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GIB AND DIANE CONOVER: VOLUNTEERS IN PROVIDENCE READING BUDDIES

Volunteers in Providence Schools (VIPS) provides Providence public school students with academic support, trains and matches volunteers with students, and sponsors special summer enrichment programs. Their latest innovative project, Reading Buddies, is creating a system for using volunteer tutors to provide prescriptive, developmental reading support to elementary students experiencing difficulty reading. This program was piloted on a small scale in 2006, with remarkable success: student reading levels increased by three to five levels.



courtesy of VIPS

Enter Gib and Diane Conover, Foundation donor advisors since 2004. Knowing of their interest in education, Pamela Tesler Howitt, stewardship manager, brought the Reading Buddies project to the Conovers, who felt it is “just what we were looking for,” in Gib’s words. “Both of our kids spent time in the Providence public schools and we know the state of the system. And we both believe that education is the key that unlocks potential. There is no question that a good education is a springboard to fulfilling your dreams.”

As it happened, Diane had volunteered for VIPS so the Conovers were familiar with the organization and endorsed its practice of training tutors to build a multiplier effect, benefiting many students over time. They also had an appreciation for VIPS’ mission to create a sustainable program with enough momentum to carry it forward well into the future.

“This grant, for us, had a lot of value built in for the dollars invested. Working with the Foundation, we were able to participate in a way we couldn’t have on our own,” notes Gib. The Conovers are pleased to know they will receive reports of VIPS’ progress with Reading Buddies. “This is much better than getting a nice thank you note and being done with it,” continues Gib. “We love the idea of understanding what is being accomplished and being connected to our philanthropy on the ground.”

AS220, with its edgy approach, is ideally suited to engage youth who have “failed” all too often in conventional terms. The program demonstrates the powerful role the arts play in youth development, with clear and specific outcomes for measuring the impact on the lives of this critical population, including:

- ◆ ability to place participants in jobs/internships beyond the Broad Street Studio’s in-house programs,
- ◆ ability to establish and deepen relationships with clinical resource partners,
- ◆ ability to actively involve youth in the creation and ongoing development of the youth resource center,
- ◆ impact of the youth resource center on the overall work of AS220,
- ◆ and collaborations with other community organizations to develop job placements for participants

Before the Foundation approached her about the project, Vera knew “a little bit” about AS220. But a site visit, conducted with Foundation staff members as part of the Foundation’s usual review process, changed her perspective.

“It is especially exciting because without my relationship with the Foundation, I never would have learned about this opportunity. I had a chance to meet some of the kids in the program,” Vera says enthusiastically. “It was so impressive. They had such a presence about them...they were so self-assured. The program would be wonderful for anyone, but it is just so great for these kids, many of whom are coming out of the Training School. They need the opportunity to turn their lives around and this will allow them to get into a better position to help themselves...we’re giving them a hand up, not a hand out.”