



## A Letter from Lindsey

Recently, the Eugene and Agnes Meyer Foundation interviewed Lindsey Buss, one of the recipients of its 2009 Exponent Award, for their on-line newsletter. Since the interview touched on so much of what has been happening at Martha's Table this past year, we thought we would reprint some excerpts here. To read the entire interview, see videos of Lindsey, and to find out more about the Exponent Award visit the Meyer Foundation website: [www.meyerfoundation.org](http://www.meyerfoundation.org)

-Editor

### • What is Martha's Table and what does it do?

Martha's Table finds solutions to poverty in the short term and the long term. We address emergency needs with food and clothing programs and break the long cycle of poverty with education and family services.

### • What sacrifices have you had to make as a result of the economic downturn?

Since early fall 2008, we've dedicated more effort to analyzing options, creating contingency plans, and communicating those plans.

We implemented a combination of immediate cuts with contingency plans that would allow us to move quickly if things became worse or better than our baseline prediction. The items removed immediately from the budget would stretch programs even further than usual, but not close them down: a hiring freeze, the elimination of our modest merit increases, and the reduction of classroom and food supplies. Under the leadership of our Board and the help of our staff, going into 2009, we had cut 7% from our 2008 budget.

### • Were there any unexpected opportunities or strategies that presented themselves due to the downturn?

Some of the greatest energy came from people wanting to jump in and help as the growing need for emergency services swelled. There also were many people finding new solutions that help us save money and provide healthier food. Farms and gleaning were the big answer for many of us who address hunger. Sending volunteers out to farms to pick fruits and vegetables left from farms who have already harvested will save us \$50,000 in 2009. Through Share Our Strength's Operation Frontline, the Capital Area Food Bank provides us with free or low-cost food and offers cooking classes to our families to help them cook healthier meals.

### • How do you keep staff morale up during these challenging times?

Like so many of us, Martha's Table has had to do more with less. Much of that burden has fallen on the staff, and so morale has become an even bigger focus for us. Several solutions have come from the staff, such as a spa day (services donated) and pot luck lunches. The biggest effort that helped our staff and that of other nonprofits was the creation of a nonprofit kickball league by a staff member of our Teen Program, Ron Allen. We had a total of five teams this summer: Martha's Table, Latin American Youth Center (LAYC), N Street Village, Urban Alliance, and Sitar Arts Center. Staff from each department would come to the games to represent Martha's Table and to connect as teammates.



Lindsey Buss (far right) with volunteers

### • Tell us a few of the significant ways in which the organization has grown or changed under your leadership.

I originally hoped to have an impact externally by reaching out to develop relationships with other nonprofits. I have found that this has also helped us internally.

I helped found the DC Alliance of Youth Advocates over four years ago, in response to a pressing need for youth advocacy representation in DC. We have now built a coalition of 100 youth-serving agencies that help provide a voice for youth and youth services in this city. We have seen our quality rise, with better services to our children, youth, and parents, and higher quality and nutritional content in our food. We have become one of only two nationally accredited after-school programs in D.C.

Partnerships – with First Helpings, Hermano Pedro, Whitman Walker, and AARP Legal Counsel for the Elderly, to name a few – have helped us to provide a broader range of services to our clients.

Internally, we hired a human resources staff member, analyzed and improved our benefits, created job descriptions, instituted an annual performance review and merit raise system (one of the victims of current budget cuts), and instituted a professional development program.

### • What do you want people to know about Martha's Table that they may not already know?

Sometimes people are surprised by how many children and youth we have here. We serve 300 children and youth ranging in age from three months to 18 years. Most of them come to our site on 14th Street and we also have programs at Banneker Senior High School and Shaw Middle School. People may be surprised that in addition to our clients that come directly to us, there are over 80 other nonprofits and government agencies that refer people to us for food and clothing. Finally, we have 10,000 volunteers a year.



