able to give their kids what they truly need," she said. "We really want to make a difference."

"We want to help as many kids as we can for as many hours a week as we can," added Berberian-Bignon.

Right now, Act4Me is limited to Miami-Dade County, but hopes to expand its operations. Act4Me has a board of directors and a medical advisory board, and is a volunteer organization.

"We have a lot of professionals in the organization and we are supported by therapists and doctors," said Berberian-Bignon. "It is a serious thing we're trying to launch."

For more information about Act4Me or to make a donation, contact Berberian-Bignon at 786-390-1172, Poulat at 786-473-6020 or Iruretagoyena at 786-338-1773; or visit www.act4me.org. The website also links visitors to grant applications. Families of special needs children can seek assistance by applying for a grant for physical, occupational or speech therapies, or for therapy supplies to support home therapy needs.

On the menu this week at the K-8 Center

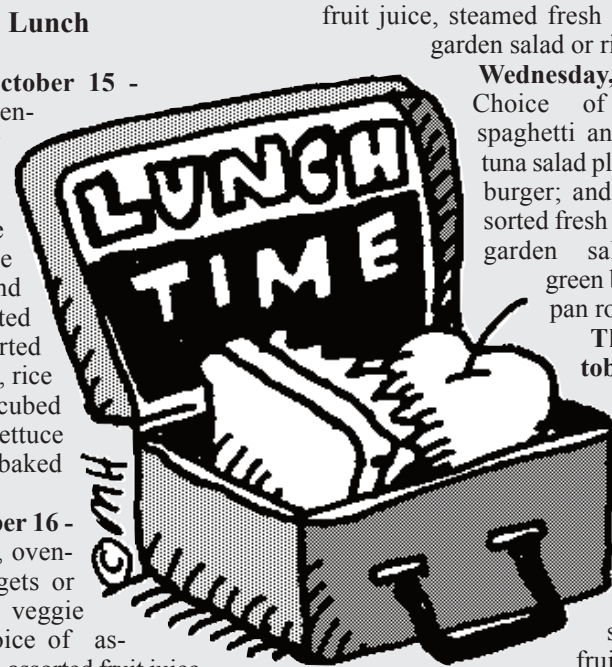
The following menus will be served at the Key Biscayne K-8 Center next week. Some items may not be served, based on availability. All meals are served with 1 percent homogenized milk.

Monday, October 19 - No school: teacher planning day.

Tuesday, October 20 - Choice of oven-baked corn dog nuggets, hoagie sandwich on roll or peanut butter and jelly sandwich; and choice of assorted fresh fruit, assorted fruit juice, steamed fresh corn cobbette, garden salad or rice and beans.

Wednesday, October 21 - Choice of Italian-style spaghetti and meat sauce, tuna salad platter or garden burger; and choice of assorted fresh fruit, juice bar, garden salad, steamed green beans or dinner pan roll.

Thursday, October 22 - Choice of Mexican-style turkey taco, assorted premium salads or rice and beans; and choice of assorted fresh fruit, chilled pears, steamed yucca or cubed tomato and lettuce salad.



Lunch

Thursday, October 15 -

Choice of oven-baked crunchy chicken fingers, oven-baked grilled cheese sandwich or rice and beans; and choice of assorted fresh fruit, assorted fresh fruit juices, rice and beans, cubed tomatoes and lettuce salad or baked maduros.

Friday, October 16 -

Choice of pizza, oven-baked fish nuggets or hummus and veggie platter; and choice of assorted fresh fruit, assorted fruit juice, steamed broccoli, hash brown sticks or garden salad.

FINAL CLOSING SALE

Everything Must Go

We are closing our doors October 30th...
Do not miss HUGE SALE!.. Up to 90% off!

The Scarlet Thread
BOUTIQUE



Key Colony Plaza

200 Crandon Boulevard
Suite 109 (next to Starbucks)
Key Biscayne, FL 33149

(305) 361-5151

