

CHILDREN AT HEART OF GRANTS

The teachers and staff who accepted CCSE grants on behalf of their schools at this year's awards ceremony had one thing in common: a fervent commitment to addressing the challenges of students with special needs. Each spoke of the children who would directly benefit from the grants.

One of these students is Conor, a third grader at St. Mary of the Mills in Laurel, whose education has helped him develop a sense of self-worth that allows him to effectively communicate with other children, according to Margaret Hubbard, St. Mary of the Mills assistant principal.

"On International "Talk Like a Pirate" Day, Conor was visiting with his first grade teacher," Hubbard told the gathered crowd at the awards ceremony. "When the teacher reminded him that it was time to go back to his classroom he said, 'Argh! I was just visiting, matey!' and with a quick wave and mischievous grin, went happily on his way." Hubbard remembered that when Conor first came to St. Mary, he was unable to interact successfully with other children.

The CCSE grant St. Mary of the Mills received will help fund the salaries of para-professionals who work with students with autism spectrum disorder.

Interspersed with their stories about the children who would benefit directly, were insights about how the whole school community was richer and more complete because it welcomed all children through its doors.

Jack, a St. Mary's second grader with special needs who loves to sing, and his fellow classmates will all benefit from the grant. "Singing helps him refocus and find his bearings...Often, one will see Jack in the hallway with one of his classmates—his audience—performing a mini concert," Hubbard said. Once, Hubbard watched Jack's classmate, who did not have special needs, quietly applaud his song, take him by the hand, then lead him back into the classroom.

Backed by Church social teaching which



Children from St. John the Evangelist, Silver Spring

Photo by Noelyne Arizona

calls for a spirit of openness to, and preference for, the most vulnerable among us, Catholic schools are uniquely called to welcome into the school community and educate children with special needs, said Dr. Timothy P. Shriver, chairman of Special Olympics, who also holds a masters in religion and religious studies and a doctorate in education. Special Olympics is an international nonprofit organization dedicated to empowering individuals with intellectual disabilities to become physically fit, productive and respected members of society.

But many Catholic schools have not lived up to this calling, Shriver said after the CCSE ceremony. For the last 30 years, Catholic educators have been limited by budgetary constraints, Shriver said, as well as a society that emphasizes high test scores over inclusion, fairness and justice.

"We have the tools, uniquely," Shriver said. "But we still have the challenge to live up to the Gospel teaching."

Shriver recognizes the impact children with special needs have on the rest of the community.

"People with special needs present enormous learning opportunities to those who don't have special needs...enormous learning opportunities about the value of courage, about the value of determination," Shriver said.

One such story of determination in action

is that of Tre, another St. Mary third grader.

"When Tre first came to us, he would not put pencil to paper without having someone sitting right next to him, guiding him through each activity," Hubbard said. This year, however, "Tre has discovered his voice as a writer and is writing wonderful stories about an elephant named Tusk and an alien who visits our school."

Whether it's Conor developing social skills, Jack finding a constructive, emotional outlet, or Tre channeling creative energy into story writing, these children are benefiting from the care of Catholic education, Hubbard and other educators say. These educators believe that each student, no matter what their intellectual, social, or physical capabilities, has something unique to offer the community. And they believe Catholic education is uniquely qualified to foster this environment where special needs children are able to develop their individual potential.

"We firmly believe that the extra personnel we have been able to place in the classrooms have helped these kids enjoy some of the successes they have," Hubbard said. "We wouldn't have been able to do that without CCSE."

Teresa Blazewicz. Teresa is a recent college graduate interested in special education issues.

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CCSE, KANE TEAM UP TO PRODUCE VIDEO

When the idea of assisting in the production of a video for the Catholic Coalition for Special Education came to David Kane, he didn't see it as just another project. It was a task essential to spreading a heart-felt message.

Kane's involvement with CCSE began when his neighbor, a CCSE board member, asked him to join the board.

