



## Little Lights Wins Keller Award

ARTICLE AND PHOTOS BY HEATHER SCHOELL

Little Lights Urban Ministries has been an afterschool and summer haven for underserved children for more than a decade. In February, Little Lights moved into Potomac Gardens to be even closer to the population they serve. Because of the hard work and dedication to the children of the community, the Capitol Hill Community Foundation has awarded Little Lights the Arnold Keller Jr. Award in the amount of \$10,000.

### The Award Goes To...

The Arnold Keller Jr. Award, is an annual Capitol Hill Community Foundation (CHCF) grant made in the name of the man who led the Lutheran Church of the Reformation in stewardship of the Capitol Hill community. Nicky Cymrot, president of CHCF, explained that the Keller Award is named after a “charismatic, wonderful guy” who had been minister of the church at 212 East Capitol St. NE from 1967 until 1993. In 1984 Keller founded the Capitol Hill Community Achievement Awards Dinner, which CHCF assumed in 1993 upon Keller’s retirement. Out of this came the Keller Award, which is given at the dinner to an outstanding organization that continues Keller’s ideals of service to the community.

Cymrot said the CHCF grants committee visited Little Lights and “reported that they were impressed with Little Lights’ operations, that their energy and enthusiasm is commendable. It sounded like an excellent opportunity to help,” she said. “The Keller Award is not something we give to a new organization,” said Stephanie Deutsch, CHCF’s Vice President, explaining that recipient must demonstrate continued excellence. “We’ve supported Little Lights’ after-school tutoring program for years. Little Lights is probably the one organization doing the most for Potomac Gardens. We are really impressed with the quality of their programming and the quality of their volunteers.”

### Moving In, Helping Out

It’s called Little Lights because the intended outcome of this nonprofit Christian ministry is to let the children shine, to draw on their inner light by offering an environment of hope and love, sur-

rounded by caring adults who treat them and each other with kindness and respect. The Catalogue for Philanthropy called Little Lights “one of the best small charities in the Washington, DC region.”

The Keller Award has made it possible for Little Lights to fill their space within Potomac Gardens – a freshened space with constructive activities, a place to meet, play and work. “We got the keys in February,” said Steve Park, Little Lights’ executive director. “In January, the unit was renovated and remodeled – a lot of people came out to help renovate – and we opened to the kids in mid-February, five days a week and two Saturdays a month. Our vision was to be a part of the community, so having the physical space has been great,” he said.

Some of the activities Little Lights offers children ages 9 to 13, in addition to homework help, is use of the computer lab, musical instruments, art and supervised play. An upside to being “onsite” is that Little Lights has gotten to know the parents. “Parents have been welcoming to us,” Park said. “Being at Potomac Gardens, we want them to be involved. Ninety percent of our kids are from Potomac Gardens,” Park continued. “We are committed to families there, and we want people to come in and volunteer. There has been a divide between Capitol Hill and Potomac Gardens. We want to help out with this,” he said.

### Lifestyle Choice

For more than 10 years, Park, has dedicated himself to bettering the lives of others. In fact, he has built his life around it; he moved from Northwest Washington to Southeast to be closer to the kids he



Steve and Mary Park of Little Lights.



Shamya with her tutor. Photos Courtesy of Little Lights.

tutored, and he met the woman who was to be his wife, Mary, when she joined the staff of Little Lights. Their two children are being brought up in the culture of helping others.

Parks recognizes the financial challenges of a volunteer lifestyle. Americorps volunteers are given a small stipend – an amount that doesn’t quite cover the cost of living in DC, so

Parks offers Little Lights’ interns and Americorps volunteers a living space in Anacostia, free of charge. “They make sacrifices,” he said. “Their sacrifice is serving a year or two years ... it gives them exposure to poverty, and the service will create leaders who make service a part of their leadership and investment in the community.”

Parks added, “We have met incredible kids here. It is a blessing to help these kids have a brighter future, and I would love for people to stop in to see the new space.”

To learn more about Little Lights Urban Ministry, go to [www.littlelights.org](http://www.littlelights.org) or call 202-548-4021. To learn more about the Capitol Hill Community Foundation, go to [www.capitolhill-communityfoundation.com](http://www.capitolhill-communityfoundation.com).

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