

2015 ANNUAL REPORT







2015 Annual Report



www.OmahaWomensFund.org

Who We Are

As a trusted expert in the community, we identify critical issues, fund innovative solutions and influence dynamic change. Since our beginning in 1990, the Women's Fund has supported local agencies with nearly \$11 million in grants for programs that address the most pressing issues as identified by our research, and we have established our own programs to meet unaddressed needs.

Our Mission

The Women's Fund of Omaha examines issues and conducts research to provide informed support for initiatives that improve the lives of metropolitan area women and girls.

Our Vision

A community where every woman and girl has the opportunity to reach her full potential.



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Lisa Schulze

Adolescent Health

Director of Operations

Marketing and PR Manager

Project Training and Education

Adolescent Health

Project Coordinator

Trafficking Response Coordinator

London Woolman

Julie Strzyz

Jodi Teal





Dear Friend,

In 2015, the Women's Fund of Omaha celebrated our 25th Anniversary of improving the lives of women and girls in our community. We dedicated the year to building through research, grants, and advocacy. Here are the highlights of what we accomplished:

1 Identifying Issues

The cornerstone of our mission is to seek relevant, credible information concerning the status of women and girls in our community. Through surveys and in-depth research, we are able to identify major issues that impact their lives. We completed the following research:

- ▶ Human Trafficking Capacity and Needs Assessment of the current services landscape in Nebraska shows that 84% of service providers across the state did not believe they were adequately meeting the needs of sex trafficking victims.
- ▶ Women in Leadership Research was completed through 80 interviews with Omaha's top influential leaders in Omaha's corporate, non-profit, academic, governmental, and medical sectors.

2 Funding Solutions

Investing in innovative solutions to address the needs we identify through our research underscores how the Women's Fund can influence change for women and girls in our community. We awarded \$250,000 to 14 organizations in our priority areas of economic self-sufficiency, leadership, sexual literacy, and violence against women. Highlights of what this funding means for women and girls in our community include:

- Nebraska Children's Home Society, Teen Chat program offers youth educational classes and supports focusing on STD education, sexual literacy, and pregnancy prevention while developing a healthy sense of personal well-being.
- Notre Dame Sisters, Hotel/Motel Education program trains hotel and motel staff within a 50 mile radius of Omaha to identify and report sex trafficking in their facilities.
- Nebraskans for Civic Reform, CIRCLES programs trains young

women to advocate through various mediums by partnering them with coaches to teach them how to engage with policymakers. to strengthen collaborations with law enforcement agencies and service providers on best practices when working with immigrant victims of domestic violence.

8 Leading Change

Providing education and awareness opportunities for our community to learn more about the critical issues facing women and girls is integral to our mission to improve their lives. In addition to building our capacity to engage in public policy, the Women's Fund led change through:

- A record crowd of 1,400 business and community leaders heard the star of ABC's "Shark Tank," Barbara Corcoran, give her very best advice for starting, growing, expanding, and investing in businesses, and converting ideas and "dreams" into fortunes during her keynote address at our 25th Anniversary "Lead the Change" celebration.
- ▶ 35 women participated in four sessions of "Ready to Run" that prepared them to run for elected office.
- Our Women's Fund Circles group offered opportunities for 65 young professional women to network, interact with established professional women and learn about philanthropy.

Thank you for your continued commitment to the important work of the Women's Fund and our vision of a community where every woman and girl has the ability and opportunity to reach her full potential!

Sincerely,

Michallez

Michelle Zych Executive Director Women's Fund of Omaha Cheri Duryea, 2014-15 President Boad of Directors



Grant Spotlight

The Excellence in Service to Women Grant is intended to recognize and encourage excellence in programming for women that aims to achieve our shared vision of a community where every woman and girl can reach her full potential.

In 2015, we awarded \$25,000 to **Justice for our Neighbors—Nebraska**, for their Domestic Violence Access to Justice program, a program that aims to strengthen collaborations with law enforcement agencies and service providers on best practices when working with immigrant victims of domestic violence.

"The 2015 Excellence in Service to Women Award is extremely meaningful to Justice Fo Our Neighbors—Nebraska. Internally, the award energized the entire staff with its very positive message of support for the important work we do every day. Most important, the grant allowed us to reach a greater number of immigrant victims of domestic abuse in our community. We used the funds to provide direct, high-quality immigration legal services and to effect systemic change by educating and connecting critical stakeholders in the justice system."

