

GIVING CIRCLE GIFT COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION FOR 2010-2011 COMMUNITY GIFTS

As we near the end of the Giving Circle's fifth year of community investments, the Gift Committee looks back with pride at the results of our gifts totaling \$350,000. Our five-year sustained commitment to home visitation coaching and education for Alexandria's most vulnerable first time parents (Healthy Families Alexandria) has resulted in stronger and productive family relationships and children who are safer, healthier and ready to learn. Our commitment to Developmental Playgroups (SCAN and the Center for Alexandria's Children) has expanded outreach, built parental skills, helped to connect families to needed resources and strengthened the parent/child bond.

Our focus for the past five years has been to support parents in engaging with their children in ways that prepare children for school and beyond. Children cannot succeed without the involvement and love of a parent or permanent primary caregiver. We have learned so much about what parents need, the obstacles they face and the devastating consequences these obstacles can have on the wellbeing of children. Building on these results, we look forward to expanding our efforts to help Alexandria's most vulnerable families by continuing to invest in innovative and successful services that support parents – parents with many burdens, but who we know are in the best position to help assure their children's success.

With these thoughts in mind, the Gift Committee presents the following Community Gift recommendations for membership comment and Board approval:

A Shared Vision for Parental Support Services: A Guide for the Future and a Map for Collaboration Up to \$10,000

The Giving Circle would facilitate a planning process involving major organizations who serve, or could serve, this mission in our community in the hopes of identifying:

- Opportunities to work together for greater coordination of resources for existing services and
- Opportunities to invest in new programs where high priority needs are not being met.

Throughout our City, there are a variety of city agencies and non-profit organizations focused on supporting parents. Through our investments in many of these agencies such as Healthy Families, the Center of Alexandria's Children, Hopkins House, SCAN, ALIVE, New Neighbors Education Center, Community Lodgings, Child and Family Network Center, and The Reading Connection, we

have increased our understanding of services provided and the pressures impacting service-delivery. The day-to-day requirements of operating and delivering programs with limited capacity leaves little or no time to think about more strategic ways to work. Indeed, it has been equally difficult for the Giving Circle to find the time to look at the larger picture to think about how our investments might:

- Inspire greater coordination and collaboration
- Fill gaps in services
- Support evaluation so that we retain services that are working and refine or eliminate those that are not
- Reach families that are currently going unserved
- Leverage other funding support

The Gift Committee believes that setting aside up to \$10,000 to support a dialogue among agencies providing services to struggling families can help us begin to answer some of these questions and will result in a road map for the future.

For instance, there are several programs in Alexandria that support home visitation to new families – Healthy Families Alexandria, Resource Mothers, the Alexandria Health Department Field Nurses, and the Naomi Project. There is duplication in individual clients served and overlap in outreach. There are also families who never receive assistance and populations not being reached. Agency and program leaders are eager to figure out workable approaches to collaborating more closely to expand services; eliminate duplication; and better identify strategies that are working.

Our investment will provide this kind of opportunity for home visitation programs along with other complementary services, such as parent education and developmental playgroups. By supporting a dynamic and collaborative process involving both city agencies and private non-profits, our investment has the potential to expand the reach of home visitation programs along with other complementary services.

Very specifically, we hope that the resulting continuum of parental supports will provide a clear vision for the coordination and expansion of home visitation to families throughout Alexandria and for the expansion of the playgroup model -- two types of complementary programs that the Giving Circle has championed.

A small workgroup of the Gift Committee members, along with target group parents, will work closely with agencies providing services to parents, to create a plan for this initiative. A plan and budget will be presented for approval to the Board.

The Strategic Evaluation and Expansion of Developmental Playgroups Up to \$40,000.

Partnering with ACT for Alexandria, the Gift Committee recommends we invest up to \$40,000 during the next year to support Developmental Playgroups throughout the City of Alexandria. The Board, at its April 20, 2010 meeting to review the proposed gifts, has recommended the potential \$40,000 investment be implemented as follows:

- Up to \$20,000 to the CAC for sustaining the existing playgroups. We hope ACT will match this investment in full or in part.
- The remainder to be used in full or in part to improve, evaluate and possibly expand the existing playgroups.

This past year, the Center for Alexandria's Children ("CAC") successfully piloted a new playgroup model that trains and provides ongoing support to parent facilitators. Previously the playgroups relied on professionals for facilitation. Last year, a decision was made to pilot this new approach in an effort to reduce the overall costs of playgroups and open the door for more cost-effective expansion. With the success of this year's pilot, the Gift Committee recommends we continue to support the existing three playgroups and expand our investment to include a more rigorous evaluation of the playgroups and creation of a plan for adding playgroups throughout the City.

Evaluation is the first step to expansion. Evaluation results will help us and the CAC in building partnerships and funding streams for more playgroups. Right now, the benefits of playgroups are well documented in the research (i.e. based on the strengthening families model and the research-based five protective factors). But we do not have good research on our own groups in terms of how well they are actually bolstering these protective factors and ways we could improve our program delivery, outreach, etc. The objectives for the next Fiscal Year include:

- Three playgroups fully enrolled with Parent Leaders who receive a stipend for their time and work; the playgroups will operate for ten months, July 1, 2010 through June 30, 2011 with two four-week breaks in August and December/January.
- Two in-house training sessions for Parent Leaders that draw on the leaders' knowledge about facilitating these groups, and further support their development as experts on child development and developmentally appropriate learning activities and resources available in Alexandria
- Increase outreach efforts and collaborative partnerships in additional

neighborhoods and evaluation of the barriers or obstacles (time? place? structure?) of attendance at the Jefferson-Houston playgroup for families living in that neighborhood

- Rigorous evaluation of all three playgroups completed by a consultant, with the results used to improve the program and leveraged to increase funding streams/partnerships
- A strategic plan for expansion (informed by evaluation and the CAC's strategic planning process) formed by Spring 2011 so funding and other organizational needs are in place to expand in Fiscal Year 2012.

A workgroup of the Gift Committee will work with CAC and, based on other available funding, apply up to \$40,000 to support the objectives above. The workgroup will put a priority on supporting efforts that position us for expansion and we will seek to use our investment to promote these activities while ensuring the three current playgroups are sustained. As the workgroup puts together more detailed plans a firm budget will be presented to the Board.

Developmental Gifts Up to \$10,000

Since 2007, the Gift Committee has awarded \$36,500 in developmental gifts to nine diverse agencies within the community including:

- the Alexandria chapter of the Boys and Girls Club to fund college visitation trips for rising high school seniors;
- Crisis Link to fund printing of referral cards with suicide hotline and other emergency;
- Community Lodgings to implement academic curricula and
- ALIVE!'s Child Development Center for teacher training and materials.

The developmental gifts have benefitted all of these agencies by funding discrete needs.

The Gift Committee strongly believes that developmental gifts and the abbreviated request for proposal used to solicit applications simultaneously keeps the Giving Circle aware of current needs within the community and keeps the community aware of the Giving Circle and the work it does. Accordingly, the Gift Committee recommends that up to \$10,000 be set aside for developmental gifts.