



Walker's 16th Annual *Lives in Bloom* Gala Makes New Fundraising Record

Walker raises nearly \$440,000 for behavioral health services, the highest amount raised during event's 16 year history

Needham, MA -- Walker, a non-profit leader in special education, behavioral health, and residential treatment for children and families, announced the record-breaking success of its 16th annual *Lives in Bloom* Gala on Saturday, May 7, 2016 at the Renaissance Boston Waterfront Hotel. Walker welcomed more than 470 guests who raised nearly \$440,000 throughout the night emceed by Billy Costa of KISS 108FM and NESN's Dining Playbook.

"Walker is grateful for the supporters choosing to share their Saturday evening with us. Joining in this celebration of the amazing accomplishments of the children and families who have overcome countless challenges is a powerful way of supporting their extraordinary efforts in partnership with Walker." Susan M. Getman, MSW, Walker President and CEO. "This year, we were delighted to present our dedicated Board Chair, Benjamin W. Thorndike, with the Distinguished Community Leadership Award. A steadfast Walker ambassador, his work has positively impacted countless children, families and communities for years to come."

Walker [honored Ben Thorndike](#) for his outstanding advocacy, leadership, heartfelt philanthropy and unwavering support for the Walker community. To recognize the accomplishment and in honor of his commitment and service to Walker, the Board of Directors are naming the Walker School gymnasium as, The Thorndike Family Gym.

"I am deeply honored to have served for the better part of the last decade as Board Chair and to receive the Distinguished Community Leadership Award," said Benjamin W. Thorndike, Walker's Chair of the Board of Directors. "Walker is truly a unique organization, providing emotional therapeutic services to children with nowhere else to turn. I am humbled by the outpouring of support during the Gala and relished the chance to celebrate Walker's amazing accomplishments both near-term and long-term."

Over the past 15 years, the event has raised millions of dollars to support the children and youth in Walker's therapeutic and academic programs. The fundraiser included silent and live auctions, followed by a three-course gourmet dinner and dancing to the music of the renowned eight-piece horn band, Soul of Boston. This year's Gala highlighted Walker's work to strengthen families. Weaving through all of Walker's programs is the mission to help a child or youth find their way to stronger family relationships, and when needed, help children with no family they can return to, prepare to join a new, permanent family to call their own. Funds raised directly impact Walker's work to support the resiliency of Walker children, provide staff with continuous learning opportunities, bring its expertise to a wider audience, create welcoming and comfortable learning, playing, and living spaces for children in Walker's residential care, and help children foster their ability to adapt, learn and overcome personal challenges.

“The *Lives in Bloom* Gala Committee is proud to dedicate our time and passion to making Walker’s flagship event memorable and successful,” said Gala Co-Chairs, Jason Jenkins, Member of Walker’s Board of Directors, and Carolyn Wood, Walker’s Vice President of Advancement. “It is our privilege to be able to support Walker’s mission to strengthen families and transform the lives of vulnerable yet resilient children and youth.”

This year’s celebration was planned with the support of a volunteer *Lives in Bloom* Gala Committee, whose efforts continue to grow the event and inspire interest, giving, and awareness for Walker’s behavioral health services. The 2016 *Lives in Bloom* Gala Committee members include Carolyn Wood, a Wellesley, MA resident and a 2016 *Lives in Bloom* Gala Co-Chair; Jason Jenkins, a Natick, MA resident and a 2016 *Lives in Bloom* Gala Co-Chair; and Zarah Ali, Laurel Lyle, Tracy Mayo, Wendy Paul, and Stephanie Sheps, all of Wellesley, MA.

“Walker and the people who work there are truly inspiring, which is something I never would have had the opportunity to experience if not for our NESN Connects volunteer program,” Sara Rose Kantrowitz, NESN Senior Producer, News. “They do so much to help transform the lives of kids facing really difficult behavioral and learning challenges. In volunteering at events like the annual *Lives in Bloom Gala*, I’ve spoken to some of the people who help support the school. Their passion for Walker is overwhelming. Seeing student performances and artwork and hearing how much they’ve accomplished thanks to their time at Walker is astonishing.”

Over the past four years, NESN has generously supported Walker events, making Walker one of the network’s annual NESN Connects partners. In September 2012, a team of NESN employees volunteered as ‘Route Marshalls’ during Walker’s *Change Shoes, Change Lives* 5K Walk and 1-Mile Run by helping to guide and cheer participants. Since 2014, NESN employees have expanded their commitment to Walker, and also volunteer each year at the *Lives in Bloom* Gala, as well as donate Red Sox or Bruins themed experiences as auction items. Last year former NESN sports anchor Elle Duncan (now with ESPN) was the emcee for the *Change Shoes, Change Lives* event. NESN Connects is the network’s social responsibility program and provides three paid volunteer days for all NESN employees to contribute at partner charities and events.

“Walker is a great organization that I never would have even thought to volunteer for had it not been for my co-workers who previously volunteered through our NESN Connects program,” said Eric Brenner, NESN Senior Technical Director. “The *Lives in Bloom Gala* is an amazing event because the people who donate really care about the cause and want to help. I look forward to helping out at Walker events every year.”

“I’ve had an incredible experience working with Walker over the past four years,” said Amy Johnson, NESN Studio Producer. “It’s a joy to work with and support the people at Walker as they create a safe and caring environment for kids to get the help and support they need, while still being kids!”

About Walker

Walker is a leading not-for-profit charitable organization providing intensive therapeutic and academic services for exceptionally vulnerable yet resilient children, teens, and families facing complex mental health, emotional, behavioral, and learning challenges. Founded in 1961, Walker’s evidence-based programs positively impact nearly 20,000 children, teens, and families each year throughout Greater Boston, the North and South Shore as well as in Central Massachusetts. Walker provides services through campuses in Needham and Watertown, community-based clinical, home-based, parent education and youth development programs, professional seminars, consultations and coaching. For more information, please visit walkercares.org or facebook.com/WalkerCares.

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