-Emiliano Lerda, J.D., LL.M., Executive Director Justice For Our Neighbors—Nebraska (JFON-NE)



LEFT TO RIGHT: Erin McArthur, director of operations; Emily Scotto, Weitz fellow; Lisa Schulze, adolescent health project training and education coordinator; Meghan Malik, trafficking response coordinator; Brenda Council, adolescent health project coordinator; Jen Pavkov, marketing and public relations manager; Michelle Zych, executive director.

WOMEN'S FUND CELEBRATES 25 YEARS OF RESEARCH, SOLUTIONS & LEADERSHIP

Twenty five years ago, the landscape in Omaha was very different for women and girls. Sure, there were some nonprofits serving these groups—the YWCA, Girls Club and Girl Scouts among them.

But for women in particular, no one was really moving the needle on the larger, more long-term issues they were facing: Domestic Violence. Pay Equity. Leadership Training. Economic Self-Sufficiency. Sky-Rocketing Child Care Costs. Work-Family Balance. And so much more.

"The Ford Foundation was offering a \$150,000 grant to organizations trying to set up a Women's Fund, and the Omaha Community Foundation thought this was a good idea for our city," says Gail Walling Yanney, one of the organization's key founders. "So I

called my friends together, and some expressed interest in getting this going. We recruited Mary Heng-Braun to be the first executive director, and the rest is history."

This small group of visionary women recognized both the need for, and potential power of, an organization focused exclusively on a wide range of women's issues. They began raising money to match the \$150,000 Ford grant, and succeeded in establishing the Women's Fund. The organization's first research report, "How Are Women Doing in Omaha?" was published in 1994. It would be the first of 20 research reports conducted over the next 25 years.

Yet Heng-Braun says that at first, reception to the idea of starting a Wom-

en's Fund was lukewarm in some circles. "It was a struggle initially," she says. "Our efforts were seen by some non-profits as competition, because women's organizations at that time were inherently underfunded. Resources were scarce." Of course, within a few short years, the Women's Fund would help to not only "increase the size of the pie," Heng-Braun says, but also support other women- and girl-serving nonprofits both financially through grants, and with reliable research to validate their important work.

How did this organization—which was initially housed with the Omaha Community Foundation and began with the simple mission of improving the lives of women and girls—grow to become the local collective voice and

primary champion of informed and innovative change for the female gender?

According to Yanney and Heng-Braun, it comes down to leadership and focus. "The dedication of a consistently solid board of directors—coupled with a crystal clear mission—deserve the credit," Heng-Braun says. "I don't believe this organization has ever really lost focus."

Dianne Lozier, who served on the board in its earliest years, agrees. "This was not just any group of women, nor was it a wholly homogenous group. They were older and younger; Christian, non-Christian and atheist; white, black and Latino; Republicans, Democrats and a-politicals; doctors, lawyers, educators, business professionals, retirees and stay-at-home moms."

This diversity was intentional, Lozier says, yet "diversity of membership, while truly valuable, does not always make for a comfortable process. In the early years the group frequently had to agree to disagree on particular topics—some of which were controversial—in order to move forward."

Yet the organization's mission was also solidified during that time: to identify issues through research, to fund solutions through grant giving, and to lead change through advocacy. In an effort to further the mission's reach, the Women's Fund founded *Today*'s *Omaha Woman* magazine in 1997.

About 10 years after the organization's inception—after Heng-Braun had retired and the organization struggled briefly to find a new leader—Ellie Archer was hired as executive director. Under her 11-year tenure, the Women's Fund published 11 research studies, grew the endowment from \$1.6 million to more than \$6 million, and started programs such as Ready to Run, Talk of the Town, Circles, and Ready to Serve. The first Women's Fund luncheon took place during Archer's first year, and the effort to reduce STDs in Douglas County, which continues today, began shortly thereafter.

For Archer, who started just as the Women's Fund became its own 501(c) (3)—moving out from the shelter of the

Omaha Community Foundation—the obstacles were many. "When I came on, it was a very challenging time in terms of the national scene—I started two months before 9/11," Archer says. "Fundraising became very difficult, so a decision was made that we would encourage people to give to direct service providers during the recession."

