

ILYA HISTORY

STUDENT CARE PACKAGES

[Student names have been changed to letters for anonymity]

Early in the ILYA project, church member Kathy Gareth and her Spiritually Group began sending packages (\$10-\$15 worth) to a student. Then, Eric Jacobson, Gayle Sheppard, and Betty Wier began to put together suggestions for packages sent by a mentor or a special friend --changed to "contact person" at the suggestion of Sue Dougherty, Independent Living Coordinator (ILC), at North East Treatment Center (NET).

October 2005 an email message was sent out to First U members who expressed interest in providing support and encouragement to ILYA to see who might be interested in becoming a "contact person" for a college student and to send "care packages." A plan was developed. The contact person would send a personalized note along with the package which contains snacks, small decorations for upcoming season, items related to student's major, and a gift card. The target cost was approximately \$30.

There were about eight students matched with contact people. Eric developed an Excel form with information about students and contacts and sent email to contacts and ILCs about the project. The students and contact people completed information forms. The student's form asked them to respond to the contact person when they received a package. However, this became a problem as the students didn't know how to respond or felt uncomfortable doing it. Betty remembered that her father sent self addressed stamped (SAS) postcards with her "college care packages" so she would remember to write to him. Thus, contact people were asked to send SAS cards with their packages.

In the meantime, we heard from West End Neighborhood House (WENH) asking if their young adult students could also be involved in this project. We agreed and six more students and contact people were added. NET packages were sent to students' college rooms or apartments. WENH packages were to be sent to the office and delivered to the WENH houses in which the students lived. However, when the West End supervisor found out that their students received the contact person's addresses they talked with Betty to tell her that was not to be done for confidentiality reasons. We had to tell contact persons to give the church's address and not their own address or phone number. Some contact people had already contacted their students, so we asked them to not get in touch unless they had clearance and had talked with the student's ILC. Many email messages passed between ILYA and WHEN to try to work this out.

School year 2006- 2007

This year there were about 15 students. (*about* is used because students may drop out of school or change addresses without notification.) Eric developed a plan that was sent to the contacts. Then, he sent reminders to suggest packages be sent six times a year (August, October, December, February, April, June). Also there are suggestions about items (FOOD: power bars, cookies, chocolate, etc; SEASONAL ITEMS: Valentine candy, etc; PERSONAL ITEMS: grooming items such as toothpaste, deodorant, bath soap, etc. ; SCHOOL ITEMS: stapler, rubber bands, etc. HOUSEHOLD ITEMS: kitchen utensils, flashlight, etc.; GIFT CARDS: Staples, Happy

Harry's, etc.). The item suggestions come from contacts' replies to ILYA emails asking them about items they included in packages and suggestions from former Student Care Package recipients.

Note about contacts and students: Barbara Crowell took "her kids" – those she had in her courtroom. The choir, with Scott, then Betty, taking charge sending packages, to Dan, a voice major at The University of the Arts. A member of UU Society of Mill Creek (UUSMC) asked if they could become involved and took on three students.

We asked contacts to "debrief" and learned – not surprisingly – that a major problem was getting students to respond. One was uncomfortable with all the restrictions of the program.

School year 2007-08

This year, a one page "**invitation**" was displayed at the Social Justice table in the Parish Hall after church which included:

Why College Care Packages? College students who have aged-out of the foster care system often lack the support and encouragement provided by families. ILYA provides a boost to these college students through regular communications and packages

What does Contact Person do? **Send 4 times a year + birthday:** September ("school's underway"); Early December (Semester finale" and "holidays on the way"); Mid *February* ("chasing winter blues"); May ("school's ending-summer's comin'") and birthday

What might be sent:

- Food (homemade cookies, power bars, fruit and nuts, microwave popcorn, etc.)
- Small decorations (for the upcoming season)
- School supplies (Post-Its, pens, stapler, notebooks, etc.)
- Items related to the student's major (music, cosmetology course items, etc)
- Personal items (soap, toothbrush, toothpaste, tissues, flashlight, etc.)
- Gift Card/Church Scrip/Booster cards (for stores to which the student has access)

How do I get to be a College Care Package Contact Person? (Contact Betty Wier)

After contact people signed up and were matched with students, they received (via email) a two page "**How to**" including:

- Key elements of plan Be sustainable, suggested amount \$35; contents and frequency similar for all students; if contact person has to drop out, let coordinator know immediately
- What to put in package: personalized note; self-addressed postcard (to First Unitarian) stamped postcard and why it's necessary to do this. Ask some questions on postcard for example, snacks they like, what they could use for school or work, kinds of things needed for apartment or room.
- Stuff to include: snacks, decorations/snacks for upcoming season; school supplies; items related to student's major; person/home items; gift card
- What if I want to meet my student; we need to check with agency NET or West End to find out if student would like to meet and if you need to have a background check and interview with staff.

Sixteen students signed up and were matched with contacts from First U and three from UUSMC. The response cards came to First U and Betty would send an email message to the contact person and then leave the card in the ILYA mail box for the contact to pick up. Although several students dropped out of school or didn't respond, some did. For example, Dan began responding to the choir; Ny typed long messages to Jerry and Carol Okeson; Lynn Ingersoll continued to be in touch with Ly even though she left WENH.

