

Valley Philanthropy Forum: Hiding in Plain Sight

Speech by Jilliene T. Schenkel

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The following is a very short “case study” which describes my interest as a donor in making a philanthropy investment to improve the lives of children, under 18 years of age, who live in the San Fernando Valley and Santa Clarita Valleys.

How can the organizations I identify help increase your philanthropic awareness and help the corporate and individual donor community focus on investing in one or more nonprofit programs in the San Fernando Valley?

In deciding which program I would be interested in funding, my criteria for this Case Study were that the program:

- *Presently exists in San Fernando Valley or in the Los Angeles region,*
- *Contains a volunteer and skill building components for the child and for the volunteer,*
- *Is not a “name brand” charity like The Red Cross, The United Way and The California Community Foundation but is an organization that has launched itself, has a proven track record and is in need of expanding.*

I want to showcase three organizations and describe the needs they are addressing. Each of these organizations addresses challenges students face with respect to their educational opportunities.

The first organization I will discuss is Reading Partners. Amanda MacLennan, their Los Angeles Executive Director is with us this morning. The second organization I will discuss is the Peer Health Exchange. Amita Swadhin, their Los Angeles Executive Director is also with us.

The third organization is Scripps College Academy. Unfortunately, there is not sufficient time to discuss the Scripps College Academy. Robert Escobar, their Director, is with us today. Since my remarks will be brief, please feel free to talk with or to ask Amanda, Amita or Robert for further information.

What questions did I ask before I identified these programs?

- 1) Does the issue I have selected affect children in the San Fernando Valley? If it does, am I aware that a program exists which can address this issue which is “hidden in plain sight”?
- 2) Does the program have components with the ability to prepare children to assist them to become economically self sufficient on a sustainable basis?
- 3) Does each organization involve one on one mentoring so that there is role modeling? (i.e., a non-family member who by volunteering demonstrates that they care).
- 4) Does each volunteer receive supportive instruction with others in our community to address the problem?

- 5) Is there meaningful and demonstrable impact? What impact will giving my money or time make? Is this a small group where a donation of my time and/or dollars can have a large impact or a small impact?
- 6) Proven record: What is the short term outcome? What is the long term outcome?
- 7) Is there low overhead?
- 8) Targeted opportunity: How is the project working on the needs its addressing?
- 9) Don't replicate what already exists; are there other groups that are already providing this type of service?

Often children are not aware of the long term impact a program can have on their lives. One program – Reading Partners, provides children in the 4th grade with the initiative to address and improve their literacy. The second program, the Peer Health Exchange provides students in the 9th grade with a health educational program. The third program, Scripps College Academy, identifies first generation women and prepares them over a 6 year period to apply and be accepted at College. I believe that if a student is unable to read, is unaware of higher educational opportunities and has minimal understanding of their physical and mental health, he or she can face serious challenges which affect educational opportunities, literacy, job training and well being.

Let's look at each of these programs:

Reading Partners:

In grades 1 - 3 students learn to read. After grade 3, students read to learn. If students are not reading at grade level proficiency by the end of 4th grade, they are four times as likely to drop out of school before high school graduation. Only 17% of low income 4th graders read at grade level in Los Angeles County. Most of the students Reading Partners serves are reading 6 months – 2 ½ years below grade level. They are primarily from low income families. In the Los Angeles Unified School District only 21% of 4th grade students read at grade level. If only 21% of 4th grade students are grade level readers, than 31% are reading at a basic level and 42% are reading at a below basic level.

In Los Angeles during the 2013 – 2014 academic year, Reading Partners coordinated eleven elementary school reading centers, worked with 600 students and had 650 local volunteers participating in their Los Angeles program. Reading Partners partners with Title 1 elementary schools. A Title 1 elementary school is a school with a poverty rate of at least 40%, but programs offered are not limited to students who are considered economically disadvantaged. At this time Reading Partners has no elementary reading centers in the San Fernando Valley but they would like to have a program in the Valley.

This program has volunteers who tutor students one on one. They meet twice weekly for 45 minutes. This program follows a step-by-step literacy curriculum. The curriculum is developed in concert with leaders in educational reform such as The Stanford University Graduate School of Education.

Reading Partners is aligned with the Common Core State Standards. Since 2010, 45 states, including California, have adopted the Common Core State Standards for English and Math.

The reading curriculum has a common core which has been adopted in California, as well as nationwide. Before enrollment Reading Partners students only gained 0.56 months of reading skills for every month in the classroom. Once they participated in Reading Partners, by the end of year, they gained an average of 1.6 months of reading skills per month. Many nearly tripled their rate of learning.

