

Pitch Perfect

Greenwich women find strength in numbers—in more ways than one



Pitch Your Peers cofounders:
Dara Johnson, Rachael
LeMasters, Nina Lindia and
Brooke Bohnsack

Members must live in Greenwich, be invited to join and all nonprofits that are pitched must either be based in Greenwich or work in town. “It’s like *Shark Tank* for charities,” Nina says laughing, “except the women are so much nicer to each other than the TV sharks.”

This past fall, the fifty-nine PYP members gathered at First County Bank’s corporate offices in Stamford for pitch night. They came to listen to their peers tell the story of four Greenwich nonprofits (see sidebar,

A few years ago, Nina Lindia realized that her charitable giving was frequent but diffused: \$50 here, \$100 there, a ticket for a luncheon, a sponsorship for a walk. Nothing seemed significant. “The asks were for really worthy causes that my friends supported, but I thought there had to be a better way to give,” she says.

Together with three friends, Brooke Bohnsack, Dara Johnson and Rachael LeMasters, she started Pitch Your Peers (PYP). The group does exactly what the name implies. Annually, members contribute \$1,000 and then pitch the causes that matter most to them to other members, hoping to win the pooled money. The only rules:

opposite), and why each is worthy of this year’s group donation. “We run it like a boardroom,” Nina says. “We don’t apologize for asking for money. We pitch.”

The presentations were polished, professional, educational and persuasive, and most important, passionate, exactly what

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the group of four envisioned when they began PYP three years ago. There were gasps as scary statistics were rattled off, tears at some of the stories, and encouragement, cheers and applause both before, during and after each pitch. It was a perfect example of philanthropy done correctly.

After pitch night, each nonprofit offered an open house, giving members

the opportunity to see the work being done firsthand. Online voting followed, and a month later the winners were announced. Kids in Crisis received the top award, \$40,000 (which was matched by KIC board member Christine Hikawa and her husband, David Windreich), with Mothers for Others receiving a second-place \$17,000 award.

Jodi Applegate, one of the four pitch champions for Kids in Crisis, said the timing could not be better for the nonprofit since it has lost its state funding. "This money will help them provide services that are essential and very expensive," Jodi says.

PYP member Karina Solomon, who also pitched for Kids in Crisis, adds: "The members of PYP commit time, money and resources to help those in need. Especially at a point in time when funding for so many charities is in jeopardy, such as is the case with Kids in Crisis, PYP is more critical than ever for those struggling in our area."

Both Jodi and Nina are quick to point out that, although there were two winners, there were no losers since pitches raise the organizations' profile before a group of women with the means to make a difference. Kids in Crisis is such an example. Last year the group came in second, winning \$5,500. What a difference a year makes. —Valerie Foster

WORTHY CAUSES: 2017 PITCHES

1. KIDS IN CRISIS (THIS YEAR'S WINNER OF \$40,000)

For forty years, Kids in Crisis has protected infants, children and tweens from abuse, neglect and family crisis. They provide free, round-the-clock crisis intervention counseling, temporary emergency shelter, a wide array of prevention programs in local communities and area schools, and advocacy throughout Connecticut. **PYP champions:** Karina Solomon, Lisa Getson, Suzanne Stillwell, and Jodi Applegate

2. MOTHERS FOR OTHERS (THIS YEAR'S WINNER OF \$17,000)

Mothers for Others supports the well-being of underserved

families by providing diapers and gently used baby equipment for children from birth to three years old. Started by local mothers, the organization has served more than 1,000 families in the Greenwich area since 2011. Mothers for Others is volunteer run and receives client referrals from Family Centers, Greenwich Department of Human Services, Kids in Crisis and the YWCA. **PYP champions:** Rachael LeMasters and Brooke Bohnsack

3. EMILY CATHERINE FEDORKO FOUNDATION

The Emily Catherine Fedorko Foundation was founded after sixteen-year-old Emily, then a student at Greenwich High School, died in a boating accident. ECFF provides funding to spread education, advocacy and awareness of boating and water-sport safety for adults and children. Through the work of the ECFF, boating laws and boat-operator licensing in our area have been dramatically improved. **PYP champion:** JJ Worden

4. FOOD RESCUE U.S.

Food Rescue U.S., with the help of volunteer drivers, picks up fresh, usable food from restaurants and grocers that would have otherwise been thrown away and delivers the food to families and organizations in need. In Greenwich, food is picked up from Whole Foods, Kings, Upper Crust, Napoli and Sound Beach Pizza and is delivered to Kids in Crisis, Neighbor to Neighbor, Inspirica and Pacific House. **PYP champions:** Whitney Keys and Lara Stewart —Valerie Foster

THE FUTURE AND BEYOND

The four cofounders never wanted PYP to become a franchise, but they always knew it could easily be duplicated. There is now a chapter in Seattle. (A friend of a friend of Nina Lindia saw a posting about PYP on Facebook and wanted to know more about it; Nina traveled to Seattle and a chapter was born.) There is also interest from women in other towns throughout Fairfield County, and Nina sees no reason why this idea cannot become a national initiative.

In addition to pitch night, there are social times throughout the year, so members can meet, mingle and get to know each other.

Last year PYP formed School PYP, a mentor program for high school girls in Greenwich. Teams from Greenwich High School, Sacred Heart and the Stanwich School delivered presentations to PYP members; \$3,000, \$2,000 and \$1,000 prizes were awarded.