

**WWL General Meeting
February 9, 2010**

Meeting called to order at 7:55 pm.

0. Guest Speakers

- Norma K. Darragh, Shepherds Inc.
- Pamela Massey, Project Return/HEAL

1. Tammy Roberts – President

- January Meeting Minutes approved. First from Catherine DeSousa, Second from Kathleen O'Connell.
- Jen Skor reported that we raised over \$2,000.00 for UNICEF. Thank you to Eileen Pouloupoulos for collecting boxes.
- Next month we should have numbers for Kidstock and CHB.

2. Community Services – Tami Campos & Kristin Adams

- Thank you to Cindy Sherlock and Leslie O'Carmony for chairing Kidstock! Thank you to everyone who helped.
- Evergreen birthdays (Pamela Cannon) – this is an organization that throws kids birthday parties because their parents are not able due to HIV. They provide a gift, juice, etc. and then the contact provides a birthday party. This month we have a special request for Jania, she is a 6 year old girl whose birthday is next week. She lives with her sister and aunt but the conditions are not great (i.e., rats). Donations were solicited for toy and clothing gifts. Pam will go back and tell her that the birthday party will happen. Thank you to everyone who offered to donate.
- FCA Baby Shower (Heather Pemberton Levy) – the shower is for about 20 women and takes place at FCA headquarters in South Norwalk. Mother who have had a baby in the last 3 months or for expectant moms. It will take place from 11am-1pm. Last year there was a craft – painting onesies – and they loved it. Great way for them to get to know each other. Then a game where they raced to change a baby. There was a speaker to discuss immunizations. Then they were each presented with a beautiful basket. This year, Liz Waltzman said that Carter's are giving lots of their excess inventory to Haiti so they are only donating 1 outfit per basket. Cheryl Bryant submitted an application to Whole Foods for lunch. Please come help if you can. Then use the April meeting to build the baskets. It's April 27th. Sign up sheet coming around. Please help! Heather will have a meeting probably after the break.
- Brady Smiles (Heather Pemberton Levy) -Thank you for all of the books to the Brady Smiles project – building up the children's library at Norwalk Hospital.

3. Senior Services – Stacey Tucker

- The next senior lunch is March 31st. This is our last one of the year, please sign up to help.

4. Membership – Debby Katz & Tamar Greeley

- Happy birthday to the January and February birthdays!
- There have been 2 First Friday lunches. Attendance has been small but we did have one new member. They will do it again in March – First Friday, bring a friend who is not a member. It is a no pressure, low-key, easy way for someone to get to know the group. Children are welcome.
- Book exchange going on tonight. If you brought a book, take a book. If you did not, wait and see if there is a book leftover. Suggestions were made to do this every meeting. Leftover books could go to the library or hospital. Please feel free to bring a book from now on.

5. Spring Fundraiser – Nanette Giordano & Kit Woolverton

- Build a bar – you can bring Gin, Vodka, Whiskey, and Champagne. Feel free to go to Peter's and mention the event and he will give you a discount as well as recommend a good vodka mixer. You can bring it to the meeting or drop it off at Kit's house. Other items for donation go to Nanette.
- The event is still in need of staffing. We need 2 people for clean up and 2 people to collect the bid sheets. Please participate, donate, etc. Catherine DeSousa will be calling you if she does not see your name.
- It will be a beautiful evening – violin and piano performances, as well as a great band. 1920's music as well as dance music. Beautiful sit down dinner. Options of filet, chicken, and a vegetable entrée. Tom Devine is our caterer and has also sponsored us. He has worked the Lansbury for many years and owns the Two Steps Grill in Danbury.
- There will be wonderful trips for the auction and lots of other excitement. Dress is cocktail or 20's attire.
- Sponsorships – don't want to ask people more than once. If you have a contact, make sure that Cheryl and Mercedes know. People are giving but we are down. Seems that people want to give something but not as much. We have to think outside the box – WWE – Triple H lives in Weston. That was a big deal and unexpected. Think of others - contractors, camps, their big season is coming up. If you know someone – email Cheryl. She'll let you know. Take a letter tonight. Maybe include it with your payment! Historic Lansbury in Ridgefield. April 10th. 6:30-11. Great Gatsby Gala.

