

IN STUDENT HANDS

Entering the campus of Elizabeth Forward High School (EF), earth movers and cranes tell you big things are happening. A fire that gutted the school's auditorium a few years ago jumpstarted a construction project that is transforming the facility. But that is not the only transformation taking place at EF.



THE iSH COMPANY AT ELIZABETH FORWARD HIGH SCHOOL

Meeting challenges is an engine for change at Elizabeth Forward, and the students enrolled in iSH, a student-run business, are drivers. Last spring, the iSH Company, which stands for “in student hands,” donated 280 crewneck sweatshirts as well as \$1,000 towards the purchase of additional clothing items for patients in need at UPMC Western Psychiatric Hospital.

The purpose of iSH is to provide real-world business opportunities where students produce tangible goods for sale with a philanthropic benefit. Students participate in one of three aspects — production, business, or social media — all mentored by their instructor, Mrs. Smith.

Explains McKenna Bittner, junior, “We develop designs, we make everything, we promote everything, and we manage the financial piece, all for a good cause. A small portion of profits from our sales goes to sustaining our business, and the rest goes directly back into our community as donations.”

Students were inspired to support Western patients following a visit from EF alumna, Jacki Faircloth, whose son, Tanner, attended EF and had been a patient at Western Psychiatric Hospital. The Faircloths' foundation, March Fourth, provides hundreds of clothing items annually to patients.

Hands-on experience, team building, and community engagement are foundational to iSH. But Mrs. Smith notes another important gain: empathy. “Empathy has increased greatly with the success of this group,” she says. “We used to come up with designs first and then look to apply them. Now we identify causes, and the designs follow.”

Students expressed gratitude for being able to do something meaningful and constructive in support of those affected by mental health challenges.

“I’m happy that this opportunity came to us,” says Haylee Abels, junior. “I know how this struggle feels as a family member. This is a way of raising awareness, letting people know they are seen, and contributing to the solution.”