

## Inside ...

On behalf of my predecessors and the women who have served on the Community Fund for Women & Girls' Advisory board, its donors and nonprofit partners, I'm excited to share this special anniversary newsletter. Let's look back on 25 transformative years!

**Karen Peart, Fund chair**



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# The Community Fund for **WOMEN & GIRLS**

a component fund of  The **COMMUNITY** Foundation for Greater New Haven

25th Anniversary Issue  
Winter 2020



## Celebrating 25 Years of Women as Philanthropists, Entrepreneurs, Leaders and Changemakers

The story of the Community Fund for Women & Girls began with one person and an idea; an idea that soon engaged, involved, enriched and changed many. And its impact ripples outward still.

In 1994, Hamden's Pamela Rendeiro came to The Community Foundation for Greater New Haven to inquire about starting a fund for women and children. From the time she was a little girl, giving was an integral part of Rendeiro's life. In lean times and in better ones, she and her husband and children gave. That year, she had received an inheritance and wanted to do something special.

Staff at The Community Foundation had just returned from a national conference where they learned of organizations around the country creating community funds especially for the benefit of women and girls. They asked Rendeiro if she would be receptive to pioneering such a fund locally — one that would be a collective effort where the community could coalesce around a common purpose. Rendeiro, who originally requested anonymity, readily agreed.

That's when some really amazing, forward thinking, can-do professional women got together as volunteer leaders and took on the challenge of building an endowment solely for advancing women and girls in the region.

Under the leadership of then Foundation Board Chair Mary Pepe, Foundation volunteers Mary Arnstein and Sheilah Rostow enthusiastically agreed to take on the charge of building a community endowment fund. They began with what was a very audacious ask for the time: \$1,000. If they could get 10 women to donate \$1,000 each, they could



Sheilah Rostow, inaugural Fund chair



match the initial \$10,000 gift. Rostow asked if women would give more than “pin money” and her fundraising co-chair, Arnstein responded confidently that, “If we ask them, they will.”

They wrote letters. They made calls. They asked and they asked. Hoping for 10 donors, they got 92 — the Founders of the Community Fund for Women & Girls. Some paid \$1,000 outright. Others couldn’t, so they committed \$250 a year over four years.

A common response of many Founders when asked for support was, “I’m not a philanthropist, *but I can do this.*” The notion of building leadership and financial capital to devote to women and girls was a powerful and compelling call. For a lot of women, it was the beginning of a journey. They were determined to be involved in this Fund. They began to see themselves as philanthropists. Some would eventually start their own funds, work directly with nonprofits, and become major donors to some of the Fund’s nonprofit grant partners. The birth of the Fund proved to be a real catalyst.

It was also the beginning of a permanently endowed fund that in 25 years has awarded more than \$1.36 million in grants, advancing the lives of thousands of women throughout 20 towns — and well beyond. Women have regained their financial footing through **Women Family Life Center’s** financial

sustainability program and found help at **Domestic Violence Services of Greater New Haven**. Women in recovery discovered new ways to move past traumas in the **Believe in Me Empowerment Corporation’s** expressive healing program while immigrant women attained their driver’s licenses and found jobs after building skills in the **Literacy Volunteers of Southern Connecticut’s** Adult Women English as a Second Language program.

The Fund has had an equally profound and lasting effect on girls. A 2018 grant impact review found that young women who took part in Fund-supported programs reported feeling more courageous in decision-making and increased confidence and resilience.



LEAP coding class participants

In programs like **LEAP’s** Girls Only coding class and swim instruction, and in **Solar Youth’s** Girls Empowerment leadership program, girls found



“Women are making the decisions for themselves and their families. They are the breadwinners. So, when you lift women up, you lift up their families and the entire community.” **Susan Garcia Nofi**, past Fund chair

new friends and a sense of belonging. Girls and young women increased their knowledge of sexual and reproductive health, learned how to recognize safe and unsafe relationships, developed conflict management skills and explored the challenges of teen parenting. And, they gained access to healthcare and programs that created greater stability in their lives.

