Women United in Philanthropy - Thomas Jefferson Area

April 2008

Ready for School and Ready for Life: Our Community’s Future Depends on It!

We know that delays and relationship breakdowns will not succeed unless they get a good start; as a society we have been slow to recognize the same about the education of our children.

In February four panelists from the public and private sectors gave a presentation to over 70 members and guests of Women United in Philanthropy about their efforts to ensure a “smart beginning” for all children in the Charlottesville/Albemarle area. The panelists were members of the Smart Beginnings Partnership, a local organization that brings together educators and businesspeople with the shared goal of getting the youngest children of our area ready to succeed in school.

Robert Pianta, Dean of the Curry School of Education at the University of Virginia and an early childhood specialist, opened the presentation with “a call to arms,” stressing research findings that 55-60% of brain growth is completed by age 5 and that the quality of the relationship between a young child and those who educate and care for him is the #1 factor in early childhood success.

Eric Johnson, Market President for Bank of America, brought the business perspective to the conversation, saying that investment in school readiness is a wise choice for the private sector. High-quality early care and education programs can yield as much as 16% annual return for every $1 invested. If we don’t invest in young children, Johnson argued, the 20% of students in Virginia who arrive at school behind will stay behind throughout their school years. He cited studies that detailed the societal costs of lack of readiness: more students repeating grades, increased special education needs, higher teenage pregnancy rates, and lower employment rates. In 2005-2006, 9,800 Virginia children (K-3) repeated a grade, costing $7,654 per child and $70 million statewide. Johnson also explained that for every $1 spent on higher education in Virginia, only 5 cents is spent on early childhood education.

Suzanne Morse, President of the Pew Partnership for Civic Change, outlined the personal, economic, and communal impacts when young children do not get the head start they need to succeed in school. Morse argued that schools cannot be expected to solve all the problems of the disadvantaged child; local community agencies must also be part of the solution, targeting the root of the problems in both the family and the school. She stressed that communities must turn around one-in-three high school dropout rate. Money, time, and good preparation for families are the answers.

Jon Nelziger, VP for Community Initiatives at United Way, Eric Johnson, Market President for Bank of America, Suzanne Morse, President of the Pew Partnership for Civic Change, and Robert Pianta, Dean of the Curry School of Education, discussed “Smart Beginnings” at a recent WUP event.

WUP Mission Statement

Women United in Philanthropy maximizes women’s leadership in philanthropy by engaging and educating its membership, increasing charitable contributions, and strengthening our community through the impact of collective giving to support humanitarian services and early developmental screenings. He also explained the current efforts to rate pre-school programs and encourage them to earn the Seal of Quality Child Care. Nelziger ultimately ended where Dean Pianta began: the efficacy of an early childhood program depends on the quality of the relationship between the adults and the children.

A lively question and answer period followed the presentations. Anyone who would like more information or to contact Miriam Rushfin, Smart Beginnings coordinator, at mrrushfin@unitedwaybja.org or www.smartbeginningsinfo.org.

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Counseling Makes a Difference for Child Abuse Victims

Dear CYFS,

I am writing to tell you my story so that others will know how CYFS helped my children and me several years ago.

Here’s what happened to us. When my kids were very young, my husband became extremely abusive and beat me repeatedly. Our home was full of chaos, and I eventually summoned the strength to leave with my children. Friends and family could only help so much; I knew I needed external help from professionals. We stayed at the shelter for abused women here in Charlottesville for three months and they referred me to CYFS.

You see, I was really concerned about the impact that all of this was having on my two boys who were 3 and 5 at the time. The 3 year old was beginning to have very explosive, destructive tantrums. I knew he needed help, but I had absolutely nothing, no money, no job.

Our CYFS counselor was an incredible person, and through play therapy with my children, she was able to witness and understand the troubles that they were having and she was just wonderful. We came to see her for 8 months. She also helped me understand how I could best help them.

Over the past five years, my abusive ex-husband has been in and out of jail several times, but I have remarried and last year received my Associates Degree from PVCC. I am now a student at UVA, something I never dreamed I’d be able to accomplish! I had to take baby steps, but my kids and I now study together.

My husband and I have a successful painting business, and my kids are doing great.

I continue to watch them very closely to be sure they are doing ok, as they grow. I am so glad that I got them the help that they needed when they were very young. I could not have done this without CYFS. The counseling I received from CYFS helped my kids and me when we needed it the most.

