



**Stories of Impact
and Innovation:
The Ms. Foundation's
Southern Strategy**

Draft



Prepared for the
W.K. Kellogg Foundation



June 2009

What Is the Ms. Foundation for Women?



“Ms. believes that equity and inclusion are the cornerstones of a true democracy in which the worth and dignity of every person are valued. Our work is guided by a vision of a just and safe world where power and possibility are not limited by gender, race, class, sexual orientation, immigration status, disability, or age. We believe that women and girls who are most affected by a problem are best positioned to create just solutions for all. We believe that change starts at the grassroots.”



Photographs by Elizabeth Rappaport

Thirty-Six Years of Change

Since its inception in 1973, the Ms. Foundation for Women has granted more than \$50 million to thousands of urban and rural organizations nationwide. Each year, it delivers more than \$4 million to over 150 groups advocating for change at local, state, Tribal, and national levels on behalf of women, families, and communities. The Foundation’s capacity-building, leadership, networking, and strategic communications support enables groups to develop skills and strategies that strengthen social movements and build greater power to achieve policy wins and long-term changes in public attitudes and beliefs.

The Foundation builds women’s collective power across race and class. A majority of grantee organizations are led by and for low-income women and women of color who remain largely excluded from decision-making tables and are most impacted by policies that perpetuate poverty and inequality. For example, in fiscal year 2007, 65 percent of grant

dollars went to efforts that focused primarily on organizations led by and building the power of people of color.

In 2008, the Ms. Foundation embarked on a new strategic direction, **Creating Connections: Strategies for Stronger Movements**. While it has always connected donors and activists and invested in groups making connections of all kinds, the Foundation has initiated an aligned institution-wide effort to support organizations making new and deeper connections across issues, constituencies, movements, geography, and policymaking levels in order to build greater power to make inclusive, lasting change.

To further this strategic direction, the Ms. Foundation supports advocacy and builds fields across four broad areas: **Women’s Health, Ending Violence, Economic Justice, and Building Democracy**.

Ms. in the South: Economic and Social Justice for Women and Children



Since 2005, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation has supported the Ms. Foundation's work in the South through three grants totaling more than \$2.7 million.

Katrina Women's Response Fund

The majority of this funding (\$2.5 million) has supported the Ms. Foundation's Katrina Women's Response Fund (KWRF), created in the immediate aftermath of the hurricanes and the levees breaking in New Orleans.

The Ms. Foundation re-granted a portion of Kellogg's support (\$1,094,039) for the KWRF to the Women's Funding Network, which in turn distributed those funds to five women's funds in communities that received large numbers of Katrina evacuees (the Women's Fund of Greater Birmingham, the Women's Foundation for a Greater Memphis, the Women's Fund of Greater Jackson, the Atlanta Women's Fund, and the Chicago Foundation for Women).

The Ms. Foundation significantly leveraged its own portion of Kellogg support (\$1,605,961) to build the capacity of low-income women and women of color on the Gulf Coast to play a central role in short-and long-term recovery, policy making, and social justice organizing by attracting \$1,300,445 additional dollars, from both individual donors and foundations, into the KWRF. To date, the Ms. Foundation has granted nearly \$3 million to over 40 organizations on the Gulf Coast through this fund.

The Ms. Foundation's grantmaking on the Gulf Coast initially focused on meeting the urgent needs of low-income women, women of color, and their families who were disproportionately affected by the storms. The Foundation then moved quickly to build the leadership and capacity of existing and emerging grassroots and state-level organizations to ensure that recovery efforts incorporated an analysis of race, class, and gender and that the voices and perspectives of low-income women and women of color were heard at policymaking tables.

Grantees led advocacy that ranged from successfully petitioning the federal government to re-fund an Early Head Start program, holding elected officials accountable for fair housing and redevelopment policies, instituting job training for women in construction to ensure access to living wage jobs, and securing over \$1 million in wages for immigrant workers exploited in the rebuilding of the Coast. Through KWRF, the Ms. Foundation began investing in the social justice infrastructure of the Gulf Coast, fragile before Hurricane Katrina and brought to its knees by the storms. The Foundation also raised awareness within philanthropy and social justice organizing about pervasive inequities across race, class, and gender and the critical leadership role low-income women and women of color must play in developing and implementing policy solutions on behalf of women, families, and communities.



