

Voices

The Newsletter of the Ms. Foundation for Women Winter 2004

Pennsylvanians Unite for Reproductive Freedom

At a time when our nation's highest leaders are determined to turn back the clock on women's reproductive choice, there is an unexpectedly optimistic outlook from one of the country's more conservative states: Pennsylvania. "We're working in an odd atmosphere right now," said Sue Frietsche, Senior Staff Attorney at the Women's Law Project. "For the first time in many years, we have a pro-choice governor and pro-choice state Supreme Court. Although Bush has signed the federal Abortion Procedure Ban into law, we feel excited and hopeful."

Pennsylvania's climate for reproductive choice has not always been so positive. In 1989, statewide controls on abortion were stricter than ever. In response, Pennsylvanians for Choice (PFC) was born. Funded by the Ms. Foundation's Reproductive Rights Coalition and Organizing Fund (RRCOF), PFC is a statewide coalition of groups dedicated to preserving and expanding women's reproductive rights; coalition members range from loose groups of clinic escort volunteers to influential women of color organizations. Through the Women's Law Project, Sue is a key leader in PFC.

Since then, PFC has become a prime example of how building partnerships across communities can truly influence state policy. The coalition has changed the image of pro-choice activists and helped to protect the health of Pennsylvanian women. One of PFC's biggest victories was the critical role it played in preventing a provision on family caps from being included in the state's welfare reform law. If passed, this provision would have punished low-income



Pittsburgh Labor Day Parade for Choice

low-income women who are sexual assault survivors from having abortions covered by Medicaid. And, with active centers in Philadelphia, Harrisburg, and Pittsburgh, PFC has created a true statewide movement to protect reproductive choice by addressing issues that all women have a stake in, and welcoming input and participation from all groups large and small.

The coalition's work is far from done, however. PFC is now tackling the problem of "crisis pregnancy centers," fake clinics that receive state funding yet give women misinformation about abortion in

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women for having children while on welfare by denying or reducing their benefits. "By working closely with legislators to educate them about these issues, we were able to make the connections between welfare and reproductive choice clear," Sue stated. "Before this, some legislators had viewed us as people who just wanted to rack up as many abortions as we could."

PFC also helped sway the media's depiction of pro-choice issues. In response to brutal attacks in the news-media on the so-called partial birth abortion issue, PFC brought Maureen Britell, a spokesperson for the National Abortion Federation, to a media briefing to tell her own story of having a necessary, yet heartbreaking, abortion in her 24th week of pregnancy, a procedure that could today be prohibited by the new federal abortion ban. "By the end, the people in the room were visibly moved, even in tears," said Sue. "After that, the nasty attacks from the mainstream press stopped. Thanks to work like that, Pennsylvania is actually one of the few states that has not passed an abortion procedure ban."

In addition to these victories, PFC has also restored and increased funding for family planning and removed barriers that prevented

the place of legitimate health services. PFC is also addressing the problem of comprehensive sexuality education in schools. The project will start in Pittsburgh, where schools are using a sex education curriculum last updated in the 1980s; PFC hopes to replicate the program statewide. Both fake clinics and sexuality education are crucial topics in Pennsylvania, which has large, isolated rural areas where it is difficult to access reproductive health information or services.

Sue remains positive about PFC's chances of success. She is proud that after so many hard years, PFC has been able to motivate pro-choice activists to continue fighting and protecting women's health, and gives the Ms. Foundation much credit for this. "The Ms. Foundation came to us at a time when the coalition was about to fall apart, telling us how important it was to have a pro-choice, state-level organization," Sue said. "Without the Foundation's support, I know we wouldn't be here today."

For more information on the Reproductive Rights Coalition and Organizing Fund, please visit www.ms.foundation.org.

MISSION STATEMENT

The Ms. Foundation supports the efforts of women and girls to govern their own lives and influence the world around them. Through its leadership, expertise and financial support, the Foundation champions an equitable society by effecting change in public consciousness, law, philanthropy and social policy.

