

## **Thinking Outside the Box**

By Jill Orr

In the summer of 2009, the Assistance League of Mid-Missouri conducted a focus group on ways to increase membership in order to better serve their community. Members saw an opportunity in the growing number of women with young and school-aged children who wanted to become involved in the organization, but whose demanding family schedules did not allow for the time commitment required by a traditional membership. After listening to the needs of these women, the ALMM launched the Junior committee, a sub-group specifically designed to allow for meaningful participation in the ALMM, but in a more flexible, family-friendly way.

Over the past four years, the Junior committee has grown to over 40 members and has participated in several ALMM programs, including taking ownership of the Bundles for Babies program as well as the local handling of the National Book Drive. Junior committee members also help staff the resale shop on 5<sup>th</sup> Wednesdays, work Operation School Bell, Cookie Connection, Book Bags, chapter fundraisers, and have helped chapter members with strategic planning.

The Junior committee is lead by two co-chairs (elected yearly) and holds five committee meetings per year. Members pay dues, but are non-voting. Junior committee members are encouraged to participate in at least one ALMM program during the year, work one shift at the resale shop, and attend the five yearly meetings. In addition, they plan and organize a community fundraiser of their own – with all profits going back into the ALMM chapter. To date, the committee has raised over \$5,500 for the ALMM!

The Junior committee has proven an excellent way for younger women in the community to participate in the ALMM at a time in their lives when many volunteer opportunities prove too time-consuming or inflexible. By accommodating women in this busy stage of life, the ALMM has not only capitalized on the strengths of a previously untapped local resource, and provided the organization with a fresh perspective, but they've provided a pipeline for these members to transition to a more traditional role as their schedules allow. Thanks to innovative thinking and a willingness to rethink traditional structures, the ALMM has found a way to strengthen its community presence, while building its future at the same time.