Ms. in the South: Economic and Social Justice for Women and Children



* The South, as defined by Ms. Foundation's Southern Strategy work, includes Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Kentucky, and Tennessee.



“...the South's low standards for workers and a weak social safety net mean that growing economic affluence is not widely shared. Although the South is now home to a record number of Fortune 500 companies, the region also makes up eight of the 10 states with the lowest household income and half of the 10 states with the greatest levels of economic inequality between rich and poor—dragging down wages and standards for working families across the country.”

—“Social Justice Organizing in the U.S. South”,
The Institute for Southern Studies, 2009

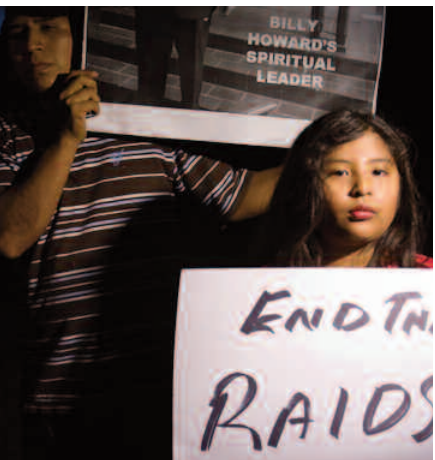
Towards a Broader Southern Strategy

Based on the learnings of their focused involvement on the Gulf Coast post-Katrina, in 2008 the Ms. Foundation decided to deepen its efforts and step up its grantmaking in the Southern region of the U.S. The Ms. Foundation knows that the social and economic inequities exposed by the levees breaking in New Orleans extend well beyond Mississippi and Louisiana, and the need to strengthen a fragile social justice infrastructure applies not just to the Gulf Coast but to the entire region. The Ms. Foundation also knows that there are a host of shared challenges and opportunities facing women, families, communities and organizations throughout the South. In recent years, organizations have worked (often in isolation, and with little visibility) to redress the effects of militarization, an expanding prison system, an influx of new immigrants and degradation of the environment, while continuing to address entrenched poverty and inequality—particularly among women and children.

The numbers speak for themselves; challenges particularly impacting single women-led families with children include:

Poverty: Almost 746,000 single women-led families with children live at or below the federal poverty line in the Southern Strategy states. More than 4.7 million children in these states are low-income. Mississippi's child poverty rate (200 percent of poverty) of 54 percent is the highest in the country, and child poverty in all other Southern Strategy states tops 41 percent.

Racial Disparities: Whereas only 27 percent of white children in Louisiana are low-income, the figure is almost three times that (71 percent) for black children. In North Carolina, 28 percent of white children are low-income compared to 70 percent of Latino children. In Kentucky, 39 percent of white children are low-income, compared to 68 percent of black children and 84 percent of Latino children. Similar statistics are found in other Southern Strategy states.

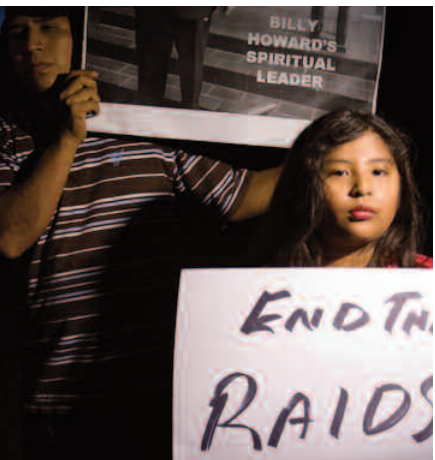


Ms. in the South: Economic and Social Justice for Women and Children



“The South is an increasingly important center of social, economic and political power. In 2007, two thirds of the nation’s 100 fastest-growing counties were in the region...[and] this growth is translating into political clout.” Meanwhile, “the South’s large and growing new immigrant communities have made the region a flash-point for the national immigration debate, including access to education and social services, workplace raids and policies...that heighten cooperation with local law enforcement.”

—“Social Justice Organizing in the U.S. South”,
The Institute for Southern Studies, 2009



Unaffordable Housing: Approximately 71 percent of the housing rendered uninhabitable by Hurricane Katrina was affordable, low-income units. Along the Mississippi Gulf coast, rents have skyrocketed by more than 30 percent since pre-Katrina. In New Orleans fair market rental units have jumped 52 percent.

