

2009 **STEPPING STONES REPORT**

LAYING THE FOUNDATION FOR WOMEN'S ECONOMIC SECURITY



**Washington Area
Women's Foundation**

**SINCE ITS FOUNDING IN 1998, WASHINGTON AREA WOMEN'S
FOUNDATION HAS WORKED TO BUILD A POWERFUL AND
ENDURING WAVE OF PHILANTHROPY TO IMPROVE THE LIVES OF
WOMEN AND GIRLS BY:**

EXPANDING AND LEVERAGING WOMEN'S PHILANTHROPY;

INCREASING SOCIAL-CHANGE PHILANTHROPY
IN THE COMMUNITY;

PROVIDING GRANTS, OPERATIONAL RESOURCES AND TECHNICAL
ASSISTANCE TO LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS; AND

SERVING AS A REGIONAL VOICE FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS.



STEPPING STONES 2009: LAYING THE FOUNDATION FOR WOMEN'S ECONOMIC SECURITY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Launched in 2005, Stepping Stones is a critically powerful and effective tool for accomplishing the mission of The Women's Foundation. With a vision of providing the comprehensive services and advocacy necessary to move families out of poverty for the long-term, Stepping Stones requires collaboration among an engaged group of stakeholders throughout the community—Grantee Partners, government officials, policymakers, corporations, foundations and individual philanthropists. Stepping Stones connects community-based organizations throughout the area to each other and to women who need their services. By bringing these stakeholders together to tackle some of our region's greatest challenges, Stepping Stones is able to do more than any one entity, strategy or service could do alone.

During the recession, even with high unemployment and an unstable housing market, Stepping Stones has continued to make a difference in the lives of low-income, women-headed families through the provision of services and advocacy focused on asset building and workforce development. Below is a summary of the results achieved in Year Four (July 2008-June 2009):

- **Grantee Partners helped more than 3,600 women in the target population receive financial education and job counseling services, a marked increase over previous years.**
- **Nearly 1,000 women increased their assets by \$2.2 million, largely due to tax credit refunds.**
- **Sixty-six women became homeowners.**
- **Over 70 women increased their income by more than \$600,000 due to job placements.**
- **Grantee Partners helped support six policy changes that ultimately benefitted women-headed families.**
- **Grantee Partners leveraged the work of others through increased partnerships and collaborations, reporting 230 organizational partnerships this year alone.**

These results are striking given the economic context. In December 2008, economists declared that the nation was in fact in a recession and had been since the previous year. Unemployment rapidly approached and then hit double digits in several states across the country as the federal government wrestled with bailout packages and an infusion of stimulus funding. Despite the dire headlines, the Washington metropolitan area has one of the lowest unemployment rates among regions in the nation (6.5 percent in June 2009).¹ According to the Brookings Institution's *MetroDCMonitor*, the Washington metropolitan area is currently among the top 20 strongest performing metropolitan areas in the nation.

However, within the region there are still wide variations, and it is clear that the outlook will get worse before it gets better. For example, the unemployment rate in the District of Columbia was 11.3 percent in June 2009. In addition, the region lost 31,700 jobs between July 2008 and July 2009,² and suburban Maryland and northern Virginia are predicted to lose another 24,000 jobs.³

¹ Brookings Institution, *MetroDCMonitor*, http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Files/Programs/Metro/metro_monitor/09_metro_monitor/09_dc_monitor.pdf

² Brookings Institution, *MetroDCMonitor*, Brookings Institute, *MetroDCMonitor*, http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Files/Programs/Metro/metro_monitor/09_metro_monitor/09_dc_monitor.pdf

³ George Mason University, Center for Regional Analysis, <http://www.cra-gmu.org/current-indicators/USandWashingtonAreaEconomiesAug26.pdf>

Reverberations in the housing market from the foreclosure crisis have also affected the region. Overall, housing prices in the region fell 5.7 percent between June 2008 and June 2009. Low-income purchasers have been at particular risk for foreclosure. In the District, foreclosure activity has not been uniformly distributed throughout the city. Wards and neighborhoods with lower property values and a concentration of low-income residents (Wards 7 and 8) have had higher rates of foreclosure starts and sales.⁴

Moreover, the Stepping Stones target population (low-income, women-headed families making between \$15,000 and \$35,000 per year) has undergone demographic changes. While the District saw little change in the number of women-headed families between 2000 and 2005, both Montgomery County, MD and Fairfax County, VA saw increases of 3 percent and 2.3 percent respectively to 19 and 15.6 percent. Still the majority of the target population resides in Prince George's County, MD (33 percent) and the District (28 percent). Additionally, although the majority of women in the target population are African American (69 percent), the share of Latina women increased by 9 percent to 14 percent.⁵

