

GLOBE EDITORIAL

Where Charity Begins

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MONEY FLOWS to charities during the holiday season. Bells ring for the Salvation Army. The United Way runs workplace giving campaigns. But even with this annual abundance, small local nonprofit organizations still struggle to raise funds.

Many donors would probably be excited to give money to YouthBuild Boston, for example -- if they knew about it. Based in Roxbury, YouthBuild runs several programs, including one that trains unemployed 18- to 24-year-olds to renovate homes that are converted into affordable housing.

What YouthBuild and other small organizations lack are armies of bell-ringers who generate publicity, write grants, and solicit personal and corporate gifts.

The United Way of Massachusetts Bay does some of this work: raising money that's distributed to organizations and providing technical assistance. But some organizations don't qualify because they aren't aligned with United Way's mission. And while giving through the United Way is valuable, it doesn't always educate donors about who the small organizations are and what they do.

So while small organizations provide key services, train nonprofit professionals -- especially minorities -- and create jobs, they lack the capacity to dip deeply into the philanthropic pool.

Donated money is essential. Funds that come with few or no restrictions pay for less glamorous but vital necessities such as rent, salaries, and administrative costs -- things grants and contracts typically don't fund. With more money, organizations can do more staff development -- a boon for the overall health of the work force. Best of all, they can innovate, providing services that government doesn't, such as helping families pay for expansion of their homes so they can qualify to adopt a child.

Now, YouthBuild and five other organizations have decided to help themselves by organizing a joint fund-raiser. Their goal is to raise \$200,000 that will be split evenly among the agencies. The organizations have worked together before, but not on fund-raising and not on the current goal of eliminating service redundancies.

The six agencies are YouthBuild, Children's Services of Roxbury, the Hispanic Office of Planning and Evaluation, La Alianza Hispana, Roxbury Multi-Service Center, and United Homes for Children. They have the support of Mayor Menino and have partnered with Citizens Bank, which is helping to raise the profile of the agencies by introducing them to other corporate donors. A "Community Gems" gala to publicize this effort will be held on Saturday at the University of Massachusetts in Boston. And the plan is to highlight other organizations next year.

Let local bells ring for the small organizations that make their communities stronger.