## Snapshots of Recent Events Around the Table

### 30 Years of Stories

2010 is going to be Martha's Table's 30th year of operation, and as part of an on-going project that we are calling *30 Stories for 30 Years*, we are collecting stories and pictures from those who have known us from our start in 1980 until now. We are hoping to capture as much of Martha's Table's history as possible, especially our early history. If you have volunteered with us, donated to us, received services from us or have visited us—we would love to hear from you! If you have any photographs or stories to share, please contact Ann Brookover in our Development Office. Ann can be reached at 202/328-6608 x224 or via e-mail at [abrookover@marthastable.com](mailto:abrookover@marthastable.com).



### Extreme Makeover: Martha's Table Edition



The Heart of America Foundation completely transformed the Martha's Table Children's Program Library in early November. To give you an idea of where we started, our previous "bookshelves," were made out of milk crates. The Heart of America Foundation generously donated many hours of hard work, and the change they enacted is astounding.

The almost 300 low-income children aged 3 months to 18 years who participate in Martha's Table's education and enrichment programs now have a wonderful new reading room with freshly painted walls covered with inspiring quotations, filled with more than 1,500 books, organized in numerous (real) bookcases, comfortable reading chairs, and decorated with original artwork by Disney artist Ceilia Washington and an artist from Life Pieces to Masterpieces, a youth program in DC.

In addition, each child at Martha's Table received three brand new books to add to his or her own home library!

This transformation occurred with the help of several members of Leadership Greater Washington. Lindsey Buss, the President of Martha's Table, worked together with three other LGW members to create the new reading room. The Dean of Education at Howard University, Dr. Leslie Fenwick, enlisted the help of Howard students who worked diligently for a week, painting, building, and organizing the new room. Mary Brown, the Executive Director and Co-Founder of Life Pieces to Masterpieces, coordinated the donation of the artwork for the walls. Last but certainly not least, Angie Halamandaris, Co-Founder and Executive Director of Heart of America made the entire project possible.

### Former Member of Our Teen Program Makes it BIG!

The nominations for the 52nd Annual Grammy Awards were announced in late November, and among the nominees in the category Best Musical Album for Children is *Banjo to Beatbox* by Cathy & Marcy with Special Guest Christylez Bacon. We at Martha's Table know Chris



well. He participated in our Teen Program in 2004 and 2005, and has come back to Martha's Table to work with the teens on various aspects of music production during the past several summers. Chris, who was recently the Artist in Residence at the Strathmore Music Center, also graciously agreed to play at Martha's Table's Volunteer Appreciation event last year, and he was a big hit. *Banjo to Beatbox*, a collaboration with Chris, Cathy Fink and Marcy Marxner, is described as "beatbox (mouth drums) meets the banjo, nursery rhyme meets hip-hop fractured fairy tale and traditional folk song meets a whole new sound!"

All of us at Martha's Table will be rooting for Chris come Grammy time next February. Chris already has the votes from one group of fans. Simone Johnson, the Director of our Child Development Center tells us that the toddlers and pre-schoolers in the program have been listening to the CD and have been dancing up a storm.

To hear snippets of the songs and to buy a copy of the CD, please visit <http://www.cathymarcy.com/store/>.

### Trick or Eat?

On Halloween, one donor turned her night of trick-or-treating into a meaningful experience and took the opportunity to help out Martha's Table and the many people who come to us for emergency food each month. Ilanna Star organized her neighborhood and school and encouraged her friends and neighbors to ask for canned food donations while they were trick-or-treating.



Ilanna handed out bags to friends to collect the food, with a sign on the bags saying, "For some people Halloween can be a fun holiday with cute costumes and candy for kids; for those people who do not celebrate on October 31st, it can be a day to help hungry people and do a mitzvah!"

And Ilanna chose to help out many hungry people, donating carloads of non-perishable goods and that food will be enjoyed by many! Thanks, Ilanna!