6. Social – Kathleen O-Connell & Eileen Pouloupoulos

- Thank you to Nanette for opening up your home for the Funky Junket. Apologize for the miscommunication. Next year it will be wild!
- Hosting Nails and cocktails – sending an evite after the break. Planning a cooking night also.

7. Long Range Planning – Julie Baisley

- Long Range Planning questionnaire on the table. Please fill it out and let us know your thoughts. We will have a meeting and presentation in the spring.
- Nominating survey also on the table. We are soliciting for positions. If you have suggestions or want to put your name down, that would be great.

8. Philanthropy – Heather Pemberton Levy

- The grant cycle for funds raised from next year's CHB and Kidstock is open. Applications are due March 5th. Everything is on the website, all materials need to be mailed to Heather. We will be having another philanthropy meeting when everything is in.

9. New Business

- Discussion ensued regarding adding other ideas for meetings, such as come in your pajamas, a college alumni day, more book and magazine exchanges, etc. If you have any other great ideas, let us know.

The meeting adjourned at 9:19 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Kim Forte
Recording Secretary

Grass roots, non-dem, org to provide inner city youth with quality education and introduction of a mentor. Program is unique in ct b/c the sponsors pay for the 4 years of high school and mentor also. Founded with 5 students at 1 pilot school in Bridgeport now 70 kids. Largest is Bridgeport. Now have Danbury, Stamford, Bridgeport, Milford, and Middletown. Place students in parochial high schools for the biggest bang for our buck. Tuition is better.

Sponsors are individual benefactors, corps, foundations, etc. Mentors come from all walks of life, doctors, lawyers, etc. People with no kids, people with 10 kids. All share common commitment to helping kids. 1 student drops out of high school every 9 seconds. That's not limited to major metro areas, but Bridgeport – 1 out of 4 students drop out. Of students who graduate, 1 out of 5 have no options beyond. Stuck in the cycle of poverty. Also interesting that across CT there are major discrepancies among mastery levels. 80 % will master the tests like 10th grade math versus 3% in lower end schools. Shepard's students face three major life hurdles: 1) high school, 2) entry in college 3) accessing enough money to attend. They are disadvantaged. They are in foster care, with incapacitated parents or incarcerated. Most are the first of their families to dream of going to college. Don't know how to navigate the whole process (eg. Fafsa forms). Don't know how to make it further on the ladder to success. They are open to all students of all races, ethnic heritage, religions. They come to us from public schools, all schools. They must pass the entry exam at the school they want to attend so we know they can do well. They are often behind in their level. Then they fill out the financial aid forms. Then the shepard's application. Student portion where they answer essays, guidance counselor does some of it. Would they fall through the cracks if they were at another school? Then interviewed with parent or guardian. They get to know the students, add a voice to their education and then tell them the commitment they are making. Once they are accepted, they are paired with a mentor. Marilyn Kirchner is on her second student. There are others. Dave Smith, a member of their board, on third tour of duty, 10 kids of his own. Bill Ackerman who worked with a man. A mentor applies, they do a background check, they provide mentor training, the student meets the mentor and they start on their 4 year journey. They are cheerleaders, not tutors. They say, I know you can do it. They help the kids navigate the process. Sometimes, just getting to school on time is a major accomplishment. Sometimes it is a space to do their homework and not care for a sibling is a major accomplishment. Pushes college. Funding from Kidstock goes to college prep funding. This is a major accomplishment for these kids. 2400 is the goal for the SAT scores. Most kids get a 400. That puts them at a big disadvantage because they don't understand the test, etc. So college prep. Freshman year: 420 most common words on the SAT test. Junior year is SAT boot camp. 2 ½ hours of test prep per year. Get them over the 1000 mark to give them access to financial aid. On average, they can boost the kids' scores by a significant percentage and it makes a difference. 70 kids. Last year they celebrated their biggest year 26 students got into college – 100% of their graduates. Shepards as part of their commitment has a commitment to community service. Yesterday at New Convenient house serving dinner, etc. Very important to them that they give back. Investment in these students is an investment in the community You can really see them mature. Down the road we hope will come back and become sponsor students and pay it forward. One of their original 5 has come back and is doing this. He works for a firm in Manhattan and got a full scholarship to UVM. We really appreciate your support, it makes a big difference. You are welcome to come and meet our students. Physically they are in Bridgeport.

