



“Strengthening Allen County children and their families, particularly those with the greatest economic need and the least opportunity.”

Dear Community Leader:

Happy New Year! I hope your holidays were enjoyable and that you're off to a productive and prosperous 2005. In this first letter of the new year (and a new format), here are a few items of interest from the Foellinger Foundation.

A small grant can make a big impact.

A few years ago, the Foellinger Foundation tried an experiment. As has been the case for many years, we invited a guest lecturer to Allen County. But instead of just listening to his insights and returning to the daily routine, we invited a group of nonprofit organizations to put the speaker's concept to work. The results taught these grant recipients, and us, a lot. Among other things, the results taught us that it doesn't always take a large project to generate thoughtful reflection and fresh thinking.

So we tried another experiment. The Foundation awarded a second round of small grants to schools and nonprofit organizations whose professional staff work with Allen County's young people. We asked them to shape a research project to learn what kids want most from youth workers (see story next column). Again, it didn't take an enormous amount of money to shape an interesting lesson for some local youth and some valuable lessons of our own about recruiting and training youth workers.

With two successful projects under our belts, we've decided these small grant opportunities hold merit. We're not doing away with our traditional form of grantmaking. But one project at a time, when there's a chance to trigger reflection and learning in an effective way, we will invite and award small grants.

Our most recent round of small grant opportunities involving parent enrichment is now under way. To award the grants, we set up a streamlined application process and involved a committee of community leaders led by a Foundation board member to review and recommend the best-qualified applications. The Foundation received more than 100 requests totaling \$2.2 million and awarded 32 grants totaling \$600,900 in early January. The grants range in size from \$3,000 to \$45,000 and are designed to help enrich parent and youth interactions through reading and building relationships.

What makes an ideal youth worker? **Ask a young person.**

We used the small grants mentioned above to learn more about effective youth workers. Because the Foundation often awards grants to youth-serving organizations – and because those organizations often use Foundation grant funds to hire, train or retain the professionals who work with local youth – we wanted to learn more about what qualities young people thought most important in youth workers and whether Foundation grants might, over time, encourage such qualities.

Our Youth Worker Training Committee, chaired by Foundation board member and former IPFW Chancellor Dr. Joanne Lantz, gathered substantial research regarding adult opinions on what makes good youth workers, but found few insights in the research from young people themselves.

So the Foundation awarded small grants to local youth-serving agencies and school systems. Each of the grant recipients assembled a group of young people who implemented a project that identified the key qualities of good youth workers. The only similarity in methodology: Each group of young people had to read books to spark their discussion.

The findings, coming from young people themselves, were refreshing. Dr. Lantz wrote about them in *The News-Sentinel*. A copy of her article is enclosed.

2004 annual report available online by the end of February. One good way to learn about the Foellinger Foundation and its grantmaking priorities is to study our annual report. This year, for the second time, we'll "publish" our report only as an online version. Our topic this year will resonate with many community leaders – the hurdles and benefits of measuring outcomes. The report will be online by the end of February. Visit the Foundation's website at www.foellinger.org and click on the annual report link.

What we're reading. From time to time, our staff reads and discusses a book. We've found that these conversations provide good opportunities to step away from our daily duties and

reflect on other issues important in our jobs. We recently finished reading and discussing *Geeks and Geezers* by Warren G. Bennis and Robert J. Thomas. The premise of the book is that successful leaders, young and old, share numerous qualities – the most important of which is some "intense, transformational experience," which the authors call a "crucible." That crucible might be professional or personal – the death of a loved one, a milestone birthday, a crisis managed successfully or unsuccessfully. Whatever the case, recognizing and learning from such crucible moments contributes greatly to leadership skills.

Wishing you a successful 2005,



Cheryl K. Taylor
President

Who works best with kids?



A guest column by
Joanne Lantz

WHO'S WORKING WITH our young people? Who should be? What characteristics - derived from training, temperament or both - would be useful to be a program director or coach, teacher's aide or counselor, headmaster or mentor? Should those who work with young people be pushovers or taskmasters, reverent or irreverent, educators or entertainers? Because the Foellinger Foundation awards grants to youth-serving organizations - and because those organizations often use foundation grant funds to hire, train or retain the professionals who work with local youth - we wanted to learn more about what qualities youth workers ought to have and whether foundation grants might, over time, encourage such qualities.

To find out, we did what foundations often do - we set up a committee. As a board member and retired educator, I agreed to chair it. To get a broad range of expertise, we invited educators and other professionals who work with young people directly or who run youth-serving organizations to share their thinking.

After delving into existing research on this topic, we discovered that while there are many adult opinions on what makes a good youth worker, we couldn't find many insights from young people themselves - especially local young people. So we decided to ask them.

The foundation awarded small grants to local youth-serving agencies and school systems. Each of 13 grant recipients assembled a group of young people who implemented a project that identified the key qualities of good youth workers. The only similarity in methodology: Each group of young people had to read books to spark their discussion.

These diverse young people read a wide range of literature from Harper Lee's "To Kill a Mockingbird" to Indiana Pacer Reggie Miller's "I Love Being the Enemy." After they read, they talked, reflected and talked some more.

Now, the typical adult might expect the typical youth to want things easy from their youth workers. Adults might expect kids to want their every need gratified. We might expect kids to seek best buddies. We might expect young folks to pursue a panacea based on a fantasy hero. But the youth we heard from - and learned from - are filled with surprising and thoughtful insights on this subject. No matter what their backgrounds and circumstances, no matter what they read or with whom they talked, the 1,000-plus young people who participated in this project had a consistent list of ideal qualities for their youth workers: Caring. Fun. Helpful. Patient. Respectful. Smart. Trustworthy. Open-minded.

The words "easy," "soft," "casual," and "lenient" didn't show up anywhere. Nor did we find a single reference to physical appearance. Our students also clearly saw the differences between cultural-icon qualities and those that make everyday heroes of parents, teachers and others working with young people.

So what can we do with what the young people have taught us? Those who select the adults working in youth organizations might weigh these qualities when interviewing. They also might build these qualities into training programs for new and existing workers. And all of us with children in our families - parents, stepparents, grandparents, guardians, aunts, uncles and others - might ask if we're applying these qualities at home and in the neighborhood.

Finally, those of us who are affiliated with organizations that award grants to youth organizations can ask grant applicants whether they and their front-line professionals practice these principles with the young people they serve.

After all, if you and we don't do all the above, some very smart kids will see right through us.

Joanne B. Lantz, a board member of the Foellinger Foundation in Fort Wayne, is a former chancellor of IPFW.