Impact
FALL 2019 NEWS from the Foundation

“Worcester is on a Roll…”
Introducing Barbara G. Fields, Foundation President & CEO

More than 180 guests joined the Foundation’s September 19th welcoming celebration for its new president and CEO, Barbara Fields, held at ArtsWorcester in the Printer’s Building, a recently renovated hub for artists and creative industries in downtown Worcester.

In her brief remarks from the podium, Barbara introduced herself and also announced the Foundation’s new $1 million grant from the Barr Foundation. This funding will be used to expand the Foundation’s Creative Worcester initiative, which is advancing the reach and inclusiveness of the city’s cultural and arts sector.

Arriving in Worcester after 28 years leading community development efforts in Rhode Island and across New England, Barbara regards this region as poised for gains on multiple fronts, and, as a longtime PawSox season ticket holder, she counts the new ballpark among its assets.

“Right now, Worcester is on a roll, with new downtown projects underway, thriving cultural life, and tremendous higher education and biotech assets—to note just some of its strengths,” said Barbara by phone a week after the event. “It’s our job to make sure the broadest array of residents participates in this renaissance.”

Chosen as 2019 Rhode Island Outstanding Smart Growth Leader by Grow Smart RI, Barbara was most recently CEO and executive director of RI Housing, and previously President Obama-appointed HUD administrator for New England. Earlier, she served for 20 years as founding executive director of Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC)’s Rhode Island office.

“Like Providence, Worcester is big enough to nurture diverse sectors; but small enough for people to know each other, work together, and get things done,” said Barbara, who began her career by earning a master’s degree in urban planning at MIT. “My approach to community building is to bring diverse stakeholders together, move beyond silos, forge shared agendas, and together, achieve results.”

Barbara sees the Foundation’s rich cross-sector relationships as key to expanding its impact. “I feel fortunate to join the Foundation, with its distinguished track record, strong and passionate staff, and eager, committed board. I look forward to leading its next stage of growth.

“We need to broaden support for our critical work, from city and state policies to public and private sector investments. Everyone gains from a healthier, stronger, more vibrant Worcester County, in which quality of life is within reach of all.”

Want to grow the good in your community? Contact Kelly Stimson at 508-755-0980 or donorservices@greaterworcester.org!
Million-dollar Grant Extends Creative Worcester Initiative through 2022

In September, the Barr Foundation awarded a three-year, $1 million grant to support the Creative Worcester Initiative through 2022, doubling the size of its 2018 grant.

“The Barr Foundation shares our belief that a strong arts community translates into a stronger region overall, and we are excited that Barr has expanded its commitment so that we can continue to invest in Worcester’s arts community,” said Barbara Fields, Foundation president and CEO. “As Worcester continues its dynamic growth, we look forward to strengthening its vibrant creative sector.”

Worcester Gains Cultural Plan

Working in partnership, the City of Worcester, the Worcester Cultural Coalition, and the Foundation have created a far-reaching cultural plan for the City of Worcester. Culminating a year of planning and input sessions that brought together arts organizations large and small, the plan, entitled “Becoming Worcester: The Evolution of a Creative City”, will be incorporated into the city’s master plan.

“This plan distills our community-wide vision of arts and culture not as nice extras,” says Jonathan Cohen, Foundation program officer, “but as key to bringing our city to life and giving voice to all.”

The Foundation will now lead implementation of the plan, coordinating a 21-member, cross-sector Oversight Committee; convening and training participants; and advancing plan strategies through its Creative Worcester Initiative, launched in 2018 and partly funded by a $500,000 grant from the Boston-based Barr Foundation.

Cultural Plan Advances Racial Equity

Prominent in Worcester’s cultural plan are strategies to increase racial equity and guide a cultural renaissance that engages and benefits all. The Foundation will take a lead role in these endeavors, which include a mini-grant program developed jointly with the Worcester Office of Human Rights. Its grants will fund projects that enable nonprofits and city departments to advance inclusive workforce practices. Also advancing workplace equity are a series of training sessions offered by the Foundation’s Nonprofit Support Center.
Funding the Basics at 16 Nonprofits

In 2018, the Foundation received an anonymous $90,000 gift and a new opportunity – the chance to offer resources for capital projects to some of the organizations in our region that need them the most. Nonprofits providing essential services such as food, shelter, job skills, and other emergency supports to those in need were the targeted audience for a one-time only Basic Needs Capital Grants program.