Unaffordable Childcare: Sending an infant to childcare for nine months costs more than tuition at a state college in many of the Southern Strategy states. And, single women-led families in these states spend an average of over 31 percent of their income on childcare, whereas married couple families spend an average of just under 9 percent.

The indicators on poverty, racial disparities, unaffordable housing, and unaffordable childcare drive home the tremendous challenges facing poor and low-income women and families in the region, now exacerbated by a global economic crisis. That said, if properly resourced, a number of organizations are poised to take advantage of new political openings in the region that have emerged in

part due to demographic shifts (increasingly urban and comprised of new immigrants) as well as a renewed focus on the power of the South and people of color constituencies following the 2008 national elections. Many of these organizations are led by low-income women and women of color who are building the leadership of other women in their communities. Together, they bring their lived experience to bear on policy solutions that will generate systemic change and real economic security for women and children across race, class and immigration status.

The Ms. Foundation’s Southern Strategy: Creating Connections

The Ms. Foundation believes that a broader strategy which invests in regional social justice infrastructure by strengthening existing networks and building new connections between leaders, organizations, issues, and policy strategies is key to bringing about systemic change for low-income women, women of color, and their families throughout the South.

Ms. in the South: Economic and Social Justice for Women and Children



Ms. Southern Grantmaking

As part of the Women's Philanthropy & Poverty (WP&P) Cluster, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation awarded the Ms. Foundation a \$200,000 grant to "address poverty in the southern United States, with an emphasis on low-income single heads of household, through capacity building, grantmaking, and supporting women to engage in policy change." Kellogg's support joins just over \$400,000 additional dollars raised for their Southern Strategy by the Ms. Foundation to date.

Since February 2009, the Ms. Foundation has awarded \$585,000 in grants to 22 organizations in the South (including Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee). This grantmaking, like grants made through the KWRF, is particularly unique because it:

- Infuses low-income women of color and race + gender + class analysis into social justice organizing and philanthropic giving.
- Connects organizations, strategies, constituencies, and policy advocacy

at local, state, regional, and national levels to build stronger movements and greater power to make change.

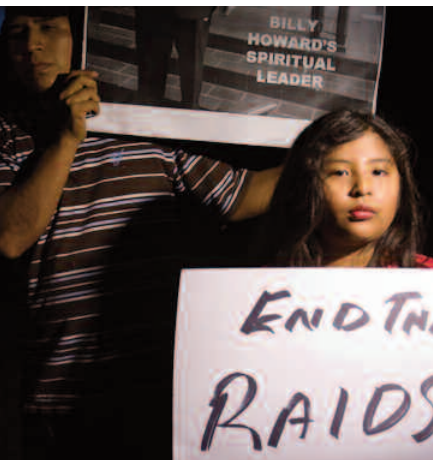
- Links social, political, and economic issues to create a cross-issue strategy critical to the survival and well-being of women and children throughout the South.
- Delivers capacity building and networking support to organizations on the ground, strengthening regional social justice infrastructure.
- Fosters leadership and active participation of grantees at policy-making tables and raises their voices on key policy issues.
- Incorporates a strategic communications approach to elevate the perspectives of women of color and low-income women through training and coordinated messaging, storytelling, and outreach.

Ms. Grantees

Taken as a whole, the Ms. Foundation's grantees in the Gulf Coast and broader South are a cross-section of

the strongest and most innovative grassroots organizing and advocacy in the region, working towards a range of policy wins that include non-traditional job training for low-income women, millions of additional dollars to support subsidized childcare for low-income women, criminal justice reform, workplace protections for those in the restaurant industry, immigrant rights, and access to reproductive health services, among others.

In March 2009, the Ms. Foundation held its first joint KWRF and Southern Strategy convening where grantees from the Gulf Coast and broader South came together, shared strategies, reinforced existing alliances and made new ones, and participated in strategic communications and evaluation capacity-building workshops. The Foundation has since built on its initial learnings from the convening to conduct a deeper assessment of Southern Strategy grantees' strategic communications capacity and lay the groundwork for shared regional messaging that amplifies the voices of grassroots organizations, low-income women, women of color and their families



Illustrations of Impact and Innovation



The following is an illustration of impact and innovation through the Ms. Foundation's Southern Strategy that has evolved since 2005 and is being implemented in 2009 with WP&P funds.

