

Teen Philanthropists with Heart and Determination

Youth in Philanthropy Grant Announcements, January 2012

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Five boxes of pizza, six bottles of soda, 13 students, \$10,000, and a list of 15 nonprofit organizations. We were simply a group of high school students eating and chatting in a classroom at 5:00 PM. However, our mission at hand was far from the casual appearance of a pizza party. In those two hours, we would determine the fate of ten thousand dollars in donations, and in the process, directly impact our community.

As members of Youth in Philanthropy, we undertook the task of funding a select number of organizations out of the 11 that sent us proposals. Initially, many of us had a cloudy understanding of the term "philanthropy." While some associated the word with money, others defined the term as charity work. As we progressed from day one to the final days of deliberation, we built upon our initial definitions and learned that philanthropy entails much more than we imagined.

On the first day that we received proposals, the overwhelming list of nonprofit organizations generated a room of hesitant and intimidated faces. Since many members joined recently, the majority of students were new to the process of raising money and allocating grants. Yet, as the weeks passed by, these students fervently engaged in the club's decisive activities, actively contributing their strong opinions and ideas to help shape the final resolution. On the day of decisions, heated discussions arose as students argued for or against certain organizations. After two hours of hearing insightful and moving input, we narrowed down our choices to four organizations: the Restoration Project, Discovery Museum, Indian Hill Music, and Communities for Restorative Justice (C4RJ).

The decision-making process, however, involved more work outside of the classroom. As a group, we visited all four nonprofits to learn more about their programs and facilities. The Restoration Project teaches furniture restoration to individuals suffering from mental illness and brain injuries. The founder of the Restoration Project, Eloise Newell, appealed to us through a personal account of her schizophrenic son, for whom she started the program. Attracted to the organization's potential and unique goals, we donated half of our funds (\$5,000) to help jumpstart their program for veterans with PTSD and TBI.

The next nonprofit, the well-known Discovery Museum, brought back old memories as we revisited the site of our childhood days. The museum's recent program for children with autism and hearing loss was a new and interesting addition. The museum requested money to provide autistic and hearing impaired children and their families the same opportunity to learn and discover as any other child. Won over by the organization's facilities and goals, we donated \$2000 to aid its project.

Another unique nonprofit, C4RJ, offers restorative justice to perpetrators and those affected by crime. Through its extensive program, adolescents and adults work with trained facilitators to create a plan of healing and restitution. Since attending the restorative meetings erases a criminal's record, young adults have the chance to correct their mistakes and look forward to a better future. Coming to a consensus, we donated \$1000 to fund more restorative cases in Acton-Boxborough. Our final organization, Indian Hill Music, will provide music therapy for Acton

Boxborough adolescents at the Victor School who struggle with social, emotional, mental, and physical difficulties. During the site visit, the organization impressed us with its fine facilities and introduced us to hands-on music therapy activities. After experiencing the effectiveness of Indian Hill Music's novel program, we decided to give the organization \$2000.

This year, the students raised \$2,630, and thanks to our generous donors (W. Clement and Jessie V. Stone Family Foundation, Innovation and Information Consulting, Acton-Boxborough Public Schools faculty and staff, Acton Lion's Club, Dave Christmas, Acton-Boxborough United Way, Gallant Insurance, Catherine Coleman and Tom Mullen), we acquired a total of \$10,000. The main reason for our incredible success this year lies in the students' constant enthusiasm and energy. Apart from readily participating in weekly fund raisers, club members contributed innovative ideas and formed strategic plans. From waving signs and battling bees at the Boxborough Transfer Station to learning how to make balloon animals at the October Fest, we worked together to reach our goals.

YIP members enjoyed themselves while taking their participation seriously. Along the way, we broadened our understanding of the term "philanthropy." We learned that as long as a person has the heart and determination to help out the community, he or she is a philanthropist. Today, we are proud to say that Youth in Philanthropy worked as both a team and a family to successfully contribute to the welfare of our community.