Executive Director of Shepards = Norma.

Project Return: Pamela. Program Director for Project HEAL. Community arm of outreach in Westport. A group home for high school girls in Westport. They have 7 girls and they run the gamut of why they are there. They stay in the house until they are 25. They have been around for 25 years. Come from all over. Project HEAL was born because they realized that a lot of girls were falling through the cracks. Looking for reasons to help

Health, Empathy, Altruism and LOVE. Community service group. Girls selected by guidance counselors to participate. Girls that would have otherwise not be connected. Not in the IT group, don't play a sport, etc. They wander around, not connected, looking for something, don't have it. Select by counselors. They meet with them at the school, tell them about it and ask them if they want to do it. They almost all say yes. Then they send them a letter saying congrats. These kids don't get selected to do anything so this is a big deal to get this letter. Amazing transformation from September. They don't know each other. They come together for the first few meetings; they talk about what they want to do. It's pretty uncomfortable. And then you watch them grow. Little conversations happen, and then they start to bond. Then they go on their first community service project, whatever that may be. They do a towel drive from the vets, or a bake sale for diapers, etc. All about the process for them. Lessons that they learn. As they venture out, you can see the bonds starting to form. You can see these girls become a group and then they are very tight knit. Once that happens, the magic starts. Then the group is driven by them. She guides them, but they drive it, design it, etc. Spend a lot of time in Bridgeport – 2 x a month to do art projects for the 5 and under groups. They plan the projects, buy the supplies, etc. As typical teenagers – they'll be crabbing all the way there – then the ride back was like, this is fabulous!. Then they start to ask if they can week every week. They come together, they love being there, she can't get out of it any week. Program in Weston High will be starting in March. They all run on the same premise, all community service based. Not a therapeutic group, but lots of therapy happens. Connection and community service are the two biggest things that happen. When she read the year end comments from these girls...all they kept saying was that their group felt like family, that it changed their life, that reaching out and helping people is so important. That it doesn't have to be big. Changed these girls' lives because they are not the girls – they are also disadvantaged – they are on the lower socio-economic scale. They are not looking for community service credits. Haiti is in the forefront right now. Might be a t-shirt drive. Assembled brail books for the ct brail society. Goes on and on. Thrilled to be affiliated with you guys and would love to collaborate with any community service project. Trying to get them involved in a road race right now – many don't understand health, etc. Spend following session talking about what it felt like. They journal too – they don't like that in the beginning. But then they love it. Write poems, draw, right a song, all ways that they express how it means for them. Kristin Ferrara is the person in Weston coordinating the group. Leslie Emmanuel is the parenting arm of HEAL (Weston too). Nothing that the girls tell them do they tell their parents, but the parents have lots of questions. It is a way of supporting the parents through these years because often they are not connected either and don't understand how to support their children. Keep the groups at 7. But can have more than one group. School psychologists and social workers know who would be appropriate. They are very proud of what they are doing. It is something that they belong too. Such a powerful connection for them. They beg her every year to go through the summer. They met at the beach and had a check in. This year they are involved in a couple community gardens.

If you have ideas for how they can help, let her know. E.g., the baby shower, etc.