Additional stories are found beginning on page 11. They are a small sample of the Ms. Foundation's Southern Strategy grantmaking, but illustrate the holistic approach Ms. and its grantees use to address complex systemic social justice issues facing low-income women and their families. These many-layered approaches empower women, create policy change, and work to end racial inequity and injustice. They provide stories of learning and success for several WP&P cluster indicators including:

- **Stories of impact about how women's funds' projects helped to move a single women-led family with vulnerable children toward economic self-sufficiency** identified and described.
- **Organizations funded by women's funds that are working on issues of women's economic security** identified and their work described.
- **Effective and innovative strategies, institutional practices, and advocacy tactics** in housing, healthcare, early care and education, and employment identified and described.
- **Stories of impact on a child and/or children** of a single woman-led family with vulnerable children identified and described.
- **Policy possibilities** (local/state/federal) with an impact on target population identified and described.
- **Number of low-income women and women of color leaders** engaged identified.
- **Networks and partnerships developed and strengthened** identified and described.



Illustration of Impact and Innovation



Mississippi Low-Income Childcare Initiative

childcare advocacy + research +
grassroots organizing

MLICCI is a statewide, grassroots coalition of childcare providers, parents, and community leaders working to enhance the quality of child development experiences for all low-income children living in Mississippi and advocate for improved childcare policies and greater public investment in childcare subsidy programs for low-income families. The organization works primarily with poor, African-American single mothers, and knows that without access to affordable childcare, it is nearly impossible for low-income women with young children to maintain employment, go to school, or establish economic security. A single mother with two children under the age of five in Mississippi, earning minimum wage, will spend approximately 50 percent of her income on childcare.

MLICCI received six grants totaling \$135,000 from the Ms. Foundation

during 2005-2009. Immediately in the aftermath of the storms, Ms. supported MLICCI's advocacy work to restore and rebuild the childcare subsidy system and serve the childcare needs of low-income women. The number of childcare centers in the three coastal counties MLICCI serves (Hancock, Harrison, and Jackson, MS) dropped 33 percent from 169 to 113 as a result of Katrina. MLICCI's advocacy efforts steadily increased that number to 131 in 2006 and 172 in 2009.

Ms. support has also enabled MLICCI to expand policy research, advocacy, and grassroots organizing efforts, resulting in the allocation of an additional \$6 million in TANF funds used to expand the supply of childcare certificates. Mississippi's childcare subsidy program for low-income working families suffers from inadequate funding and lack of transparency, as well as burdensome and unfair policies for both families and providers. Only 30 percent of eligible children can be served at

current government funding levels, and over 6,000 children are now on the waiting list.

MLICCI has made important strides in reforming this system and building a strong grassroots coalition to push for greater investment and policy changes to support subsidized childcare. As a core member of the Katrina Child Care Initiative, MLICCI has worked since 2005 to rebuild the childcare sector in Mississippi, leveraging more than \$650,000 from non-government sources for direct aid for the field. MLICCI has provided training and technical assistance to over 100 low-income centers throughout the state, emphasizing financial viability, child development skills, a culturally diverse curriculum, resource development and advocacy. MLICCI is also advocating for key short-term policy changes, such as eliminating work requirements for parents who are full-time students, that are necessary to improve continuity and affordability of access for Mississippi's parents.



What Has Been Learned?



Collective Strategic Learning from Ms. Foundation Investments

Knitting together individual grantee learnings demonstrates Cluster-level highlights from the constellation of WP&P grants. The Ms. Foundation is using the following strategic learnings to take forward its work in the South:

- While using a race, class, and gender lens is essential to creating the most inclusive, equitable and sustainable change for the region, it is not generally recognized. Women's advocates are too often seen as advocating for a "single issue" or as a "special interest group" and the inherent connections between gender, race, and class are lost. Similarly, the role of women in re-building and reweaving devastated communities is not overtly recognized, even though people (men and women) do "know it" on an intuitive level. Moving the external frame to encompass race/class/gender will take a sustained, multi-pronged strategy.
- Economic justice is the driving issue and frame which connects myriad factors affecting recovery and rebuilding on the Gulf Coast, and women's lives in the South and across the U.S. more broadly. Increasing women's economic security necessitates advocacy on issues such as criminal justice, juvenile detention, access to housing and transportation, immigrant rights, and health care justice.
- A capacity building strategy must include convening and networking, as well as coalition building, strategic communications, civic engagement, and leadership and organizational development. Greater capacity must also be built to enable advocates from the region to reach the national level to secure resources for a multi-issue, long-term policy agenda.
- The current economic downturn reinforces "Katrina fatigue" and calls for strategic communications that can reinvigorate commitment to the region. The downturn has a disproportionate impact on women and families throughout the South, already the poorest region of the country.
- Sustainable change demands sustained civic engagement. We must identify and support organizations that are deeply embedded in the community and viewed as trusted messengers; they will build the level of civic engagement over the long haul.
- It is necessary to support the process of healing from PTSD, displacement, and other forms of trauma, both through service provision and through art, media and storytelling, for victims, aid workers, and organizers in post-disaster settings.



