Junior Auxiliary of Columbus, Mississippi

Award of Excellence Entry

2016

Since 1942, Junior Auxiliary of Columbus (JAC) has been providing a comprehensive range of services to the children of Lowndes County. JAC has achieved a reputation of excellence in the community and upholds that level through the work of 59 Actives, 11 Provisionals, and 44 active Associate and Life members for a cumulative total of 11,425 hours. The quality of each project is a result of annual intense evaluation to determine if the project can use improvement and if it is relevant to our children’s needs. Maintaining a rapport and dialogue with the Columbus City Schools’ Superintendent as well as Lowndes County School District’s Superintendent offers the organization unique insight into the changing needs of the students and how JAC can best support them. It is only through the diligent commitment and inspiring compassion of our membership to our community’s children that our projects enjoy success.

Service Projects

During 2015-16, JAC maintained 10 service projects. Active, Associate, and Life members contributed 4,614 service hours to these projects.

**Stand Up Speak Out** is JAC’s most recently developed project, which came at the urging of area schools. This program focuses on the effects of bullying, and the anti-bullying message is spread through a variety of interactions with students. Students in schools across Lowndes County take part in interactive role playing scenarios to learn how best to be a good bystander when they witness bullying and even submit posters and essays that illustrate their newly acquired knowledge of bullying prevention and their commitment to ridding their school of
bullying behavior. SUSO received the Martha Wise Award for Outstanding New Project in 2014. [27 members/ 194 hours/ $0/ 600 served]

**Choose Your Path** is designed to teach students that the choices they make today will have great influence on their future. JAC coordinates with school counselors to determine topics and problems that are unique to their school and grade level. Programs have a wide range of current topics such as bullying, cyber-bullying, health and fitness, drug use, drinking and driving, and even the experience of a prison sentence. At our most recent session, we partnered with the Mississippi University for Women’s Education Department and brought in renowned speaker and founder of Champion of Choices, Marc Mero. Marc’s presentation focused on serious issues such as bullying, peer pressure, substance abuse and suicide that were presented in a way that really touched the listeners at a “heart level.” Students were inspired to treat themselves and others with respect, dream big, achieve goals, and cherish relationships. [7 members/ 46 hours /$6,500/ 1,200 served]

The JAC **Clothing Room** absorbs the greatest investment of service hours and financial resources. Teachers refer names of students who are in need of new uniforms and necessities to help them meet their school’s dress code to school counselors. The counselors coordinate with JAC through our innovative online template. JA members speak with each referred child’s family to schedule a fitting day, which the child leaves with plenty of uniforms. It is our hope that wearing a new, clean uniform can engender confidence for students and allow them to more adequately participate in their academic endeavors. All active members participate in the Clothing Room in capacities that include year-round restocking of our “store,” planning massive purchases of uniforms, fitting children, and working with children’s parents to offer them assistance in their time of need. A spin-off of the Clothing Room is the **In-Depth** project, which
assists victims of tornado, fire, or other catastrophes with clothing for adult and children. [52 members/ 964 hours/ $28,965.77/ 453 served]

In My Shoes came to life when an active member, whose child has a disability, expressed the need to educate students on the obstacles of children with special needs. This project gives second graders the opportunity to step into the shoes and lives of children experiencing disabilities. Students are read grade-appropriate books about vision and hearing impairments, Autism, Cerebral Palsy, and Downs Syndrome. The students use various manipulatives to simulate the difficulties in tying their shoe or zipping a zipper and other real-life scenarios. Students are amazed by the increased time and effort it takes to do tasks they may have once found quite easy. By the conclusion of the project, students have gained an understanding of their peers’ disabilities and are better able to celebrate their special needs friends. [19 members/ 89 hours/ $48.76/ 260 served]

Summer JAM is JAC’s intensive summer project. Actives assist students who have been recommended for summer school to build their math and reading skills. This seasonal project enjoys heavy involvement by the many teachers in the membership; students receive quality, methods-based instruction to prevent the “summer slide” of skills. [14 members/ 123 hours/ $0/ 20 served]

