



**Power of Together 2
Meeting Minutes, November 14, 2023**

Barb Silver called the meeting to order at 7:02 pm and welcomed everyone to the meeting, which was held at the Mystic YMCA. She reported that we have one new member, Patricia Clark. PoT2 has made donations totaling \$322,710 since its founding in 2016, some organizations having received two awards.

Barb introduced Jane Mandes, Associate Director of New Heights, who reported on how the PoT2 funds awarded to New Heights last quarter were being put to good use. New Heights, the Southeastern Connecticut campus of Vista Life Innovations, supports neurodiverse young adults (17 and older) with disabilities and helps them move toward personal independence through their residential program, day programs, and art programs. Vista serves over 200 people on all their campuses. Funds from PoT2 enabled New Heights to refresh their art program in several locations with new art supplies, especially oil and watercolor paints and paintbrushes. Jane brought with her a painting of a lovely tree which was painted by several people at New Heights, enabling the painters to learn to work together and create community. Proceeds from sold artwork support the students. There will be an art show next year at the La Grua Center showcasing artwork all made by more than one artist. She invited everyone to visit their Pawcatuck location.

The hat was passed and three people's names were chosen:

1. Hans Rollema represented Safe Futures, which helps victims of domestic violence. It has been in operation since 1976 and serves 21 towns in Southeastern Connecticut. 10,000 victims were helped last year. 35,000 families in Southeastern Connecticut need help. Safe Futures is currently raising funds to build a center that will offer needed services, such as legal aid, counseling, health care, housing, safety, and more, in order to make these services all available together in one place so that victims of abuse do not have to travel to the different stops currently required to find safety for themselves and their families and pets. This proposed 21,000 sq. ft. building will be constructed on 11 acres in Waterford, which Safe Futures already owns. Safe Futures has raised \$6M so far out of the \$8M needed. Hans recommended reading *Black & Blue* by Anna Quindlen, a telling novel about domestic violence. Funds would go toward the capital campaign.
2. Barbara Sahagan represented S.T.E.P.S. (Striving Toward Empowered Personal Success), which offers mentoring and life-skills training to a diverse group of over 100 girls in 7th – 12th grades in New London and Groton. It was started by two local women (who are both still volunteering at S.T.E.P.S.) 16 years ago to help young girls make positive choices. It offers three programs: an afterschool empowerment program in Groton and New London (and they were just invited into two more school districts); a summer leadership program; and leadership day, which focus on topics such as, body image, healthy relationships, media and financial literacy, and much more. Barbara recently attended the S.T.E.P.S. Sweet 16 Gala where she met two very self-confident "S.T.E.P.S. girls" who had each earned MLK scholarships of \$25,000. (One is currently a scientist at Pfizer.) S.T.E.P.S., with a budget of approximately \$170,000, relies mainly on volunteers, and most of the funding goes directly into programs, which take place at schools and on college campuses.
3. Shannon DePerry represented Operation Fresh Start, which assists families who have children in crisis by providing much-needed household items and school supplies, among other essentials. It provides welcome baskets for children who have aged out of foster care and are currently homeless. This year so far, OFS has given out many welcome baskets and toiletry kits, along with 537 pairs of pajamas, some of which were donated, though this year they had to purchase many pairs since donations were down and expenses were up. 175 loaded backpacks were given to Noank Community Services, and many other organizations and families

who reached out. OFS is going into their Christmas drive currently, with over 80 children to be “adopted” for Christmas, 50 of whom have already been adopted.

The organization receiving the most votes was the S.T.E.P.S. program.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:42 pm.