



Bucks 4 Kids History

It was January 1986 and I was in the hospital recovering from having given birth the day before to my son, Doug. The phone in my room rang. It was my employer. I was working for the county as Solicitor for Domestic Relations at the time, and then-Commissioner Sandy Miller was on the line. I was worried that perhaps it was bad news; maybe they were cutting my maternity leave short.

No such thing. Sandy asked me to serve on the Children & Youth Advisory Board. It turned out to be an easy gig. Every two months or so, we met for an hour to talk about how the agency was faring. Our purpose was to advise then-director Janet Skiba on budgeting and personnel issues. The Board had no powers. I met some nice people, but contributed little, having sparse knowledge of bureaucracies.

At one such meeting, my new friends and I wondered aloud how foster teenagers afforded items other adolescents took for granted. Parents of high school students routinely provide money for class rings, graduation expenses, prom tickets, senior class trips, college application fees and the like. But who provided these extras for the teenagers in care? The household gets a mere \$16 per day stipend for each child, hardly enough to provide the basics. Janet related that such kids "do without." We fondly recalled our own senior year festivities. It didn't seem fair that kids who lacked so much else would also lack these simple pleasures. So we decided then and there to raise money for these kids.

That spring, fellow Board members, Nick Merlo, Judy

La Cour, Jack McDermitt, Linda Sepsy, Elizabeth Schoenfeld, Arlene Corb and I held the first meeting of the group that would come to be called "Bucks 4 Kids."

We started with a fundraiser at the Spring Mill Country Club. Then in the following five springs, we held Beef & Beers emceed by now Board member Bob Davis, with entertainment provided by Fortune Teller Mary Jane Maley.

Since a county agency cannot raise funds, Bucks 4 Kids spun off and incorporated as s 501© (3) with the PA Department of State, wrote by-laws and elected a board.

We at Bucks 4 Kids have since expanded our fund-raising efforts to include newspaper subscription drives, golf outings, dress-down days, and benefit performances at theaters. We've also applied for grants. Mostly we canvassed local businesses, clients, friends & relatives for individual & corporate donations.

Checks as small as five dollars and as large as \$5,000 trickled in. For the last two years, B4K has been one of the beneficiaries of the Doylestown Red, White & Blue 5-k race. Over the years, we have come to depend upon annual gifts from the Shrenk Foundation, the Behavioral Foundation and the Bucks County Commissioners.

Through the years, B4K's mission continued to be to provide direct financial assistance to kids in care. Our motto is "We Meet Unmet Needs." We developed an application form to enable caseworkers to confidentially identify what their kids need and describe why they need it. Having established the framework, we were flooded

with applications in no time. Every single request had merit. After reading the wide variety of requests, including dozens for summer camp, school pictures, music lessons, work boots, tech school clothing, field trips and sports registrations, what began as an adolescent fund was quickly opened up to kids of all ages.

"We want kids in foster homes to have normal experiences, like other kids. We don't want them to feel different," says Board president, Frank Burstein. "They work so hard to please everyone and be part of a family."

In 1993, we learned that only 6 to 10 kids in care in Bucks County graduate from high school every year. Nationally, only 35 percent graduate high school and only 11 percent obtain any post-high school education. "When people think about foster kids, they picture babies or small children," says Sally Fedorchak, a retired C & Y supervisor, now Vice President of B4K. "Little kids without parents are easy to care about, but the little ones grow up quickly and are suddenly dropped by a system they have come to rely upon.

"These "aged out" graduates have already faced formidable challenges in their short lives. They face adulthood the same way they lived most of their childhood, family-less. Their successful transition from care to adulthood after a childhood of chaos is only possible with support, both emotional and financial. Further education is rarely an option, not only due to lack of finances, but also because there is simply no one in their corner advocating for them, especially if they have lived in different homes.

So, we established a

Scholarship Program. Since 1993, B4K has awarded an average of \$12,000 in scholarships every year to these students. B4K takes great pride in encouraging these brave kids to go the distance.

Since 1994, the Bucks County Commissioners have proclaimed June "Graduate Month" to honor our scholarship recipients and the milestones they have achieved.

Currently, thirteen people sit on the B4K Board. There are six honorary members. June Fenwick serves as our liaison to Children & Youth. The Board meets eight times a year to review the dozen or so applications submitted at each meeting and write the checks. All funds raised in our fiscal year are distributed and we start over again the following year.

"Some of these kids never get a break, says Board member Genevieve M. Querin, "B4K is the last resort."

From 1991 to 2008, all of the over \$200,000 donated was distributed to the kids via individual grants or scholarships. Our only expenses are postage and an audit. All Board members are volunteers. We have no office, computer or staff. All contributions are tax deductible.

Please help us continue to positively impact the lives of the kids in care in Bucks County and make their dreams a reality.

**Contact us at
215.340.5039
or check out our website,
bucksforkids.org.**

*Nancy Larkin Taylor, Esq.
Founder & Corporate
Secretary B4K*

THE CHARITABLE FOUNDATION
OF THE BUCKS COUNTY BAR ASSOCIATION

Annual Holiday Music Revue 'Tis the Season ~ Celebrate the Children

*Proceeds to Benefit Bucks 4 Kids and
The Charitable Foundation of the BCBA*

Bucks 4 Kids provides financial support for children within the Bucks County Children & Youth Services Agency and provides a structure to raise funds to benefit those children.

The Charitable Foundation of the BCBA promotes and supports activities, programs and organizations designed to advance social justice and the health and welfare of individuals, families, and the communities of Bucks County.

Thursday, December 11, 2008 6:30 p.m. ~ 9:30 p.m.

*Food, drinks, and a live and silent auction
Entertainment by choirs from local area high schools
including Central Bucks East and William Tennent*

Tickets \$100 per person ~ Cocktail Attire

*To purchase tickets or for more information, contact
Christina Strickland at 215-348-9413 x105*