



DELLA LAMB COMMUNITY SERVICE

Building Success Together



In 1897 the Methodist Women's Mission began providing childcare for immigrant women who worked as domestics in Kansas City. Most of those served were poor, single mothers whose older children stayed home from school to care for younger siblings.

Della Cochrane Lamb and others eventually expanded the organization's mission to assist other working, single mothers living in poverty. The group was incorporated as Della C. Lamb House, Inc. and services were added to provide nutritional, educational and employment assistance for low-income, single parents. In the 1960s the program moved to its existing location in an urban neighborhood in Kansas City and, in 1990, changed its name to Della Lamb Community Services (DLCS).

Within a one-mile radius of DLCS there are five federal housing projects and more than 2,200 Asian and African refugee families. DLCS serves both traditional low-income families and refugee clients. The median income for the families served is less than \$14,000—half the size of the median family income in the Kansas City metro area. The unemployment rate of the families assisted by Della Lamb is 33 percent compared to single-digit unemployment in the city overall.

The mission of DLCS: "...to empower its clients to meet the challenges of education, employment and self-sufficiency in an ever-changing world." With an emphasis on education, DLCS provides daycare and early childhood education, a charter school, before and after school tutoring and activities, Adult Basic Education (including GED and English as a Second Language), and other supportive services.

Refugee families struggle to learn a new culture and language, but they also must contend with the normal challenges of living in poverty—limited resources, medical care and education and employment issues. They are thankful to have escaped famine, persecution and civil war in their own countries, but they still must overcome enormous obstacles in order to make life better for their families. Della Lamb provides life-changing resources for children and their family members. It provides the practical assistance, encouragement and support needed to take families in devastation to the point of hope and ultimately, self-sufficiency.

In 1999, Della Lamb opened the first charter school in the State of Missouri targeted to help the children of refugee families by giving them the special attention they needed to succeed academically. The area where Della Lamb serves

has the lowest socioeconomic standing, the highest dropout rate and the highest limited-English speaking rate in the district. Children, already struggling to overcome cultural and language barriers, had previously been thrown into the mix of this already brewing cauldron of academic failure.

One hundred percent of its first enrollees tested one to three years below grade level in one or more core subjects. By the end of the first year of the new year-round, charter school, all of the non-readers had advanced to grade level or only one year below level in Reading. Seventy-one percent of the kindergartners were reading at a first grade level and 22 percent were reading at a second grade level.

At the end of the second year, 92 percent were reading at or above grade level. And while the children were receiving a superior education, Della Lamb's adult clients were receiving advancement in literary skills, job skills training, life-skills training and employment assistance. "When you have such a great organization," said Keith Ashcraft, chair of the "Building Success Together" campaign, "you can go into solicitation appointments with pride. People are happy to respond."

In 2001, United States Secretary of Education Rod Paige, acknowledged that, "In our nationwide research of 'pockets of poverty,' Della Lamb is celebrated as one of eight sites throughout the nation in which Education is Happening Despite All Odds." Not only were its clients receiving an education "despite all odds," but the organization was continuing to serve and expand despite its cramped and inadequate headquarters.

In early spring of 2001 Keith Ashcraft invited Bud Cooper, a personal friend, to lunch to discuss a future capital campaign for Della Lamb. During that meeting Dr. Ashcraft asked Cooper his opinion about hiring counsel to assist Della Lamb in their efforts and if he was familiar with Hartsook Companies, Inc. When Cooper shared with him that he was now a member of that firm, the door of opportunity to work with DLCS was opened.

After nearly two years of working on the campaign themselves, the volunteer leaders and staff had successfully raised several hundred dollars but were in a long plateau. The Board approved hiring Hartsook Companies to conduct a Campaign Assessment. Said Cooper, "With information gathered during the assessment, we returned to the Board with a recommendation to address certain public relations issues along with beefed-up communication to the funding community about Della's financial stability.

The image of Della Lamb had been strong in the community. However, due to a lack of sufficient administrative staff, they missed several funding opportunities and lost credibility within the funding community. As Hartsook Companies worked with them, offering fundraising guid-

ance as well as additional staff to tell the Della Lamb story, this image began to change and monies became more accessible to the campaign.

Made Possible Through "Building Success Together"

- **2,500 square foot multi-purpose building for before and after-school programs**
 - **New program opportunities**
 - **Transportation for clients**
 - **Strong endowment**
 - **2,500 square foot administrative offices**
 - **First-ever Director of Development**
 - **Large circle of friends**
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Prior to "Building Success Together," the organization's thrift store had been converted into a makeshift school with eight classrooms and computer lab, as well as offices for staff and social workers, and an area for day care and early education. Della Lamb's charter school was thriving at a different location and several other facilities were being used for various programs and services. Enlarged administrative offices and additional space for expanded programs and services was a growing necessity.

