

## Washington Area Women's Foundation The Power Of Giving Together

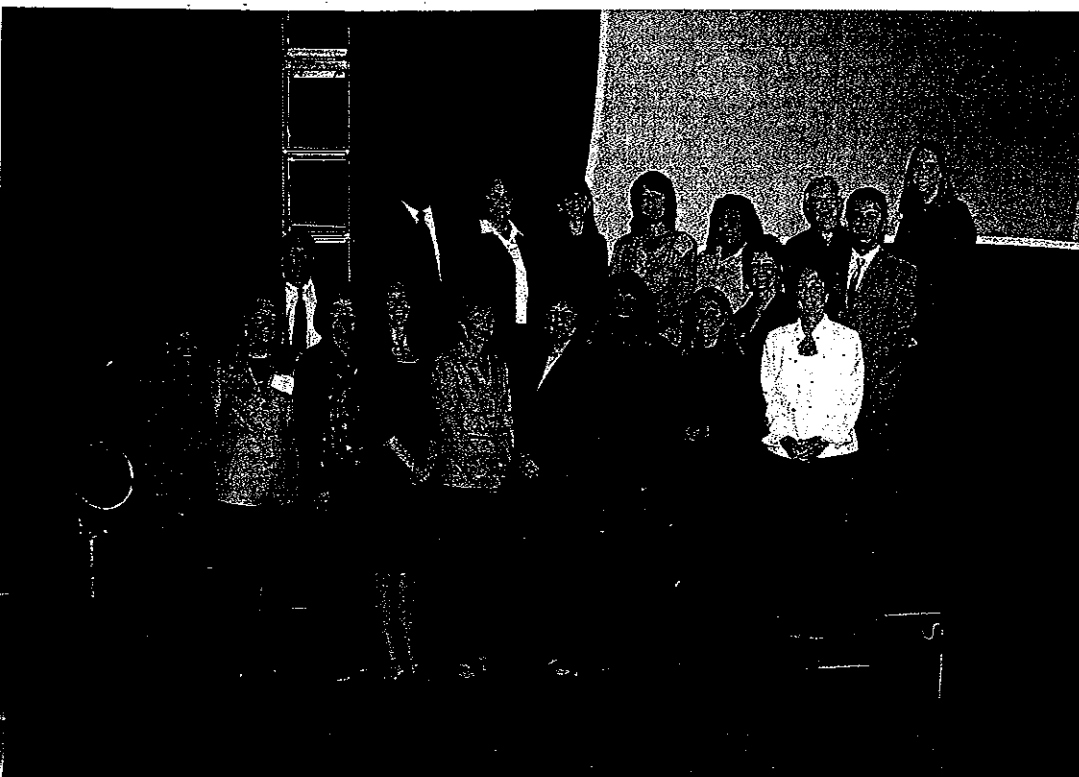
By Carrie Smoot

Washington Area Women's Foundation (The Women's Foundation) is dedicated to making empowerment, economic security and self-reliance a reality for low-income, women-headed families in metropolitan Washington. Through donor education and engagement, grantmaking, leadership development, public awareness and research, it is encouraging a powerful philanthropic wave to improve the lives of all women and girls.

"Involvement with The Women's Foundation is networking of the heart," says president Anne Mosle. It's the only regional women-focused grantmaker and one of more than 130 women's funds worldwide. Grantmaking doubled in 2005. Individual and institutional giving increased. A new clearinghouse will launch in the fall to connect people with resources to grantee and non-profit partners and the women and families they serve.

A Portrait of Women & Girls in the Washington Metropolitan Area ([www.thewomensfoundation.org/PortraitFinal.pdf](http://www.thewomensfoundation.org/PortraitFinal.pdf)), a collaborative report released in 2003, inspired the \$5 million Stepping Stones Initiative of Washington Area Women's Foundation, which contains a range of strategies for financial education and wealth creation, creating pathways to self-sufficient jobs and business ownership and improving child care and early education and health and safety.

Wider Opportunities for Women (WOW) ([www.wowonline.org/](http://www.wowonline.org/)) is one of 19 current Stepping Stones regional grantees. WOW helps women enter nontraditional careers like construction. Executive director Joan Kuriansky will use the Stepping Stones grant for a three-year project to bring more women into protective service jobs such as firefighters, po-



Left front: Stacey Stewart, Julie Jensen. Far right front: Anne Mosle and Donna Callejon (board chair) with all Stepping Stones Grantee Partner Organization representatives

lice officers and homeland security personnel.

