

Duchesne Fund for Ministry: Creating change, supporting Gospel values

On a dreary day in February in northern Indiana, the warmth in the Earthworks Market came from the bright smiles of the graduates. Brandon, Corey, Deborah and Hannah celebrated their completion of the first Project Ready course, an employment training program for young developmentally disabled men and women. Project Ready provides education through experience – in this case, in a bakery operated by Earthworks, a ministry directed by Sue Rogers, RSCJ, and sponsored by the Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ. Earthworks' mission is to advocate for environmental education and action, teaching the importance of protecting our fragile natural resources. They have a baking program designed to teach the connection between food and the environment. As a natural extension, Earthworks collaborated with two local agencies to create Project Ready, a flexible eight to ten-week curriculum that provides critical job and life skills to an underserved community, that of developmentally disabled adults.

“At the heart of Earthwork’s mission is education. We seek to draw people into an understanding of our responsibility to protect the integrity of creation,” Sister Rogers said. “I believe this kind of education is critically important at this time.” In addition, young people with mild learning disabilities have few training options. Project Ready met both needs.

Start-up funds for Project Ready came, in part, from a 2011 grant from the Society of the Sacred Heart’s Duchesne Fund for Ministry. The Duchesne Fund for Ministry was established to bring about systemic change based on the Gospel values of justice, integrity, contemplative attitude and peace. Funded the past several years by an anonymous donor, the Fund advances the mission of the Society by providing financial support for ministry projects in line with province priorities. “We’re so grateful for the generosity of the friend who supports the Duchesne Fund,” said Kathleen McGrath, RSCJ, Duchesne Fund Committee Chair. “Every year we must turn away qualified organizations, or fund at a lower level than

requested, because we only have so much money available. We would be delighted to see this fund grow through the gifts of others who support the province’s priorities.”

The grant to Earthworks was one of twenty-six, totaling \$135,000. Gifts went to support such life-giving initiatives as an early intervention program for children suffering from trauma, legal services for immigrants, a safe house for victims of human trafficking (see article on page 10) and other programs for underserved groups. All projects have an educational component and all have a connection to an RSCJ, Associate or collaborator. The Duchesne Fund for Ministry Committee will select this year’s award recipients later this spring.

For Debbie, who just completed Project Ready, the impact of this grant is tremendous. She was encouraged to learn and challenged to test her limits. For her, the best part of the Duchesne Fund is, “I’m ready for a job now. I really, really want to get a job.” ❖



Sue Rogers, RSCJ, (third from left) doesn't hesitate to get her hands dirty during a baking class at Earthworks. Funding for the class comes in part from a grant from the Duchesne Fund for Ministry.