



Zelda Smith

Punta Gorda, Florida



[First Impressions Foundation, Inc.](#)

Learn about Florida Entrepreneur Zelda Smith:

Prior to establishing First Impressions Foundation, Inc., Zelda Smith spent 10 years with the Charlotte County School System. With Master's Degrees in Law and Criminal Justice, and experience working in a correctional facility in Arcadia, FL, Smith has committed most of her professional and personal life to helping those in need. Her recent journey started in 2017 after being acknowledged as The Charlotte County School System Employee of the Year.

"With the recognition came a \$1,000 cash reward," she said. "I used that money to start First Impressions Foundation. Throughout my ten years with Charlotte County, I saw a lot of kids that struggled. These were good kids, but they weren't college material. They wanted to do other things in life, like trade and technical schools, but they struggled financially. Many of them also had challenges at home. The originally

idea was to start a scholarship fund to help them out.”

As a single-mother with a full-time job, Smith is no stranger to adversity.

She started her non-profit knowing that others face even greater obstacles and she was determined to do something about it.

“My original idea was to fund-raise in order to raise money for the scholarships,” she said. “However, being so small and having other organizations like Goodwill and Salvation Army in the area made it difficult to grow. Even though we’re not competing, per say, we are providing similar services. I needed a different source of revenue.”

Smith continued, “People in the community, friends and family know about me dressing up and my love for fashion. By combining that and my love for kids, I opened a boutique in November, 2018. I met with the Charlotte County Chamber and the SBA and worked with them to open the store.”

According to Smith, the clothes in the boutique are donated by people throughout Charlotte County. All the proceeds go towards funding the scholarships. The school systems then decide who gets the scholarships. “It’s up to the teachers and administrators,” Smith said.

“These people work with the kids and know who needs what.”

By networking in the community and through use of social media marketing and news articles, Smith has grown First Impressions Foundation into a non-profit that’s making an impact. The scholarships have grown and lives are changing for the better. For Smith, making a difference is what drives her forward.

“It’s so rewarding when we get testimonials from the kids showing their appreciation,” she said. “There’s so much going on the world. We try our best to provide them with a small part of the puzzle to help them be productive. We give them opportunities to be successful.”

Looking ahead, Smith’s goal is to provide a minimum of \$1,000 in scholarships on a yearly basis. She wants to increase the exposure for First Impressions and grow the boutique side of the non-profit. She also wants to be in a position of offer jobs for kids that want to get into retail.

What advice does Smith have for aspiring entrepreneurs? “Take a breath,” she said with a laugh. “Just breath through the process. It’s easy to get overwhelmed. Also, know that your purpose is as good as anyone else’s. Believe in what you’re doing and just keep going.”

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