

charity snapshot

Making an Impact

The Community Connections Resource Guide has quickly become an invaluable tool for the social services community.

BY ERIC SNIDER | CONTRIBUTOR

The Sarasota/Manatee region is rich with nonprofits and aid organizations but until recently no central source listed them. That changed in 2020, when Making an Impact — itself a nonprofit — published its Community Connections Resource Guide, which has quickly become an invaluable tool for the social services community.

The booklet lists nearly 300 organizations with accompanying descriptions outlining their mission. Services are broken into 17 wide-ranging categories, including abuse, food pantries, housing and shelter assistance, and alcohol and drug addiction. The organizations are further subdivided into the geographical areas of Manatee County, Sarasota County and the Venice/Northport area.

“It was originally created to help those who help others,” says Victoria Kasdan, co-founder and chair of Making an Impact. “But it’s also available to the general public — although, I have to say, we didn’t always have enough (copies) to go around.”

That scarcity was effectively solved in January when the guide debuted online in a user-friendly, searchable form. The digital version was largely

Continued on Page 44



Photos by Lori Sax

Victoria Kasdan established Making an Impact as a nonprofit and quickly started bringing in money from grants and donations.

Continued from Page 42

made possible by a \$15,000 technology-focused grant from the Knight Donor Advised Fund of the Manatee Community Foundation. Previously, the guide had existed only as an online flipbook. The grant also paid for advertising on public transportation and a promotional video.

Making an Impact published the third edition of the Community Connections Resource Guide in January. Copies are distributed to local nonprofits, government entities, law enforcement agencies and faith-based institutions. They've become invaluable aids to staffers seeking to match the appropriate organization with the people they're assisting. The case management department of the Lakewood Ranch Medical Center utilizes the guide, as do three of Lakewood Ranch's EMS stations. The Manatee County Sheriff's Office puts them in the hands of officers in the field.

Kasdan exudes the confidence of a woman who is used to getting things done. She grew up on the South Side of Chicago and worked for 20 years as a registered nurse in the intensive care unit of the city's University of Illinois Hospital. Kasdan went on to sell pharmaceuticals, medical equipment and medical insurance in her hometown and Minneapolis and New Jersey. After the youngest of her three children graduated from high school, Kasdan and her husband sought a more temperate place. That turned out to be east Bradenton.

In 2015, Kasdan signed on as executive director of We Care Manatee, a nonprofit that helps the uninsured get health coverage. She left in 2019 to start her own (for-profit) consulting agency, Mission Made Possible, specializing in health and human services.

One of her clients wanted a comprehensive list of charities in Sarasota. She poked around and discovered that none existed. Kasdan found her way to Linda Hoy, a CPA who moved to Sarasota from upstate New York in 2005. A recent divorce had heightened Hoy's awareness of aid organizations, so "I started researching what Sarasota and Manatee counties had to offer, since I was new to the community and didn't know myself," Hoy wrote in an email.

Her simple document grew to more than 100 pages and 200 nonprofits. But she didn't know what to do with it.

"My worst fear was that when I died, my resource guide (would die) with me," she says.

Enter Kasdan. She reckons that Hoy's document got the guide about "60% there. But it was not ready for prime time in the form it was in then."

Kasdan and her husband were on a cruise around Australia and New Zealand when COVID-19 abruptly shut down the world. Back in Bradenton, with plenty of time on her hands, Kasdan contacted Hoy about moving the project forward.

"It became pretty clear right away that Covid would create a lot more need in the community and the guide would be even more necessary," Kasdan says.

Kasdan established Making an Impact as a 501(c)(3), convened an eight-member board of directors and, along with Hoy, set about finishing the resource guide. By early summer of 2020, they'd released the first printed edition in an 8-1/2 x 11-inch format. Kasdan soon found out from nonprofits, particularly the American Red Cross, that the book needed to be more portable. Shrinking the size and adding a ring binder added to the cost. Kasdan, no slouch at fundraising, started bringing in money from grants and donations.

The all-volunteer Making an Impact has remained small, with virtually no overhead and administrative costs making up less than 5% of budget. The most recent edition of the guide added 19 new nonprofits and cut a few that had failed during the pandemic, bringing the total listings to 283. There are now 3,000 copies in circulation.

"When Linda and I started this, it was because we thought there may be more people like us who needed information to help others," Kasdan says. "What we didn't realize was how many of them there were."

GET IN TOUCH

Making An Impact

11161 State Road 70 East,
Suite 110-585
Lakewood Ranch, FL 34202-9407

Email:

Info@Making-An-Impact.org

Phone: 941-251-5846

Website: Making-An-Impact.org



Linda Hoy started the guide, which has now grown to showcase nearly 300 nonprofits.

“
When Linda and I started this, it was because we thought there may be more people like us who needed information to help others. What we didn't realize was how many of them there were.” **VICTORIA KASDAN**