While many challenges lie ahead, the most recent Stepping Stones results demonstrate the effectiveness of this model in countering the cycle of poverty. **The cumulative results are striking: over the lifetime of Stepping Stones, just over 6,000 women have increased their income and assets by \$22.2 million.** Half of that gain is a direct result of advocacy efforts to enact a living wage in the District of Columbia. The remainder (\$8 million) is a result of increases in assets through debt reduction, increases in savings and homeownership, with an additional \$3 million as a result of increases in income from job placements. In total, 286 women became homeowners, achieving a lifelong dream.

During hard economic times, people need services and advocacy that can help them either maintain their financial stability or prepare themselves for a future recovery. The success of Stepping Stones in helping low-income women-headed families continue to achieve income and asset gains during a serious recession is a testament to the strength of this model in good times and bad.

⁴ <http://www.neighborhoodinfodc.org/housing/#latest>

⁵ Analysis prepared by the Urban Institute for Washington Area Women's Foundation, June 2008.

CLEARING THE PATH: STEPPING STONES BACKGROUND AND HISTORY

Washington Area Women's Foundation created Stepping Stones in response to findings from the organization's groundbreaking 2003 report, *A Portrait of Women & Girls in the Washington Metropolitan Area*. The report showed that low-income, women-headed families—single women raising children—were the most economically vulnerable population in the region. The report identified four key areas for work to improve the lives of these women and their families, areas deemed critical to ending the persistent cycle of poverty:

- **Financial education and wealth creation opportunities;**
- **Pathways to self-sufficient jobs and business ownership;**
- **Affordable early care and education options; and**
- **Improved health and safety.**

These four areas formed the core of Stepping Stones, and in 2004, The Women's Foundation began developing coordinated strategies for attacking the problem systematically. They included grantmaking and technical assistance, community education and engagement, and advocacy and leadership development. To power the initiative, The Women's Foundation developed four grantmaking funds, each addressing distinct challenges. By mid-2008, women philanthropists, family foundations, national foundations, financial services corporations and the public sector had committed more than \$5 million in contributions. Since 2005, The Women's Foundation has made grants of over \$3.5 million to more than 45 community-based organizations.

During the first three years (2005-2008), Stepping Stones specifically targeted women-headed families (single women with children under the age of 18) with annual incomes of \$15,000-\$35,000—a low-income working population. According to an analysis by the Urban Institute, there were nearly 32,000 such families in the Washington metropolitan region in 2000, with the majority living in Prince George's County, MD (37 percent) and the District of Columbia (28 percent).

WALKING THE ROAD: GRANTMAKING STRATEGIES

Early in the effort, The Women's Foundation mapped out a timetable for launching each of the individual grant funds. Accordingly, three funds were launched in Stepping Stones' first two years: the Financial Education and Wealth Creation Fund, the Jobs Fund and the Strategic Opportunity and Partnership Fund. Work on early care and education was officially launched in October 2008 with the creation of the Early Care and Education Funders Collaborative. The fifth and final fund aimed at improving women's health and safety is expected to be launched in 2010.

FINANCIAL EDUCATION AND WEALTH CREATION FUND

The goal of the Financial Education and Wealth Creation Fund (FEWC) is to help low-income, women-headed families obtain a base level of financial knowledge and increase and preserve their collective assets and income. This fund supports community-based organizations in providing free tax preparation, homeownership counseling and basic financial education services.

- **During the fourth year of Stepping Stones, Grantee Partners with FEWC Fund grants helped 844 low-income women increase their personal savings by more than \$2 million. This is largely due to the number of women claiming and receiving the Earned Income Tax Credit.**
- **Year Four saw a dramatic increase in the number of women (more than 3,000) seeking financial education counseling and services. This number exceeds the total number in both Years Two and Three, and is a direct result the economic downturn.**
- **Despite a time of economic decline and a turbulent housing market, 66 women purchased homes this year.**
- **In all, Grantee Partners under the FEWC Fund helped nearly 1,000 women decrease their debt, increase their savings or increase their home equity this year—representing \$2.2 million in increased assets. Over the past four years, Stepping Stones has provided these services to more than 2,900 low-income women in the area, for an increase in assets of over \$7.9 million.**

FEWC FUND SUCCESS STORY

Gwendolyn Mathis was born and raised in Washington, D.C., and has never lived anywhere else. So it made perfect sense for Gwen to want to own a home in the city that is her own. Ever since Gwen knew she wanted to become a homeowner, she has taken the steps that would lead to making this dream a reality. Her first step was becoming a member of Manna's Homebuyers Club in 1990. However, Gwen's road to homeownership was a long and arduous journey that included a job loss, construction delays and serious health setbacks, but she persevered and on September 18, 2008, she settled on her new home where she currently lives with her children.