BELIEFS AND VALUES STATEMENT

Our work is guided by our vision of a just and safe world where power and possibility are not limited by gender, race, class, sexual orientation, disability or age. We believe that equity and inclusion are the cornerstones of a true democracy in which the worth and dignity of every person are valued.

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120 Wall Street, 33rd Floor

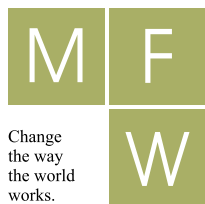
New York, NY 10005

Phone 212.742.2300

Fax 212.742.1653

info@ms.foundation.org

www.ms.foundation.org



Letter from the President & Executive Director

Dear Friends,

As we enter an important election year, we remind ourselves that women must be at the frontlines of strengthening our democracy. With the recent passage of the partial birth abortion ban, the continual erosion of civil liberties, and an increasingly conservative judiciary, the threat to our freedom is real. The leadership of the Ms. Foundation for Women and our grantees is crucial in responding to today's challenges.

Women leaders bring the value of caring for family and community to their work, and act with others rather than against them to find the best solutions to our most pressing problems. In addition, women in this country have a long legacy of struggle and triumph in the face of overwhelming odds. Because of this history, they have an important role to play in strengthening democracy in the U.S. and building new democracies around the world. When women lead, change happens.

Yet women's voices are ignored, not amplified. Their ideas and experience are overlooked, not recognized and heeded. Despite these obstacles, women are standing up, raising their voices, and improving their lives and the lives of their families and communities. The organizations funded by the Ms. Foundation prove this every day, taking leadership on even the toughest issues. For example, few issues are more divisive than reproductive rights, and pro-choice activists face constant attacks from legislators intent on rolling back Roe v. Wade. Undaunted, women are leading coalitions



Sara K. Gould & Marie C. Wilson

Henry Leutyler

When women lead things happen.

such as Pennsylvanians for Choice, profiled in this issue's cover story, that successfully face down the opposition and protect women's health. Pennsylvanians for Choice is just one among dozens of grantees that form partnerships with local, state, and national organizations to directly impact the democratic process, ensuring that legislation meets women's needs.

The Ms. Foundation is also playing a role in introducing the framework of human rights to U.S. activists. This October, we held our 12th Institute for Women's Economic EmPOWERment, welcoming women from five countries outside the United States. The Institute's tone was global, as participants discussed how their work on economic issues is human rights work, and learned from human rights activists in this and other countries.

We hope you are as inspired by the stories of our grantees' work as we are. While we live in challenging times, know that the Ms. Foundation and the women whose work we fund will always stand and face those who threaten our democracy. As always, thank you for standing with us.

Marie

Marie C. Wilson
President

Sara

Sara K. Gould
Executive Director

Region At A Glance

California

As one of the largest, most populous, and most diverse states, California often serves as a bellwether for the rest of the nation on democratic, social, economic, and other issues. California recently gained nationwide attention for its unprecedented gubernatorial recall election in October. Also on the ballot was Proposition 54, or the Racial Privacy Initiative, which would have banned any government collection of racial and ethnic data, making it almost impossible to address statewide inequities in health care, education, housing, employment, law enforcement, and other areas. Thanks to a large, organized coalition of groups, this measure was defeated.

In addition to Prop. 54, which gained widespread media attention, organizations in California are fighting less visible, but no less important, battles over immigrant rights, living wages, and racial justice. Through specialized funds, the Ms. Foundation for Women supports a number of organizations in California that work to ensure the rights of all who live within the state; following is a sampling of these groups. For more information, visit www.ms.foundation.org, or the respective organization's website, listed below if available.

