

Legacy Youth Tennis and Education

18 June 2014

[Legacy Youth Tennis and Education](#) (formerly Arthur Ashe Youth Tennis and Education) has sought to dramatically change the way young people lead in volunteer service. Legacy's innovative program model incorporates authentic, youthful voices into the fabric of the organization while simultaneously empowering young people to develop the knowledge, skills and dispositions that make them ripe for community leadership. Fifteen years ago, Legacy's young people gave of themselves by reading to younger children, serving as junior tennis coaches and participating in food and clothing drives. Today's drastically evolved model allows and teaches Legacy's youth to engage in program design, fund development and organizational decision making. With primary support from the Harvey Goodstein Charitable Foundation, Legacy's Goodstein Junior Leader Initiative provides a comprehensive and meaningful experience—one that fosters young people as they carry their talents and passions through Legacy and out into the wider community.

Four years ago, the Harvey Goodstein Charitable Foundation invested in Legacy with a \$400,000 catalytic

matching grant, which encouraged its Goodstein Junior Leaders (GJLs) to uncover a pressing community need, issue or problem; to develop an innovative program to meet this need; and to raise money and develop a plan for executing their civic innovation. Under the leadership of Ben Hirsh, Legacy's Coordinator of Youth Leadership and Volunteer Engagement, the GJLs have resourced and implemented a range of mutually impactful projects.

Youth leadership innovation

Youth-serving organizations across our country are attempting to position young people not just as the recipients of well-intentioned efforts but also as active participants who spur change and help manage and govern their respective organizations. It is in this spirit that Legacy Youth Tennis and Education purposefully provides opportunities for its young people to become active advocates in their communities and in our shared organization. We have done so through years of program experimentation and innovation that have ultimately yielded a high-value, self-sustaining program model that benefits its participants, the organization itself and most importantly, the communities that Legacy's young people seek to impact.

In 2000, Legacy board member and co-executor of the Harvey Goodstein Charitable Foundation Sandra Goodstein made a 10-year, \$1 million grant to the then Arthur Ashe Youth Tennis and Education Organization.

The purpose of the grant was to engage young people in ongoing volunteer and community service initiatives, such as serving as junior instructors in the organization's National Junior Tennis and Learning summer program, assisting as reading buddies in the organization's Munchkins Early Reading Program and getting involved in seasonal clothing and food drives. These activities, while absolutely necessary and meaningful, were largely organized by the professional staff team and served as conduits to exposing young people to community service and allowing them to simply "plug in." This initial approach was appropriate for our organization's formative years of youth leadership work and consistent with programming across the wider youth development field; however, the plug-in approach did not allow for our young people to take ownership of their volunteer experiences.

At the end of the 10-year grant period, Ms. Goodstein came to us with a desire to bring our youth leadership program to the proverbial next level. She had a desire, and believed Legacy was ready, to more fully engage young people in nonprofit management, including fundraising and program design. We agreed that the timing was suitable for a paradigm shift: time for our diverse group of high school leaders to evolve from passive participants to leaders, producers and activists, inside and outside of our organization. We codesigned, with Ms. Goodstein, an initiative through which young people raise money for a

program i) sponsored by our organization or another organization; ii) identified and/or designed by the young people themselves and iii) addressing a specific issue with personal meaning to our youth leaders. For every dollar that the young people raised, this second generation Goodstein Grant would match three dollars to one—the first dollar to support the program itself, the second dollar to support Legacy’s annual operating expenses and the third dollar to be invested into Legacy’s Goodstein Endowment Fund, ensuring the sustainability of our youth leadership efforts in perpetuity.

We will describe two of the notable projects for which our GJLs have fundraised and prepared, including pictures of the projects. The first project involves a partnership with the Stenton Family Manor in East Mount Airy and is designed to engage teenagers from the homeless shelter system in our tennis and leadership programming. It was born out of our young leaders’ belief that Legacy must be accessible to the neediest young people in the most fragile circumstances. To support the costs of our young people’s community outreach and program implementation (an hour of on-court tennis lessons with the Junior Development clinic, an hour of team-building and nutrition lessons and a community meal with our Goodstein Junior Leaders), the GJLs identified the Philadelphia Foundation’s YOUTHadelphia grant-making initiative through its Fund for Children. Our young people wrote their grant proposal, led the site visit with

the YOUTHadelphia program staff and youth grant makers and represented Legacy upon receiving the \$10,000 grant award. This project is in full implementation, and our GJLs just received a second grant from the YOUTHadelphia grant-making board to deepen and expand the impact and reach of the program.

The second project has been fully completed and was exceedingly ambitious in its scope and magnitude. Shortly after the earthquake in Haiti four years ago, our young people chose to sit with us and Ms. Goodstein in an activity designed to help them determine some community issues and problems about which they were passionate. They seized on the physical destruction that was plaguing various communities. The GJLs began with a desire to send financial support to Haiti, but quickly realized that visiting Haiti to provide service, friendship, hard labor and an introduction to the game of tennis would have a much stronger and lasting impact. They set out on a two-year plan to organize a service trek and to raise the necessary dollars to make it happen. The GJLs first realized the importance of vetting and forging partnerships; soon, they discovered an international NGO, buildOn (formerly known as Building with Books), which helped connect them to the Haitian community. buildOn also helped link the GJLs to its Lower Merion High School chapter, with which the GJLs partnered for the entirety of the endeavor. It took two and a half years of carwashes, bake sales, tennis tournaments and a combination of

special events and private donations to raise the \$38,000 that ultimately funded the foundation of a primary school in a rural Haitian community, as well as the travel expenses for the seven GJLs who participated on the service trek. The GJLs and Lower Merion students spent a week submerged in the Haitian community: living with host families, engaging in cultural workshops and spending hours of hard labor digging dirt, moving rocks and pouring cement for the school's foundation. The experience by many personal accounts was transformative for our youth leaders and provided some real value for the Haitian village of Menard.

In closing, we believe that we have developed a model for youth leadership that is impactful for its participants, sustainable within our organization and replicable within other extracurricular youth organizations. Should an organization have the desire to infuse authentic youth voices into its culture and operations, and the willingness to give up the decision-making reins at critical junctures so that young people are able to take ownership, our model is certainly worth attention.

Kenny Holdsman, president of Legacy Youth Tennis and Education is the primary author and, Ben Hirsh, coordinator of Youth Leadership and Volunteer Engagement, is a collaborating author.