"As I looked into it, I learned that some Catholic schools are not fully accommodating children with disabilities," said Kane, founder of Kane Real Estate Services in Bethesda, MD. "This population of students with special needs is really underserved. Our responsibility as Catholics and parents is to ensure we educate all children to reach their full potential."

Today, Kane is a member of the CCSE Board of Directors and passionate about the cause of inclusive education.

Several board members pushed the idea of a video as a moving way to show educators and administrators the significant impact that CCSE is making in area Catholic schools. Kane became the concept's driving force. Today CCSE uses the six-and-half-minute video to promote its mission to educators, parishes, families and potential supporters.



David Kane & his uncle, Msgr. Thomas Kane.

Kane's eagerness to help CCSE sprang from his own experiences as a student.

"I had learning disabilities as a child and there was no one to help me through the difficult time I had as a student," said Kane. "Now, with so much more known about learning disabilities, I am happy to help other children avoid that painful period of feeling lost and no one teaching them how to learn in their own ways."

Aside from providing his own donation, Kane made calls and generated enough contributions to pay for almost all of the cost of the video, "If You Believe in Me.... I'll Believe in Me." However, that wasn't all Kane did.

"Along with his tireless efforts to raise sufficient funds, he found the producer who works with one of the best, Emmy-Award

winning directors/cameramen in town," said Francesca Pellegrino, president of CCSE.

Pellegrino and CCSE directors Carin Collins and Mary Brogan spent hours visiting schools and speaking to educators to determine which to feature in the video. Pellegrino accompanied the film crew on shoots, sometimes for more than 10 hours a day, and she and Brogan spent hours pouring over transcripts and editing the video late into the evening. For guidance throughout the project, CCSE enlisted the input of Seattle professionals and relatives Brad Huskinson, an accomplished director and videographer, and Virginia Pellegrino, a producer and writer.

The work paid off. The video has been well received and generated new interest in CCSE's programs, both locally and nationally.

"It was intense, but it was a labor of love," Pellegrino said.

Frank Maniglia, Jr. President of MVI Post, Falls Church, VA was videographer and director, and Virginia Wolf produced it. See the video at CCSE's website, www.ccse-maryland.org or on Youtube.

David Sabia. David is a junior, at Boston University majoring in Journalism. His brother, Stephen, has Down Syndrome.

CCSE AWARDS \$101,500 IN GRANTS TO FOUR CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

Since 2005, the Catholic Coalition for Special Education, Inc. (CCSE) has provided Catholic schools in Washington DC and Maryland with the extra support they need to offer children with special needs a chance at success by awarding grants to promote their education. Each year, CCSE has increased the total amount of grants it awards. At the 2008 Grant Awards Ceremony this fall, CCSE made it possible for four area schools to continue effectively their commitment to these children.

CCSE awarded a total of \$101,500 in grants, up from the \$84,000 it awarded in 2007.

"We are most grateful for this award," says Sister Kathleen Lannak, principal of St. John the Evangelist School in Silver Spring, which received an award of \$24,000. "It

eases the financial stress to the budget necessary to carry out the program effectively." The school, which also received a grant last year, will use the funds to supplement the salaries of two paraprofessionals who work directly with the students with special needs at St. John's.

St. Mary of the Mills was awarded its second CCSE grant, this year for \$37,500, to supplement the salaries of paraprofessionals dedicated to students with autism spectrum disorders and emotional disorders. CCSE awarded its first ever grant ---for \$30,000 --- to Our Lady of Lourdes in Bethesda to supplement the salary of a special education teacher dedicated to students with developmental disabilities.

Mount St. Joseph High School in Baltimore

received a challenge grant of \$10,000. It will use this grant to support the young men in their school's St. Giles "Come Sit by Me" Program. The program, named after one of the patron saints of individuals with disabilities, serves high school students with developmental disabilities. It was the third year Mount St. Joseph had received CCSE support.

Upon receiving their individual grants, each school expressed gratitude to CCSE and vowed to be good stewards of their award.

