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IMPACT AUSTIN : WOMEN UNITED FOR A BETTER COMMUNITY

GRANT SUPPORTS LIFEWORKS' YOUTH TRAINING PROGRAM

[BY: KERI THOMAS]

When a group of people come together with a common goal, the impact of their contributions is often magnified exponentially. Impact Austin is an organization that is making the most of this phenomenon to help the Greater Austin community. "We are ordinary women making an extraordinary impact," explains Rebecca Powers, founder of Impact Austin.

This quickly growing group is made up of local women who have generously opened their wallets to the amount of \$1,000 each to make Austin a better place.

Flying back to Austin after visiting her brother who was dying of cancer, Powers was inspired to begin the philanthropic effort of combining women's resources to make a significant difference in her community. On that flight, she read about a group of women in Ohio who pooled their money and selected a non-profit to receive their combined grant. The idea was that a larger sum of money can create more impact than single, smaller donations. "I decided to channel my anger about my brother's situation to something positive that I could do in his honor."

Powers' initial goal was to form a group of 100 women who—through an individual \$1,000 donation -- would collectively contribute a \$100,000 grant to a worthy organization. She soon realized, however, that her vision had even greater potential. Within the first year, Impact Austin reached a total membership of 126 women.

In 2004, 200 women donated \$1,000 each, enabling the group to give two grants this year. Furthermore, administrative funding is raised in addition to the \$1,000 member contributions. As a result, 100 percent of each member's commitment goes toward the grants, ensuring that the money's full power is realized in the community.

Impact Austin gives money to non-profit organizations in five categories: health and wellness; family; culture; environment, and

education. "We have five committees that evaluate the grant applications from organizations in each of these categories," Powers says. Each category committee selects one finalist, and finalists make a presentation at the annual dinner. Members then vote on the organization that will receive the Impact Austin grant. "It is a very emotional evening," Powers shares. "There are so many wonderful non-profit organizations in the area doing amazing work. Many of the stories tug at your heartstrings, which makes it difficult to select a winner."

LIFEWORKS GETS A TASTE OF IMPACT AUSTIN'S SUPPORT

The group's first grant recipient—LifeWorks—received a \$126,000 grant in 2004 and is now starting to realize the true impact of those funds. LifeWorks is an organization that transitions youth and families from crisis to safety and success through a wide range of programs. One particular program provides invaluable training experience for young people transferring from foster homes to independent, self-sufficient lives. Impact Austin's grant has helped LifeWorks take advantage of a tasty opportunity to create a real-world training ground through a Ben & Jerry's Ice Cream Partner Shop initiative. The program's strength is that it allows young adults to learn job skills, management techniques and customer service in a retail store environment.

"Our program participants must learn to live as adults at a younger age than those who are able to go to college or receive some sort of guidance and financial help from parents," says Susan McDowell, executive director of LifeWorks. "Twenty-five to 40 percent of children leave the foster home program at age 18 will not receive a formal college education." These young adults do not have access to employment training and supportive encouragement when they enter the workforce, she explains. "They need employers who are invested in their

grant recipients to date: **2004** : LifeWorks **2005** : Communities in Schools & Austin Travis County MHMR

success. It inspires the confidence to continue beyond minimum wage jobs," she adds.

Every year, the program gives 40 young adults the chance to learn what it takes to succeed on the job. After six months, 15 participants rotate through the program where they learn leadership skills, problem-solving and responsibility. Weekly support groups give participants an opportunity to discuss issues and receive supportive advice. The goal of LifeWorks is to help participants identify and build upon their personal strengths, so that they can translate these talents to successful jobs and careers.

The Ben & Jerry's Ice Cream shop located on the northwest corner of Fifth Street and Lamar is owned by LifeWorks, and the youth participating in the job-training program operate the business, including the catering services. McDowell is proud of the way program participants have taken the newly opened Ben & Jerry's store and made it their own. "There is a true sense of ownership," she says. "These employees have already impressed me with their problem-solving abilities. When the freezer went down shortly after we opened, the employees came up with the idea to move the ice cream to the catering truck. That idea saved us thousands of dollars."

Impact Austin's grant has been a large part of LifeWorks' Ben & Jerry's job-training success, but the group's support goes even further. "The women of Impact Austin have been incredibly generous with more than just their pocketbooks," McDowell explains. "We have more than \$126,000. We have 126 advocates for our cause." The women have helped the organization's other programs, too. They have donated baby furniture, provided families with gifts during the holiday season, and given additional money to support various LifeWorks campaigns.

As the Impact Austin group grows, so does its influence both in the community and within the members' families. "My daughter has begun a similar group for young girls called 'Girls Giving Grants' or 'G3'," Powers says proudly. "It is a meaningful experience for the girls." Powers also points out that women have traditionally volunteered more time than money to their communities, while men have tended to give more money. "It's important for women to have the chance to give in a variety of ways," she says. By combining their efforts through Impact Austin, these women are beginning to make a significant difference in the Austin community that is sure to have positive, long-lasting effects. **IN**

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THE CATWALK

523 Academy has been named the Catwalk for its cedar walkway, shaded by the centuries old oak tree, that connects the main and guest houses. Located in Travis Heights at the top of the hill just east of South Congress and south of Town Lake, the Catwalk is available for
\$749,000

Located on a spacious corner lot, the main house is 2829 square-feet; has seasonal city views, custom built kitchen, open floorplan, extensive covered decks for outdoor living, 4 bedrooms, 4 baths, Master Suite, local artist stained concrete, and many fine wood built-ins.

The 1 bedroom, 1 bath guest house (648 sqft) sits above the 2-car garage, has beautiful hardwood floors, full kitchen and an incredible view of the Catwalk.