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Southwest Michigan

Bella Terra



Bella Terra is an Equine Assisted Learning (EAL) Center in Southwest Michigan. Horses have the power to influence people in powerful ways. EAL is a process of self-discovery and improvement facilitated through the use of horses, where participants gain insight about themselves and how they accomplish goals. This has many applications in all arenas of life for professional and personal improvement, such as team building, leadership development, at-risk youth, 12-step programs, personal growth and psychotherapy.

About 50% of the attendees at Bella Terra attend on a pro bono basis. The proprietors, Todd and Kim Shook, approached Bread for the Journey of SW Michigan for a grant to purchase tables and chairs that would be used in a meeting room where orientation takes place at the beginning of each program. We were happy to extend a grant of \$185.

Music Therapy in Kalamazoo

Sara Houseman is a committed music therapist at the Croyden School in Kalamazoo, Michigan, and created the Music Therapy program for the mentally impaired and autistic children at the school. Music Therapy offers these kids a lot of benefits, including a chance to create lyrics with fill-in-the-blank exercises, an opportunity to discuss lyrics and simple imagery, exercises to deal with attention-span issues, and music making with simple instruments. In the background of Sara's work is several years of statewide budget cuts in Michigan, and schools have certainly not been spared.

Sara came to Bread for the Journey of SW Michigan with a request to fund the purchases of an instrument station, song cartridges, a PA system, and several instruments. We gave her a grant of \$1880.

Offender Aid & Restoration

Having been raised in a military family, Stephanie Penn served four years in the Marines. At the age of 38, she is also a twice-convicted felon, a prison-educated paralegal and a holder of a BA in the behavioral sciences. She finished her three-year parole term in March of 2004, and has learned first-hand how few support services exist for parolees. She's made it her mission to help ex-convicts find their place once back in society.

After working in two social service agencies in Kalamazoo, MI, Stephanie founded OAR, Offender Aid & Restoration. At OAR, offenders are offered guidance in five critical areas: employment, public benefits,

housing, parenting rights and student loans. She came to Bread for the Journey of SW Michigan for a grant to help establish an office where she could coordinate her organization's efforts, screen offenders for her program and help them rebuild their lives. We were happy to give Stephanie a grant of \$1500 to help her accomplish her goals.

Kids Kafe



As the Executive Director of the Eastside Neighborhood Association in Kalamazoo, MI, Amy DeShon is a neighborhood savior. Within this northeastern quadrant of the city, 25% of its residents are senior citizens and 45% are under 18, with a disproportionately high number of single mothers. The working poor also live here, with the unemployment rate at just over 9% and the average income at \$11,063. Needless to say, stress levels in the area run high, brought on by low income, hunger, old and poorly insulated homes, worry and a lack of hope. The result is further neglect, lots of petty crime and a neighborhood in decline.

To counter these trends, Amy started the Kids Kafe three years ago where, three times a week, kids can enjoy a well-balanced, freshly cooked dinner at no cost. Since starting this program, the petty crime rate has dropped and, accordingly, so has the police surveillance level. During this past winter, tight family budgets were further squeezed by an unusual surge in utility bills, and so the number of kids coming for meals nearly doubled. With this increase in demand and the policy to never turn away any child attending school, the program's budget was spent four months ahead of schedule. Bread for the Journey of SW Michigan gave Amy \$1000 to help the Kids Kafe get through the summer until local food drives and other fundraising activities could match the new demand.

Direct Care Workers

Direct Care Workers is a dedicated, hard-working group of caregivers who work with frail elders and persons suffering from dementia in nursing homes, assisted-living facilities and home health agencies. Although the work is highly demanding both physically and emotionally, their wages are generally low, as is often their self esteem. All of this leads to an unusually high job-turnover rate.

Last year, Marie Stoline began Caregiver Appreciation Day, an all-volunteer effort to demonstrate gratitude to Direct Care Workers. The event brought both educational offerings as well as positive affirmations to the 75 caregivers who participated. All in all, the day had a very positive impact on their feelings about the work they do. Based on its success, Bread for the Journey of SW Michigan was happy to give Marie \$750 to put on this year's event.

Senior Day Care Center

For five years, Kristina Seth has been working to create a nonprofit day-care center for seniors in Allegan County, a rural community in Southwest Michigan. In the process of remodeling the kitchen to meet code requirements, she encountered unexpected expenses related to the plumbing for an industrial sink. She

came to Bread for the Journey to help fund the surprise expenses. She needed the grant quickly so that she could pass inspection and open her doors. Bread for the Journey of Southwest Michigan was happy to extend a grant of \$3,500 to complete the kitchen.

Young Black Males of Kalamazoo

Sheron is a mother of an 18-year-old black male who made a bad choice a year and a half ago. As a result, he is serving an 8- to 15-year prison term. Following her son's arrest, Sheron realized she knew nothing about how to deal with the judicial system. Without money to hire her own attorney, she quickly realized that families with means have an incredible advantage in navigating the court system. Sheron saw a huge need to reach out to young black males in her community to show them alternatives to life on the street or in prison, and to educate them about the legal system should they need that information.

First, they needed to understand that once they become convicted criminals, life will always be tarnished by that fact. Also, if they do get arrested, they should realize that court-appointed attorneys do not always have the time or the desire to extend that extra hour needed to be of real service to their clients. So Sheron established a non-profit organization called Young Black Males of Kalamazoo to disseminate hope and information in this county where blacks make up 35% of the general population and 80% of the prison population. Bread for the Journey of SW Michigan gave her a grant of \$ 730.00 to help start her non-profit organization.

We Can Make a Difference

Neldine Edwards is a social worker and the founder of "We Can Make a Difference" in Benton Harbor, MI. For 21 years, she worked as a family therapist before creating a vision that provides help to parents in this poverty-stricken, primarily black community that saw a race riot erupt in 2003. To date, over 1000 parents and service providers have taken and been helped by the classes offered by her organization. The classes use role playing, homework assignments and applied lessons for specific parenting situations. The classes are culturally sensitive in order to foster a sense of identity and pride within those who participate.

Neldine asked Bread for the Journey of SW Michigan to fund a coaching course for past graduates who would then be able to provide home-based coaching to participants in future classes. We gladly extended a grant of \$1500 to help institute the coaching curriculum and get the first class up and running.

Music Therapy for the Birthing Center at Borgess Hospital

Gina Thomas, a nurse in the Birthing Center at Borgess Hospital, came to Bread for the Journey of Southwest Michigan wanting a small grant to purchase CD players and CDs to use in the hospital's labor/delivery rooms and nurseries. Since studies show that music can decrease the need for pain medications and epidurals, special CDs have become available to help laboring mothers with breathing and to calm infants in the nursery. Borgess Hospital serves a large proportion of low-income residents in our community who would not otherwise have access to these resources. Bread for the Journey of Southwest Michigan provided a grant of \$380 for the purchase of CD players and CDs for this program.

HIV / AIDS and Spirituality

Angela Jackson has been solving community problems throughout her career in the health and human services field. She is currently the program director for the African American Health Initiative in Kalamazoo. A quiet activist, Angela believes that spirituality is the key when it comes to communities dealing effectively with the AIDS epidemic. To that end, she is working with churches to address HIV/AIDS, with a goal to establish places where it is safe to openly discuss prevention and treatment options.

She requested support to participate in the American Friends Service Community African Solidarity Tour so she could better understand what it is that sustains victims with limited resources, and how communities effectively educate people about HIV/AIDS. Angela will use this information to work with her constituents, and Bread for the Journey of Southwest Michigan provided a grant of \$1500 to support her work.