



EMPOWERING THE MINDS OF TOMORROW

Diverse, fun and imaginative, CRO programs step up for students

Millions in funds raised. Thousands of hours donated. Countless young lives lifted up—from early childhood to college.

This is the staggering positive impact that the Cliffs Residents Outreach (CRO), a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization launched in 2007, has made for families all across Upstate South Carolina.

The beauty of the collective efforts by each community is the tangible difference being made in the lives of students and teachers right in the region they call home. Combined with the generous donations by residents at The Cliffs, the hands-on involvement of numerous volunteers is key to the successful implementation of proven, long-lasting initiatives aimed at enabling children's life-long success.

Spearheading new STEM initiatives is how **The Cliffs at Keowee Falls** CRO is helping students and mentors connect indoors and out after the isolation of virtual learning. "Being able to meet at the school makes such a big difference," says longtime volunteer Mary Gum. A number of exciting new projects include funding enhanced resources for the students' Nature Trail Improvement

Project (\$4,650), as well as the Green Steps Program (\$9,690) at Walhalla High School, both of which provide outdoor learning and engineering insight, equipping students to apply STEM principles to the school's environmental stewardship curriculum.

Similarly, when Keowee Falls CRO Advisory Council members learned about the Friends of Lake Keowee Society's Jack Lewis Watershed Stewardship Scholarship, they stepped up to fund two \$2,500 scholarships for students with a strong interest in natural resource conservation and the environment. And at Tamasse-Salem Elementary School, Principal Bobby Norizsan joined forces with CRO Liaison Cindy Lowery to create the TSE Challenge to be Great Scholarship for the TSE fifth graders, which will award 2029 graduates \$1,000 for use at the two- or four-year college they attend. "This will be key for many students who may not otherwise be challenged to believe that they can, and should, plan to not only graduate, but also pursue higher education," said Norizsan.

At **The Cliffs Valley and Mountain Park** CRO, members are all in on a good story — and doubling down on their long tradition of sharing the power of reading. Since 2007, the CRO community has invested in reading material for Gateway Elementary, Slater-Marietta Elementary and Northwest Middle, and estimate that a total of 5,000 books are now gracing the shelves of these school libraries because

of CRO donations. The group also funds the purchase of a license to use the Accelerated Reader Program at the elementary school level, which engages young readers and helps teachers evaluate literacy proficiency.

"We implemented the Accelerated Reader Program this year in order to try to motivate our students to do more independent reading, whether they read at home or at school. Our school read 11,798 books this year, and student participation and improvement only continue to increase," praises Elizabeth Nix, Literary Specialist at Slater-Marietta Elementary School. Beyond donating funds to purchase reading materials and library resources, residents at The Cliffs have also given generously of their time to the longstanding tutoring program at Slater-Marietta Elementary School. Over the course of more than 20 years, 460 volunteers have donated more than 37,000 hours of one-on-one help to beginning readers, and the program has become a model for the Greenville County Schools district.

The focus has been on fun team-building programs that encourage, uplift and inspire for **The Cliffs at Glassy** CRO. At Heritage Elementary, a "House System" was implemented to build community and camaraderie among students. Individuals were "sorted" into one of four houses, where they could earn points for showing good character, as well as academic achievement or improvement. The CRO funded the electronic points system and T-shirts for all students. The initiative helped children and staff to sustain a positive culture in the midst of the stress of the pandemic. Heather M. Hester, Principal, adds "the first quarter benchmark results had Heritage Elementary students excelling. We were scoring in the top 20% of the entire district. Community matters, and we are thankful that [The Cliffs Communities] are a part of ours!"

Most recently, making bright dreams of higher education possible has taken center stage for **The Cliffs at Keowee Springs** CRO. By funding scholarships for graduating students at D.W. Daniel High School who will fall slightly short of the means to pay for their first year of secondary education, this new educational initiative aims to bridge the gap for deserving future

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— ROB ACKLEY, CRO MEMBER

college students. In each of the past two years, Keowee Springs CRO has approved \$20,000 for the scholarship fund, and this year, six students received Keowee Springs Scholarships. While many of the scholarship winners will attend technical colleges, two of this year's recipients have been accepted at Furman and USC. Notably, three of this year's winners were the first in their families to graduate from high school and all six are the first in their families to enroll in college.

Partnering to meet the early literacy needs of children in our community — and equip them with lifelong advantages — is how **The Cliffs at Keowee Vineyards** CRO is making a difference. After the Pickens County School District kindergarten screening program revealed that many of the children lacked key skills needed to start school, the Keowee Vineyards CRO piloted and then launched Dolly Parton's Imagination Library for children 5 and under in the northern end of the county — a well-established, award-winning program that mails an age-appropriate book each month to registered children where the program is offered. This is the first time the program has been funded in Pickens County.

"We have just launched this initiative, but evidence indicates it will nurture a generation of lifelong readers," smiles Rob Ackley, CRO member. The four zip codes currently supported represent more than 1,300 children, and the CRO is partnering with the Pickens County United Way to develop funding and support for the remaining Pickens County zip codes.

