Firm Foundation

Group offers women, families support ‘to move up in life’

By Lesley Young
Special to The Commercial Appeal

When Leslie Shaw and her two grandchildren were moved out of the Dixie Homes public housing complex in 2008 during its redevelopment, she was convinced she would be back.

While she waited to return to her apartment of 14 years, the Women’s Foundation for a Greater Memphis contacted Shaw to see how she was doing.

That meeting would change the trajectory of her life.

Shaw, 51, who has adopted her 7-year-old granddaughter and has custody of her 13-year-old grandson, is now studying sociology at Southwest Tennessee Community College, living in a town house in Raleigh, and serving as a facilitator for various programs offered by the Women’s Foundation.

“The Women’s Foundation for a Greater Memphis saw something in me that I didn’t see in myself, and that motivated me to want to do better,” Shaw said.

Shaw’s story is one of hundreds of similar accounts from 1,200 former and current public housing families for whom the organization provides case management through its partner, Urban Strategies Memphis Hope.

• “The Women’s Foundation for a Greater Memphis is focused on supporting women and children by providing support services so that they can have access to and can create opportunities for a better lifestyle,” said Ruby Bright, the executive director and CAO of the foundation.

The 18-year-old foundation partners with more than 100 nonprofits, offering more than 350 programs and serving 16,500 clients a year.

Shaw first enrolled in one of the foundation’s classes, “Getting Ahead in a Just Getting By World.”

“I actually learned I was statistically living in poverty and didn’t realize it. This made me want to uplift myself and try to move up in life,” said Shaw, who earned a scholarship and a Pell grant for college.

“Bridges out of Poverty: Strategies for Professionals and Communities,” in which she now acts as a facilitator, offered her a better understanding of how to relate to others and find access to the necessary resources for economic self-sufficiency.

The organization relies heavily on financial contributions, such as grant-making, community initiatives and public-private partnerships, raising and investing millions of dollars in its...
I consider myself an information activist. I try to have access to information to give to others that may not know about the opportunities that are available to them. I search for information to help myself, my kids, and the community and I love it.”

Leslie Shaw, president, Women’s Foundation for a Greater Memphis

Blue musician Ken Gibson: DeltaArts

ARTS

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“The Arts is a must. When the arts are not a part of the curriculum, we would be in a different world.” The Lincoln Center Institute for the Arts in Education has previously focused on arts education in schools. This year, the institute is partnering with the Portland Art Museum to launch a new initiative called “Arts in Schools.” The program is designed to help teachers develop skills in working with artists, and to create opportunities for students to participate in the arts. For more information, visit the institute’s website at www.artsinstitutes.org or call 800-555-5555.

For more information, visit www.wfwm.org, or call 901-578-9346.