For more information on the Believe in Me! Grant-Making Program and/or Technical Assistance Outreach Services please contact CCSE at grants@ccse-maryland.org or (301) 933-8844.

MOUNT ST. JOE'S BOYS WITH DISABILITIES MEET POTENTIAL

When Ben Stevick and his family began looking for high schools in 2005, he thought Mount St. Joseph High School, a Catholic boys' school in Baltimore, would be the perfect place. Ben's older brother, Matt, had graduated from Mt. St. Joe's, and a number of Ben's classmates from St. Mary of the Mills School in Laurel planned to attend the Catholic high school after graduating.

However, Ben had a unique challenge: he has Down Syndrome.

Ben's parents, Dick and Doris Stevick, had considered a number of schools, but believed no other school would push Ben to reach his potential like Mount St. Joseph.

"As parents, we wanted for Ben what we wanted for our other (five) children," said Doris Stevick. "and that was the opportunity for him to be challenged and encouraged to be the best that he could be."

Mount St. Joseph is one of the first Catholic High School programs in the United States to take on the initiative of providing inclusive instructional assistance in the regular academic classroom for students with intellectual disabilities.

After solidifying the school as their top choice, the Stevicks approached Principal Barry Fitzpatrick.

"Initially, I was a little skeptical because I knew that he wouldn't be able to meet the academic requirements that everybody else could," said Fitzpatrick, who worked with children with Down syndrome when he was in high school. "But I never told them 'no'."

Fitzpatrick took the plan to the school's

president, Brother James Kelly. Brother Kelly agreed, but was concerned how MSJ would pay for the program since he was the moneyman in charge of the school's finances.

Mount St. Joseph was committed to starting a program for students with developmental disabilities with the arrival of Ben Stevick. While the commitment was there, the funding was not. That's where CCSE came in.

CCSE helped solve the problem by awarding Mount St. Joseph a one-year \$42,000 grant to support Ben's enrollment. The grant helped fund equipment and pay the salary of Cheryl Hall, the coordinator/teacher who previously had worked with Ben as an aide at St. Mary of the Mills. Hall's job included modifying Ben's work and tests so they corresponded with work done by the rest of the academic class.

"Without the help of groups like the CCSE, we couldn't begin to do this," said Fitzpatrick.

"(Fitzpatrick said to us) 'Get up here, sign the paperwork, let's do this!'" said Stevick. "And it has been phenomenal since."

After awarding the first "magnificent" grant to Mount St. Joseph's, CCSE came through with an \$11,500 grant the following year and a \$10,000 matching grant for the 2008-09 year, Brother Kelly said.

"Once I saw the funding problem somewhat alleviated, I was more willing to see the program continue to develop because I think it's a wonderful program," he said.

That second grant enabled the Mount St.

Joseph's St. Giles Program to admit Andrew Wolfe, another child with Down syndrome, in 2007.

Before Andrew enrolled at Mount St. Joseph's he had been educated in a segregated setting and was not being challenged, said Hall, who had observed him in his prior school.



Mount St. Joseph student Ben Stevick distributes communion at a school Mass.

"I could tell he just wanted to be challenged and he has really risen to the occasion here," said Hall. "I'm so proud of them both."

Hall said CCSE's involvement was the key. "CCSE wants to eliminate the financial part," she said, "and I think once you get over that hurdle and have the administration saying this is something we should be doing, then you can go from there. It's not that difficult, we just need to have the support."

Doris Stevick shares Hall's sentiment. She hopes other Catholic schools will initiate programs to enable more students with special needs to reach their potential. It's paying off for Ben.

"I'm seeing Ben not put limits on himself," she said. "He keeps talking about college, his buddies, going and getting a job, buying a house. You name it. For parents of a kid with special needs, just seeing him have those dreams is precious."

David Sabia. David is a junior, at Boston University majoring in Journalism and is brother to Stephen, who has Down syndrome.

