

local news

Local Organization Needs Items To Help Girls in Need

Pace Center for Girls is looking for products and money to help local young women in need.

By **ANDREA DAVIS**
Daily Sun Senior Writer

After hearing a story about a girl whose mother was too busy grocery shopping to go to her graduation, Betty Rohan made plans to reach out to the girl to congratulate her.

Little did she know that by reaching out to this girl, her life would change and she would become more involved with girls in a similar position.

"My heart went out to her and others in her situation," said Rohan, of the Village of Collier. "As a member of Hometown Civitan, I was already familiar with the work Pace Center for Girls did. I wanted to do more to help though, so I got involved and became a board member for the nonprofit."

Pace Center for Girls opened in Marion County in 2001, and since that time has served more than 1,000 girls, helping up to around 100 girls yearly. The group provides at-risk girls academic and counseling services. The center is open from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday at 328 NE 1st Ave., Suite 500, in Ocala and is currently looking for donations of feminine hygiene products, hair accessories and monetary donations to help pay for computers, food, and personal protective equipment. To learn more about the center and their needs, visit pace-center.org/locations/marion.

"All the girls we work with at the center are wonderful," said Rohan. "We keep in constant communication with the girls and help them succeed in their goals."

Pace is a safe and supportive academic and wrap around social services model for girls, ages 11-17, helping girls overcome challenges and prepare for their future, Rohan said.

Carole Savage, executive director for the Marion County Pace center, said all donations they receive help gives the girls a confidence boost.

"We especially need the feminine hygiene products as most of the girls we help are overcoming challenges like poverty and cannot otherwise afford them," she said. "In addition to supplying these girls with essential items, we help girls who are struggling and who have experienced some form of trauma, to get their grades back on track, learn in a safe and supportive environment, get along better with friends and family and plan for a productive future."

Savage said the work they do at the centers is important because the center also helps provides social, emotional and mental health counseling.

"Some of these girls feel like they are abandoned, especially when their parents are unable to celebrate important accomplishments," she said.

Rohan said each girl reminds her of a sister, child or niece in need.

"We consider them our girls, both while they are at the center and even throughout their life," she said. "We like to stay in touch with them, but they really need help."