"This was our first capital campaign ever and I have to say that we started out with some major miscalculations," offered Ashcraft. "We tried raising money to reduce a debt we incurred on the purchase of land. We began with a goal that was based on what we wanted to do, rather than starting with an amount that we could realistically raise. Bud Cooper came in and got us on track. He helped us organize a steering committee, spoke face-to-face with our long-time supporters, and gave us an assessment that was lower than our own goal, but we knew he was right."

The campaign began with a stretch goal of \$3.15 million that was eventually raised to \$3.35 million. A capstone gift of \$90,000 from the George K. Baum Family Foundation meant that DLCS exceeded its goal, raising more than \$3.6 million in this very successful capital campaign, and, at the same time, re-establishing their good name in the Kansas City philanthropic community.

Cultivation for the campaign took many forms; but one of the most effective was offering tours of the existing facility. Said Ashcraft, "Cultivating your regular donors is terribly important. We made several connections with prospective donors through steering committee and board member contacts. We gave them tours of this building so they could see what we were accomplishing with limited space. People who took tours were so impressed with what we were doing



in cramped quarters that they felt good about giving us the space we really needed to serve our clients."

Early in the silent phase of the campaign, Della Lamb received a lead gift of \$500,000 from one steering committee member and \$300,000 from another member. Board participation was 100 percent. A \$250,000 gift earmarked for the transportation came in early from a trust fund managed by Bank of America. Since Della Lamb provides door-to-door transportation for its charter school students, and meets a variety of transportation needs for its adult clients, new and replacement vehicles were a significant campaign item.

The campaign received many foundation gifts including a \$356,000 gift from the Hall Family Foundation and a \$97,000 from the Nettleton Foundation. As well, there were a large number of major gifts to this campaign including a \$160,000 gift from the Harry J. Lloyd Charitable Trust and \$120,000 from Blades & Associates.

They enjoyed also a greater return than expected on a mail solicitation. Offered Ashcraft, "I wrote a letter and asked for a campaign gift from 1,100 prospective donors. Each letter was personalized with the recipient's name and sent out with a 37-cent stamp. I signed all 1,100 and tailored most of the letters with a handwritten note. Even optimistically, we expected to see \$10,000 to \$15,000. We ultimately raised \$50,000 from the letters."

Enthusiasm for this campaign was so strong among those donors solicited for major gifts that the organization never officially went to a public phase to reach and exceed its goal. "The solicitation process was a very positive experience," said Ashcraft. "Della Lamb's ability to give donors a persuasive demonstration of the mission's effectiveness through tours, stories of lives changed and statistical evidence of their successes (i.e. the dramatically improved reading

scores at the charter school) gave volunteers a wide-open door to ask for very generous gifts. Donors were pleased to be part of this organization's great work."

When Della Lamb was within \$1 million of its goal, it applied for and received a J.E. and L.E. Mabee Foundation challenge grant of \$475,000. This meant that the remaining \$1 million needed to be raised within one year of accepting the challenge. The timing of this challenge grant came when the nation's economy was severely sagging and some foundations were watching their profits disappear.

Acknowledged Ashcraft, "We had given tours to several foundations that expressed strong support and mentioned possible gifts of \$75,000 and \$100,000." By the time it came around to asking for those gifts—especially in light of meeting the Mabee challenge—Della Lamb faced one of its few campaign disappointments. "The foundations were still just as supportive of our mission, but they were only able to give us gifts of \$7,500 to \$10,000," he added.

During this same time, a new donor contact was adding another unexpected – and positive – twist to the campaign. "In order to meet the Mabee challenge, we had to get creative in seeking new prospects," said Ashcraft. "We met a man through connections with one of our steering committee members. The donor gave us an initial gift of \$40,000 and soon after added another gift of \$60,000. He also said, 'Keep me informed of your progress. I don't want to see you fail [to meet the Mabee challenge].' This man eventually gave a third gift of \$40,000 for a total campaign donation of \$140,000".

Della Lamb met the Mabee challenge, and exceeded its original campaign goal, but there was yet another happy ending with endowment. They started the campaign with a \$100,000 endowment with a goal to grow it to \$300,000. As the campaign came to a close, the organization was looking at an endowment of nearly \$1 million, much from bequests.

Currently, Della Lamb helps 1,800 families everyday with some form of service. With the success of "Building Success Together," they are in a much better position—physically and financially—to extend that help to other low-income and refugee families in need.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR - *Denise Rhoades is a free-lance writer living in Newton, Kansas. Denise has worked on several projects for Hartsook Companies and regularly writes campaign case statements and articles for Hartsook clients.*

For more information about Hartsook Companies, Inc., call 316.630.9992 or visit www.hartsookcompanies.com

