Fall Insights Tour: Donors Meet Early Education Grantees

Sunlight streamed into a classroom at the Guild of St. Agnes on a recent October morning as a group of Foundation donors squeezed into tot-size chairs to eat a healthy breakfast of French toast and fruit. Held on October 9, the event was the Foundation’s ninth annual Fall Insights tour, which each year enables donors to explore urgent community needs and promising solutions close-up.

The tour visited three early learning centers that serve low-income families. At these centers, the day begins with a nourishing breakfast, and continues with attention to the full spectrum of a young learner’s needs, including motor, social, cognitive and emotional development.

At the three sites, which included Worcester Comprehensive Child Care and Rainbow Child Development Center, donors joined children as they learned through play, music, art, meals and games. They also talked with a panel of regional experts and center executives about what it takes to provide high quality care and make it affordable to low-income families.

“For many programs, tuition plus state and federal aid leaves a gap of $17 a day per child,” says Ed Madaus, the Guild’s executive director.

Emphasizing staff development, panelist Eve Gilmore, director of partnerships at Edward Street Child Services, said, “Promoting quality education means supporting early education teachers in gaining the skills to nurture the child’s social and emotional experience, which are pivotal to learning.”

“Early learning is key to bridging the achievement gap in our community,” says Foundation CEO Ann Lisi. “Much of the research that is guiding us now is relatively new. We owe it to ourselves to understand what a difference we can make on multiple fronts, including funding scholarships to build a work force with the skills to nurture young learners.”
Scholarship recipients Give Back:
A new Alumni Network

Members of the new Alumni Network are former scholarship recipients that organize social events, service projects, and participate in choosing a recipient for their “Class of Tomorrow Scholarship Fund.”

With a minimum gift of $20, network members contribute to the scholarship fund and their gifts are matched by a generous donor. “Many students want to pass on the gift of tuition assistance to others,” says scholarship officer Beckley Schowalter.

The first recipient of their $1,000 scholarship is Michael Richard, a Fitchburg High School graduate who met the criteria for the scholarship.

Michael was taking a full schedule of AP classes, playing an influential role in campus politics, and assuming a leadership position in three community service projects. Although he was the likely choice for senior class president, Michael eschewed that coveted position so that he could continue meeting his community commitments and maintaining his high academic standing.

The Alumni Network Chair Andrea M. Garry, a junior at Assumption College says “Giving this award allows us to be part of the philanthropic cycle.”
Sessions Guide Nonprofits in Tracking, Building Net Unrestricted Assets

The Foundation’s Nonprofit Support Center advances the nonprofit sector in Worcester County though a variety of workshops for local leaders.

In a recent workshop, leader Hilda Polanco, CPA, founder and managing director of Fiscal Management Associates, LLC, talked about helping nonprofits increase their financial strength. “Unrestricted is the key word, but most grants are restricted to specific programs.”

“LUNA (Liquid Unrestricted New Assets) is any organization’s savings account for sustainability,” says Hilda. “Nonprofits are driven to deliver the greatest amount of service. They regard a balanced budget for the year as a success. But each year’s budget should also strengthen the LUNA.”

Workshop participants included MassDevelopment’s vice president Roy Angel, a financial professional for 30 years. Attending as treasurer of Big Brothers Big Sisters of Central Mass/MetroWest with its CEO, Jeffrey Chin, Roy says, “We gained many valuable takeaways, including a tool to share financial information with our board in a meaningful way. And Hilda walked us through an exercise to measure our LUNA and quantify our liquidity needs in a given budget year—a most revealing process.”

The Foundation’s special projects officer Gail Randall says “These workshops are among the ways we help organizations bring their important services to our community.”

Largest Fund Helps Transform Worcester into New England’s Healthiest City

Worcester will become the healthiest city in New England by 2020 if the private and public groups backing the Greater Worcester Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) achieve their goal.

Developed by the City of Worcester, UMass Memorial Health Care and more than 100 other community partners, the CHIP roadmap focuses local organizations—including service providers and grantmakers—on advancing five priorities: healthy eating and active living; mental health; access to primary care; violence and injury prevention; and health equity.

“By fostering collaboration across organizations, Worcester’s CHIP provides a platform for even greater impact,” says Karl Bjork, president of the Fairlawn Foundation, Greater Worcester Community Foundation’s largest fund, which has aligned its guidelines with the plan’s priorities. “Partnerships between funders and those putting proposals on the table, are key to meeting the plan’s goal,” says Karl. “We’ll support programs with the vitality and efficiency to make it work.”

Since 1992, the Fairlawn Foundation’s dual grantmaking objectives have been to improve health and health care in Worcester County. Its grants have funded programs that develop local practitioners at all levels, from paraprofessionals to nurse practitioners, as well as learning resources and scholarships.
An adventurous spirit guides Foundation board member Carolyn J. Stempler, whose life and career have taken her coast-to-coast.

A skier and snowboarder, Carolyn met her husband, Howard, an attorney at Seder & Chandler in Worcester, at a 2004 ski club meeting in Dallas. Soon after, Carolyn, a St. Louis native, married Howard and moved here to Worcester. She also became a stepmother to Sally, 21, a fundraising intern at the Boston Women’s Fund; and Emily, 26, an adjunct professor at Quinsigamond Community College.

Ardent in all her pursuits, Carolyn graduated from Arizona State University with a degree in computer information systems and later obtained a master’s degree in engineering and business from the University of Pennsylvania. Reaching the top of her profession, she eventually became the CIO of a Fortune 500 company. In 2003, turning to an entrepreneurial career, she became a Ben & Jerry’s franchisee. Most recently, she launched her own custom stationery and design firm. “I finally get a chance to be creative,” says Carolyn.

Soon after moving to Worcester, Carolyn decided it was important that she become involved in her new city and realized the Foundation offered her a chance to have broad reach into the community. “I’d like to provide our volunteers with the tools to become more empowered ambassadors,” says Carolyn. “We offer a compelling choice to investors who want to promote community change.”