

SCHOOL-TO-COLLEGE PROGRAM— NEW FUNDING AND EXPANDED FOCUS

Susan Kostal

The Bar Association of San Francisco's School-To-College (STC) program is planning to expand its reach to include a second San Francisco high school within the next few years. Supporting the BASF Foundation in this effort, the Lurie Foundation recently dedicated a \$20,000 matching grant toward the expansion. Shartsis Friese LLP, through commitments by its management committee and the efforts of its partners and associates, is raising the matching funds.

Started ten years ago by former BASF President Therese Stewart, now chief deputy city attorney, the program has been based at Balboa High School, an under-resourced public high school in San Francisco where, previously, only 25 percent of the students who applied were accepted at a four-year college or university. When the STC program began, it relied mainly on attorney volunteers to serve as mentors to the students and focused on high school juniors and seniors. Today, the program reaches more than 300 students beginning their freshman year and boasts a full-time, on-site BASF staff member, Sandy Restrepo, who spends nearly all her professional time, and some of her free time, at Balboa.

The program has a solid roster of success stories. Balboa students have gone to University of California campuses as well as Ivy League schools. One student, Alfredo Sabillon, an immigrant from Honduras, spent time in the city's troubled Sunnysdale and Potrero Hill housing projects before bouncing from couch to couch at friends' houses. Sabillon nearly dropped out, but administration and STC staff noticed his potential and pushed him

to stay in school, later helping him with the college admission and financial aid processes, and even with his immigration status. Today, he is a full-time student at Stanford, studying comparative literature, on a full scholarship.

"For School-To-College kids, the [four-year college] acceptance rate in 2007 was 85 percent," says Sue Cox, director of development for the BASF Foundation. Now the program, supported by the BASF Foundation and an integral part of its pipeline programs, which are designed to encourage more minority students to consider a career in law, has outside grant funding and a new host of fans, thanks in part to BASF Foundation President (and Shartsis Friese partner) Tracy Salisbury.

"The great success of the program at a relatively small cost made us realize that we had a replicable model that we want to expand into additional schools. But we also need to make sure it is well-funded before we take that step," says Cox. The Foundation applied to the Louis R. Lurie Foundation for funding. As part of its review of the request, Lurie Foundation members toured the campus to get a first-hand view of what the program does. Fortunately, Salisbury came along.

Both the Lurie Foundation and Salisbury liked what they saw. "The Lurie Foundation gave us \$20,000 for the current program and a completely unexpected \$20,000 matching grant for the expanded program," Cox says. "We were delighted—and challenged!"



From left, bottom row Chris Garrett (summer associate) and Carolyn Reiser. From left, top row: Tracy Salisbury, Lisa Stockholm (summer associate), and Bob Friese

Now the ball was in Salisbury's court. As the parent of a high school student she is attempting to shepherd into college, she knows some of the hurdles the Balboa students faced. But there are other hurdles: for many Balboa students, English is a second language; they often work to help support the family; and often their parents don't speak English and haven't been to high school, let alone college. "These are kids who do not have a lot of family experience with college, are not always encouraged, and sometimes, are actively discouraged by their communities," Salisbury said.

Salisbury, who described herself as a fan of the program before her tour, says, "My enthusiasm for the program knew no bounds after that." She immediately took on the task of raising the matching funds. "A matching grant isn't exactly free money, but it's there for the taking. It seemed to me \$20,000 was an amount of money we ought to be able to raise, and I decided to put my money where my mouth was."

Salisbury made good on her pledge by writing the first check at a BASF Foundation board meeting to kick off the campaign. ("I've since learned that carrying my checkbook is risky business.") She then turned to her firm and presented the challenge to the management committee (she sits on the committee) and "got a \$10,000 commitment right off the bat."

"We decided to raise the rest of the money from individual donations within the firm," Salisbury says. The checks starting flowing her way. "Pretty much every time I talk about it, someone hands me a check."

Soon, Salisbury had closed to within \$6,000 of her goal. That's when the firm's associates stepped in. Every year they sponsor a fundraiser, a Jeopardy-style trivia contest, in which the firm fronts a team to compete against summer associates. For \$10 a vote, attorneys can buy their way on, or off, the trivia team. Last year, the firm raised \$2,500 for the Muscular Dystrophy Association. The contest, run by associate David M. Catechi, is "frontier justice" at its best, he says. "I don't believe in the trickle-down hazing theory. I like to bring it up. The contest almost always leads to embarrassment for some attorney." (Summer associates, generally, are spared, and tend to be strong competitors.)

The trick for all but the most daring, of course, is to buy your way off the team while voting others on it. Litigation partner Robert Ward plays Alex Trebek and comes up with the questions. Past categories have included 1980s movies, baseball, American literature, and the Simpsons. By the August 1 contest date, Catechi had raised \$5,200, beating last year's amount and bringing Salisbury closer to her goal.

Thanks to the Lurie Foundation and Shartsis Friese, BASF leadership is now able to consider which public high school will be home to the second program. Funding will provide a school-site coordinator, like Restrepo, says Jayne Salinger, director of BASF's pipeline programs.

The fundraising campaign has reached a critical momentum, Cox says. "The Lurie money gives credibility to our other fundraising proposals," she says.

More importantly perhaps, the program is rock solid at Balboa. Restrepo is known in the halls there and recently served as a chaperone for a school dance. "There's this level of trust that's been developed, and it's important for the students to see me outside my office."

Her individual impact is tremendous. She recalled Lucky Shah, a student who came from Pakistan in 2000. After the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, he felt ostracized in middle school. His grades suffered. In high school, he did no better. When Restrepo got to him, he was a class clown with a low GPA who had already written off his high school career. "He figured he would start over in community college. He was not really connected to any resources," Restrepo says.

With Restrepo's help, he quietly began to focus on the college process. He was able to meet with a representative from Humboldt State University, and according to Restrepo, "that day he made the connection. He could see himself in college. He told me, 'I am going to do this.' He got in, on the merit that he wants to be the first one in his family to go to college. He didn't have stellar grades, but his story was so compelling, it put him over the top."

Lucky Shah starts college this fall at Humboldt State. Restrepo is confident he will do well.

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