



**Initiative: How I Won a Marathon Before it Started – Kayleigh Bhangdia**

Last summer I attended the Julie Foudy Leadership Academy at the Peddie School in New Jersey. When I left the camp I was inspired to help the community and make a difference. Every Friday night in July, I run races at the Arlington track in Unionvale, N.Y. One Friday, Suzanne O’Neal, the head of the Marathon Project came to talk about her organization and try to get volunteers. I thought that raising money for this organization would be a great community service project. I went and talked to Suzanne O’Neal about volunteering.

The Marathon Project is an organization that targets inner-city kids with obesity, drug addiction or home abuse, as well as drop outs. It teaches the kids to run, and they compete as a team in many races. In November, they run in the Philadelphia Marathon, either the half or the full marathon. It costs \$1,000 to send just one kid to the marathon and my goal was to raise \$1,000. I told Suzanne O’Neil that I wanted to write a letter and send it to many people. The letter would explain the organization and also ask for contributions. She thought that was a great idea and would be a great way to get people to learn about the Marathon Project, and also raise money.

I wrote the letter, made many copies and sent them to friends and family with pre-addressed envelopes for them to return their donations. Many people sent me donations and I soon had about \$500. It didn’t seem like I would reach my goal of \$1,000, so I spent time thinking up other fundraising ideas. I decided that I would set up a stand at my school (Duchess Day School) giving out Marathon Project bracelets, and asking for donations. I got some blue bracelets that said “Power of Prevention,” which is the Marathon Project’s saying. I raised about \$50 from that. I made four speeches at my school to explain about the Marathon Project and give everyone a better understanding of what I was doing. I also worked at a water station at the Dutchess County Marathon (In New York) supporting the Marathon Project. I sent my letter to more people and more checks kept coming in the mail. I had about \$750 and that seemed to be the most I would get.

One day I received a letter from the Julie Foudy Leadership Foundation granting me \$250. This made me reach my goal of \$1,000 and I could successfully send one kid to the Philadelphia Marathon. I was so happy! I went to a Marathon Project party to give Suzanne O’Neal the check. She too was so happy! She said that I was one of the highest single fund raiser; this made me feel so proud.

About 60 kids/mentors finished the race at the Philadelphia marathon in 2007. Some checks are still coming in the mail. I am going to try to raise another \$1,000 next year to send another kid to the Philadelphia Marathon. I also am going to try to be a mentor for the Marathon Project next year and even run in the Philadelphia half marathon. I would not have been able to complete my goal of raising \$1,000 in time for the Philadelphia Marathon without the help of the Julie Foudy Foundation and the generous \$250 check. The leadership skills I took from the Julie Foudy Camp helped me be a leader in my community and raise money for the Marathon Project.



Thank You!

Sincerely,

Kayleigh Bhangdia