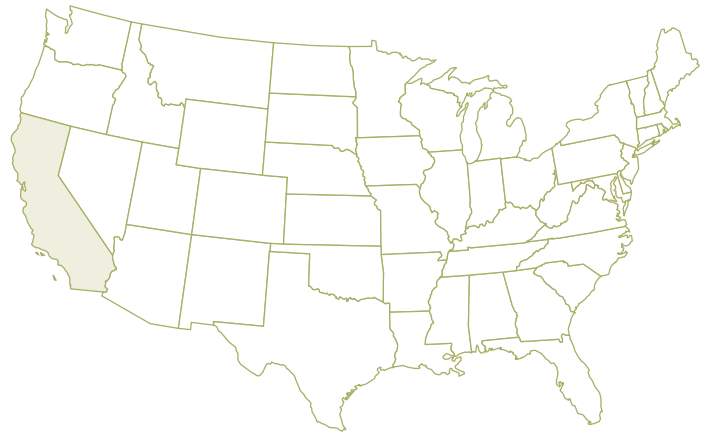
Democracy Funding Circle

Applied Research Center (ARC): This research institute brings issues of racism and racial justice to the forefront of public policy and advocacy. Founded in 1981 to bring together research and activist work, ARC was an outspoken opponent of Prop. 54. Through its website, its publication *ColorLines*, and partnerships with other social justice organizations, ARC provided the facts behind Prop. 54 and resources to advocate against the measure. (www.arc.org)

National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights (NNIRR): For 15 years, this organization has worked to place immigrants' rights on policy agendas at the state and national levels. NNIRR has gained national and international recognition as a leading voice on immigrant issues. Through its research and advocacy, the group has exposed the myths behind scapegoating immigrants for overpopulation and environmental problems, challenged abusive immigration enforcement activities, and brought attention to the specific concerns of migrant women. (www.nnirr.org)

Women and Labor Fund

Center on Policy Initiatives (CPI): CPI works to lift the standard of living for low- and middle-income working families through research, advocacy, and organizing. Their latest project, the San Diego Living Wage Campaign, has received widespread media attention nationwide. Recently, the Campaign scored a critical victory when the San Diego City Council Rules Committee voted unanimously to send the proposal to the City Manager and City



Attorney to study its impacts and legal aspects. The next hearing on the proposal will be in February. (www.sdlivingwage.org)

Family Child Care Association of San Francisco: This group works to maintain a high degree of professionalism in the care and education of young children, and promotes family child care as a vital service to the community. Members of the Association sit on San Francisco's Child Care Planning and Advisory Council, rally at the State Capitol, and educate policy makers. (www.familychildcaresf.org)

Sophia Fund

National Immigration Law Center (NILC): NILC protects and promotes the rights of low-income immigrants and their families. Their work, ranging from policy advocacy and training to litigation and education, has gained nationwide respect. NILC has won major victories in California for immigrants' rights, including preserving prenatal care for immigrant women, defending the rights of asylum seekers to work in the United States, and playing a pivotal role in restoring \$12 billion in Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and more than \$800 million in food stamps for legal immigrants unfairly targeted by the 1996 welfare law. Now, in coalition with several other statewide groups, NILC is engaged in the California Immigrant Welfare Collaborative to ensure that changes in the welfare law take into account the needs of immigrants. (www.nilc.org)

Collaborative Fund for Youth-Led Social Change

Center for Young Women's Development (CYWD): Working to develop the skills of young women involved in the juvenile justice and foster care systems, CYWD in San Francisco provides training and employment opportunities, identifies issues of concern to this vulnerable population, and crafts action strategies. Young women incarcerated in juvenile prisons often experience sexual harassment. To address this issue, CYWD gathered information from incarcerated youth, researched existing antidiscrimination policies,

and pressured juvenile corrections officials to institute a landmark antidiscrimination policy to protect incarcerated lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, and queer youth. Youth participants are now developing and implementing sensitivity training for juvenile hall staff.