CCSE OFFERS TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE TO SCHOOLS

To promote and facilitate implementation of special education instruction in Catholic schools, CCSE will fund a limited number of technical assistance seed visits in Washington, D.C. and Maryland.

For more information about CCSE's Technical Assistance Program, see the website at <http://ccse-maryland.org/schools.html>, call 301.933.8844 or e-mail grants@ccse-maryland.org.

Technical assistance includes support in:

- In-Service training;
- co-teaching and collaborative teaching strategies;
- establishing and designing a new program and a daily schedule specifically tailored to the students' needs;
- defining the Admissions process, reviewing IEP's and educational reports;
- establishing a peer mentoring program;
- implementing appropriate modifications and accommodations.

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT: LESMESES FAMILY SHOWS SUPPORT IN BIG WAY

When attorneys Scott and Melissa (Missy) Lesmes decided to get involved with the Catholic Coalition for Special Education, they jumped in with both feet.

First, the couple joined others as founding benefactors of CCSE. Then Scott became the organization's pro bono legal counsel. Missy took a key role serving on the events committee for the Spring Benefit, CCSE's largest fundraiser, for each of the three years it has been held.

The Lesmes, parishioners at the Shrine of the Most Blessed Sacrament in Washington, DC., have a personal interest in the

valet parking. The Lesmes donated wine and liquor, time, energy and talent, and they identified numerous in-kind and monetary donations to help ensure the success of the Spring Benefits. They also invited many friends and associates, enabling CCSE to expand its base of contacts and donors.

The couple's commitment was contagious: after they became involved with CCSE, their parents, stepparents, siblings, aunts and uncles followed their lead.

Dorothy Shetterly, Scott's mother, donated flowers and floral arrangements for each annual Spring Benefit, as well as a dinner

Me Grant-Making Program and other programs. They have greatly contributed to CCSE's success."

"Volunteer Spotlight" is a regular feature highlighting an individual or family who has offered distinguished service to CCSE.

TEACHERS OFFERED TUITION ASSISTANCE

The CCSE recognizes there is a chronic and pervasive shortage of special education teachers qualified to provide individualized special education instruction in the classroom. To help offset this shortage CCSE has established the Teacher Tuition Assistance Program to provide financial assistance to teachers and other professionals pursuing advanced degrees in special education.

CCSE launched this program Dec. 1, 2008.

If you are interested in this opportunity please contact CCSE at 301.933.8844 or e-mail: grants@ccse-maryland.org.

See the website for further details at <http://ccse-maryland.org/tuition.html>.



Photo by Noelyne Alzona

CCSE volunteer Missy Lesmes and her son Scotty.

cause. They are parents of four children and their only son, Scotty, 12, has Down syndrome.

"The mission is very important, and we're committed to it," said Missy Lesmes, who attended Catholic schools as a child and whose other children attended Catholic elementary schools. "Overall, our philosophy is that just because a child has a disability, that shouldn't foreclose the opportunity for that child to have a faith-based education and be included in the Catholic school community."

For the spring fundraisers, Missy was instrumental in negotiating the best terms for everything from catering services to

and overnight stay at Silverbrook Farm, an historic inn in Purcellville, VA, that she owns and operates. Missy's sister, Jennifer, offered to do pro-bono communications work, and another relative, Art Willson, last year served as auctioneer for the Spring Benefit's Live Auction.

"It really is a family affair," said Missy Lesmes. "As they see it, they're doing something for Scotty."

"The Lesmes family has been a huge, driving force within CCSE," said CCSE President Francesca Pellegrino. "Their generosity has helped us limit spending on fundraising, which in turn has resulted in greater program funding for our Believe in

THE CCSE SPIRIT

The CCSE Spirit is published twice yearly by the Catholic Coalition for Special Education. CCSE expresses its thanks to Coakley & Williams Construction, Gaithersburg, MD, which generously donated graphic design, printing and mail services to make this newsletter possible.