You know, now it seems that CYFS comes up all the time. I have received phone calls on several occasions from friends calling on behalf of someone else who is having the same trouble I had. They need to hear from someone who has been there, and I tell them how I got help from CYFS and suggest steps that they can take.

It was such a struggle for me to put my life back together, juggling school, children and jobs, and now I want to help others with similar challenges. My husband and I just started a small scholarship at PVCC for women who have suffered setbacks and need help paying for school. And I am happy to share my story if it can help someone get the help that they need when it matters most. CYFS was there for me and my kids with the help that we desperately needed. We wouldn’t be where we are today without that, and I want to thank everyone who has helped in some way to provide these services to kids and families. Thank you for being there for us.

Sincerely,

Daisy Rojas

At the WUP meeting on September 17, Jacki Bryant, executive director of Children, Youth, & Family Services, reported that our grant of $14,525 to CYFS in 2007 enabled the continuation of their VOCA (Victims of Child Abuse) program, which provides counseling for children and their non-offending family members. Many of us were moved by a letter Jacki read from a former client whose children received counseling several years ago. We are most grateful that the writer, Daisy Rojas, has given us permission to reproduce her letter here.

International Rescue Committee Reports to WUP

On November 13, 2007, Women United in Philanthropy sponsored a wonderful event at the home of Deborah Hayes in Edinburg. Our featured guests were from the International Rescue Committee, the recipient of our 2007 Human Services Grant. Susan Donovan, the IRC’s executive director, and a colleague, Miran Dickey, spoke to a group of nearly fifty WUP members and guests about the way our grant of $19,300 is being used to benefit refugee high-school students in our area. Both the presentation and subsequent discussion were lively and informative.

Ms. Donovan described the challenges facing teenage refugees as they struggle to adjust to American schools. Not only must they learn English as a second language, but they also must figure out how to fit into a social and cultural world that is often very different from their own. They tend to be the most marginalized group of students in a high school; it is even difficult for them to connect with other groups of minority students. The grant that WUP gave to the IRC last spring went toward a program for these refugee students. With this money, students are able to receive support and counseling to help them transition to their new life in the Charlottesville area.

Ms. Donovan shared with us a number of stories, both heart-wrenching and heart-warming, about what it is like for refugees as they enter the United States. Those who arrive from third-world countries are generally unfamiliar with many of the modern conveniences and technologies we enjoy, including light switches, dishwashers, and phones. They don’t know English, and they are often scared, exhausted, and beaten-down by the brutalities and upheavals they have experienced. They need a tremendous amount of support and instruction when they arrive in Charlottesville, and that is precisely what the IRC provides.

Each new refugee family is followed by the IRC until their children are placed in school, they have jobs and housing, they begin mastering English, and they eventually becomemcme connections. The commitment of IRC to these refugees is huge. All of us in the audience came away appreciating more than ever the crucial role that the IRC plays in making new lives for foreigners who have been oppressed and displaced by war, hunger, poverty, and/or natural disasters.

WUP would like to thank Deborah Hayes, Kekai Brooks, Joan Jay, and sponsor Roy Wheeler Realty.

Upcoming Events

• Spring Luncheon – May 12:
Women United in Philanthropy’s Annual Spring Luncheon will take place Monday, May 12, from 11:30-1:30 p.m. at the Omni Hotel in Charlottesville. Suzanne Morse, President of the Pew Partnership for Civic Change, will speak on “Making Charlottesville the Smarterest Community: Keeping Kids in School.” All members are invited to attend free of charge and may bring guests at the cost of the luncheon.

• Fall Activities: Look for announcements for a September WUP reception to honor our 2008 grant recipient and a November panel on foster care.

Are you interested in joining Women United in Philanthropy?
Please visit our website at www.unitedwayva.org/womenunited.htm for more information.

Member Profile: Maxine Burton

Maxine is a retired occupational health nurse and graduate of UVA who for years was the first person to go to for health emergencies and nursing care at Comrad. She is active in the community, serving on boards as Hospice of the Piedmont. When she is not traveling with her husband, Henry, she enjoys time with their children and grandchildren.

Maxine was willing to join WUP initially because she reasoned, “If WUP was associated with the United Way, Thomas Jefferson Area, it would do the most good with the least cost.” She added, “I liked the idea of women getting together and deciding priorities.” Henry and Maxine are natives of Charlottesville, “An endangered breed,” she jokes, “and we like to give back as much as we can.”

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