What Has Been Learned?



- Ongoing resource development and leveraging of resources is essential in the South, as the dearth of philanthropic resources in the region is a significant barrier to sustained and bold action. The Foundation is trying to resource grantees to think on a large-scale about their work, to make meaningful connections across issue and strategy, and to engage in long-term planning. However, this is a difficult agenda with limited financial resources. As such, raising/leveraging resources, which takes substantial staff time, must be budgeted for.
- Collaborations and partnerships are vital in building strategy and in surviving in a difficult economic climate. They are, however, difficult to sustain. It is often a challenge to make sure that the partnership is truly institutional, and not based solely on the relationship between two people.
- Because of competition for resources, it is a challenge, as well as an opportunity, for national public foundations to work in deep partnership with each other. There is a tension in working closely together and, at the same time, needing to distinguish unique rolls for fundraising and communicating to various audiences.



What Does the Future Look Like?



In each of the Southern Strategy states, at least 41 percent of children live in low-income families, and no fewer than 25 percent of all children statewide live in single-female headed households. The majority of children in these single-female headed households are low-income.

The Ms. Foundation has formed partnerships with organizations that understand the complexity of issues that bear on these vulnerable women and families: access to education, jobs that pay a living wage and the affordable child care necessary to take such a job, access or lack of access to health care and reproductive services, interaction with the criminal justice system, immigrant status, and the role of race, class, and gender in determining opportunities and access to power.



The Ms. Foundation's priorities in working with its partners in the South include:

- **Systematically building the capacity of organizations in the region** (in such areas as strategic communications, fundraising, coalition building, and evaluation) for greater policy influence and impact.
- **Increasing the use of a race, class, and gender lens** among advocates, opinion makers, foundations, and individual donors.
- **Raising the voices and leadership of women most directly affected** in order that their lived experiences inform policy direction in the region.
- **Connecting the progressive agenda of organizations in the South to the national progressive movement** through active networking, support for relationship building, and resources for greater visibility.
- **Increasing the sustained civic engagement of, and leadership opportunities for, low-income women and women of color** throughout the region.
- **Attracting additional financial resources for grantmaking and capacity building from regional and national philanthropy** by leveraging the Ms. Foundation's expertise in serving grassroots, local, regional, and national progressive organizing.

Additional Illustrations of Impact and Innovation



Families and Friends of Louisiana's Incarcerated Children

juvenile justice reform + vulnerable youth + education and training

Families and Friends of Louisiana's Incarcerated Children (FFLIC) is a statewide advocacy organization working on behalf of Louisiana's youth, particularly those involved in or targeted by the juvenile justice system. FFLIC's work includes representing youth at disciplinary hearings, developing parent-advocates through trainings, advocating for policy change, and representing the voices of community and family members of incarcerated and at-risk youth at a variety of policy-making tables.

Ms. Supported Programs

Between 2005 and 2009, FFLIC received seven grants from the Ms. Foundation totaling \$145,000. Immediately after Hurricane Katrina, this support enabled FFLIC to help local women of color and their children to rebuild their lives. FFLIC's members were also fierce advocates for the care of detained youth during and after the storms. Returning against

government orders to New Orleans, FFLIC began to identify the 240 juveniles (over 95 percent of whom were African-American) that had been detained in the Orleans and Jefferson parishes at the time of the storm. State officials then asked FFLIC for assistance in reuniting these youth with their families. FFLIC staff and volunteers canvassed the Convention Center and the Superdome in New Orleans, and other evacuation sites, to find the families of the detained juveniles. "We put on our FFLIC t-shirts and walked around," a staff member said, "and it worked. I'll never forget finding my first grandmother." With the help of 40 volunteers in at least 15 states, FFLIC matched every detained juvenile from the Orleans Parish Prison with family, and released them into family custody.

