

NONPROFIT LEADERSHIP

# Lynda Kohler

PRESIDENT/CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER SHARP Literacy Inc.

When Kohler took the helm at SHARP Literacy a year and a half ago, she used her 25 years of experience at Midwest Airlines to run the 8-year-old nonprofit more like a business.

She started by putting everything out to bid to cut costs and leveraging her corporate connections to increase fundraising. Kohler knows that change can be tough, but by setting practical goals based on her values, she earned buy-in from the staff and board.

Kohler always keeps SHARP's mission – helping children build reading, writing and research skills through the visual arts – central to strategic planning with the goal of reaching more students and becoming a more accountable organization. During her short tenure, there has been a 25 percent increase in the number of children served – up to 7,000 students in grades one through five in 34 public schools.

“Using her business acumen and corporate connections, she helped Ronald McDonald (House Charities Eastern Wisconsin, Kohler's previous agency) reach new levels of fundraising and now she is re-energizing SHARP Literacy's profile in our community,” said Tami

Sweeney of Life Productions Inc., who has worked with Kohler to make videos for SHARP and Ronald McDonald House. “She just makes things happen and gets great results.”

Kohler, 52, is planning to pilot an online evaluation tool to collect data and measure student achievement.

She has learned to make the most out of limited resources and increase visibility through collaboration. Kohler was instrumental in partnering with Big Brothers Big Sisters and the Milwaukee Zoological Society to donate backpacks and books to children in Milwaukee. She has integrated STEM – science, technology, engineering and math – principles into SHARP's second-grade curriculum and worked with the Milwaukee School of Engineering to construct a 3D computerized weather cube model. Kohler has also fostered partnerships with Children's Outing Association, the Jewish Community Center and Hunger Task Force.

“When you work together, you find ways to do things better,” she said.

“She excels as an administrator, is a thoughtful, ethical and creative leader, and has demonstrated tire-

less energy in representing the organization in a way that reflects SHARP Literacy in the most positive light,” said board member Jan Lennon.

Kohler's high-energy personality and extreme passion and commitment motivate her staff.

But she insists, “You can't train people to care. It's just in their genes. They're here because they are engaged and passionate about the mission.”

Kohler attributes her success to role models early in her career such as Patti Gorsky, pres-



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— JENNA KASHOU

“ You can't train people to care. ”  
It's just in their genes.