Instead of failing behind month by month, participants gained reading skills, which closed and accelerated their learning. Let's look at some of the aspects of this program which could be subject to criticism such as:

- a. Computers: How are they used?
- b. National Organization: Is the focus national or is it Los Angeles focused?
 - This program is LA focused which is why it has an office and an Executive Director who is based in Los Angeles.
- c. Nationwide concern that we are falling behind in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM).
 - Without being able to read, students cannot develop proficiency in STEM subjects or any other subjects.
- d. Scalable: Yes: Curriculum follows the common core curriculum:
 - : The curriculum at the Reading Centers are the same throughout the United States.
 - : This program is constantly upgrading its curriculum.
 - : Training of community volunteers, no background is necessary.
 - Just a desire to help a child learn to read.

Opportunities for philanthropy support can consist of starting a service program or providing financial assistance or volunteering and/or creating a scholarship.

Reading Partners needs the following specific help:

- \$10 buys 5 grade-appropriate books from which Reading Partners 3rd or 4th grade students can select their favorites to take home and keep, often giving the student a chance to own his or her own books for the first time.
- \$750 refreshes or upgrades an existing library at one Reading Partners school site.
- \$1,500 establishes a reading library at a new Reading Partners school site.
- \$2,000 provides all the supplies required to establish a new Reading Partners school site. This includes a computer, word games, child-friendly décor, and seating around the reading library.
- \$50,000, augmented by a federal subsidy from the AmeriCorps helps with payroll costs. This enables Reading Partners to establish and operate its program in a new school. Over 190 qualified schools are on the waiting list.
- This program is looking for local Board Members.
- Donate books. Amita has a list of what is needed.

Charles W. Eliot once said that “Books are the quietest and most constant of friends; they are the most accessible and wisest of counselors, and the most patient of teachers”.

As a parent of three children, who are now young adults, I have seen the importance that being able to read as well as enjoying reading can make in the lives of our children.

Peer Health Exchange

The mission of Peer Health Exchange is to give teenagers the knowledge and skills they need to make healthy decisions. They do this by training college student volunteers to teach health workshops in public high schools which lack health education and in which a majority of students live at or below the poverty line. The program has been in LA since 2009.

Peer Health Exchange bases the need for their program on the Center for Disease Control's Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance (<http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/pdf/ss/ss6104.pdf>). The latest data from this survey are from 2011. It includes self-reported data from high school students.

LA Unified School District (LAUSD) participates in the study. PHE bases their program on self-reported data from LAUSD high school students. These data show the following results (which the programs matches to the topics in their curriculum): for STI/HIV Prevention Workshop, Pregnancy Prevention Workshop, and Sexual Decision Making Workshop:

- 18% were never taught in school about AIDS or HIV infection
- 39% are sexually active; 39% of these sexually active teens did not use a condom the last time they had sex
- 28% felt sad or hopeless (almost every day for 2 or more weeks in a row so that they stopped doing some usual activities during the 12 months before the survey)
- 11% attempted suicide one or more times (during the 12 months before the survey) Abusive Relationships Workshop, Healthy Relationships Workshop
- 11% have been hit, slapped, or physically hurt on purpose by their boyfriend or girlfriend (during the 12 months before the survey)
- 18% of sexually active teens drank alcohol or used drugs right before having sexual intercourse
- 8% have ever physically forced to have sexual intercourse when they did not want to (10% of girls and 6% of boys)
- Nationwide, 20% have ever experienced childhood sexual abuse (25% of girls and 17% of boys) – this is a CDC statistic from the Adverse Childhood Experiences Study
- 39% were offered, sold, or given an illegal drug by someone on school property (during the 12 months before the survey)
- 18% are binge drinkers (had five or more drinks of alcohol in a row within a couple of hours on at least 1 day during the 30 days before the survey)
- 24% rode with a driver who had been drinking alcohol one or more times (in a car or other vehicle during the 30 days before the survey)
- 13% are obese
- 10% smoked cigarettes; smoked cigars, cigarillos or little cigars; or used chewing tobacco, snuff, or dip on at least 1 day during the 30 days before the survey.

They also base the need for their program on the availability of health education for high school students in Los Angeles County. Some key facts are that:

- The state of California does not mandate comprehensive health education. The only related requirement is 6 hours of HIV/AIDS prevention education.
- The 2012 Los Angeles School Health Profiles indicates that among high schools, 15% did not have a health education curriculum that addresses all 8 national standards for health education. (15% of LAUSD's high school student population is over 23,000; if you add in LAUSD charter high schools, that number is closer to 27,000 students)
- LAUSD's high school graduation requirements include a semester-long (0.5 credit) comprehensive health education class. The biggest need for Peer Health Exchange in LAUSD is within charter high schools (which are exempt from this requirement). Currently, all 27 of Peer Health Exchange Los Angeles partner high schools are charter schools within LAUSD.
- All charter schools are public schools.
- LAUSD has the largest number of charter school students in the country. This year in LAUSD high schools Peer Health Exchange reached 3,300 teens (all in the 9th grade) in 27 schools.

