

Girls Giving Grants buys new wardrobes for children in need

By Kristine Toffe

STAFF WRITER

Over the past year, a group of young women, aged 13 to 18, sacrificed two Sundays a month to bring dreams into focus. Girls Giving Grants has come together to address charity at the youth level.

Girls Giving Grants strives to recognize projects that benefit Austin area youth. Their mission is to educate members on the needs of the community and identify where their help could be used most.

The members of Girls Giving Grants pay a \$100 membership fee, which goes directly towards the grant money. The first year the organization had 21 members, allowing them to provide the shelter with \$2,100.

The girls learn about non-profits and how to review grant applications, and they conduct site visits of the organizations to narrow down the finalists.

"The girls launched the program themselves," said Lisa Ly-



Austin Children's Shelter executive director Gena VanOsselaer (left) is presented with a check at the Girls Giving Grants awards ceremony by members Laura Sweitzer, Brittany Burch, Miriam Kalk and Miranda Hoffman.

ons, director and grant administrator. "They wanted to focus on youth-related causes in the greater Austin area."

This past April, Girls Giving Grants awarded their first grant to the Austin Children's Shelter. Girls Giving Grants is the youth extension of Impact Austin, a philanthropic group for women.

The Austin Children's Shelter has provided emergency shelter, high-quality care and hope for the future to the abandoned, abused and neglected children of the Austin community since 1984.

Most children who go to the shelter are removed from their

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home in an emergency situation to avoid additional injury. In their haste to leave, personal belongings and clothing are left behind. Funding from this grant will enable children at the shelter to purchase new clothing.

"For the older children at the shelter, it is really important for them to have control over what happens in their lives," said Gena VanOsselaer, executive director of Austin Children's Shelter. "The grant allows them to go to the store and pick out their own clothes."

The shelter serves about 330 kids a year and the clothes that they pick will go with them to their new foster home.

"The money we are awarding them will make a huge impact on the teens of that shelter, which makes it hit home even more as we are able to relate with those our own ages," said Miranda Hoffman, Lake Travis High School senior and Girls Giving Grants member.

The timing of the grant was perfect. A new school year is about to start and the children at the shelter need new

clothes. The members of Girls Giving Grants were pleased with their decision because they helped improve the lives Austin youth, which is the focus of their organization.

"The girls saw themselves in the kids. They recognized how important it is for the children at the shelter to fit in and dress like everyone else," VanOsselaer said. "I am personally so impressed with the girls and their involvement with this process."

Young women in grades 8 through 12 interested in becoming a member of Girls Giving Grants can contact Lisa Lyons at contactus@girlsgivinggrants.org. Membership deadline is September 1.

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