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THE PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Dear Friends,

Welcome to this inaugural issue of CCSE Spirit. We are fortunate to have wonderful writers in our midst as well as the generous support of Pat Caulfield, president of Coakley & Williams Construction in Gaithersburg, Maryland, who donated design and printing services. Pat and his wife Connie are founding members of CCSE.

There is much to tell you. Three years ago, we launched the Believe in Me! Grant-Making Program and thanks to your generosity have been able to award about \$250,000.00 to schools seeking to increase their services to special needs students. We produced our promotional video If You Believe in Me...I'll Believe in Me., and established the school Technical Assistance Program and the Tuition Assistance to Teachers Program. Soon we will launch the Share the Word Campaign.

Had someone told me 25 years ago I would one day create a charitable organization to support children with disabilities in Catholic schools or a Disabilities Ministry at Blessed Sacrament Parish, I would have summarily dismissed the idea as idle folly. But the Lord has a plan.

It Began with Alex

Here I find myself today telling you about our son, Alex, who has changed the lives of my husband, Frank, and I dramatically since his birth in 1991. Alex is a warm, affectionate 17-year-old with a great sense of humor. He loves music and sports, and like every Italian, loves to eat and try new restaurants!

Alex was born with mild cerebral palsy, an intellectual disability, and a related medical condition. And he wants to do all the same things as his non-disabled peers. After years with Alex in and out of hospital and intensive care, trying to make sense of what doctors did or didn't tell us, I felt alone, angry and dejected; I suffered a profound crisis of faith.

Fortunately for me, my wonderful husband urged me to go to Mass regularly. Thanks to the homilies of one special priest, a transformation occurred deep within me

that took me from hopelessness to faith-filled action.

The challenges inherent in being the parent of a child with special needs have been many. But they have given me strength and character enough to reach out to other families who need the same help, support, love, understanding and peace. My experiences awoke in me the passion to strive for change in our community.

Dreams Shared and Deferred

Parents of children with and without disabilities share the same dreams: to offer each child the best opportunities to meet his or her potential. This dream drives us at CCSE: All children are welcomed into God's family at baptism. Jesus teaches us

I've met numerous parents, just like me, who earnestly want a Catholic education for their children. My vision is that one day soon their children will benefit from a full 12 years in a caring, compassionate Catholic school community. With CCSE's help, it can happen for your child!

CCSE Creates Community

Alex hasn't been fortunate enough to benefit from a Catholic education. But CCSE is creating a community that Alex didn't have before---and he and many others will benefit from it.

Research indicates that "typically developing" students (i.e. students without disabilities) derive academic benefits from involvement and relationships with

students with special needs. The presence of students with disabilities in the general education classroom provides a catalyst for learning opportunities that students with or without disabilities might not otherwise have. It is a win-win for all. As a Catholic family how can we afford not to do this?

Today's students without disabilities are tomorrow's leaders. We're counting on them to apply lessons learned from their positive Catholic classroom experiences alongside students with disabilities to their own family lives, workplaces

and communities.

Please share *CCSE Spirit* with your family, friends, colleagues, neighbors, educators and anyone who shares our passion for ensuring we welcome all God's children into our Catholic schools.

I look forward to meeting more of you and learning how we can join forces to make a difference in the lives of our children with disabilities as well as the Catholic schools we love.

Many blessings to you and your family as we begin the new year.

FPellegrino

Francesca Pellegrino
President and Founder



CCSE President Francesca Pellegrino with son Alex and husband Frank Pellegrino, CCSE Vice President.

Photo by Noelyne Arizona

to welcome all the little children. And all children should have the opportunity for a Catholic education, including children with developmental disabilities! They should have the choice of attending their parish school with siblings and peers. They should be welcome in that community, where reverence for life and Christian values are the guiding principle, and individuals with disabilities can share their individual gifts with others.

But as parents raising a child with a disability soon find, many Catholic children with disabilities are not always received with open arms by their parish schools. These schools have limited financial resources and are not equipped to educate these children. CCSE was formed to help provide Catholic schools with the resources they need to welcome all God's children.

