

GAWL LEADERSHIP ACADEMY ALUMNA TAKES SERVICE BACK TO FIRM

I first heard about the Nicholas House at a GAWL Leadership Academy session. I was drawn to the idea of doing a community service activity with other women lawyers and of helping homeless families. Little did I know that I would make service at this local homeless shelter for transitional families part of my Firm's culture.

After graduating from the Leadership Academy, I joined the GAWL Foundation Board and participated in a Nicholas House dinner where we brought and served dinner. It was a great and meaningful experience, and gave me the confidence to volunteer to be in charge of a dinner.

For the dinner I hosted, I sent a firm-wide email asking for volunteers and money contributions for the dinner. The response was overwhelming. Not counting the in-kind donations of food, drinks, and paper products, my friends and colleagues donated more than \$900! The dinner was a huge success – pizza, sodas, salad, and lots of homemade desserts. Ten volunteers from my firm helped serve the meal.

While we served dinner, a case manager talked to us about what projects we might want to undertake with our excess financial donations. Nicholas House's basement floor needed repairs and they needed a bike rack for storage issues. After a little more investigation, we decided to organize a "work day," where we organized a large storage shed, cleaned the yard, and repaired broken playground equipment. We also obtained tickets to the Zoo for the children at Nicholas House. The outpouring of support was contagious – my mother donated a handmade quilt and a senior partner built a bike rack for Nicholas House. All of this work was accomplished in roughly a two-week period.

Since then, other people at my firm have spent hundreds of hours at the Nicholas House – renovating the bathrooms, painting the common rooms, and serving dinners. And, my GAWL Leadership Academy class reunites each year for an annual Nicholas House dinner. Each of us has been personally enriched by the Nicholas House experience. I never would have expected that so much would have come from that little session at the Leadership Academy.

I am very grateful to the GAWL Foundation for presenting this opportunity to me and my colleagues. Certainly I have received more from the experience than I have given. I challenge each GAWL member to do something for her community before the end of the year – it can start with just a simple email.

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