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**NEWS RELEASE**  
**For Immediate Release**  
**July 22, 2016**

**RAYS BASEBALL FOUNDATION AWARDS \$5,000 GRANT TO THE EARLY LEARNING COALITION FOR EARLY STEPS TO SCHOOL SUCCESS PROGRAM IN MANATEE COUNTY**

**Palmetto, Florida, July 22, 2016** – The Early Learning Coalition (ELC) of Manatee County, Inc. has been awarded a \$5,000 grant from the Rays Baseball Foundation to provide books for the Raising A Reader component of its new Early Steps to School Success (ESSS) program.

The Raising A Reader materials will provide 50 children and their parents with 100 award-winning books to read at home during this school year. The books will then be recirculated among 50 additional families over the next four years servicing a total of 250 children.

ESSS - a program developed by the world renowned Save the Children organization - is a low-cost, targeted approach to enhancing school readiness for children in some of America's highest need communities. Key components include: home visits by early childhood coordinators for pregnant women and children ages birth to three, helping parents develop skills and strategies that support early childhood development with a focus on early literacy, book bag exchange, transition to school activities, and fostering a positive connection between families and schools.

Save the Children introduced the ESSS program in 2006. Built on public-private partnerships with local schools and states, ESSS delivers high quality early childhood development services to children ages 0-5 and their families

Save the Children invests in childhood – everyday, in times of crisis and for the future. Founded in London, England, in 1919 before moving to the US in the early 1930's, Save the Children gives children a healthy start, the opportunity to learn, and protects them from harm here in this country, and around the world.

The Rays Baseball Foundation, the official charity of the Tampa Bay Rays, awarded the grant through its Community Fund Grant Program. Grant recipients will be recognized during a welcome reception and a pregame ceremony at Tropicana Field on September 7<sup>th</sup>, 2016. Grants averaging \$5,000 are awarded to help support and enhance current programs offered by community-based nonprofit organizations. To date, the Community Fund Grant Program has awarded more than 188 grants to local charities totaling \$972,500

*The Early Learning Coalition of Manatee County, Inc. is a multi-service agency dedicated to helping children develop skills that they will need to be successful in school and life. The agency's focus is on high quality school readiness opportunities for all children and their families, understanding that it is in the first years of life that a child's future educational success is determined and the critical role of parents, as their child's first and most important teacher. To learn more about Coalition's services, go to [www.elc-manatee.org](http://www.elc-manatee.org) or call 941-757-2900, extension 212.*



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