

Grant to support Coatesville Youth Initiative

\$8,900 from Ronald McDonald House Charity

By CONNOR SHOWALTER
Journal Register News Service

The Ronald McDonald House Charity of the Philadelphia Region Inc. on Monday presented an \$8,900 grant to the Brandywine Health Foundation for its program to benefit Coatesville youth and drug-free communities.

Brandywine Health Foundation will use the grant to fund its Coatesville Youth Initiative, which provides year-round programs and activities to area youth. Specifically the grant enabled the foundation to house its recently hired Drug-Free Communities program coordinator, Lula Defershar, in a new office for the Coatesville Youth Initiative.

"My goal will be to just be out in the community and make other people aware that we do exist and that we do have different resources for them," said Defershar, who graduated from Millersville University in 2010 with degrees in social work and political science and a minor in marketing.

"I mean realistically you can't change everybody, but I want to get more kids involved," Defershar added.

After completing a year-long planning process, the youth initiative launched in 2009 to facilitate increased academic success, reduce juvenile criminal activity and substance abuse and develop leadership skills. The program fosters collaboration among youth and community residents and more than 40 area businesses, youth serving organizations and nonprofit and county agencies, along with the Coatesville Area School District and other educational entities to enhance the knowledge and skills of the youth.

"Now having the drug-free communities program as a part of our efforts, it just adds another layer of prevention,

education and support," said Chaya Scott, director of the Coatesville Youth Initiative. "It's an opportunity for us to get the community involved and really saving our kids so that they are able to reach their fullest potential."

"Everything that we do is all about making sure that the kids here can dream big, aim high and they have the support from the community to make it happen," Scott added.

Recently the foundation received a grant that will fund \$125,000 a year to the youth initiative for five years. Frances Sheehan, president and CEO of Brandywine Health Foundation, said the grant, provided by the Office of National Drug Control Policy and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, marked the first time Coatesville received such funding.

"It's a community-based effort that we will be building up in the next five years," Sheehan said. "Now (Defershar) will be going out in the community and encouraging stores not to sell tobacco products to underage children and discouraging stores, for instance, from selling rolling papers."

"(Defershar) will be getting young people involved in educating their peers about the downside of getting involved with drugs and alcohol and smoking," Sheehan added.

A board of directors governs the Coatesville Youth Initiative and oversees five subcommittees that address issues in the community. Those groups, which are open to the public, include the Greater Parental Engagement, Pathways Beyond High School, Out-of-School Time Task Force, Community Outreach Work Group and Juvenile Justice Collaborative.

"I think that this initiative will bring hope back to (the youth) and I think without



Staff photos by Connor Showalter
At right, Brandywine Health Foundation President and CEO Frances Sheehan, left, and board member Cleo Alston accept a grant from the Ronald McDonald House Charities of the Philadelphia Region Inc. Above, posing with the grant check for the Coatesville Youth Initiative are, front row, from left, Drug-Free Communities Program Coordinator Lula Defershar, Brandywine Health Foundation President and CEO Frances Sheehan, board member Cleo Alston, Ronald McDonald; back row, from left, Coatesville Youth Initiative Director Chaya Scott and Coatesville Area Senior High students Jessica Locker, Scarlett Patton, Kourné Harden and Oliva Lewis.



hope they don't have anywhere to go," said Cleo Alston, a board member and owner and operator of McDonald's restaurants in Parkersburg and Brookhaven.

The Coatesville Youth Initiative also runs a program called ServiceCorps, for Coatesville Area School District youth between 14 and 18, which combines an eight-

week employment experience with an opportunity to develop leadership skills.

In addition, the grant supports a group of middle and high school students attending the Coatesville Area School District.

"You learn a lot about team building and how to work with others," said Scarlett Patton, a senior at Coatesville

Area Senior High and member of the youth council. "(The council) gets along like a family, everybody is different and we all like come together as one person."

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