

## BOONTON HIGH SCHOOL

## Students develop as philanthropists through unique program

In early March, Boonton High School introduced the Main Street Philanthropy Academy to its students. A 501(C)(3) charity, Main Street Philanthropy Academy is made possible by a partnership between a generous donor or donors who funds the program, a Main St. Philanthropy ambassador or teacher, and the school.

The organization describes its purpose as "to transform people from the inside out, and society from the bottom up by helping youth and adults experience the joy of purposeful giving." This is accomplished by using philanthropy as a catalyst to instill critical life skills in program participants.

Led by Yale Levey, the Main Street Philanthropy Academy ambassador, 11 Boonton High School students completed this 10-week program. These students chose to invest their time to accomplish this program during their free time without any class-

room credit.

Many of the life skills students experienced in this program are not formally taught within a typical school environment. Things like financial literacy, basics of investments and taxes, written and oral communication skills, public speaking, self-esteem, community awareness, interpersonal trust and communication, identification of personal values and purpose, group collaboration and teamwork, volunteerism, and gratitude were just some of the important lessons students learned.

In their initial weeks, the students, working in small teams, spent time identifying the causes that were important to them. They researched charities to find reputable and worthy organizations and find those that aligned with their teams' causes. Students were required to cold call leaders of the organizations and then invited those leaders to Boonton High School for panel discussions.

During these panel discussions, students had the opportunity to interview the representatives and learn more about the organizations' operations to help determine which organizations had the greatest impact in the community and therefore, worthy of a grant money issued by the students.

In addition to meeting weekly in class, students spent a considerable amount of time outside of school. As part of the program; they were required to write a weekly blog about their experience as they went along. Though teams were provided with money to contribute to their chosen charities through Main Street's donors, they also sponsored fundraisers to raise more money.

"The most challenging part of this program was finding a fundraiser we could do, that is outside of school, and that would make the most money," said junior Donika Ahmetaj. "It had to be an event that everyone would

enjoy and want to take part in again."

One of the most successful fundraisers sponsored was a dodge ball tournament where students paid to be members of a team.

Deciding which charities were going to be the recipient of their donations was challenging for Donika as well as other students on her team who called themselves "The Miracle Workers."

"We wanted to help everyone, but still wanted to give our main charity the most moneym," she said.

Sophomore Kaveesha Kodituvakku, whose team was called "The Shooting Stars" agreed, saying she found the biggest challenge for The Shooting Stars was choosing just two charities to donate to.

"There are so many charities and important causes in need and we struggled to narrow it down to two," she said.

Collectively, the three groups raised \$882 through their fundraisers. This was added to the grant money from the Main Street Philanthropy donors for a total pool of \$4,381.71, which was allocated to six different charities: Cancer Support Community of Central New Jersey, NJSEEDS, Children's Aid and Family Services of N.J., Children's Home Society of N.J., Friends of Wayne Animal Shelter Adoption Day, and the Imam Al-Khoei Foundation.

On May 23, the group of students traveled with Yale Levey and faculty members Heidi Brady and Tracy Longo, to present their contributions to three of the char-

ities. They met with organization representatives and shared with them their experience through this process, and how they came to decide upon the charity.

Their first stop was NJSEEDS in Newark, an organization that works with young people to "change the lives of motivated, high-achieving students from low-income families by transforming their educational opportunities." The students presented a check for \$550 to Jennifer Mehr, director of development, who praised both the Boonton High School students and the Main Street Philanthropy Program.

"To see young people not only energized, but educated, about philanthropy is truly inspiring. Mr. Levey's unique and structured approach to giving gave them an understanding of nonprofits that I'm not sure many adults have. I am confident they will take what they learned to others as they continue to be active and engaged citizens," she said.

The next stop was the Cancer Support Community Central New Jersey, which received \$1,321 from the group. Amy Sutton, executive director, was impressed with the students. She and several of her board members had participated in the panel discussions at Boonton High School earlier in the process.

"My board and I were tremendously impressed by these students. They self-selected to participate in the Main Street Philanthropy program, and not for class credit," she commented. "They were incredibly articulate in speaking about their interests, and

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## BHS

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what was important to them. It was also interesting for us to hear about our organization through their eyes. When we as a charity have educated donors, it's always a good thing."

Their final stop of the day was at the Petco store in Parsippany where the Friends of Wayne Animal Shelter (FOWA) was sponsoring an adoption day. FOWA received \$940 from the students.

While the program required an investment of their time, the students found the experience rewarding and that they learned valuable skills.

Emily Kelly, a sophomore and member of the team "Voices for the Voiceless" said, "this program has changed my life. I always thought that I was capable of great-

ness, but now I know that I can do anything I set my mind to, especially when it comes to changing the world for the better and making it a more empathetic, healthy, and happy place to live in."

She continued, "The heart of this program- the true reason that Main Street is so vital and successful- lies not within the pages of our workbooks, but in the actions and steps we take towards philanthropy in the real world. I emphasize the "real world" because instead of talking about the world and talking about the injustices we see during our class, we quit the talking and shot right into action."

Amy Zaniewski, a junior and member of The Shooting Stars said, "When I think back to junior year, MSP will be the first thing that comes to mind. It is such an honor to be able to take part in a class where you learn so much about yourself, your classmates,

and how important it is to give back to those who need it."

Superintendent of Schools Christine Johnson was thrilled to have a program like Main Street Philanthropy at Boonton High School.

"The students had an authentic experience in the areas of fundraising, communications, and social services. I am very proud of the students who chose to participate in this wonderful program. It is another unique opportunity that has been integrated into the overall high school curriculum," she said.

The authentic experience of the Main Street program is one of the unique aspects of the program and truly makes it effective. Said Yale Levey, "This program results in profound transformation for all involved: students, faculty, schools, charities, donors. Minds are opened, possibilities are explored, imaginations are ignited, help is given, hearts are touched and lives are changed - forever."

Student Kaveesha agrees, commenting, "The program taught me real world values and lessons I will need for my future."

And in helping others, the students also gained insight into themselves. "This program helps you grow, emotionally and mentally," said Donika. "It's a really good way to discover more about yourself and find how you fit in with society."

To see the entire Boonton High School Main Street Philanthropy student blogs, visit [mainstreetphilanthropy.org/boonspring2014/](http://mainstreetphilanthropy.org/boonspring2014/).

For more information on the Main Street Philanthropy Academy program, visit [mainstreetphil.org](http://mainstreetphil.org) or contact Yale Levey at 973-228-6566.

### What's your story?

Have you, a family member, friend or neighbor accomplished something newsworthy? Have your story told in *Neighbor News*. Send us a brief description of what you have done, or what someone else has achieved, and a reporter will contact you for the rest of the details. Email your information to: [neighbor@northjersey.com](mailto:neighbor@northjersey.com) or fax it to the news editor at 973-586-8199.

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