

Chris Grumm: Improving Lives through Women's Funds

By Kelly Schultz, NCRP

Chris Grumm, president and chief executive officer of the Women's Funding Network (WFN), has been credited with supporting its member funds in a massive expansion plan that raised the assets of women's and girl's foundations from \$180 million to over \$400 million. WFN, through its member funds, invests in and advances various programs that seek to improve the circumstances of women and girls—tackling such interrelated problems as housing, child care, employment, health, and safety—through local, national, and international grants.

Last year, WFN partnered with the Ms. Foundation for Women in a \$1.3 million Hurricane Katrina project, funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. The money was invested in community-based organizations in the Gulf Coast and other areas.

Chris Grumm sat down with NCRP to discuss WFN's successes and challenges and the issues facing women today.

NCRP: What is the place of the Women's Funding Network in the women's funding movement?

CG: I think the Women's Funding Network plays a key role and, in some ways, a central role [to the overall women's movement]. It's an organized way to bring together women's funds with donor and with grantee leaders.

We are both a network, and we are helping to build a movement. There are not a lot of organizations that fit into both roles. We are creating more effective tools thereby supporting greater effectiveness among our member funds. The increased capacities are, in turn, rippling outward to women's organizations that receive grants and capacity-building support from our members. Together with our members, we have increased the amount of philanthropy going to women's and girls' pro-



Chris Grumm, President and CEO of the Women's Funding Network

grams, which increases their ability to create social change in their local communities.

NCRP: Under your leadership, the Women's Funding Network has seen tremendous growth in membership and assets. To what would you credit this success?

CG: Women's funds see themselves as playing a critical role in community change. I think growth has come from the success of this model that, one, everyone can be a philanthropist; two, funds support on-the-ground leadership who understand solution building; three, women are relational givers and give more and

longer when a community is part of the equation; and four, social change philanthropy is about making a difference and women need to be at the table for that difference to be sustainable.

We've seen growth of women's funds because we've seen growth of wealth among women. Women donors are looking not just to write a check but to be a part of, and to make a difference in, their community. It's a critical aspect of their philanthropy.

NCRP: You claim that "Women's and girls' funds have traditionally been ahead of the curve in testing and defining programs and policies that improve the lives of women and girls." How is the Women's Funding Network thinking ahead of the curve today when it comes to women's issues?

CG: We are made up of 115 women's funds from around the world, and what happens is women's funds are hearing firsthand from grantees and donors regarding issues most impacting their lives. Women's funds provide the leadership to bring grantees and donors together, address emerging issues, alert to changing trends and craft sustainable solutions. This puts them at the forefront of the social change movement.

NCRP: Over the past decades, the issues affecting women and girls have changed significantly in some ways, yet remained fundamentally the same in others. How have the issues changed, and in what way have they remained the same?

CG: Poverty, poverty, and more poverty. [The issue] has remained the same. Some women have been able to move out of poverty. Women have moved into new job markets, become CEOs and more wealth is in the name of women than ever before. Look at the millions of women who have started their own business through the help of grants that gave access to loans and trainings. They are creating new income streams and new jobs. In this way you see change.

But we have not seen change in the lowest income level, and part of that is because we haven't had the policies in place to bring about that change. Women and children make up 70 percent of those in poverty. Until that percentage drops, we continue to only treat the symptoms.

NCRP: What can the broader sector of philanthropy learn from women's funds?

CG: We define philanthropy by people with the willingness to make a difference, not by the amount of money people give. When you bring together the people regardless of race or class who come with on-the-ground solutions with financial resources and with a sense of community, you can make a difference that explodes across sectors around the globe.

I think the fact that women's funds are on a growth trajectory—even when the economy was going down, women's funds were able to maintain and in some ways grow. That is because those involved in women's funds experience community and that creates loyalty, which means regardless of the state of the economy or the world, we stand together to make a difference.

NCRP: What program areas distinguish the work of your members?

CG: Many of the people we work with are talented and gifted leaders from their communities. We focus on empowering leaders within our own community using a woman's perspective. Educate a woman and you educate a family. Give a woman health care and you give a family health care. Give a woman economic security and a family has economic security. Women are our entry point in making a difference in a community.

NCRP: How would you describe your donor base?

CG: It is a very loyal donor base. It has breadth and depth of as many donors as there are communities across

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the world. There are thousands of donors who give to women's funds around the world. Predominantly women give, but also men who want to make a difference in the world contribute to the women's funding movement.

Many of the donors have been supporting this kind of work for years. At the Women's Funding Network, we say that everyone can be a philanthropist, with people who give from \$10 to multimillions. Our donor base spans the economic classes, and it is a base filled with people who want to make a difference.

NCRP: From a funder's perspective, what is the greatest challenge you face in implementing initiatives and achieving your objectives?

CG: We have a really good idea of what works on the ground and can make a difference. There just isn't the amount of resources available to do work in the magnitude that is needed.

One of the biggest challenges for anybody working in social change is how do you quantify, evaluate, and know



Photo by: Erin Lubin Photography

Low-income working parents and their children from Parent Voices, a project of the California Child Care Resource and Referral Network and a grant partner of the Women's Foundation of California.

you made a difference? Therefore we have developed a tool called "Making the Case." It measures that impact of social change and allows our movement to track our work, especially results and return on investment.

NCRP: What do you think one of the Women's Funding Network's greatest successes has been?

CG: One of our really exciting successes is a program called Women of Color/International Development Incubator (WOCIDI). It's a training program made up of women of color and international women who come together to learn from each other the skills and tools for development and fundraising.

Over the last three years, 45 women have come through the program and together have raised \$24 million. When they started, many women had no interest and did not think they could be successful fundraisers, but it has been a wonderful opportunity to see how women can come together, share wisdom, lead, and be successful fundraisers.

NCRP: Can you give an example where you felt like real progress was made toward social change?

CG: The women's funds were extremely effective in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Our Katrina project, funded by Kellogg through the Ms. Foundation, along with the Women's Funding Network and five of our member funds, gave grants that created and developed exceptional programs for evacuees and women from the Gulf Coast.

Women's funds addressed the issue of a disaster from the point of view of women. You cannot use a single-issue approach. If you want sustainable change, you have to use a holistic approach: You have to provide job training, child care, schools that are safe, mental health care, and they need legal aid for those [with] houses going under foreclosure and for all other legal issues.

All of these things cannot be provided piecemeal. We found that in the grants that were made through the Katrina Fund, that holistic approach really allowed people to make a change and feel more secure in the communities they were living in.

Women from [our] local communities supported women from the Gulf Coast to speak out in Washington about issues impacting their families and the lack of funding available to implement solutions on the ground. The willingness to trust women's leadership on the ground gave them the resources to let their leadership be really effective.

NCRP: What is your vision for 20 years from now?

CG: Twenty years from now, I hope there is no need for women's funds because communities would support women, their leadership and their work. But, as a realist, my vision is that women's funds are the major distributors of billions of dollars in grants and with those resources, the course of the world is changed where everyone has the opportunity to experience economic security, freedom from violence, access to health care and environmental sustainability.

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