Reality Fair brings a dose of reality to 11th graders about life after graduation. Students are given a “salary” based on their present GPA. The students visit various booths that mock real-life situations such as having to purchase a car, pay utilities, budget for groceries, etc. Students quickly see that their GPA-based-budget may not allow them to pick their dream car. Students are counseled about managing their resources responsibly and encouraged to strive for above-
average grades so that may one day enjoy the reality of their dreams. [22 members/ 205 hours/$114/ 300 served]

$^3$ (Fit and Fabulous Forever) is a project that resulted from a community-based survey that indicated that there was a need for a focus on children’s health. Fourth grade students enjoy a health fair in which they visit seven booths. The booths were created with the Mississippi fourth grade health, nutrition, and science curriculum in mind. These booths offer exciting relays, astonishing science experiments to illustrate the sugar in certain foods, and even weighted vests during activities to feel the effect of extra weight. At the end of the fair, students are sent home with their own $^3$ Frisbee so that they may play and discuss their experience with their families. [18 members/ 138 hours/$526/ 300 served]

Each year, JAC awards scholarships to a group of local, college-bound high school seniors. Candidates submit an application and essay and are selected based on financial need and academic merit. In 2016, four students were awarded one-time scholarships, and two students received annual scholarships over four years. In 2014, two new scholarships were created, the Eleanor Slaughter Excellence Scholarship and the Terry Brewer Service Scholarship. Both of these were established in memory of outstanding JA members, and the scholarship requirements were designed to echo what these two women most valued, excellence and service. [11 members/ 113 hours/$28,037.57/ 13 served]

JAC evaluates our projects at mandatory committee meetings for Welfare, Service, and Civic Projects and also an Overall Evaluation meeting. During evaluations, committee members meet with the chair to discuss the projects’ strengths, weaknesses, and offer suggestions for improvement. The projects committee analyzes the community’s need and determines if the project is still meeting it or if the service is being duplicated elsewhere. At the mandatory
Overall Evaluation, committee chairs read the evaluation feedback to the membership who then rules if a project is kept or discontinued.

_National Service Project ~ Child Welfare_

Junior Auxiliary Mentors (JAM) meet one-on-one mentoring with 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> graders. Each JAM team member mentors the same student over a span of one to two years. This project began at the urging of area teachers who recognized a correlation between academic and behavior issues with a lack of individualized attention in the child’s life. Members are assigned a child identified by the classroom teacher in September and meet individually with the child weekly throughout the entire school year. Visitors to Columbus schools often see JAM members visiting and sharing a snack with a child, reading with the child to help them with their reading goals, or tutoring them in a core subject. The children anxiously await their special JAM time each week, and teachers have seen a marked improvement in the children’s motivation, academics, and demeanor. At the end of each semester, students are awarded their own books to begin their own home library. Past honors of the JAM project include the Martha Wise Award (1998 & 2009), and the National Focus Award (2000). [25 members/ 336 hours/ $100/ 23 served]

_Finance_

JAC hosted our 66<sup>th</sup> annual Charity Ball and Pageant and used our “Report to the Community” insert in the local newspaper to provide full-financing for all projects. Many patrons and supporters attended the Ball and were recognized as sponsors. Corporate, community, business, and individual sponsors purchase advertising in the “Report to the
Community” as a show of support for JAC’s many projects. This publication promotes awareness of the JA mission and educates the public on what JAC does for the children of Lowndes County each year. This finance endeavor generated $142,700 in 2015-16. [70 members/ 2,601 hours/ $142,700/ 700 served]

JA demonstrates fiscal responsibility through careful budgetary planning, an annual professional audit, and by keeping one year’s budget on reserve as recommended by NAJA. These monies are invested in a money market account for maximum safe interest earnings. This account is monitored monthly by the chapter as well as by an independent source. Additionally, the treasurer presents monthly reports to the membership for review, and a hardcopy of all transactions is available. JAC uses QuickBooks accounting software and maintains and updates it on the chapter’s onsite computer.