CCSE MISSION STATEMENT

The Mission of the Catholic Coalition for Special Education is to ensure that children with special needs are able to attend and receive an appropriate education in their local Catholic elementary schools and high schools.

In the words of Pope Benedict XVI "no child should be denied his or her right to an education in faith, which in turn nurtures the soul of a nation."

CCSE provides grants and technical assistance to help Catholic schools in Washington, D.C. and Maryland achieve this goal.

Because you believed in me, I believed in me! Pictured are students from Our Lady of Mercy, Potomac, MD, whose inclusion program serves as a model for Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Washington.



Photo credit: Teri Kozlowski



Photo by Noelyne Alzona

2007 Spring Benefit Honorary husband-and-wife Chairs Dr. Timothy Shriver and Linda Potter, along with CCSE friends Alex Pellegrino, Eli Lewis and Pat Progar.



CCSE President Francesca Pellegrino (right) presents a grant check to resource teacher Joanie Friel (left) and Patricia McGann, Principal, Our Lady of Lourdes School, Bethesda.

A BRIEF CCSE HISTORY

2003

F. Pellegrino and parents with children with special needs meet w/ Msgr. John Enzler, who encourages group to make vision a reality

MARCH 2004

CCSE receives first pledges of \$10,000, \$2,000 and \$5,000

OCT 2004

Board of Directors and Professional Advisory Board form and hold first meetings

2003

2004

2005

DEC 2003

Pellegrino meets with ADW Superintendent of Catholic Schools

SEPT 2004

Catholic Coalition for Special Education is incorporated in State of Maryland

MAY 2005

CCSE website launched

FOUNDING BENEFACTORS MADE VISION A REALITY

CCSE President Francesca Pellegrino and the members of the Board of Directors express their sincere gratitude to the following benefactors who turned the dream of CCSE into a reality with their generous donations.

\$10,000 - \$15,000

St. Gertrude Foundation
Anonymous
Mr. and Mrs. Neil Coakley

\$5,000 - \$9,999

Mr. and Mrs. Stephen Brogan
Mr. and Mrs. Alan Cassidy
Dr. Daniel Fernicola
and Dr. Barbara Butler
Mr. and Mrs. Fernand Lavallee

\$1000 - \$4999

Mr. and Mrs. Patrick Caulfield
Fannie Mae Foundation
Mr. and Mrs. Scott Lesmes
Mario and Christine Maringelli
- in memoriam
Mr. and Mrs. Tim Mullin
Mr. and Mrs. Dean Packard
Frank and Lee Pellegrino
- in memoriam
Dr. and Mrs. Peter Sabia
Mary Lou Steptoe, Esq.

\$500 - \$999

Debbie and Larry Demaree

\$100 - \$499

Mr. and Mrs. Raymond Bonner
Mr. and Mrs. Benedict Cohen
Mr. Emmett Delaney
Mrs. Sheila Fasella
Dr. Donna Krasnewich-Vostal
Virginia Pellegrino & Brad Huskinson
Aurelio & Bianca Ratti

