

**Teachers' Treasures, Inc.**  
**2003 Indiana Achievement Awards**  
**Award Category: Innovation/Small Organization**  
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**Award Sponsor: Nina Mason Pulliam Charitable Trust**

**Organizational Mission**

The mission of Teachers' Treasures, Inc. is to serve the educational and creative needs of children in the greater Indianapolis area by providing a unique means to transfer donated merchandise from businesses and individuals to teachers for use in their classrooms and schools.

**Organizational Overview**

Urban school budgets are under pressure. Teachers, students, and parents are learning how to get by with less money and supplies. Often teachers who are confronted with the resource deficits of their schools spend \$500 or more out of pocket to provide materials to students. This situation led a group of concerned individuals to identify the need for a free materials center patterned after "Crayons 2 Computers" in Cincinnati.

Teachers' Treasures, Inc. was organized and opened for distribution August, 2000. Teachers from 16 targeted schools (poverty index of 85% or higher) shopped for supplies from donated materials. It is the only state organization attempting to solve the need for school supplies by matching free materials available in the community with children who need them.

Teachers' Treasures, Inc. intended audience is 68,900 students in 134 schools identified with a poverty index of 40% or higher. The method of reaching this audience is through classroom teachers in eligible schools shopping on a scheduled basis for free materials.

**Program Description**

Many education experts agree that when children attend school without basic supplies they are already one step behind their peers before the educational process begins. Creativity is sacrificed when supplies are not available and children may withdraw from school participation and special projects when they feel inadequate and different. The primary goal of Teachers' Treasures is to promote student success by helping to "level the playing field."

Teachers' Treasures is the only program in the state created specifically to offer free school supplies to teachers in certain schools within central Indiana. These schools are identified by Title 1 as having a poverty index of 40% or higher. Students within this

category are often unable to bring needed basic materials to school. They are at risk of becoming behavior problems as well as attendance problems.

The program was established in August, 2000 after a year of planning. A strategic plan was developed by a committee with a representative from Gleaners Food Bank, a school principal, the Re-do-Re-use director, and a local consultant. A grant from Re-do-Re-use paid for development of the strategic plan.

The strategic plan conceived the problem as multi-faceted: thousands of students without basic supplies, under paid teachers purchasing student essentials and motivational awards, and an abundance of adaptable materials being discarded by businesses and individuals. In order to solve this problem, the general public must be made aware of the great need of students and the ways of using unwanted materials to ameliorate some of these needs. Local industry identifies a means for helping improve education in the community, for being good corporate citizens, and for finding an alternative to disposal for obsolete or excess inventory or supplies.

### **Program Results**

Teachers' Treasures goal is to reach all needy students in central Indiana. The strategic plan envisioned beginning with 16 target schools with a poverty index of 85% and higher. Opening day saw 160 teachers wait in line to receive supplies. As donations increased, schools were added. By June, 2001, 66 schools with a 70% poverty index were shopping on a scheduled basis.

In 2000-2001, a total of 2632 teacher visits delivered \$484,151.21 dollars worth of donated materials from 160 donors to 35,000 students. During the 2001-2002 school year, 4882 teacher visits resulted in distribution of \$1,054,807.28 dollars worth of donated materials from 257 donors to over 63,000 students in 109 schools. Currently, teachers from 134 public and private schools, serving 68,900 students (poverty index of 40% or higher) are invited to shop for supplies on a regular basis.

Teachers' Treasures is highly efficient in achieving its results. In 2000-2001, it distributed over a half million dollars of donated material with one paid employee and 55 volunteers who donated more than 1900 hours. More than a million dollars of donated supplies were distributed the following year employing two full-time and one part-time employee, and 257 volunteers who gave more than 5,200 hours.

### **Program Impact**

Teachers' Treasures has had effects on several levels. The most conspicuous is the energy it has infused into the teachers, students, and schools that are direct beneficiaries of the program. Teachers in the target schools now feel supported. They are able to channel their energy and resources into more effective creative effort on behalf of their students.

They can also see how the larger community has stepped forward to improve the results they produce.

Students now have the resources they need to achieve at their potential. They also no longer have to feel like second-class citizens because their resources are inferior to students in other schools with a stronger resource base and more parental and endowment support.

A byproduct of the program is that usable items are now kept out of the waste stream. Most donated products would have been thrown away because they needed re-packaging, repair, or were obsolete.

Donors indicated that it was destined to be thrown away as it had been in the past. Another impact of the program has been to create opportunities for part-time employment, student entrepreneurship, and youth training programs for student enhancement and development.

### **Potential as a Model**

This program can be replicated. Several steps that Teachers' Treasures took prior to starting contain lessons for other jurisdictions contemplating similar programs. The process should begin with formation of a broadly representative committee to assess the need for a re-use facility. In addition, the study committee should determine sources of donations within the region. Another valuable step is site visits to similar programs. These site visits should involve interested parties, especially prospective board members. Once a decision is made to move forward, the board should file to incorporate as a 501(c)(3).

Teachers' Treasures has already begun to help others follow its lead. They assisted staff of the Johnson County Solid Waste Treatment Program as that organization sought to add a section of school supplies for teachers in their district. Teachers' Treasures was able to help Johnson County, which decided to charge a handling fee for service, with ideas, organization, and an exchange of product. A teacher in Lexington, Kentucky has also contacted them for ideas in starting such a facility. In addition, the Chamber of Commerce in Charlotte, North Carolina made several contacts asking for ideas about how to begin and floor plans. During the spring of 2002, 25 people came to town for a meeting and visited the facility.