



Keys for Hope

Nomination for Outstanding Youth in Philanthropy

Keys for Hope, a group of dedicated energetic middle school students, embodies the spirit of AFP and are deserving of this year's Outstanding Youth in Philanthropy award. Since 2011, Keys for Hope has been raising funds for Crisis Ministries to help build Charleston's new homeless shelter. While fundraising has been important, raising awareness about the issue of homelessness has been the centerpiece of their efforts.

After touring the existing shelter and learning about Crisis Ministries plans to build a new one, this group of girls decided they wanted to help in some way. At the time, they were 10 and 11 years old. Too young to volunteer in the soup kitchen, but old enough to know they wanted to make a difference. They brainstormed ways to raise money. They quickly gravitated towards the key as a symbol of home and hope. But then what? Who wants a used key? What if the keys were decorated in such a way that they became personal to the person buying it? Seasonal keys, sports-themed keys, sorority keys. The possibilities seemed endless. But would people buy them?

The girls took a leap of faith and collected hundreds of miss-cut keys from hardware stores and began painting and decorating them with buttons, gems and other embellishments. For a \$5.00 donation, the keys were offered as necklaces, key chains, backpack charms, zipper pulls, gift tags, magnets, pins and ornaments. To date, Keys for Hope has raised over \$40,000 to help with the construction of Charleston's new homeless shelter. Beyond the money raised, Keys for Hope has helped spread the word about Crisis Ministries and homelessness to thousands of people visiting and living in our community.

The original "key kids" has grown to 14 girls not only making and selling keys themselves, but also recruiting school groups, church groups and others to decorate and sell keys. At key making workshops, the experienced Keys for Hope girls conduct training to help the groups use the right supplies to ensure the quality of the keys. Before making keys, the girls share information about homelessness and Crisis Ministries. They quote statistics and tell stories of homeless families so that the groups making keys understand the ultimate goal. At farmers markets, craft fairs and festivals, Keys for Hope kids tell the story of Crisis Ministries with every key they sell. These girls willingly and lovingly give up holidays, Saturdays and free time to make and sell keys and to educate their community about the importance of providing hope to our most vulnerable citizens.

What began as fundraising for a new shelter has evolved into a movement among some of our youngest philanthropists to make a difference. The girls who comprise Keys for Hope most certainly give of their time, talent and treasure to lead our community towards providing hope for those in the most need. The Keys for Hope girls have demonstrated that age simply doesn't matter. Dedication, determination and compassion make the difference.

Submitted by:

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