Up to \$99

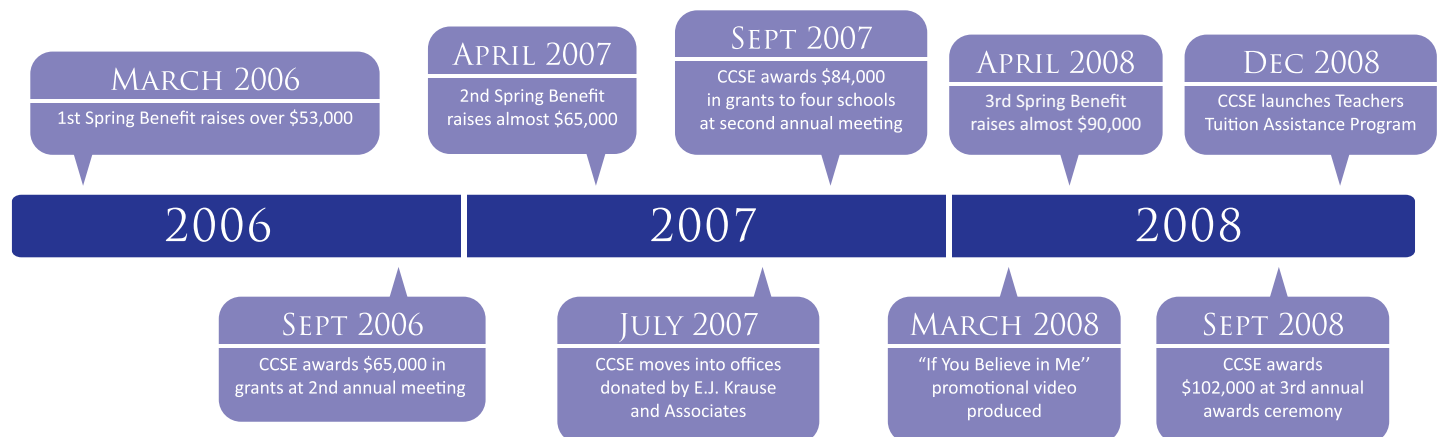
Mary Ann Carmody, R.N.
Dr. and Mrs. Daniel Drell
Mrs. Andrea Walsh
Elaine & Ron Xifo
Mrs. Ida Zaki



Sandra Andreas McMurtrie, 2008 spring benefit honorary chair, with her daughters Amanda Herndon, member of the CCSE advisory board, and Maria Guadalupe McMurtrie.



Friends Eli Lewis and Lucy Collins at CCSE's first spring benefit.





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CALL FOR APPLICATIONS!

If your Catholic school is located in Washington, D.C. or Maryland and is considering expanding or creating a program to enroll two or more students with developmental/intellectual disabilities who would benefit academically and spiritually from qualified special education instruction CCSE invites you to submit a proposal. Funds from CCSE can be applied to hiring special education staff and to purchasing materials necessary to provide appropriate accommodations and adaptations to the curriculum.

CCSE will also consider unique requests that meet CCSE objectives. Please submit a Letter of Intent/Inquiry. For preferred format, see the Washington Grantmakers Common Grant Letter of Intent at <http://ccse-maryland.org/commonGrantLOI.pdf>. Upon receipt of your letter of inquiry CCSE will send you a complete Request for Funding Application (RFA). CCSE wishes to support as many schools as possible. There is no deadline. For more information, contact: CCSE, Inc., (301) 933-8844 or info@ccse-maryland.org. P.O. Box 673, Kensington, Md. 20895

WILL YOU HELP CCSE?

Yes! I wish to support students with developmental disabilities and the Catholic Schools that serve them.

- **Volunteer** time and talents to help CCSE support even more schools and students with disabilities. Join one of our committees or volunteer in CCSE office as your schedule permits.

- **Donate services pro-bono.** Accounting, development consulting, graphic design communications, public relations are just some of the areas where we need support.

- **Sign up for eScrip.** It's free and easy! Shop with a participating merchant using an eScrip registered Safeway card, credit or debit card and CCSE will receive a donation from that merchant. Sign up at www.escrip.com

- **Don't have the time to volunteer?** Consider making a donation or contributing an item on our Wish List.

Donate online at www.ccse-maryland.org and click Donate Now or mail a check to CCSE Inc., PO Box 673, Kensington, MD 20895

Wish List:

- **Believe in Me! Grant Making Program**
 - o \$5,000 will help fund the salary of one special education teacher in one school;

- o \$2,500 will help fund the salary of one special education paraprofessional in one school;

- **Teacher Tuition Assistance Program**
 - o \$1,000 will help a teacher get a Master's Degree in Special Education.

- **Donate a tripod, portable pull-up projection screen for use by CCSE**

Contact Francesca Pellegrino or any Board member:

Tel: (301) 933-8844

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