Reproductive Rights Coalition and Organizing Fund

Latino Issues Forum (LIF): Established in 1987, LIF is a statewide policy and advocacy institute that addresses public policy issues

in the Latino community. LIF prioritizes health care, access to higher education, sustainable development, the environment, leadership and civic participation, energy, and the impact of telecommunication for low-income consumers. Recently, the organization branched out in a new direction by creating a reproductive health agenda for Latinas, detailed in the new report, *Our Health, Our Rights (Nuestra Salud y Nuestros Derechos): Reproductive Justice for Latinas in California*. (www.lif.org)

Women's Rights Are Human Rights: The Institute for Women's Economic EmPOWERment

On October 9-12, 2003, more than 150 women and men from around the United States and five other countries gathered in Austin, Texas, for the 12th Institute for Women's Economic EmPOWERment, an intensive skills-building and training event to advance women's economic development and economic justice. This year's theme, Connecting Human Rights and Women's Economic EmPOWERment: A New Path for Building Communities, connected participants to activists in the United States who have pioneered in using a human rights framework to move their economic justice work forward.

Institute participants represented a broad range of backgrounds, including domestic violence prevention, young childhood development, environmental and economic justice, economic development, and youth organizing. By linking economic issues to human rights, participants constructed a larger picture of the ways that multiple factors can keep a woman in poverty. For example, when considering women's small business development, Institute attendees explored how racism, poor access to healthcare, and lack of affordable child care affect low-income women's ability be microentrepreneurs. A human rights approach offered participants a framework for discussing single issues collectively, developing unified approaches to ending poverty and to holding governments accountable to global standards of human rights.

Participants' days were filled with workshops, classes, and strategy sessions taught by over 40 faculty members who contributed their expertise to the Institute. In the evenings, they came together for cultural expressions of song, dance, spoken word, and grew as colleagues in a movement to end poverty and social injustice. Participants also created masks used to represent themselves and their community. By the closing plenary on Sunday, the room was filled with a powerful display of art that was representative of the time shared in Austin and the spirit that drives the struggle.

Institute participants returned to their organizations embued with a renewed sense of purpose, tools, and strategies. They were inspired by the words of leaders in the human rights fields, including Loretta Ross, Cheri Honkala, Mallika Dutt, Esther Chavez, and Phaedra Ellis-Lamkins. They also left with a new tenet for their work, provided by Ross: "A united human rights movement transforms social justice activism—it is the language of people's power."

Making a Planned Gift

Creating a bequest or trust naming the Ms. Foundation as a beneficiary of your estate or part of your estate is one of the best ways to ensure that your commitment to transforming the lives of women and girls will continue to impact future generations. If you are considering a bequest or trust, please contact Molly Honigsfeld at 212.709.4442 or mhonigsfeld@ms.foundation.org

Lateefah Simon Receives MacArthur Genius Award

The Ms. Foundation congratulates Lateefah Simon, Executive Director of the Center for Young Women's Development (CWYD) and a 2003 MacArthur Fellow. This honor, given by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation and commonly referred to as the MacArthur Genius Award, includes a \$500,000 grant. The Ms. Foundation has been a proud supporter of CWYD and Lateefah since 1993, providing more than \$275,000 in grants to build its important work with young women involved in San Francisco's juvenile justice system. Lateefah, at CWYD since she was 17 years old, is a distinguished community leader who has transformed the lives of hundreds of young women. See Region at a Glance section for more about CWYD's work.

Riding for Workers Rights

Starting September 20, 2003, thousands of immigrants boarded buses in Seattle, Portland, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Las Vegas, Minneapolis, Chicago, Houston, Miami and Boston to place immigrant issues in the public eye and on the nation's political agenda. The Immigrant Workers Freedom Ride brought workers to Washington, DC, on October 1 and 2, where they met with union leaders and members of Congress to stress the importance of immigrant rights. On October 4, the Freedom Ride culminated in a rally attended by more than 100,000 workers and union supporters in Flushing Meadows Park, Queens, New York. The Ms. Foundation supported the New Jersey-New York portion of the Freedom Ride.

