



March 2010 Update

**OF HOME, FAMILY AND FUTURE**

Dear Friends,

I wish each person involved in Of Home, Family and Future would pause, just for a minute, and hold close to your heart the feeling of satisfaction you deserve. Whether you sent a check, volunteer as a mentor, sit on the Board or run an organization that accepts responsibility for managing the recipients - what we are accomplishing together really matters. The programs we design and support are often the last life line for some terrific people who are fighting through incredible difficulties to create successful lives.

This year the Student Mentoring Program has 5 students, who are at varying levels of success. According to a 2008 report by the NY State Office of Children & Family Services, only 7-13% of qualified youth in foster care actually attend college compared to 60% of youth not in care. A Casey Family Programs study found that only 2% of youth from foster care received a Bachelor's degree compared to the 24% rate for the general population. Early indications are that OHFF can increase that number to 35-40% by working with agencies that identify and support promising students, through offering reasonable spending money for the things that are needed to compete with students from "regular" lives and by providing mentors to offer support and advice.

Recently OHFF had a holiday gathering for students and mentors. Both groups enjoyed the chance to meet others in the program and compare stories. Attending was the OHFF Secretary Chris Byrnes who, although she handles many of the support functions for OHFF, found she was amazed and moved by the experience.

"I was so surprised to have both the mentors and the students be so grateful for everything. Almost every person, mentors and students alike, expressed their appreciation to me for the things OHFF has done. As a mother of a college student, I shared stories with the mentors on the difficulties of trying to communicate with and support students. It really brought home to me that OHFF is one of very few things 'in their corner' when it gets tough."

One of the success stories that makes me smile is that of a student who is now in her third year at SUNY in Communications and achieved a 3.4 GPA last semester. But, in the tradition of college students everywhere, our students often begin their college careers with poor, impulsive decisions. When the results are disastrous, they learn that OHFF mentors stand with them to help them fix the problems. They have adults they can trust to help them figure out how to find and use the resources available to improve their grades. The mentors also find themselves becoming advocates with the students to help work through issues like illness, roommate problems, study habits or even the very real fear that they will "age out" of social services support before they can complete college, putting their chance of getting a degree and a start on a career to an end. While we have learned that there is no "silver bullet" in terms of the perfect program, OHFF students have learned that they have the power to "rescue themselves." With a lot of effort and concentration, they can make the decisions that give them a real future.

Good Shepherd Services has been a terrific partner in finding and supporting students for the OHFF grant program. Additionally, I am happy to say that we have formed new partnerships with both the Jewish Child Care Association and the NY Foundling Center for Child Protection to identify additional students.

The Domestic Violence Program is also delivering success based on our steadfast support over 3-5 years for families that are emerging from domestic violence. Achieving safe, stable lives is nothing short of a miracle for these women and their children. The mothers continually demonstrate their determination to work hard for themselves and their children. With our help covering childcare, rent guarantees or subsidies, job training, credit and budget counseling etc., these families are truly blossoming. One little girl recently received the Humanitarian Award at her school – reflecting an amazing generosity of spirit.

Our newest family joined OHFF this fall through our agreement with Sanctuary for Families. Jennifer has a five year old daughter and is supporting both of them through her work as a Nurse's Aide, while continuing her training to become an LPN and ultimately an RN. She is known as someone with a good heart, who has survived through terrible times and who lost the last of her family support with the recent death of her mother. As part of the OHFF grant, we have been helping her create regular budgets and get connected to the internet world. It caught me by surprise when Jennifer expressed her excitement about being able to choose a computer by herself – having the chance to evaluate the options and choose the right one, rather than settling for whatever came her way. I realized again how many advantages I've always had.

I know that our donors want reassurance that every dollar they give is being managed responsibly. We want to reiterate the charity's financial philosophy.

- There is no paid staff for OHFF. All work done for OHFF is done by volunteers, including skilled, committed Officers, Directors and Student Mentors who receive no compensation.
- All administrative costs are funded by the founders, Bob and Nancy Schulman. That means that all contributions go directly to the individual program recipients.
- The programs funded by OHFF grants are administered through highly respected agencies, including Good Shepherd Services, Safe Space and the Sanctuary for Families. The programs are unique within these agencies for their focus on high potential individuals, rather than the broad spectrum of people in need that agencies cover, and the programs are entirely funded by OHFF. The agencies believe strongly enough in these programs that the administration and the day to day disbursements of grant monies are managed by the agencies, with no additional funding from OHFF.

I hope you share my sense of joy in the results that we - OHFF partners, mentors, volunteers and donors - have achieved. Realizing that OHFF is often the last safety net between success and a homeless shelter is sobering; standing for people who have the determination and courage to succeed despite very difficult circumstances is incredibly rewarding. The women and children who are finally feeling safe and the students who have a whole new world opening in front of them continually show us how grateful they truly are.

Warmly,



Nancy Schulman