



100 Years and Growing!

Over ten years ago, the Ashtabula Foundation created its Youth Philanthropy program hoping to cultivate the next generation of philanthropists in Ashtabula County. Mollia Zezzo is proof those hopes are being fulfilled.

The program was first initiated by the Foundation at Grand Valley High School in Orwell and today philanthropy boards exist in all 10 schools in Ashtabula County. The Foundation provides \$5,000 to each High School Philanthropy Board and students follow the same procedures used by the Ashtabula Foundation directors to grant funds to non-profit organizations in the community.

Conneaut High School has been sponsored directly by the Conneaut Foundation since 2014.

The student boards solicit and review grant applications and conduct on-site interviews to learn about the organization's request. The students then meet to discuss which organizations will receive a grant.

One of the first things the program makes clear to the students is that needs in the community are far greater than the \$5,000 they have to distribute. Zezzo is doing what she can to narrow that gap. She was a sophomore at Edgewood High School when the program changed her outlook on life. "The Youth Philanthropy program led me to start my own business when I was 17. Today I am 21, running my own faith-based apparel company, Follow the Son."

Proceeds of Follow the Son sales are donated to organizations in need.

Zezzo, a resident of North Kingsville, said serving on Edgewood's Youth Philanthropy Board, "sparked the idea to create my own company that would raise money to donate to similar organizations in the county." That company, Follow the Son, has shipped items to all 50 states including Puerto Rico and donated about \$6,800 to 15 non-profit organizations, she said.

"I am a full-time college student at Ohio University studying Applied Management in hopes to earn a degree next May. How I like to put it is, this company is a gift from God and I have been honored to run it and give generously to communities. He's working through me and this business to spread Good News and share the Gospel through my simple, modern faith-based apparel designs. Follow the Son is fully in God's hands and depending on the future growth of it, I would be open to taking this on as my full-time job. Until then, I plan to start my career working after college in the promotional products industry alongside my family members and run Follow the Son after hours," she said.

Zezzo's story fits the template created by the Ashtabula Foundation to guide the students to adult lives of service and volunteerism. "We feel the Youth Philanthropy program provides immeasurable experiences and lifelong values of service learning for our youth," a Foundation official explained. "Not only are they contributing to the development of their community, but they are also contributing to their own development of core values such as leadership, civic engagement, and volunteerism, something we hope they carry on into their adult lives."

The Foundation's goal is to allow the students to focus on ways to give back to the community through service learning, to expand leadership skills, to use their individual talents and energy to help in this type of endeavor relating to the community in which they live and work, the official said.

Since its inception, the Youth Philanthropy program has granted more than \$300,000 to local non-profit organizations.

**Watch for next month's article to learn more about the Ashtabula Foundation.
Celebrating 100 years of service!**