Reducing Youth Incarceration

FFLIC's leadership, working in coalition with other advocates, secured the passage of the Juvenile Justice Reform Act of 2003, which closed Tallulah, the state's most notorious juvenile detention facility (700 beds), and implemented community-based

alternative facilities. This effort reduced the number of incarcerated youth in Louisiana by half, from 1,200 in 2002 to approximately 600 in 2006. In 2009, FFLIC and allies closed Jetson Detention Facility, which housed 200 youth, aged 14-20. Jetson was used primarily to house non-violent offenders, yet combined them with a violent minority, resulting in violence, injuries, and reported rapes.

Youth Incarceration Reform

While Louisiana's reform efforts have resulted in dramatic declines in the number of youth in custody, Louisiana continues to incarcerate youth at a higher rate than the national average. In 2006, Louisiana's rate of detained and committed youth in custody was 15 percent higher than the national average. Two-thirds of these youth were non-violent offenders. FFLIC is now waging a *School to Prison Pipeline* campaign, demanding that as Louisiana's educational institutions are rebuilt and reformed, children are kept in schools and out of the harsh and punitive juvenile justice system. FFLIC secured an agreement from the Recovery School District in New Orleans



Additional Illustrations of Impact and Innovation



requiring that all school personnel receive training on the school to prison pipeline. By the end of 2008, FFLIC had provided over 50 trainings. FFLIC has also been successful in reducing the number of school security guards in the District by 50 percent.

Program Expansion

Thanks to the membership and leadership of parents and community members that it has engaged, the majority whom are low-income women of color, FFLIC continues to expand. In 2007 one parent advocate opened a new chapter in Shreveport and was appointed to serve on a Children and Youth Planning Board. There are now five chapters statewide.

Georgia Citizen's Coalition on Hunger

civic engagement + community organizing
+ policy change

The Georgia Citizens' Coalition on Hunger (Hunger Coalition) is committed to ending hunger, homelessness, and poverty in Georgia, where 38 percent of single-female headed households with children live below the federal poverty line, and over 1,000,000

children statewide live in low-income families. Single-women led families are the Coalition's primary constituency. The Hunger Coalition serves nearly 9,000 people annually through six different projects.

Building Economic Security

The Hunger Coalition has organized campaigns to increase the economic security and civic and political engagement of their constituency. In 2000, they led a successful campaign to increase Georgia's minimum wage from \$3.25 to \$5.15 per hour, and they are working on another increase to \$7.25 per hour.

Encouraging Civic Engagement

In 2007-08, the Hunger Coalition collaboratively organized a voter registration, education, and mobilization project registering over 60,000 new voters in the state; 70 percent of these voters were women, primarily African American and Latina. This campaign responded to the removal of tens of thousands of voters, primarily African-American women, from the voting rolls in 2000 and 2004, a tactic used to discourage African-American voters from civic participation by

requiring them to re-register to vote. Supported by a \$30,000 grant from the Ms. Foundation, the Hunger Coalition will move to engage newly registered voters in long-term civic participation activities. The Coalition will recruit 500 citizens (at least 70 percent women) to participate in leadership development, community organizing, legislative and advocacy campaigns, public hearings, and statewide gatherings.

Expanding TANF Benefits

It will also engage current and former Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF) recipients in a campaign to eliminate time limits in the program. The current limit for TANF support in Georgia is four years, leaving low-income families and children extremely vulnerable in the current economy. As of January 2009, fewer than 2,500 Georgia residents were receiving TANF benefits (in 2004, 28,000 did), including only 18 percent of Georgia's children living below 50 percent of the poverty line. Campaign organizing will begin with a summit of at least 50 female TANF recipients from several counties.



Additional Illustrations of Impact and Innovation



Women in Transition

living wage + education + empowerment

Based in Louisville, Kentucky, Women in Transition (WIT) builds the civic participation and capacity of people in poverty, across race and gender, to advocate for economic justice and human rights.

WIT's primary constituency is urban, low-income single mothers, and its work seeks to address the underlying problem of poverty by educating and empowering those who are marginalized by poverty and related factors.

Like many Southern states, Kentucky has disproportionately high rates of poverty, particularly among women and children: Over 45 percent of single female-headed families with children in Kentucky live below the federal poverty line, and 43 percent of the state's children live in low-income families.

