Colleen Abdoulah grew up in the prairie province of Saskatchewan, Canada, the fourth of five children in a family that was a model of tenacity and generosity. Colleen worked in the family restaurant, where she learned first-hand about helping others.

“Our parents taught us to work hard, to share our success, and to feel grateful for good fortune, rather than entitled to it.” The entire family chipped in to help at the restaurant, and workers always shared in the profits. When a worker’s family member was ill, the Abdoulah family provided support as well.

Colleen received an undergraduate degree in Publications and Marketing from Mount Royal College in Calgary, Alberta, and an MBA from the University of Denver. Today she is the President and CEO of Wide Open West (WOW!), a regional internet, cable, and phone provider headquartered in Denver. Colleen built the company, then sold it in 2006. At the suggestion of her financial advisor, she opened a donor-advised fund at The Denver Foundation as a way to maximize the charitable aspects of her financial success.

A generous supporter of many causes, Colleen believes that philanthropy is spiritually based. She states, “We are here not just to care for ourselves but to care for others.” She focuses her philanthropy on causes that affect women and children, especially those who are marginalized. She also gives to organizations that combat abuse, hunger, and poverty nationally and internationally. A cancer survivor, she also supports health issues. In addition to her demanding work schedule, Colleen finds time to participate on four boards: the American Cable Association, C-SPAN, the Rocky Mountain Children’s Law Center, and the Women’s Vision Foundation.

Colleen Abdoulah constantly challenges herself to do more, to give more, and to help others. Thank you, Colleen, for challenging each of us, as well.

For more about Colleen Abdoulah, visit www.denverfoundation.org and click on Donor Stories.

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Family Philanthropy: Tips for Working with Children and Young Adults

I am the family face;  
Flesh perishes, I live on,  
Projecting trait and trace  
Through time to times anon,  
And leaping from place to place  
Over oblivion.  
-Thomas Hardy, 1917

Thomas Hardy’s poem “Heredity” isn’t about philanthropy, but these lines aptly describe the legacy a charitable family leaves. Here are some ideas to consider in crafting your brand of family philanthropy.

**Talk…and listen**  
Philanthropic consultant Kay Sprinkel Grace regularly says “we have two ears and one mouth and we should remember to use them in direct proportion.” If you have specific goals for family philanthropy, express them to your children up front. Let everyone know how you view the opportunity to work together in charitable giving. Then, be sure to ask their opinions, as well. The formula for success includes giving general guidelines while also allowing responsibility.

**Provide family volunteer opportunities**  
Modeling charitable behavior is important, and volunteering offers a great opportunity to do so. See what interests your children the most, then research and agree on volunteer activities. Sometimes it’s the cause that’s most important such as (helping the homeless), and sometimes it’s the activity (such as participating in a fun run or serving food at a shelter)—but agreeing and doing it together make the most sense for success.

**Provide recognition**  
Recognition and appreciation are in short supply, yet they’re easy to give and vitally important. Thank your children for their ideas, their enthusiasm, and their efforts. Show respect for their commitment by matching their gifts with your own. Ask them how they found and chose their causes. Learn from their passion.

To discuss ideas for your family’s philanthropy, contact the Philanthropic Services Group at 303-300-1790.