



## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **How the Coronavirus is Affecting Local Charities**

Organizations are forced to close community centers and cancel fundraisers.

As the coronavirus outbreak affects restaurants, small businesses, and everyday life, South Florida charities are also taking a hit. Many people are hoarding much needed supplies and items like hand sanitizer combined with government directives for social distancing have forced organizations to cancel fundraising events.

One of these charities is Branches, a local non-profit dedicated to providing life-changing opportunities for children and families to break the cycle of poverty. Branches has canceled their Black Tie & Blue Jeans Gala and Auction, their largest fundraiser for the year originally scheduled for May 9th. In response to the virus and the shelter-in-place guidance from the CDC, Branches was also forced to temporarily and partially close all 3 of its sites which serve over 500 elementary through college students after school and in the evenings. Their children and youth can now no longer attend their beloved programs. Branches and the VITA free tax prep coalition, Miami Tax Pros, had to cancel hundreds of tax appointments in Miami-Dade alone, leaving many desperate and worried about their much needed tax refunds. Branches also had to quadruple the number of meals they typically provide as their families are in dire need of food. These families experience higher levels of stress under normal conditions, and with the current health crisis, these environments are likely to be more stressful.

**Loss of revenue will be significant, but thanks to an incredible Matching Grant provided by Trish and Dan Bell, all Gala donations and all Gala sponsorships which are converted into donations will be matched \$1 for \$1. Several kind sponsors have agreed to convert their sponsorships into donations including: The Himan Brown Charitable Trust, Rod & Sandy Bell, The Tonkinson Foundation, Victoria & Jason Randolph, Bilzin Sumberg, Kathy & Scott Howard, Truist, Aetna, Center State Bank, Crowe LLP, City National Bank, JP Morgan Chase, Missy & Jim Morgan and Publix, among others. Branches is asking people to help during this time of crisis and donate.**

Throughout this Coronavirus Pandemic, Branches is working tirelessly to serve our community virtually, and has already provided 7,092 grab-and-go meals for their children and families. The Grow & Climb team is connecting with students and families via phone calls, text messages and Zoom meetings to prevent social isolation, to meet the educational and tutoring needs of the students as they adjust to remote learning. The Achieve team is providing financial wellness services through Zoom meetings and phone calls, providing financial coaching, small business and emergency assistance. The Achieve staff has already provided 940 virtual meetings with participants where they assesses their needs, and has provided 782 Business Coaching sessions to 385 small businesses, completing 27 loan applications. With all the VITA free tax prep sites closed, Branches launched a 'Walk-Up' Window tax prep service and was one of the first few open VITA sites in the State of Florida, providing tax refunds to families who urgently need them. Lastly, Branches has processed 229 emergency assistance applications for financial support as part of the Miami Pandemic Relief Fund in the form of rent, food and medicine, and have thus far awarded over \$35,000 to cover those needs.

"Almost 60% of families in our community are struggling to make ends meet, and now due to the COVID-19 pandemic, even more individuals will find themselves in desperate situations." says Brent McLaughlin, Executive Director of Branches. "Branches serves to create opportunities for these children and families to break the cycle

of poverty and succeed in school, become more financially stable, and attain a higher quality of life. With generous support from individuals, churches and corporate partners, we are making an impact for thousands of our neighbors in need."

To support the Branches Gala and help fund life-changing programs enabling children and families to break the cycle of poverty, one can make a donation online at [www.branchesfl.org/gala](http://www.branchesfl.org/gala)

To learn more, please click here to view [Branches COVID-19 Response VIDEO](#).

For more details, please contact Isabelle Pike at 305-206-5689 or [ipike@branchesfl.org](mailto:ipike@branchesfl.org)

### About Branches

For over 45 years, Branches has made a positive impact in the community by delivering on its mission to serve, educate and inspire people through student, family and financial stability services. Branches provides long-term, holistic services for motivated individuals and families. We help people grow deeper and climb higher in life by building a foundation through education so they can achieve their goals and fulfill their potential. For more information about Branches, please contact Isabelle Pike at 305-206-5689 or [ipike@branchesfl.org](mailto:ipike@branchesfl.org) or visit Branches at [www.branchesfl.org](http://www.branchesfl.org)

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