Janet Tillman a UUSMC member wrote to see if their Chalice Circle might take on a student. Definitely -- the next school year.

School year 2008- 09

There were about 12 students. Some special events:

Dan graduated with high grades! Barbara Crowell (his Family Court Judge), Betty and Bill Wier attended his Senior Recital. It was amazing.

Jan Jones found a beauty supply store and purchased a \$30 gift card for her student who attended Shilling Douglas for cosmetology and needed to purchase equipment for school.

Barbara Crowell and June Peterson took on another of Barbara's kids, Di, at Delaware State University (DSU) and wrote a grant to purchase a computer for him.

Dr. Rita Meek was contact for Nik who had a major in a medical area at U of Maryland Eastern Shore. Nik transferred to UD, but dropped out this semester. After she had a baby, Rita sent her a large package with baby books, new parents medical guide, and gift card.

Unfortunately, there were quite a few "no responses." Some of those had dropped out.

School Year 2009 – 10

There were about 16 students. Maureen Sandberg became Nic's mentor for financial education. Maureen reported that she felt inspired by Nic. Betty Wier has been Tra's contact and they seemed to be getting package delivered and responses worked out at Alvernia College. Rita Meek's student Nik transferred back to U of Maryland Eastern Shore in biology. Sue Oldenburg's student Ce graduated from Del Tech!

Again, there were some dropouts and no responses.

School Year 2010 – 11

This year there were about 16 students. Maureen's student Nic completed Del Tech associate's degree and continued on to UD. Barbara Crowell and June Peterson's student Di spoke at the UUCentral Delaware service (with no notes) -- quite remarkable. Betty Wier's Tra transferred to Delaware State University. Now her packages can be delivered by Barbara Crowell when she delivers to her students Ma and Di. And, of course, there were dropouts and those not heard from.

School Year 2011—12

This year there were about 13 students. Sue Oldenburg's mentee Nic graduated from UD and is staff assistant to Lt. Gov. Denn! Tra married Ty (son of her driver to appointments). Rita Meek's student Nik graduated from UMEastern Shore this year! That's the good news. As other years, there were dropouts and no responses.

School Year 2012 – 13

This year there were about 15 students. Jacquee Lukawski's student Kat wrote two long letters of appreciation. It seems that most of the WENH students dropped out.

School Year 2013 – 14

This year there were about 15 students. Betty Wier's student Tra gave birth to Tyr. And, she graduated from DSU in spring 2014! Dan auditioned at Curtis School of Music and continued to teach karate and voice as well as work as manager at the Green Room at the Hotel DuPont. Jan Jones' student Par graduated from the American School of Cosmetology! Nan and Parry Norling have begun a good relationship with student Sa at UD. Barbara Perry and Henrietta McKelvey's students were Bro and Chy, two of triplets at DSU. There were no WENH students this year.

School Year 2014 – 15

This year there was a slow start because NET was not supported by the state and the section that gave the ILCs a home left the state. Finally they were picked up by People's Place in Sussex County – now New Castle County, People's Place 2 (PP2). Thank goodness. There were about 10 students. WENH was not in touch regarding students. Barbara Crowell was still in contact with Ma and Ra at DSU. Debbi Zarek continued to be in touch with Mi and Ed although they were not in school this semester.

School Year 2015 – 16

Based on conversations with the ILCs, a new process was added to the "How to" section of instructions for sending a care package this year: *"WHEN YOU SEND A PACKAGE, email or text your student to let her/him know that a package is on the way. Ask your student to let you know when the package arrives. Copy your student's Independent Living Coordinator (ILC) on the message."*

This year Sue Dougherty (Independent Living Coordinator PP2) took responsibility to make sure all students responded when they received packages. This became helpful in making the connection between students and contacts. When contacts let us know that packages had been sent but they haven't had a response, ILC Sue D. followed up. This year, we emphasized texting and email communication. These methods have made it much easier for the contact to let the student know that package was coming. In most cases, the students replied. The complication was that the coordinators of the College Care Packages project (Betty and Sue Wilson) do not always know whether a package has been sent and/or student has responded. So the

coordinator made email contact to see if package was sent and student had responded in some way. If there had been no response, Sue Dougherty was contacted to follow up.

There were 6 new students-- WENH added 3 -- so the total was 14. Nan and Parry Norling continued a strong bond with Sa, visiting in her apartment in Newark. Betty Wier inherited Em who kept in touch by texting and postcards. One of Debbi Zarek's students, Ed, was back in school at Del Tech in medical editing. Sa and Em spoke at Stewardship on the ILYA/Big Music Sunday. Samantha graduated and has a job Price Waterhouse.

Sue Wilson took over as coordinator of this program in the spring!

School Year 2016 – 17

Sue revised the "How to" document extending the response section – text and/or email student and Student College Care coordinator and ILCs --and, deleting the section about SAS postcard.

There were about 18 students this year from PP2 and WENH. Em graduated from Del Tech and continued on to UD. Di spoke for the Stewardship segment in the church program. With him were his wife and their twins.

Changes: Students now complete electronic forms. Personal contact is permitted.

School Year 2017-2018

19 students and contacts!