

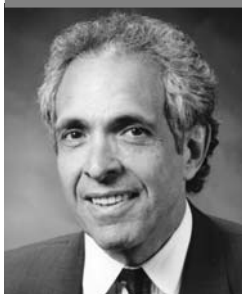
# Profiles in Progress: Client Stories

Sometimes, in the process of living our day-to-day lives, we happen upon a circumstance or a situation that demands our attention, and ensures that our routine will never again be the same. Such has been the case for Joe Lagana and Bill Wolfe.

Both men are deeply involved with the Homeless Children's Education Fund (HCEF). Joe founded this organization in the spring of 1999 after retiring from his 17-year position as Executive Director of the Allegheny Intermediate Unit. In Joe's experience as a teacher, principal, school superintendent and then executive director, he was appalled by, and felt helpless about, the terrible learning impediments children faced when their families became homeless. The children would spend many hours in shelters, removed from their school studies and normal environment. In addition to missing valuable instruction, the idle time sometimes spawned the wrong kind of activities. Joe vowed to change that and his retirement afforded him the opportunity to engage this problem full time.

Joe immediately began to attack the issues facing homeless children that he had previously witnessed. First, Joe lobbied for a change in federal and state legislation to mandate transportation to school for children in shelters. Eighteen months and many bureaucratic obstacles later, Joe got his legislation. Then, he turned his attention to insufficient educational resources for the kids. Often, children enter the shelter with no more than the clothes on their backs and certainly without proper school supplies and additional clothing. Joe's Homeless Children's Education Fund provides those necessities. Also, the Fund has built learning centers in many of the shelters. These computer-based learning centers provide the setting and tools for the

children to do homework and broaden their horizons beyond the limited scope of their current situation. An interestingly unexpected byproduct is that the learning facilities are attracting the mothers of the children to their own learning opportunities. The Fund aims to provide learning centers to all 16 shelters in Allegheny County.



Joe Lagana

Joe is supported in his efforts on behalf of homeless children by a board of directors he has fashioned from business and community leaders. His board chair is Bill Wolfe. Bill is a Vice President of Marsh, Inc., and has spent

his career in the human services and business development areas, primarily with large insurance companies. Bill grew up in Pittsburgh and lived away from our city for 26 years, returning in 2001.

Bill has always been devoted to children's issues, serving on the boards of organizations such as the YMCA. So it was natural for him to pair with Joe shortly after his repatriation to Pittsburgh. Bill is "committed to help this region grow and prosper, and providing for those among us needing assistance is one of the best ways to accomplish this."

Bill sees the initiative of assisting young people as an investment in our area's future. He was elected HCEF board chair early this year and has added innovative fund development initiatives such as The Haunted House in South Park held during the month of October.

The current challenge is to raise \$300,000 to fully equip the learning centers in all area shelters. The equipment includes hardware, software and educational materials of various types. It is no small project. But, with continued community support and the unstinting energy of Joe, Bill and the board and

volunteers, it surely will happen.

Joe grew up in Cambria County and attended high school in Ebensburg. He came to Pittsburgh for his first job and found a home. He currently lives in the city with his wife, Lynne, and his daughter, Dr. Frances Lagana, is a podiatrist in Boston.

Bill grew up in Pittsburgh, and though he traveled and lived in many cities and countries, always pined for the time when he could return to his roots. Bill and his wife Eileen reside in Sewickley. Their daughter Katie is a recent graduate of Duquesne University and teaches at the Watson Institute in Sewickley. Their son Bill is a student at the University of Dayton.

Joe Lagana and Bill Wolfe embody the spirit of our region in their attempt to better the lives of those less fortunate. We are proud to call them clients and friends.

Contact The Homeless Children's Education Fund at 412-562-0154 to make donations of money, equipment or supplies. •



Bill Wolfe



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