JOBS FUND

The goal of the Jobs Fund is to build better pathways to jobs with family-sustaining wages and benefits and/or career ladders that include wage and benefit progression. The fund supports job training and workforce development services, including job placement, retention and advancement focused on occupations and sectors that are most likely to pay family-sustaining wages and benefits or to have clear career ladders with potential for professional and wage advancement.

- **This year, Grantee Partners with Jobs Fund grants helped place 15 women in higher-paying jobs, 18 in high-growth jobs, and 38 in nontraditional jobs. Since 2005, over 3,000 women have been placed in higher-paying jobs, through direct placements or through enactment of the District of Columbia's living wage law.**
- **Grantee Partners helped 323 women take advantage of educational opportunities aimed at improving their work skills this year. They placed 125 women in apprenticeships or internships, provided the women with employment mentoring or otherwise helped them become job-ready.**
- **Over the life of Stepping Stones, Grantee Partners have helped more than 660 low-income women participating in programs supported by the Jobs Fund increase their incomes by more than \$2.9 million.**

JOBS FUND SUCCESS STORY

Washington Area Women in the Trades (WAWIT) has been working to adjust its program to meet growing demand for “green collar” construction tradeswomen in the region. A partnership of the YWCA of the National Capital Area, Wider Opportunities for Women and the Community Services Agency of the Metropolitan Washington Council of the AFL-CIO, WAWIT is a seven-week construction training program designed specifically for DC women. One recent success is a graduate, Rachel Perry, who started her own green business, Capitol Green Solutions LLC, with services including energy auditing and weatherization. Rachel credits WAWIT with helping her learn about the construction trade and green jobs in the Washington region and how this work can benefit a community and all of its residents. Rachel reports that Capitol Green Solutions LLC is in its “ramp-up” stage (including working to qualify as a Certified Business Enterprise with the DC government) and that she hopes to employ 20-25 workers by February 2010.

EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION FUNDERS COLLABORATIVE

In October 2008, The Women’s Foundation launched the Early Care and Education Funders Collaborative in partnership with several local funders. The Collaborative’s mission is to support systemic changes in early care and education programs that will improve early learning and ensure the access to and quality of care among young children (ages 0 to 5).

The Collaborative made its first round of grants in January 2009 to six local nonprofits. Three additional organizations received funding during the second round of grantmaking in June 2009. Results of this work will be incorporated into future Stepping Stones reports.

ECE FUNDERS COLLABORATIVE SUCCESS STORY

Lakisha Morris is currently enrolled in the Early Childhood Learning Institute at Hopkins House, working toward a degree in early care and education. As a single mom of five children, Lakisha was unable to work after her twins were born prematurely with severe disabilities and required around-the-clock care. In order to survive, Lakisha was reliant upon her mother and public assistance, but she knew that having an education was critical to her success. Praising the program, Lakisha said, “ECLI allows me to be a student in school without neglecting my parental duties. They provide childcare, in addition to tutoring services and mentors for all students. ECLI’s flexibility allows me to finish my education and continue pursuing my passion for working with children, especially children with special needs.”

STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITY AND PARTNERSHIP FUND

The Strategic Opportunity and Partnership Fund (SOP) makes grants to nonprofit organizations engaged in research, policy advocacy, grassroots organizing, capacity building or communications and media activities that support the overall goals of Stepping Stones. Over the four years of Stepping Stones, SOP Grantee Partners have scored several major policy victories, each with a potentially transformative effect on the lives of low-income women in the community. Most recently, these policy wins include:

- **Prevention of a proposed staffing cut in the DC Office of Women's Policy Initiatives;**
- **Collaboration among business, philanthropy and nonprofit communities, as well as the DC City Council, to work toward a community college for the District;**
- **Grantee Partner appointment to DC's Medicaid Health Care Ombudsman Advisory Committee; and**
- **Formation of a Nursing Assistive Personnel Sub-Committee, which has been asked to provide a training and regulation model to the DC Board of Nursing.**

LAYING THE FOUNDATION FOR SUCCESS

While many challenges lie ahead, the most recent Stepping Stones results demonstrate the effectiveness of this model in countering the cycle of poverty. **The cumulative results are striking: over the lifetime of Stepping Stones, just over 6,000 women have increased their income and assets by \$22.2 million.** Half of that gain is a direct result of advocacy efforts to enact a living wage in the District of Columbia. The remainder (\$8 million) is a result of increases in assets through debt reduction, increases in savings and homeownership, with an additional \$3 million as a result of increases in income from job placements. In total, 286 women became homeowners, achieving a lifelong dream.