In the San Fernando Valley, peer health exchange partners with 4 high schools (High Tech Los Angeles, in Van Nuys, Discovery Charter Prep, in Pacoima, North Valley Charter Academy, in Granada Hills and Vaughn International Studies Academy, in Pacoima). This program serves 432 teens in those schools.

This year there are 300 college student volunteers in Los Angeles County, including: 118 from UCLA, 68 from USC, 57 from Occidental College and 57 from CSUN. CSUN is the most successful partnership because most of the students are from the San Fernando Valley. CSUN Volunteers teach at these high schools every Thursday and Friday. Students who volunteer from CSUN also benefit from this program because (1) they develop a commitment to public service (2) it prepares them to become leaders who become aware of and often remain committed to serving the needs of the San Fernando Valley and (3) it helps them make better choices concerning their own health. Over a twelve week period, a specific topic is focused on each week. Each student is given a bi-lingual pocket size fold out guide which lists resources which they can access.

Peer Health Exchange needs:

- 1) Want to expand to 68 or more CSUN students in 2014 so that they can reach more classrooms.
- 2) Expand within the four High Schools they are currently serving in the San Fernando Valley. They are in the process of identifying more high schools in the San Fernando Valley.
- 3) Would like to have more than one Board Member who is from the Valley. Currently this program has one board member who is from the San Fernando Valley.
- 4) Transportation Costs: To help get the CSUN students to the high schools. Not all CSUN students have cars, many rely on the bus.

In 2011 – 2012, an evaluation showed that:

42%	61%	94%	75%	93%
GROWTH TEEN HEALTH KNOWLEDGE FROM PRE- TEST TO POST TEST	OF TEENS REPORTED THAT THEY USED SOMETHING THEY LEARNED FROM THE PHE WORKSHOPS TO MAKE A HEALTHY DECISION	OF TEENS REPORTED THAT THEY PLAN USING SOMETHING THEY LEARNED FROM PHE WORKSHOPS TO MAKE A HEALTHY DECISION IN THE FUTURE	OF COLLEGE STUDENT VOLUNTEERS REPORTED THAT THEIR EXPERIENCE WITH PHE INCREASED THEIR COMMITMENT TO PUBLIC SERVICE	OF PARTNER HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPALS WOULD RECOMMEND PHE TO OTHER SCHOOLS

Funding opportunities for Peer Health Exchange include:

- \$250 funds serving one additional student.
- \$5,000 funds an additional classroom of students.
- \$25,000 funds an additional high school.
- \$132,000 funds the next year’s expansion throughout Los Angeles.

There is no duplication of services with other nonprofits, as this program is all encompassing. One somewhat similar program is Health Corps, a nonprofit founded by Dr. Mehmet Oz; it focused mainly on nutrition and exercise. Another similar program is Planned Parenthood, but this group offers only three workshops.

Peer Health Exchange is data driven. It is compelling because it shows the important linkage between health, graduation from high school and academic success.

Scripps College Academy

Extremely capable high school girls from low income families often lack the resources or encouragement at home or at school to pursue higher education. At Sylmar High School 68% are economically disadvantaged. Many come from families with no exposure to college and too many of these students are “tracked” out of college attendance by high school guidance counselors. Further, even top students often focus on less selective colleges because they believe they will be less expensive and are fearful of their capacity to compete at top schools. Yet top schools often have more financial, academic and administrative resources to help students who arrive with gaps in skills or experience. Many colleges provide scholarship support, reducing the student debt burden.

Scripps College Academy approach is three-fold:

- 1) Community Tutoring: Weekly academic support and mentorship, middle and high school students within single sex environment. Scripps women students who are part of Claremont Consortium, serve as tutors.
- 2) College Club: Helps low income 8th grade students begin high school on college prep path the workshop leaders are often 1st generation college students. At Sylmar High School, 68% students who graduate in 4 years. 49% took the ACT or SAT.

- 3) Scripps College Academy Scholars: Intensive multi year program for female students who have been identified as high achieving with limited resources and who want to be one of the first generation in their family to attend college.

Focusing Philanthropy

I want to thank Larry Gilson and Kelly Hewitt from Focusing Philanthropy. Focusing Philanthropy identifies, evaluates and presents organizations such as Reading Partners, Peer Health Exchange and the Scripps College Academy so that donors can be confident that the funds or the time they contribute are achieving the greatest possible impact.

My son once asked me “what does it means to be successful?” Each of us has our own definition of success but I believe that without the ability to read, and without knowing how to access mental and physical health services it is much harder to be successful.

In closing I would like to share a Native American Proverb with you: *“Tell me and I’ll forget. Show me and I may not remember. Involve me and I’ll understand.”*