Women Raise Their Voices on HIV/AIDS

On November 15, 2003, hundreds gathered in New York City to raise their voices in support of women impacted by HIV and AIDS at the first annual Power Walk NYC, sponsored by Ms. Foundation grantee Sisters Mobilized for AIDS/HIV Research and Treatment (SMART). According to the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, at the end of 2002, approximately 50 percent of adults living with HIV or AIDS worldwide were women. Yet men's needs remain at the center of advocacy and research. The Power Walk was a crucial reminder that women cannot and will not be the invisible face of this devastating disease.



Campaign for Low-Income Workers Ends in Victory

In October 2003, Illinois Governor Rod Blagojevich brought an end to a 20-year campaign for living wages and fair benefits when he signed a collective bargaining agreement for home healthcare aides who work with patients supported by Medicaid. This agreement, the first of its kind in the state, was supported mainly by the Chicago Homecare Organizing Project (CHOP), a Ms. Foundation Women and Labor Fund grantee. Over 20,000 workers will see a 38 percent increase in pay over four years and will gain unemployment insurance and access to a formal grievance procedure. CHOP is not resting after this victory, however; it is now campaigning for a similar agreement for home childcare workers subsidized by the state.

Ms. Bits



Grantee Organizations Receive Leadership Awards

Two Democracy Funding Circle (DFC) grantees have received 2003 Ford Foundation Leadership for a Changing World awards. These awards highlight outstanding community leaders who have the courage and commitment to fight some of our nation's most entrenched social problems. The Ms. Foundation is proud to congratulate Marcy Westerling, Executive Director of the Rural Organizing Project in Scappoose, Oregon, and Ken Toole and Christine Kaufman, Co-Directors of the Montana Human Rights Network (a former DFC grantee). Both organizations, working mainly in challenging rural environments, have received crucial support from the Ms. Foundation.

Recent Grants

The reauthorization of the current welfare legislation, Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), is approaching. In September, the Sophia Fund and the Rapid Response Policy Fund made four joint grants for a total of \$40,000 to national organizations working on issues of welfare reform. These groups will conduct intense advocacy and education, and fight to ensure that the new welfare reform legislation addresses the needs of low-income women and their families.

For more information about these Ms. Bits, please visit www.ms.foundation.org.



120 Wall Street
33rd Floor
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Donor Profile: Katy Mendez

In 1985, Katy Mendez had just graduated from college with a partially formed life goal: to do work that would make the world a better place. That's when she got a job as a receptionist at the Ms. Foundation for Women. "Working at the Ms. Foundation was very influential," Katy said. "I had always been interested in women's issues and feminism, and it was inspiring to see women like Marie Wilson taking action on things that really mattered."

In the Foundation's supportive environment, Katy's career aspirations fell into place. Because of her co-workers' encouragement, she decided on law school. "At the time, I took a decidedly nontraditional approach to law, concentrating on public service law," stated Katy. She attended the City University of New York Law School, a school whose philosophy meshed with her social justice goals.



The Ms. Foundation also shaped Katy's philanthropic tendencies. She has been a donor to the Ms. Foundation since 1985 because she observed the Foundation's grantmaking activities and its ability to connect with small, local organizations around the country. In addition, she could see how important every donation to the Ms. Foundation, large or small, really was. "What I know about philanthropy I learned at the Ms. Foundation," Katy said. "Where is your money going, and who really needs it? I give what I can to the Ms. Foundation, because it finds the groups I can't, and it supports important work I might not think of, like women's economic development."

After ten years of a successful law career, Katy now has two young children and is studying for a master's degree in education. She plans to become a teacher, a traditional career choice steeped in the feminist principles she learned at the Ms. Foundation. "I wanted to get back to hands-on work with others," Katy said. "I believe that working with children and creating an environment where they learn to value multiculturalism, equality, and community is the best way to make social justice a reality."