To build this grant program from the ground up, the Foundation assembled a review committee whose members are well connected in the community and hold expertise in an array of areas including the operation of local food systems, new business development, and community organizing. Several members were Leadership Worcester alumni with deep understanding of the complexity of our region’s needs and challenges.

The committee reviewed 26 applications requesting a total of $183,000. In February 2019, acting on their recommendations, the Foundation awarded 16 nonprofits with grants that varied in size from $1,500 to $10,000. Grantees included shelters, urban farms, and rehabilitation programs – nonprofits themselves in need of the basics: roof and fencing repairs, new refrigerators, replacement beds, and food pantry equipment.

“So many nonprofits do wonderful work but have limited resources to make it happen,” said Shon Rainford, a member of the Basic Needs Capital Grants review committee, director of the Worcester Regional Food Hub and Leadership Worcester ‘19 alum. “I know from experience, now as a grant maker as well as a grant seeker, that operating expenses that keep the lights on and the doors open can be the hardest to find.”

Recognizing that a strong start yields gains that last a lifetime, the Foundation launched its Early Childhood Initiative in 2015 as a framework for building cross-sector partnerships and strategic grants that nurture healthy development of children during their formative first years.

In support of evidence-based programs that further best practices, the Foundation’s Early Childhood Initiative is about to launch a five-year pilot with the Worcester Public Schools that will build upon effective practices to improve kindergarten through third grade outcomes. Entitled “Arriving Ready,” the pilot will span prenatal care through grade three and engage two public schools as hubs providing integrated education, health, and social services to neighboring families.

Testing a potential city-wide model, “Arriving Ready” will execute a design developed with the Education Development Center (EDC) under a generous grant from the Alden Trust. YOU, Inc., a Worcester-based behavioral health agency, will manage the program, which will be evaluated by the EDC and Clark University.

The Early Childhood Initiative also continues to engage the community in issues facing children and their families, most recently by co-sponsoring a well attended September panel discussion and screening of the 2018 documentary, No Small Matter, which examines the national crisis in pre-K education and childcare.

Such events over the last two years have catalyzed development of the Together for Kids Coalition, which promotes the well-being of children and families throughout Greater Worcester. The Foundation assisted its visioning process, which resulted in a strategic plan. Supported by a Foundation mini grant, the Coalition is executing its plan, which includes working with city leadership to expand the early childhood agenda of the Worcester Youth Violence Prevention Initiative.

Living in Freedom Together, received a $10,000 grant toward renovations for Jana’s Place, a residential treatment facility for women. Above, CEO Nicole Bell is shown in a renovated kitchen.
Resource-constrained Nonprofits Gain Fundraising Savvy

Leaders of nine nonprofits have joined a peer learning cohort on fundraising conducted by the Foundation’s Nonprofit Support Center. Consultant Chuck Gordon is leading its six group sessions and providing each nonprofit with individualized, onsite consulting.

“These nonprofits do outstanding work despite resource constraints,” says Chuck. “Here, they gain best practices and skills in development, starting with the CEO’s role as lead relationship manager and rainmaker.”

Delegating to gain time for donor stewardship, Steve Fischer, executive director of the Regional Environmental Council, says, “We’ve set specific targets, including weekly, monthly, and quarterly calls, e-mails and meetings to advance relationships with donors.”

“The workshops and one-to-one meetings with Chuck already have my board president and me on the same page regarding the board role in fundraising,” says Robb Zarges, PhD, executive director, CASA Project. “Board members increased their giving, we created a new annual appeal process, and I’m meeting with prospective financial partners each week.”

Mental Health Workforce Pipeline Strives to Increase Qualified Providers

The Foundation administers the Fairlawn Foundation Fund, which supports innovative, evidence-based projects that improve health care in the region.

Established in 1992, the Fairlawn Foundation began byremedyng the nursing shortage, convening nursing school leaders and supporting new approaches to recruitment and training as well as scholarships. A decade ago, the Fund backed programs that greatly expanded the training of health care paraprofessionals, developing a new, qualified work force to meet an urgent need.