Girls from **Farnam House** attended a summer camp to learn architectural design and that sticking with math adds value and can be transformative. A grant to **Yale School of Medicine** taught North Haven middle school girls about healthy relationships. And a grant to the **West Haven Community House** extended the reach of its successful Teen CHAT Youth Development Program (for teen pregnancy prevention) and expanded the curriculum to include career exploration.



West Haven Community House Teen Parent Program

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It's fitting that the 25th anniversary year coincides with the centennial of the women's right to vote. That also began with a handful of women and an idea back in 1848, to make a change so bold at the time, that it took 72 years and many, many women (and men) to make happen. The 19th amendment was ratified on August 26, 1920 and on November 3 this year, millions of women cast their ballot in the U.S. election.

At the legislative level, the Fund made a grant in 2010 to support **Christian Community Action's Mothers (and Others) for Justice** documentary, "Living in a Broken System." The film features individuals sharing their personal struggles and challenges living within the welfare system. It premiered at the Connecticut General Assembly, and has been shown at numerous conferences and forums throughout the state. Additionally, the Fund has helped elevate women's voices by providing scholarships for young women to attend **The Campaign School at Yale**.



Members of the Mothers (and Others) for Justice

## What We've Accomplished Together

Since its inception, the Fund has hosted special gatherings featuring noted speakers. The group of renown women has included activist and Ms. Foundation for Women founder Gloria Steinem with Ms. Foundation President and CEO Teresa Younger, Women's March Co-chair Linda Sarsour, "Good and Mad" author Rebecca Traister, and 'me too.' Movement founder Tarana Burke. Other distinguished speakers have been writer and "On Being" contributor Courtney Martin, actress and former Chairwoman of the National Endowment for the Arts Jane Alexander, and Pulitzer Prize winning journalist and bestselling author Anna Quindlen.



Courtney Martin at the 2015 Annual Meeting

Fund events have inspired and urged women to be decisionmakers, allies and advocates. They've encouraged girls to achieve without fear, and as Gloria Steinem reminded us at the 20th Anniversary celebration, to never forget the basis of women's philanthropy — that the people who are experiencing the challenge or problem know best the solutions.

Convening topics have been as varied as the women who attend them. They've covered intersectionality, the Voting Rights Act, reproductive rights, the Affordable Care Act and the care economy. There have been programs about strategic philanthropy for women, wealth creation and how to leave a personal legacy for your family and your community. Fund convenings have attracted women from all swaths of the community and helped create a powerful, deeply connected, diverse community of women and girls.

Throughout, the Fund has focused on creating a ripple effect in the areas of increased economic security, expanded leadership opportunities and, in particular, promoting advocacy and representation among women. The research shows that whether abroad or at home, investing in women and girls leads to economic growth and a stronger region. And that's good for all of us.



Tarana Burke with guests at the 2018 Annual Meeting

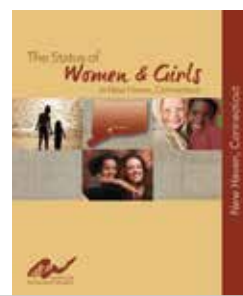
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Collaborate  
with others



"I used to think a philanthropist was a Warren Buffet... and through the Fund I realized we are all philanthropists. We all have different gifts. We have different skills and we can contribute them every single day." **Nancy Yao Maasbach**, past Fund chair



## What We've Accomplished Together

### Bus Passes and Bureaus 1995–2005

In the early years, grants from the Fund were “modest and meaningful.” They were about essential things: phone cards and bus passes so women living in homeless shelters had transportation to get to doctor’s appointments and job interviews.

Volunteer members of the Grants Committee provided careful consideration and lived experience to the grant deliberations. For example, a 2004 **Domestic Violence Services Emergency Shelter** request appealed for funding to provide bureaus at the only area shelter facility that allowed for women and their children to remain together.

A lively discussion occurred on whether purchasing bureaus advanced women and girls. The decision was made when the crux of the matter was revealed in the application. A mother experiencing homelessness noted, “When your entire life’s belongings are in a trash bag, a bureau is a big deal.”