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STEPPING STONES GRANTEE PARTNERS (2005-2009)

EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION FUNDERS COLLABORATIVE

CentroNia: To create a professional development pipeline to support Child Development Associate (CDA) course completion for entry-level teachers and to create a “train the trainer” model.

DC Appleseed: To provide advocacy to raise the wages of child care workers in the District.

Empower DC: To lead and coordinate efforts to support informed advocacy by DC residents directly in early childhood issues and ensure their sustained involvement in policymaking.

Fairfax Futures: To strengthen the capacity of the child care community and expand the engagement of teams in each of eight neighborhoods in Fairfax County as a scalable model for future expansion in the county and across the region.

Hopkins House: To support a demonstration project to increase the pool of early care and education professionals in the region by helping low-income women earn a Child Development Associate (CDA) and 31 credits toward the 67 needed for an Associate's Degree in Early Childhood Education.

Montgomery College Foundation: To implement the Family Child Care Fundamentals program to strengthen the capacity and professional development of family child care providers.

Prince George's Child Resource Center: To support providers serving low-income children as they navigate the newly implemented quality enhancement opportunities available through the Maryland State Department of Education.

Voices for Virginia's Children: To improve economic success for Virginia's low-income families through data and policy analysis, collaboration with partners, education and advocacy.

WETA: To support a new initiative that will provide parents and caregivers of infants and toddlers information on developmental milestones and ideas for activities that build pre-literacy skills.

FINANCIAL EDUCATION AND WEALTH CREATION FUND

Capital Area Asset Builders (CAAB): To support partnerships with Stepping Stones Grantee Partners to provide financial education and Individual Development Accounts to low-income, women-headed families.

Central American Resource Center (CARECEN): To develop a financial education and wealth creation program for clients in the target population.

Community Tax Aid, Inc. (CTA): To support a partnership in the EITC campaign to provide quality free tax preparation clinics and taxpayer education services for low-income, women-headed families.

Doorways for Women and Families: To support the Financial Literacy Independence Track Program to build financial literacy and behavioral capacities essential to helping women escape poverty.

Housing Counseling Services: To support the Women's Homeownership Initiative to build wealth among low-income women and women-headed families.

International Migrants' Development Fund (FIDMi): To support the Powered Latinas! Financial Promotoras Project, a program to increase engagement in the formal financial system and wealth creation opportunities.

Lydia's House: To support the Ward 8 Women's Financial Education Center to provide financial education and wealth creation strategies for low-income, women-headed families.

Manna, Inc.: To support the Homebuyers Club (HBC), Individual Development Account (IDA) and Manna Mortgage (MM) programs for low-income, women-headed families.

Marshall Heights Community Development Corporation (MHCDO): To support the Asset Building Pathway Program to provide financial education and counseling to reduce debt and increase savings and asset development opportunities.

Tenants Empowerment Network of Catholic Charities: To support the Financial Stability Program to provide financial education, personal financial management, and asset development services to secure financial self-sufficiency.

The Women's Center (2005) received a planning grant to develop a financial education curriculum with a gender lens.

JOBS FUND

CASA of Maryland: To support the Workforce Women's Initiative to place low-income Latina women in long-term jobs that pay a living wage.

Community Preservation and Development Corporation: To support a Home Healthcare Technologies Career Training Program to upgrade the skills of women working as nurse's aides and home health aides.

DC Hunger Solutions: To conduct public education and advocacy to connect Stepping Stones participants to federal nutrition programs.

Goodwill of Greater Washington: To support the Women in Construction program and improve services through intensive job training, gender-specific case management and employment retention services.

Greater Washington Workforce Development Collaborative: To support GWWDC's work to create policy and systems change that strengthen regional workforce development policies, enhance funding streams, develop or grow institutions, enhance the profile of workforce development issues and build seamless linkages between public, private, and nonprofit programs.

