

Dear Friends,

Now more than ever, higher education is a must if the U.S. is to remain competitive in the knowledge-based global marketplace. In the near future, 90 percent of the fastest-growing jobs will require some postsecondary education or training. Higher education is also important for personal well-being, with college graduates in the U.S. earning nearly twice as much as workers with just a high school diploma. Higher education is truly the “universal passport to success”.

It is fitting that this issue of *BranchingOut* features five inspiring organizations that are helping a variety of Milwaukee-area residents – from kindergartners to immigrant adults – prepare for and gain access to higher education. In addition to the stories here, you can read more about this critical issue on the Research Local Issues portion of our website under College Access/School Success.

Sincerely,



Doug Jansson
President

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Transforming urban education

Michael Nguyen believes education is the root of all success. That’s why after finishing his degree at the University of Illinois in 2009, he decided to help others reach their potential.

What better way, he thought, than in front of a classroom. In less than a year, Nguyen is now a middle school English teacher at Carson Academy on Milwaukee’s northwest side.

What helped put the psychology and sociology major on a fast track toward reaching that goal was a new teacher training program in Milwaukee called

Teach for America. It recruits recent graduates like Nguyen from colleges and universities around the country, provides intensive summer training and places those newly trained teachers into the highest-need schools.

“We want in our lifetime and in our generation’s lifetime to create a world where your income level and the color of your skin no longer determine whether you will get a college-ready level of education or not,” said Garrett Bucks, program director for Teach for America in Milwaukee.

Teach for America is one of a host of national programs designed to transform urban education. Forty corps members started in the fall at 24 schools. Corps members commit to serving two years and receive ongoing coaching and professional development, including earning their teacher’s license as well as a master’s degree in education from Marquette or Cardinal Stritch universities. Over the next two years, the program plans to place an additional 60 in charter and Milwaukee Public Schools.

The program looks to teachers like Nguyen to make significant gains toward closing the achievement gap. Teachers are expected to help students advance more than 1-1/2 years in math and reading or have 80 percent of the class meet grade-level standards. Nguyen understood those high expectations coming in and said the program prepared him to do his best.

“I used to be up until 2 a.m. to get ready for the next day,” he said. “Now I’m a lot more comfortable, secure and confident. It has been a difficult transition, but incredibly worthwhile.”

Funding needs include \$5,000 to offset the annual cost to recruit, select, train and support a corps member. ■



Teach for America put Michael Nguyen on a fast track to become a middle school English teacher in Milwaukee.

Grants of \$250 and more will help any of these outstanding organizations meet important community needs.

Milwaukee Conservation Leadership Corps: So much more than a summer job



For these teenagers, “green” summer jobs with the Milwaukee Conservation Leadership Corps also offer leadership training and job-readiness skills.

In this economy, many teenagers would feel lucky to have a summer job flipping burgers. For the fortunate students in the Milwaukee Conservation Leadership Corps, their summer job provides employment plus environmental education, leadership training and job-readiness skills.

The MCLC is introducing these urban teens to conservation careers they likely don't even know exist. Crews of 10, with two adult crew leaders, work on projects in a variety of Milwaukee County parks and green spaces, including Grant, Estabrook and Washington parks and the Hank Aaron State Trail.

The crews spend six weeks, Monday through Thursday, on trail construction, erosion prevention, habitat restoration and removal of invasive species. On Fridays, they have a half day of environmental education and field trips, which include sampling fresh produce at a farmers' market, an overnight camping trip and a tour at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

An all-important orientation week offers the teens job-readiness training such as resume writing, interview skills, how to apply for a job, online job searches and financial literacy. In 2009, there were 160 applicants for 100 spots; for 2010, there were 500.

The MCLC is managed by the **Student Conservation Association**, a nationwide provider of conservation volunteers for America's public lands since 1957. The success of the local program comes from a collaboration of public and private sectors, including founder and lead sponsor Johnson Controls, the Milwaukee Area Workforce Investment Board, the Milwaukee County Parks, and local businesses and foundations.

Funding needs range from \$1,000 for transportation to work sites for two crews to \$7,000 for beautification and restoration projects in three Milwaukee County parks. ■

Casa Guadalupe: The bridge of integration



Casa Guadalupe Education Center provides Washington County's Latino immigrants with instruction in English and GED prep and citizenship prep classes.

Casa Guadalupe Education Center is more than a place where members of the Washington County Latino community can gather, celebrate and share their cultural heritage – it's a place that also helps Latino families transition successfully into American society.

That effort begins with learning English. Because many of Casa Guadalupe's clients arrive in the U.S. with little or no English, their first step is to attend English classes, which are offered to about 40 adults each semester. All teachers are bilingual and can answer questions in Spanish, which helps the learning process. The curriculum is based on the practical, workplace vocabulary needed on the job.

As the learners progress in their mastery of English, Casa Guadalupe provides other tools for advancement, including GED prep classes and citizenship prep classes. Those with sufficiently strong English are referred to one of Casa Guadalupe's many community partners, Moraine Park Technical College, where they enroll in a variety of technical, professional and service courses.

The agency's role is pivotal. It is the only bilingual and bicultural organization serving the growing Latino immigrant population of Washington County, which increased 76 percent between 2000 and 2008.

Other programs at Casa Guadalupe help strengthen the personal, social and business skills of the new residents. The Family Services Program conducts adult education and literacy programs in basic reading, writing and math; personal and professional development; and counseling and family support.

Funding needs range from \$500 to hire one teacher for five people who want to become citizens to \$6,000 to expand the computer lab by 10 computers (and software) for English instruction, job skills and job searches. ■

ACE encourages success for all



Ensemble musicians' visits to classrooms are an exciting part of Arts in Community Education's multi-faceted program.