Continuing Education

JAC offers several educational opportunities throughout the year for its membership. This year, Peter Imes and Ashley Gressett came and spoke to the Chapter about the Lowndes County Imagination Library. The Library provides one book every month, free of charge, for Lowndes County children from birth to age 5. They discussed the importance of literacy at an early age and how every child deserves the chance to learn and grow, no matter what. The Chapter and Provisional members also had the wonderful opportunity to hear NAJA Foundation Trustees and JAC Life members Marian Chancellor, Celia Ford and Cindy Rood speak on NAJA, the Foundation and our Chapter history. They also shared some great tips on being a good JA member.
Community Relations and Involvement

JAC enjoys a unique rapport with the community as demonstrated by the great level of support we receive from the public. The Chapter works closely with all area schools, the Salvation Army, Red Cross, the Department of Human Services, the Columbus Public Library, Mississippi University for Women, Main Street Columbus, WCBI-TV, the Commercial Dispatch, Baptist Memorial Hospital, and others. JAC has earned the respect of the community because of our intense commitment to its betterment. These organizations even reach out to JAC when a need is observed.

Life and Associate Involvement

Our Life and Associate members maintain a high level of involvement with our organization and are always there to lend a hand or offer valuable advice. They attend the November luncheon and May General Meeting & Crown Celebration where they enjoy camaraderie with each other as well as with our Provisional and Active members. We update them quarterly through our publication, Lifeline, to let them know ways in which they can continue their involvement. The JAC Public Relations committee also works diligently to maintain a database of up-to-date contact information for each Life and Associate member so as to keep them connected to JAC activities. Associate and Life members also enjoy seeing “real-time” pictures of project happenings as they follow along on social media.

Associate and Life members contribute financially to scholarships as well as other service projects. These members make a strong presence at the annual Charity Ball as well as at the Ball week reception hosted in their honor. It is not rare to see an Associate or Life member helping out the week of Ball through flower arranging or other endeavors in order to make it a success.
Many of these ladies continue to serve on projects with which they’ve formed a connection long after their years as an Active have passed.

**Provisional Training**

The Provisional Training course is the foundation for new members to understand the level of commitment, responsibility, and accountability required of all members. JAC finds this imperative to the future of our organization; thus, training occurs weekly for two hours per session over the course of six months. Provisionals go through a detailed study of the National and Local Constitution and Bylaws. All current Board members and committee chairs attend these meetings to speak about the duties and function of each committee. Provisionals are required to observe every project during their training. To better understand our heritage, this training includes visits from past Chapter Presidents and past NAJA Presidents.

**NAJA Involvement**

All NAJA correspondence was read to the chapter and answered promptly; all deadlines were met by JAC. In 2016, past Chapter President Londa Lebrun was elected as the NAJA Treasurer. We also currently have two past Chapter Presidents and one past NAJA President serving as a NAJA Foundation Trustee. One of our past Chapter Presidents served as a CSC in our area. JAC is also honored to have five past NAJA Presidents.

JAC submitted the following three projects for awards: Louise Eskrigge Crump Award, Martha Wise Outstanding Project Award, and the Norma DeLong Education Award.
JAC aims to have representation at all NAJA functions. The Columbus Chapter sent 20 actives to the Memphis Area Meeting, 4 actives to the Hattiesburg Area Meeting, and 22 actives to the 2016 Annual Education Conference.

The Columbus Chapter of Junior Auxiliary contributes to the NAJA Scholarship program in a multitude of ways. In order to support the NAJA Foundation, 100% of JAC actives annually donate $10 per individual; in 2016, this contribution reached $550. At the 2016 Annual Education Conference, JA of Columbus was recognized by the NAJA Foundation for our contributions leading to Fellow status in overall donations to the Foundation. JAC also donates at the Platinum Crown Level for NAJA Graduate Scholarships. Lastly, a financial contribution totaling $250 was given to the NAJA Resource Center.