Northern Virginia Family Service: To support Training Futures, a program to provide intensive training in office technology and employment in the health care support industry.

SOME: To support the Center for Employment Training's three programs (Medical Administrative Assistant, Business and Customer Relations Associate, and Building Maintenance Service) to place low-income women in high-growth sector jobs and nontraditional occupations.

Southeastern University, Center for

Entrepreneurship: To support the Female Property Management Certificate program preparing women for careers in the real estate industry.

Urban Alliance Foundation: To support the Health Alliance program training D.C. residents for sustainable nursing careers.

Wider Opportunities for Women: To support a protective services sector project, creating pathways to jobs in law enforcement.

Year Up: To enroll 25 low-income, women-headed households in training to enter the information technology sector.

YWCA National Capital Area: To support the Washington Area Women in the Trades (WAWIT) program, training women for nontraditional occupations.

STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITY AND PARTNERSHIP FUND

Bethel House: To build the organization's capacity and participate in the Stepping Stones initiative.

CFED: To determine the feasibility of developing an asset scorecard in the Washington region.

Community Bridges: To support planning for a 2008 conference to empower immigrant and low-income girls about the power they have to overcome obstacles to financial, relational, and political success.

DC Appleseed: To support two projects addressing the lack of an adequate workforce development system in Washington, D.C.

DC Coalition on Long Term Care: To support improvements in the wages, benefits, training and job opportunities for long-term care home care workers in DC.

DC Employment Justice Center: To support the campaign for the living wage.

D.C. Women's Agenda: To support activities to bring the needs of the District's low-income women and girls to the forefront of policymakers and the community.

Empower DC: To support the Child Care for All Campaign, which works to develop the skills, confidence and leadership of low- and moderate-income parents to advocate around child care issues directly impacting their lives.

Fairfax Futures: To strengthen advocacy efforts in Fairfax County and Richmond for access to quality child care and early education by leveraging the resources of the business community.

Girl Scout Council of the Nation's Capital: To support work on updating the Portrait Project.

Greater Washington Board of Trade: To develop a strategic plan for the implementation of a regional health care workforce initiative.

Human Services Coalition of Prince George's

County: To support a Director of Public Policy position to advocate on behalf of Prince George's County nonprofits working to improve the lives of women and girls.

Prince George's Child Resource Center: To support the National Harbor Child Care Project that will provide links to high-quality, affordable child care by partnering with employers, offering quality enhancement opportunities to child care providers, and providing hands-on support for employed mothers seeking child care.

Southern Institute on Children and Families: To engage employers in the health care, real estate, and protective services sectors in a dialogue on challenges and opportunities related to promoting stability of lower-income employees in these three sectors.

Suitland Family Life and Development Corporation: To support a public awareness campaign targeting the business community in Prince George's County, encouraging them to adopt policies to benefit low-income, women-headed families.

The Training Source, Inc.: To support financial education services for low-income women in transitional housing and employment programs.

The Urban Institute: To serve as the Stepping Stones research partner by providing ongoing data analysis, organizing an annual research briefing, and preparing a monthly research newsletter.

Trinity University: To support work on updating the Portrait Project.

Virtuous Enterprises, Inc.: To support community focus groups to raise awareness of the needs of the Stepping Stones target population in Prince George's County.

PREVIOUS GRANTEE PARTNERS – MICROENTERPRISE AND BUSINESS OWNERSHIP PLANNING GRANTS

Southeastern University, Center for

Entrepreneurship: To support the planning and research component of the Low-Income Female Entrepreneurs (LIFE) Program, which identified the needs of female entrepreneurs.

Trinity University: To support research and planning of financial education and self-employment programs for low-income, women-headed families, and the development of an on-line inventory of microenterprise development organizations.

Stepping Stones Investors

Fannie Mae Foundation
Jenesis Group/Chasdrew Fund
Annie E. Casey Foundation
DC Appropriations
Citigroup Foundation
Ford Foundation
Rockefeller Foundation
W.K. Kellogg Foundation
Jan Brandt
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Stepping Stones Evaluation Partner

Evaluation of Stepping Stones is conducted by Innovation Network, a Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit organization. Innonet has provided planning and evaluation consulting, training, and online tools to nonprofits and funders since 1992.

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Stepping Stones Research Partner

The Urban Institute serves as our Stepping Stones research partner, providing important demographic and data updates to assist us in advancing our work. The Urban Institute gathers data, conducts research, evaluates programs, offers technical assistance overseas, and educates Americans on social and economic issues — to foster sound public policy and effective government.

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