As part of a science lesson, third graders sing "Dem Bones" and point to specific bones in their bodies. In math, first graders listen to Aaron Copland's "John Henry" and identify the patterns. And in art, fifth graders make papier mâché firebirds to illustrate Stravinsky's "Firebird Suite".

These fun — and mind-expanding — activities are all part of the ACE (Arts in Community Education) program of the **Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra**. This 20-year-old, K-5 arts integration program uses the arts as a tool to teach core subjects.

ACE teams up the MSO with 23 area schools (12 MPS) and 30 arts partners, ranging from the Milwaukee Ballet to the electra-acid-jazz duo Mrs. Fun. ACE exposes students to community, creativity, problem solving and multiple ways of learning and expressing themselves. The program components include a carefully developed curriculum; teacher training; musician/artist visits to schools; a school-wide Family Evening at each school; and an annual MSO performance programmed for each grade level.

The fact that ACE kids have such enriching experiences is due in no small part to smart planning and oversight. In addition to giving students a broad view of life, ACE enhances their learning. Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction data indicate that students in ACE schools outperform their peers by 9 to 11 percent across all subject areas, especially social studies and science.

Funding needs include \$500 to fund one school's ACE Family Night, \$1,000 to fund one classroom's participation in ACE and \$5,000 for a year of ensemble visits for one school. ■

Breaking down the barriers to their dreams



College Readiness 21 prepares under-served students for a successful college experience.

For many young people who are low-income, minority and the first in their families to aspire to higher education, college may be only a dream.

Unless, that is, those young people are fortunate enough to encounter College Readiness 21. Currently CR21 works closely with nearly 500 diverse students statewide who lack access to higher education opportunities but possess the drive to succeed. The program, which began in 2002 under the wing of the **Wisconsin Foundation for Independent Colleges**, serves 200 students in Milwaukee.

After students are recruited in the eighth grade, CR21 staff, tutors and mentors work closely with them over the next four years. CR21's support includes a five-day Summer Institute on a local college campus. Saturday Events, also on campus, provide academic instruction, tutoring, standardized test preparation, and college admissions and academic advising. A college tour for incoming juniors and seniors offers yet another glimpse into college life. Other opportunities include a career showcase, a college fair, and tutoring, coaching and mentoring by upper class college students. There is also scholarship support from CR21 and participating colleges.

In short, CR21 aims to break down the barriers that stand between these young people and their dreams. And the approach is working. To date, 100 percent of CR21 students who remained with the program for two or more years have completed high school. Of these, 89 percent have enrolled in college.

Funding needs range from \$1,500 to cover the programming costs for one student for one year to \$25,000 to fund a five-day college tour for 50 students. ■

Safe Place for Newborns: The gift of a “forever” family



Safe Haven baby Marley and her adoptive mom Tricia.

Eighty-one babies, each lovingly welcomed into an adoptive home. Eighty-one birth mothers, each cared for medically and supported while she made the difficult decision to safely abandon her newborn. Thank Wisconsin's nine-year-old Safe Haven Law for these outcomes.

The law allows mothers to relinquish their newborns anonymously within 72 hours of birth, without fear of prosecution, to a service provider such as a hospital staffer, police officer, firefighter or emergency medical technician. This option is literally a lifesaver. Giving birth outside a hospital setting can be dangerous for the mothers. An out-of-hospital birth can be challenging for a healthy baby, and it can be life threatening for one who experiences a difficult delivery or is born with a critical health condition.

Still, since 2001, 17 Wisconsin infants have been abandoned unsafely. Many birth mothers are not aware of the Safe Haven Law, nor are many providers. The Safe Place for Newborns program is working to change this. Founded nine years ago in Middleton, the program relocated in January 2010 to **Wheaton Franciscan Healthcare-St. Joseph** hospital.

Program coordinator Tricia Burkett educates hospitals and clinics in Milwaukee and across the state about the Safe Haven Law. She has distributed flyers and brochures, staffed booths at professional conferences, and held information sessions and trainings for service providers. Burkett is also conducting a community outreach campaign aimed at birth parents experiencing a crisis pregnancy. “Women and teens need accurate and compassionate information as they make this decision,” she said, “and timely social services to initiate the adoption process.”

Funding needs range from \$500 for brochures and materials for 10 community organizations to \$3,000 for bus ads and billboards. ■

Fair Housing Council fights foreclosure and predatory lending



The Metropolitan Milwaukee Fair Housing Council works to prevent sad situations like this one.

Predatory lending and housing foreclosures are far from a new phenomenon, but far too many people are still entering into risky loans and ending up as victims of other scams.

Among those agencies leading the charge against the predators and providing help to those who end up as prey is the **Metropolitan Milwaukee Fair Housing Council**.

The agency began in the late 1970s in an effort to combat the rising number of cases of housing segregation and discrimination. For more than 20 years, it has worked to enforce fair housing laws and protect homebuyers.

Since then, the council has developed a niche around anti-predatory lending practices. In 2002, before predatory lending became a familiar term and foreclosures became a national crisis, the agency developed Strategies to Overcome Predatory Practices, an initiative that provides outreach and education; does research on lending, loan marketing and foreclosures; and helps policymakers with legislative and regulatory work.

Providing direct assistance to borrowers is one of STOPP's main objectives in order to stem the tide of foreclosures that threaten to overtake area neighborhoods. In conjunction with various homebuying agencies as well as federal agencies, the council has held three community-wide foreclosure prevention events in which nearly 350 borrowers had a chance to meet with housing counselors and their lender in hopes of avoiding foreclosure. It also offers a hotline as well as meets one-on-one with borrowers to review their loans, share resources and options, and offer advice.

Funding needs include \$7,000-\$12,000, which covers the cost of a 6-hour foreclosure prevention event. ■