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Acton Boxborough High School Student Philanthropists Give \$10,000

Acton, Massachusetts –Can a group of committed teens change the world? They already do, say philanthropists and non-profit leaders. Acton Boxborough Regional High School’s **Youth in Philanthropy (YIP)** members set an example of philanthropy by focusing on the needs of local organizations in need. The program provides students with an unusual opportunity to learn the grantmaking process, and the students themselves raise funds and award thousands of dollars to local charities. This year’s program culminated in the students’ decision to award a total of \$10,000 to two worthy community groups—**English At Large** and **Acton Community Supper, Inc.** YIP also set aside \$2,300 for an endowment fund towards awards for future years.

With the guidance of Acton/Boxborough English teacher **Liz Walker**, Coordinator **Kay Steeves**, and professional fundraiser **Catherine Coleman**, this year’s group of fifteen student members met weekly to learn about philanthropy and hands-on participation. The students received an immersion in fundraising and budget evaluation, group consensus building, setting of grant criteria and priorities, and evaluation of non-profit needs.

“Being involved with YIP is emotionally inspiring me for me,” says **Jennifer Stone** of the W. Clement and Jessie V. Stone Foundation, a program donor. “It gives me such hope for the future. To see kids have an awareness and compassion for communities radically different from theirs, in their own backyard is a powerful thing. This experience will change their lives. Even in affluent communities like Acton, there are proposals from people with substantial need. To be sensitive to this need while being in a position to help, gives meaning to life and great satisfaction.”
Discussing the effect on the future, Stone says, “These kids will talk to others as college students, and it won’t stop there. The effect will billow out to a broader group. It’s exciting to see this

small pocket of people—these YIP members and mentors that ‘get it’—illustrating that all of us have the opportunity to help. There are massive problems that are difficult to approach, but these guys make us see what can be accomplished with a commitment to making a difference in the community.”

C. Andrew McGadney, Clark University’s Vice President of University Advancement concurs. “Here at Clark our motto is ‘challenge convention and change our world.’ We’re looking for applicants with a passion for their field, no matter what it is. It is important for us to find applicants who are able to make a commitment—of their time and their ‘treasure’—that the Youth in Philanthropy kids make. Getting young people to think about philanthropy at an early age fills a critical need for the country. With this program, the students already see positive outcomes from their efforts. They experience how good it feels to give, and it makes giving a lot easier in the future. The program not only gives the participants early exposure to the field of development, philanthropy, and non-profit administration as career paths, but also a beginning for a lifetime of working for world change.”

Youth in Philanthropy members presented the grant awards at a ceremony on Martin Luther King Day at the Acton Boxborough Regional High School, as part of an event recognizing the community service of 673 student volunteers, each contributing a minimum of 25 hours of service, with some contributing more than 100 hours. This represents a significant increase in volunteerism for the school, up from 550 participants last year. Acton-Boxborough United Way (ABUW) Board President **Jane Boatright** introduced the group, describing the program as a “journey to becoming caring, compassionate, and generous adults”. The ABUW includes teen representatives on its board and this year Youth in Philanthropy Junior, **Jenna Mullen** serves on the board, providing another important way for AB teens to contribute.

YIP member and AB Senior **Arielle Chapnick** addressed the audience saying, “This year we focused our awareness on local charitable organizations serving families. We learned about the workings of non-profit organizations from budgets to boards and reviewed eleven grant proposals. We made site visits and received live presentations from six finalist organizations and went through the process of final deliberation resulting in a unanimous decision.”

The group funded the grants by selling raffle tickets and doing chores for the community over six months to add to support from local corporations, foundations, and service groups. Together with contributions from the Highland Street Foundation, W. Clement and Jessie V. Stone Foundation,

The Acton Lion's Club, Innovation and Information Consultants, Rebecca and Peter Capodilupo, the Haartz Corporation, and with the support of fundraiser Catherine Coleman, the organization raised \$12,300 representing a 20% increase over last year's funding level, especially impressive in light of a challenging economy.

"Youth in Philanthropy is an amazing program," said English At Large Executive Director **Macy DeLong**, accepting the \$5,000 grant award. "It's wonderful to see kids at this age willing to go out to the community to learn about fundraising and understanding the need to provide financial support to community organizations." Dedicated to literacy instruction, English At Large (www.englishatlarge.org) has provided one-on-one tutoring for 8,000 English learners throughout the greater Boston area since its founding in Lexington in 1971. The funds will provide training for tutors, and support the purchase of learning materials housed at the Acton Memorial Library. Program participant Amy Sun joined the speaker at the ceremony.

This year Community Supper/ Acton Food Pantry applied for funds for holiday food distribution. After a site visit, and in response to increasing needs, the students added funds beyond the original request, allowing the organization to purchase a much-needed freezer for its distribution center. Chairperson and Pantry Director **Kathy Casaletto** (www.ActonCommunitySupper.org) thanked YIP on behalf of Community Supper, Inc. saying, "We promise to put the grant to great use. It was wonderful to observe YIP students working together with compassion, interest, and careful consideration, and we greatly appreciate your confidence in our organization." Founded in 1985 to help alleviate hunger in the Acton area, the group also received a YIP grant last year, and this year is adding four to six families each week to the 225 served.

With a mission to raise public awareness of community needs, Acton-Boxborough United Way, YIP's fiscal agent, matches needs with services and raises funds to support the community's charitable efforts. YIP representative, ABUW board member, and AB senior **Jenna Mullen** explains that when deciding which agencies to fund, YIP considered whether its money "would merely be a drop in the bucket of a large organization, or whether it would make a large difference in its service." YIP also considered "the sustainability of the program our money would fund and the need of the program in the community." She describes how both English At Large and the Community Supper are small organizations that would greatly benefit from YIP money.

Liza Penney, a Senior said she definitely got a sense of how non-profit organizations operate, including work with budgets and fundraising, as did **Daniel Hoadley**, a Junior with an interest in History, English, and Ethics who said that he hadn't realized before how many people need support. Senior **Wendy Chen**, said, "YIP is a unique program presenting so many aspects of the non-profit world." Chen noted that although she studied the issue of poverty in school, until she saw the need for herself, with empty food pantry shelves empty representing hunger in our local community, she didn't understand the reality. **Arielle Chapnick**, a Senior, has a career goal to be involved with a helping profession. "YIP is a way to give back directly to organizations in our local community." Betty Yang, Jennifer Chen, Jessica Zhang, Liza Penney, Nithila Asokaraj, Riley Yan, Sammi Brown, Neha Sundaram, Rebecca Rejto, and Rosa Huang also served as YIP members this year.

Students may explore joining the YIP program for the 2010-11 season by contacting ABRHS teacher Liz Walker at lwalker@mail.ab.mec.edu. The grant review process is central to the program and is precisely the same mechanism found in the world of philanthropy. The students learn the basics about local needs, non-profit organizations, and budgets and review practice grants before looking at the actual applications. The group seeks proposals that fit the human service criteria of Acton-Boxborough United Way, from local organizations that will use the funds effectively and towards being self-sustaining. Each year YIP sets new funding priorities and invites groups to apply in multiple years. Proposal forms are available each September through an RFP process with the final applications due in November. Anyone wishing to donate to AB Youth in Philanthropy may contact Catherine Coleman at runfar@speakeasy.org.