### Early grants supported:

- **Rachel’s Table** employment training in the culinary arts for homeless women.
- **Elm City Girls Choir** acapella performing group of girls ages 8–16.
- **St. Martin de Porres** quilting workshop, for scholarships for women and girls to learn the art of quilting.
- **Life Haven** shelter’s purchase of computer software so women had access to math programs, typing tutorials, resume builders and family budget programs.
- **The Valley CARE Team’s** Family Ties project helping families cope with the challenges of HIV and AIDS.



Rachel’s Table, a program of the Jewish Federation of Greater New Haven and Fund grant recipient

- **HerStory** Theatre Project where girls ages 12–16 had the chance to turn their personal experiences into works of performance art.
- **Katherine Brennan School’s** Women of Dignity and Virtue, a motivational program for seventh- and eighth-grade girls focused on career development and building social skills.

### So Many Firsts 2005–2015

The next decade saw tremendous growth in promoting advocates for women and girls in new ways, looking closely at how to address larger systemic problems.

In 2008, the Fund saw an opportunity to break down barriers in the legal system for families seeking reunification through the **first policy research grant** for **r kids Family Center**. The investment of \$10,000 sought to document inequities in the legal system where deserving families had a 50-60% chance of being reunited due to representation barriers in the legal system; r kids Family Center families referred for reunification services have a 91% rate of reunification.

The next year the Fund made its **first federal policy investment** to support the efforts of the **New Haven Diaper Bank** (now The Diaper Bank of Connecticut) to get diapers included in items listed as essential in public assistance.

The Fund celebrated its 15th Anniversary in 2010 with the creation and release of “I’m A Philanthropist,” the Telly Award Winning piece documenting the history and future of women’s philanthropy. At the same time the **first individually-named funds designated for women and girls** were created for gender equity. The Women’s Vision and Edelweiss funds started a trend that has elevated women’s philanthropy in Greater New Haven and resulted in 25 individually-named funds commemorating incredible women and supporting the Fund’s focus on women and girls in grantmaking for perpetuity.

In 2011, **the Fund’s first multi-year commitment** was awarded for health research after disproportionately poor outcomes for women with cardiac issues came to light. Shockingly, as late as 1995, scientific research did not include gender as a variable; the lack of understanding and knowledge about how women experience heart attacks contributed to adverse health outcomes for women in critical care. The grant to **Women’s Health Research at Yale** totaled \$50,000 over two years to support the inclusion of gender in scientific research.

In 2014, **the Fund refined its approach to grantmaking**, asking nonprofit partners how programs were intentionally designed for women and girls based on participant



“We must doggedly press on since there is so much work to do, and because ‘a better world for women is a better world for all of us.’”

Janna Wagner, past Fund chair



Deepen relationships





Pequeñas Ligas Hispanas

experience and circumstances. The Fund focused more intentionally on economic security broadly as a preferred area of investment and one year later — its 20th anniversary year — **the first six figure investment in the economic security of women and girls** occurred. Longtime Fund partner **All Our Kin** was awarded \$160,000 over three years for the Business Entrepreneurship program, investing in business education and planning supports for family childcare providers — an essential component of the modern day workforce.

Throughout this decade, the Fund’s grantmaking helped girls grow and women advocate for themselves:

- At **Pequeñas Ligas Hispanas de New Haven**, girls ages 4–18 tapped into their inner athlete by participating in volleyball, track, basketball and soccer through a program designed to advance girls’ skills, confidence and participation in high school or college sports.

- At the **Young Parent Program of Milford Inc.**, pregnant and parenting teens had access to childbirth classes and support services and family planning.
- The Fund collaborated with the **City of New Haven** in 2012 to publish “The Status of Women & Girls” report.

Also noteworthy in this decade was the advent of the Fund’s Giving Women campaign. Originally aimed to increase the Fund’s endowment from \$700,000 to one million dollars, this effort to grow resources for women and girls was encouraged by The Community Foundation which offered matching donations, dollar for dollar, up to \$100,000 to incentivize giving. At the time of the Fund’s 25th anniversary, the permanent endowment, including the individually-named designated funds supporting its grantmaking activities, is valued at \$3.5 million.