Kuriansky outlined figures. "In Fairfax County, VA, for a woman to support herself, one infant and one preschooler, her annual salary must be \$53,600. With an infant, preschooler and school-age child, the needed salary rises to \$69,000. Encouraging all women to pursue these careers puts them in higher income brackets to support their families."

Donna Callejon, The Women's Foundation board chair and chief operating officer of GlobalGiving ([www.globalgiving.org](http://www.globalgiving.org)) says much work remains, including continuing programs on asset building and job creation, and ensuring that The Women's Foundation is a valuable, permanent and comprehensive

resource for potential donors and grassroots community groups. "We are just beginning to capture and quantify the most useful data," she says. "It's not enough to just look at how many women were involved in certain programs. We want to look at how well women were able to take newfound knowledge, resources and insights and improve their lives."

Brigitte Rouson is a member of The Women's Foundation's African-American Women's Giving Circle. "We plan to partner with well-known institutions across D.C. that can tell us where the needs and opportunities are while listening to the community. We want to provide support that makes a difference. Place-based giving respects people and fosters self-determination." Rouson says the next steps for the

Circle are to network, participate in community gatherings, invite proposals and make site visits, and then make grants in two cycles, this year and in 2007.

"The Women's Foundation is incredibly helpful in linking and educating donors about nonprofit organizations," says Leah Rampy, former chair and current member of The Women's Foundation's Rainmakers Giving Circle, whose projects build self-esteem, health and safety for girls and young women. "It's very powerful to review applications, participate in site visits and learn about organizations we want to support."

"The cold hard truth is that many women who head households lack access to quality jobs and education." *continued on page 45*

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tional opportunities," says Stepping Stones co-chair U.S. Sen. Mary Landrieu (D-LA). "Women deserve real job opportunities and not just those that allow them to adequately support their families, but opportunities that give them a real chance to move ahead and build assets for themselves, their family and their community."

Julie Jensen is also Stepping Stones co-chair and a lead investor. "The Washington area is home, and I want to give back," she says. "To have impact, to make a big commitment, you have to stretch yourself."

A philanthropist, tax lawyer and single mom, Jensen serves on the boards of many local and regional entities. Her parents began the Genesis Group to support an array of local and national projects. Jensen and her late husband organized the Chasdrew Fund, which provides nonprofit training, technical assistance and capacity building. The Women's Foundation used funding from the Chasdrew Fund to develop and implement the Stepping Stones grantmaking program.

"When I speak to groups about Stepping Stones, I want to show them the many faces of single parenthood. It's not enough to concentrate on one thing or focus on short-term results. You can build a state-of-the-art day care center, yet if women can't afford it, you haven't gained anything. Stepping Stones addresses all the issues that will lead low-income women with families to economic security—they are resourceful women with great untapped potential," Jensen says.

Stepping Stones is also co-chaired Stacey D. Stewart, president and CEO of the Fannie Mae Foundation ([www.fanniemaefoundation.org/](http://www.fanniemaefoundation.org/)). The Fannie Mae Foundation pledged \$1 million in 2003 for Stepping Stones and has provided ongoing support to community anchor organizations like Marshall Heights Community Development Organization ([www.mhcd.org](http://www.mhcd.org)) and Manna Inc. ([www.mannadc.org/mannadc/transition%202006.htm](http://www.mannadc.org/mannadc/transition%202006.htm)).

"We are trying to improve the lives of low-income people. Home ownership is elusive for low-income single women with children because they lack "stepping stones" of stable employment, health care and child care. Stepping Stones partners address these basic needs. Grantee organizations teach financial literacy and money management—additional tools for owning a home." Public, private, individual and corporate investors support Stepping Stones. "All want to help it thrive," Stewart says.

The Women's Foundation and its foundation, corporate, government and community partners, says Mosle, do what they can to change systems for the better. "We've learned that strong families are integral to global economic development and that women are central to the process. We want to support that approach in our region. The upcoming local elections will provide an opportunity for candidates to demonstrate their commitment and innovation in areas such as workforce development programs, which are key to jobs for low-income women with families. It will be interesting to see how women mobilize to support candidates trying to lift up this population."

"We work to ensure that our community is vibrant and supports all women and girls. As one of the fastest growing women's foundations in the country, Washington Area Women's Foundation is a key resource and catalyst for women's philanthropic potential," says Mosle. "In giving together, we can make the most impact."

*Carrie Smoot is a Northern Virginia freelance writer.*

### Washington Area Women's Foundation

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