Current Fairlawn Fund grants are investing in the Mental Health Workforce Pipeline, from its 2018 planning phase through its implementation, now underway. Bringing together a host of stakeholders, the Pipeline addresses a crisis in mental health and human services in the region, where 700 positions remain unfilled and long waiting lists exist for services.

“In the past, agencies tended to compete for workforce,” says Lorie Martiska, vice president of advancement at Open Sky Community Services, lead agency for the project. “The Pipeline is a multi-disciplinary group of providers, colleges, funders, and coalitions that are working together to create a systemic solution—from training and recruitment to retention—and make mental health and human services professionals available to all who need their care.”

Leadership Worcester Launches Alumni Network

As Leadership Worcester begins its fifth year, former participants in this nine-month civic leadership program are creating an Alumni Network to sustain valued friendships and continue collaborating on projects that move the community forward.

‘18 cohort members Kim Davenport (photo, above right) and Ryan Matson are spearheading the launch. “Together, we learned how the city works and combined our different talents to solve problems,” says Kim, a managing director at Edward Street Child Services. “We formed strong friendships and helped each other develop as leaders,” says Ryan. “I look forward to building on these ties.”

“The Alumni Network will keep these relationships going,” says Joe Salois, former Foundation chair, who heads the program’s selection committee, “and connect professionals who care deeply about the region and know how to work together.”
Focus on Youth

Foundation Scholarships
Invest in Local Students

This Spring, the Foundation awarded scholarships totaling more than $685,000 to 400 students in Worcester County who are entering or attending college.

“The Foundation's scholarship program touches so many,” says Donor Services Officer Liz Nye, “the students and families who are supported as they tackle the rising costs of college education, our donors whose scholarship funds honor loved ones and mark milestones, and the volunteers who serve on selection committees that pore over hundreds of impressive applications. It’s a community collaboration with far-reaching impacts.”

Nearly 300 people came together to celebrate the achievements of this year’s scholarship awardees at a reception on June 19 at Worcester State University.

Youth for Community Improvement Celebrates 20th Year

Now beginning its 20th year, the Foundation’s Youth for Community Improvement (YCI) has, since 1999, engaged more than 200 students in awarding more than $300,000 in grants to 75 nonprofits.

Each year’s cohort is drawn from local high schools throughout Greater Worcester. As they set goals, review applications, and select grantees, they identify and act on their shared values and often form lasting bonds. “YCI empowers teenagers as capable, passionate citizens who can make a tangible contribution to their community,” says Program Officer Sarah Shugrue.

The Foundation invites all current and past YCI participants to its December 18 reception celebrating the program’s 20th anniversary. Alumni include Brendan Donahue, YCI ’98, now a supervisory postal inspector leading the Dept. of Justice Elder Fraud Strike Force. “As its first cohort, we developed YCI’s mission statement and created an endowment that sustains YCI today. We all had diverse backgrounds but were willing to work together to achieve common goals—which doesn’t always happen when people get older. And YCI showed me philanthropy is for all, not only the rich. Each of us can determine a compelling need and make a gift with impact.”
Barbara G. Fields, President and CEO

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Growing the Good
Creating a Greater Worcester

Put your compassion and imagination to work growing the good in your community. Create a fund with the Foundation and join us in creating a region in which:

- All children gain a strong start during their first years
- All residents have access to the health care they need, when and where they need it
- At-risk youth can gain opportunities to succeed in school and in life
- Economic and housing security is within reach of all
- Civic, cultural and natural resources enrich our lives and strengthen our community

Give now—or plan a future gift. Choose the Foundation fund that best suits your goals:

- Enable the Foundation to meet pressing community needs and invest in promising solutions by creating a discretionary or field-of-interest fund
- Support a cherished cause or nonprofit with a donor advised or designated fund
- Honor a loved one or group in perpetuity with a named scholarship fund
- Designate the Foundation as a beneficiary of your will, trust, or retirement vehicle.

Call 508-755-0980 or email donorservices@greaterworcester.org to find out more.

OUR MISSION: To enhance our community, now and in the future, through philanthropic leadership