## Advocacy, Equity and Social Justice 2016–present

At the 23rd Annual Meeting of the Fund in 2018, then chair Janna Wagner remarked of the Fund, “We are more diverse across religion, race and ethnicity and age than we have ever been in our [history]. As a result, we give voice to a range of identities and beliefs, and we unite over our commitment to feminism, equity, and fighting injustice.”

That’s not by accident. Since the Fund’s inception, Fund leaders, supporters and grant recipients have continuously learned from each other and expanded understanding through listening sessions, commissioned reports, roundtables and public forums. The work has been intergenerational, and the commitment to collaboration, inclusivity and celebration of diversity has led to some noteworthy activities:

The Bilingual Community Advocacy project at **Connecticut Women’s Education and Legal Fund (CWEALF)** was first funded in 2016 and is a collaboration with **Junta** and **New Haven Legal Assistance Association**. The project helps under-served Latina populations to successfully navigate the legal and social service systems.

Another collaboration with the **Connecticut Women’s Consortium** resulted in the training of 25 community, behavioral health and educational organizations to provide the renowned Girls Circle curriculum to their respective constituents. Girls Circle programs

are evidence-based support groups for girls ages 9–18 to build self-esteem, promote resiliency, empowerment, identity and healthy relationships. This innovative grant expanded access to girl-focused programs in the region.

In 2019, the Fund awarded its first grant to the local LGBTQ+ community to defray the costs of programming for persons who identify as female. The grant to the **New Haven Pride Center** is paving the way for a more inclusive community through new programs and enhancing existing activities to have a larger focus on traditionally-marginalized LGBTQ+ identified women, including assigned female at birth, cisgender and transgender women.

That same year, Women & Girls funding helped create the Sisters United women’s program at **The Connecticut Bail Fund**, and the first formal organizing initiative against mass incarceration in Connecticut led by women of color. Funding makes possible staffing for support and resources for women newly out of prison, fighting criminal charges and worried about their children being taken away, women battling addiction or on the verge of losing housing.



Focus on gender; amplify voices



“I want people to think what is the biggest boldest gift that you can make in whatever way makes you proud? Just don’t be afraid to do it.”

Jana Shea, Advisory Board Alumna



In response to the dismantling of the Connecticut General Assembly's **Permanent Commission on the Status of Women** just three days before the end of the 2016 legislative session, the Fund quickly mobilized to collaborate with women's funds across the state to maintain the network of aligned and allied gender advocates. The Fund approved a two-year, \$40,000 investment to start the **Connecticut Collective for Women & Girls** (the Collective). The Fund continues in a leadership role to support the Collective; a renewed commitment has been approved in 2020.

Through the Collective, the Fund has joined with women's funds again to support a research report on the economic effects of the coronavirus pandemic on women. Initial results show just how disproportionate the economic impact has been. According to the National Women's Law Center, in September 2020 alone, 865,000 women left the workforce in the U.S. at a rate four times higher than men. The final report about the impact of COVID-19 is due to be released in early 2021 and will be used to inform legislative and policy leaders.

It's quite something to see just how far that first idea, that first gift, has traveled — galvanizing and inspiring so many, advancing the lives of women and girls.

If you like what we've collectively been able to accomplish over these last 25 years, just imagine what we can do moving forward together!  
**Your gift will help us continue to:**

- **Advocate** for systems change
- **Listen** and be a voice
- **Advance** gender equity
- **Collaborate** with other funders, leaders and stakeholders to maximize impact
- **Deepen** relationships with nonprofit partners and the women and girls they serve
- **Promote** the social and economic advancement of women and girls

**Please consider supporting the Fund with a gift online at [fundforwomenandgirls.org](http://fundforwomenandgirls.org) or mail your gift in the enclosed envelope.**

To support the Fund's activities in perpetuity through your own designated fund, we welcome the opportunity to speak with you. You can build your fund over time and name it for yourself or in honor or memory of a loved one. Please contact Sharon Cappetta at 203-777-7071.

