

Donor Spotlight

Beth Dillinger Foundation

Helping Kids in Need and Healing a Heartache



Bob and Kay Dillinger are never far from fond memories of their daughter, Beth.

Her legacy of kindness and caring has paved the way to promising futures with Take Stock in Children, an initiative of the Pinellas Education Foundation. “We wanted to take what happened and make something positive out of it,” Kay says softly.

It is still difficult for them to talk about. In 2006, their world was shattered when their beloved daughter and only child took her life at

age 31. But amid their unfathomable grief, they found a way to turn a parent’s nightmare into a dream for countless struggling children and teens through the creation of the Beth Dillinger Foundation, which has a special bond with the Pinellas Education Foundation.

“It gave me a reason to leave the house and try to do something positive in Beth’s name,” Kay adds. “It was the only way I could continue.”

In 2007, they decided to form a nonprofit organization that would offer a much-needed helping hand to Pinellas youth facing deeply perilous circumstances – and perhaps save some lives in the process. From that desire to make a difference, the Beth Dillinger Foundation began to take shape. To date, nearing its 14th year of existence, the Dillinger Foundation has raised more than \$3 million to benefit Pinellas youth in need.

“They took this tremendous tragedy, the loss of their daughter, and just look at what they’ve done with it through the Beth Dillinger Foundation,” says close friend Bob McIntyre, a past Pinellas Education Foundation Chairman, as well as a longtime board member and supporter. “Here’s a foundation that not only clothes and feeds children. But it also educates them through their partnership with us.”

McIntyre and his wife Joanne, who provided comfort as the Dillingers coped with unimaginable heart-break, eventually connected the couple to the Pinellas Education Foundation and its signature program, Take Stock in Children, as a way of building the organization.

The Beth Dillinger Foundation soon became deeply involved in helping low-income Pinellas students achieve success in middle school and high school, with the promise of a Take Stock in Children college scholarship. The funds they contributed have enhanced the lives of students who might otherwise never be able to attend college (with the Pinellas Education Foundation providing a 4-1 match). To date, the Beth Dillinger Foundation has sponsored 256 financially disadvantaged students through Take Stock in Children.

“What makes the program so effective is having the mentor,” Bob Dillinger says. “And that’s why I think the Pinellas Education Foundation has such a high success rate of children completing what they started out to do – whether it’s vocational or educational or academic.

“Partnering with the Foundation has allowed us to help give scholarships to children who would otherwise not be able to enjoy higher education,” adds Kay. “It’s tremendous to be able to provide a helping hand.”

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The partnership provided another key benefit in the early stages. “It gave us credibility right off the bat,” Bob says. “Anyone knew when they gave money to us for scholarships, it would be well administered by the Pinellas Education Foundation. That really played a role in our ability to raise more money.”

The Beth Dillinger Foundation has, in turn, given back to the Pinellas Education Foundation by contributing to the Stavros Society, a special giving group that supports numerous Pinellas Education Foundation initiatives. Another endeavor close to the Dillingers’ hearts is Beth’s Closet, originally stocked with their daughter’s outfits and accessories.

Housed at the Pace Center for Girls, the closet allows at-risk girls to select items normally beyond their means: dresses, jeans, T-shirts, blouses, skirts, pajamas, shoes, jewelry and purses. “Beth was a clothes horse – she loved shopping and getting good deals,” Kay says. “It means so much because some of the girls haven’t had anything new for three years.”



Left to right: Close friends Bob and Joanne McIntyre, Cat Coats and Lance Becatti (of the Beth Dillinger Foundation Board), and Bob and Kay Dillinger.

Bob is recently retired from his career as Pinellas County Public Defender, spanning 45 years (including 24 as an elected official), which inspired other forms of giving like Hope Chest and Beth’s Corner. “His entire career has been dedicated to helping those less fortunate, and he’s been my inspiration as far as running the Foundation,” says Kay.

Their most recent program, Nourish to Flourish, began after Bob learned that there were some 7,000 chronically hungry children – those who go to bed hungry or have insufficient food on weekends – in Pinellas County. “That really bothered me,” Bob remembers. The Dillingers thus added a program that provides healthy meals for children who don’t receive enough nourishment at home.

Running their foundation, including the annual “Value Me” Luncheon and Fashion Show, has taken a team effort. For her part, Kay was honored as a Lightning Community Hero in 2013. “It was very humbling,” she says. “But it’s not just me. It’s Bob. It’s all my friends. It’s all the volunteers.”

And it’s a special daughter, whose memory continues to touch lives and make a difference for so many.



**Pinellas Education
Foundation**

Inspired minds transform lives