



Best Practices Case Study

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Editor's note: The Confidence in Kansas Public Education Task Force sponsors the Friends of Education Awards. To recognize exemplary partner development, Kansas Partners in Education sponsors the Partner Activity award category. Each nominee is a business, company, or agency that has provided an on-going partner activity over an extended period of time (minimum of three years), by means of volunteer time, services, finances or other types of support, in amount that exceeds typical collaboration from a private or public institution. This case study highlights a 2010 Partner Activity award recipient and is an educational service to KSPE members, their organizations, and prospective partners.

## Assistance League of Wichita

*2010 Award of Excellence Recipient, Partner Activity, Friends of Education Awards*

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Assistance League of Wichita, a chapter of National Assistance League, has been serving the Wichita community since 1984. Local chapters of the non-profit Assistance League are dedicated to addressing specific needs of their respective communities. Over 130 members of the Wichita chapter volunteer approximately 15,000 hours each year. Three of the four Wichita chapter programs benefit local students and graduates: Operation School Bell<sup>®</sup>, Bear Hugs, and Assistance League of Wichita Scholarships.

Assistance League of Wichita was founded in 1984 and became a chapter of National AL in 1987. Through a network of 122 chapters and over 26,000 members, AL helps people in need achieve a better quality of life. The National AL focuses on local chapter needs first by helping volunteers establish a vision and mission for their respective communities. To facilitate the AL's philanthropic work, all funds raised locally stay in the local communities.

In Wichita, the Assistance League's fund-raising is uniquely designed to meet the needs of donors and recipients of the group's philanthropy. Over 47% of the Wichita chapter's funding comes from contributions from individuals, church groups, organizations, and foundations. All other fund-raising is accomplished by volunteer members.

The Assistance League Thrift Shop, located at 2611 E. Douglas in downtown Wichita, has operated since 1990. Quality merchandise is donated by members and the community. The Thrift Shop then sells the donated items to the community at large to raise funds for Assistance League of Wichita programs. Many customers of the Thrift Shop would not be able to afford these items at a retail store. During the 2008-09 fiscal year, the Thrift Shop generated \$81,833 for Assistance League activities.

The Assistance League also sponsors The Gingerbread Village as a fund-raising activity. Local chefs, professionals, groups, adults and children create original gingerbread houses

for display, judging, and then for sale. Visitors can bid on original gingerbread houses and have an opportunity to create one of their own at Graham Cracker Junction. A Preview Gala with live and silent auctions kicks off the event each November before the holiday season. In 2009, Assistance League hosted a life-sized Gingerbread House at Cambridge Market. Children were invited to have their picture taken with a gingerbread boy. These community-oriented activities help the organization establish goodwill and awareness of its service activities. In 2009, the Gingerbread Village raised \$59,303 for Assistance League activities.

In general, over 75% of all funds raised by local Assistance League members are used to directly help the underserved in the Wichita area. Local projects may be modeled on National Assistance League programs to increase operational efficiencies and create the necessary public awareness to sustain such philanthropic pursuits. Assistance League of Wichita supports three projects that directly benefit the students of the Wichita Public Schools. The district serves a free-reduced population of over 70 percent.

Assistance League helps underprivileged children be better prepared for learning by providing new clothing, shoes, and school supplies so they can arrive in the classroom ready to learn. Operation School Bell® began fifty years ago as a one-woman effort by Ruth Ann Montgomery to provide clothing to disadvantaged children. It is now the signature national philanthropic program for National Assistance League. All clothing and supplies provided through this program are new. The volunteers who purchase, sort, package, and distribute the clothing and supplies often never meet the children who benefit. Wichita's Operation School Bell® recently reached a milestone of having provided clothing to 59,000 children in the Wichita Public Schools. The district's school social workers submit clothing requests for children. These students receive new coats, hats, gloves, jeans/pants, shirts, (or school uniforms), and undergarments. Students receive vouchers for new shoes. Toiletry kits and backpacks are supplied as needed. Operation School Bell® clothed 3,584 students during the 2008-09 school year at a cost of \$173,705. To demonstrate its support of Assistance League's Operation School Bell®, the district provides a storage and distribution site.

Since its local founding in 1984, Assistance League has kept students at the heart of its mission. Wichita, like many other communities in Kansas and the United States, has been adversely affected by an economic recession. The number of "underprivileged" children increases when unemployment climbs, and more families need help. A philanthropic partner like Assistance League of Wichita provides countless "hand-ups" to help students be better prepared for success in the classroom and extra-curricular activities. Assistance League is also a trusted partner for district counselors and teachers, who feel comfortable asking for clothing and school supplies on behalf of underprivileged children. Assistance League of Wichita consistently exceeds expectations as a district partner with the Wichita Public Schools and the local community.

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