NORMA DeLONG EDUCATION AWARD
2016-2017

CHAPTER NAME: Junior Auxiliary of Columbus

CHAPTER ADDRESS: Shannon Stafford
P.O. Box 11
Columbus, MS 39703

EDUCATION CHAIRMAN: Summer Graham

POPULATION CATEGORY: 15,000-29,999

COST OF PROJECT: $3,950 (approximately)

NUMBER OF ACTIVE MEMBERS INVOLVED: 7

NUMBER OF ACTIVE CHAPTER MEMBERS: 54

NUMBER OF PEOPLE SERVED: 1,500

Follow outline exactly in making award presentation.

I. How was the need for the project/program determined? (100 words or less, DOUBLE SPACED; WRITTEN IN THE SEQUENCE AS LISTED BELOW) Send one digital photo per entry either email or on disc.

II. Summarize Project — 1000 words or less
Include the following:
1. Complete description of project and how it was carried out.
2. Population of area
3. Number of Active members in Chapter
4. Number of members planning and hours spent in planning
5. Length of actual program/seminar, etc.
6. Number of Chapter members attending
7. Age range of participants
8. Utilization of NAJA Resource Center (if applicable)
9. Number of people served.
10. Public Relations information for project.

III. Project Evaluation — (300 words or less, DOUBLE SPACED; WRITTEN IN THE SEQUENCE AS LISTED BELOW)
1. Feed back from participants
2. Impact on community
3. Applicability of program to other communities
4. Worthiness to present to other Chapters
5. Plans to expand into the community and/or presentation by other organization(s)
6. Plans to repeat program/project
I. Junior Auxiliary of Columbus' Choose Your Path project was designed to impact large groups of students, with the project's message centering around the basic idea that the choices kids make today will have a great impact on their futures. 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.

II. Project Summary

Choose Your Path brings motivational and educational speakers who encourage and inspire students to make good decisions on their own and to stay on the right path. The goal is to help them realize that their actions and choices have far-reaching consequences which will affect the rest of their lives. Committee members meet with local school principals and counselors to determine what issues are most pressing for their students and then a speaker is selected to address those specific needs.

This year, Junior Auxiliary of Columbus welcomed Mr. Laymon Hicks as the Choose Your Path speaker. Laymon gives students the power to “Get Up, Get Out and Go Get It!” Laymon is a nationally recognized motivational expert who takes youth on a journey using his life experiences and shows students that their past does not have to dictate their future. Laymon has an extraordinary ability to connect with young people with his personal story of overcoming obstacles throughout his life to achieve success. Laymon’s enthusiasm is contagious as he empowers people of all ages and walks of life to make positive choices and achieve their goals. It takes a special gift to connect with students, especially high school age kids who often have an aloof “too cool for school” attitude. Laymon has an innate ability to fly through that artificial barrier with ease as his honest and straightforward style allows the kids into what seems like a part of his soul. The crowd opens up and the change is almost palpable as kids move to the edge of their chairs, hanging on to his every word. One day. One talk. Immeasurable impact to have
someone who understands the struggles facing kids today, someone who has been through what they face and who has come out of on the other side with his soul intact, and someone with an endowed gift from God to share his story. Simply put, he was a hit.

The city of Columbus, Mississippi, has a population of 23,168. Junior Auxiliary of Columbus has 54 active members and the Choose Your Path Committee consists of 7 members who contributed 64 hours to planning for this project. The program lasted one hour and was presented to over 1,500 students with six different schools attending. The audience consisted of children ranging from 9th to 12th grade. Media contacts received a press release and invitation for coverage. Posters were distributed throughout the community, as well as on the media’s website and Facebook page, JAC’s website, Facebook page and Instagram, and the Mississippi University for Women’s website.

III. Project Evaluation

A 16 year old High School Junior who attended one of the school presentations emailed Mr. Laymon Hicks afterward and revealed that she self-harmed as a coping mechanism. Her letter reads, in part: “I have been on suicide watch for the last two years. I have a depression disorder as well as anorexia nervosa….I have been dealing with both of those disorders since 2015, when my father was killed in front of me a couple of days after my birthday….Today, when you spoke about your life and some of the key points in your talk, you had me in tears….I have a 4.0 GPA but I feel that though that is not good enough for me to be considered smart. I am being inducted into the National Honor Society in March but I still don't feel smart…when we spoke, it really made me think. What if I did kill myself? How would my family react to my dying? How will my mother feel when she knows that she has lost her youngest daughter? Your presentation spoke to me and I want to say from the bottom of my heart, Thank You.”

Choose Your Path has been an incredibly successful project for Junior Auxiliary of Columbus. We always say that if our projects truly impact just one child, they would be
worthwhile, but this project reaches more students per presentation than any of our other project work and the response from students is moving and powerful. Choose Your Path could benefit any community and would be a worthwhile project for any JA chapter to present. Junior Auxiliary of Columbus plans to continue this project as a part of our work for the children of Lowndes County in the Fall of 2018.