And yet despite this and other challenges, the Women's Fund continued to grow, giving increasingly larger grants to local nonprofits, conducting more indepth research and raising continued awareness about women's issues. "The neat thing about the Women's Fund is that over the years I really felt everyone involved was genuinely interested in our cause and mission," Archer says. "They weren't there to advance themselves personally. They were there to advance women in our community, and shared a real camaraderie. That's why we were ultimately successful."

Archer retired three years ago, and the Women's Fund hired Michelle Zych, a young leader who by all accounts has infused new energy into the organization. "Ellie set it up for Michelle, and Michelle is dynamite," Heng-Braun says. "It's better today than I ever dreamed—what a super feeling that is."

Yanney wholeheartedly agrees. "We have the energy now that we had 25 years ago, because the next generation is out there doing it like we did, back when we started," she says, adding the work of the Women's Fund is still very necessary. "Women's issues are still the world's issues," she says.

Zych says that she and other women of her generation are products of the work of the Women's Fund. "Thanks to the dedication of our founders, we are able to stand on their shoulders to keep responding to the needs of women and girls in our community," she says.

The future looks bright, Zych says, because the Women's Fund continues to seek bold solutions to the tough issues that impact the ability of women and girls to reach their full potential. "Our strength lies in our ability to convene partners to develop and implement collective strategies that actually

improve the lives of women and girls. We will continue to rely on research to ensure that our solutions are best practice-informed and culturally competent. We will continue to fund organizations that work directly with women and girls. We will use our position as a respected institution to advocate for policy solutions. And we will build the next generation of leaders to ensure that this important work continues."

To date, the Women's Fund has awarded 100-plus local women- and girls-serving agencies \$4.5 million in grants. Its endowment has grown to nearly \$10 million, and it will release its 21st research report in 2016.

But the real question is, has it improved the lives of women and girls in the Omaha community, as originally intended? According to its founders and community leaders, the answer is a resounding yes.

"When we used to go talk to CEOs about the Women's Fund or women's issues, they didn't take us seriously," Yanney says. "I think they do now."

The Women's Fund has established itself as a credible leader, educator, and advocate on issues facing women and girls, Lozier says. "Many elements played a role in its growth and development—grit, perseverance, even plain old stubbornness—but we always focused on the overwhelming desire to make a difference. Twenty five years later, it is a very powerful and respected institution.

The Women's Fund continues to identify issues, fund solutions and lead change."

Although the Women's Fund has certainly surpassed the dreams of its founders, Heng-Braun says they never expected to see it reach its pinnacle—and they still haven't.

"It's a moving target," she says. "The vision was that none of those who set it up would see its true fruits in our lifetime. It's like planting an acorn to grow an oak tree—it continues to grow and live on long after you've gone. So, too, will the Women's Fund."

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2015 Gifts

\$10,000 +

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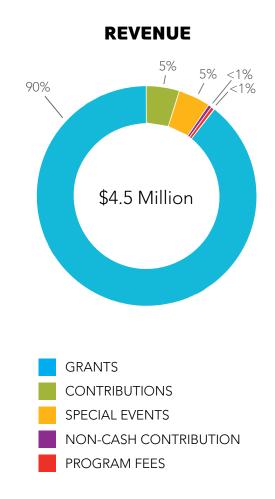
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2015 Tributes

The Women's Fund thanks those who contributed to our annual Tribute Campaign. A full listing of 2015 Tributes are listed online at goo.gl/oGL34x

2015 Financial Summary



Grants	\$4,117,880
Contributions	\$223,070
Special Events	\$217,325
Non-cash Contribution	\$20,939
Program Fees	\$1,470

Total\$4,580,684



Help Us Make an Even **BIGGER** Impact!

- ► Support our work by making a <u>donation online</u>, by mail (1111 N. 13th Street, Suite #106, Omaha, NE 68102) or by calling us at 402.827.9280
- ► Take advantage of employer matching gift options
- ▶ Include the Women's Fund in your estate plans
- Visit our website at www.OmahaWomensFund.org to learn more about our work and how together we are making a difference
- ▶ Join the conversation on our social sites—Facebook, Twitter and YouTube





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