WIT's many accomplishments over its 10-year history include helping to pass a living wage ordinance for government employees in Metro

Louisville and securing an allocation of \$1 million to establish an Affordable Housing Trust Fund in Louisville, KY.

Ms. Supported Programs

With a recent grant of \$30,000 from the Ms. Foundation, WIT will pursue two initiatives: *Claiming Our Rights and Reclaiming Our Children (CORROC)*, and *Dismantling Classism*. The *Dismantling Classism* initiative engages members in leading educational workshops on the negligent treatment of people in poverty.

Reforming the Child Welfare System

CORROC organizes and advocates for low-income families who have had their children removed from their homes by Child Protective Services for poverty-related reasons. While child neglect is the primary reason for removal, many symptoms of poverty, such as lack of adequate housing, utilities and/or food, are often mistaken for intentional neglect. As a result, children are separated from their families and the root causes of these symptoms are not addressed. CORROC provides support to families to help them reclaim their children

and improve their economic security, and mobilizes families to advocate for reform of the child welfare system. CORROC has guided over 100 families through the system over the past four years, and reached hundreds more through community advocacy work.

Women in Construction

job training + economic self-sufficiency + public and private partnership

The Women in Construction program (WinC), an initiative of Moore Community House (MCH) in Biloxi, MS, trains low-income women in the Gulf region for jobs in the construction industry, a non-traditional industry for women, the higher wages and benefits of which make economic self-sufficiency possible. Single mothers currently working in low-wage jobs, and their families, are MCH's primary constituency.

Ms. Supported Programs

The Ms. Foundation first supported the Women in Construction program post-Katrina (two grants totaling \$35,000) when it was a pilot project of Wider Opportunities for Women, a national organization with expertise in non-traditional employment for women.



Additional Illustrations of Impact and Innovation



Construction Skills Training

WOW identified MCH as a partner well-suited for the unique opportunities and challenges in the region post-Katrina: a tremendous need for re-building coupled with a severe lack of well-paying employment opportunities for low-income women.

Through an eight-week training program, WinC trains 60 to 80 women per year, and has a waiting list of 265 women. In 2008, the first full year of operation, WinC equipped 50 women with the skills needed to secure an entry-level job in the construction trades, a robust industry on the Gulf Coast as rebuilding continues.

With single women-led families earning a statewide average yearly income of \$16,547, WinC and similar initiatives respond to an urgent need for both qualified construction workers in the region and jobs that can move women into economic self-sufficiency. Sabrina Graley, a mother of two and graduate of WinC's second class, now works for J.O. Collins, a commercial contracting company. She makes \$10.50 an hour as a carpenter's helper, and has been

rebuilding an historic church in Bay St. Louis, MS. At Graley's graduation, she remarked how proud she was to be working on a project that she can show her daughter.

Other Work Supports

WinC also addresses the personal, social and political issues that impact women in the region.

WinC understands the connections between the lack of available public transportation and quality and affordable child care in the region and participants' ability or inability to secure and sustain steady employment. In response, they complement construction skills courses with financial stipends for childcare and transportation; and social supports including support groups, mentoring, resiliency coaching; and job placement assistance.

Advocacy

WinC engages its constituencies of trainees, graduates, employers, and regulatory agencies to advocate for increased job opportunities for qualified women. They have cultivated a strong relationship with the Department of

Labor's Office of Federal Contract Compliance to ensure that regional construction companies follow federal compliance standards related to hiring women. WinC's Program Director is an active member of the Gulf Coast Civic Works Act Governance Committee. Through relationships with regional construction firms, WinC offers itself as a resource to meet federal equal opportunity regulations and to develop a more welcoming workplace for women.

Program Replication

WinC is currently the only construction trades training program for women in the entire Gulf Coast region, and is exploring replication. WinC is currently working to formalize its model to make this possible and is also developing a leadership component designed to engage women as advocates for both the rebuilding and recovery process on the Gulf Coast and for the empowerment of women in this male-dominated industry.



Additional Illustrations of Impact and Innovation



Alabama's Women's Resource Network

criminal justice reform + vulnerable
women + policy change

The Alabama Women's Resource Network (AWRN) (an initiative of the Southern Center for Human Rights) is a coalition of incarcerated women, service providers, advocates, and state agencies working to ensure that Alabama communities support women to lead safe, healthy lives.

With the goal of significantly reducing the women's prison population, AWRN advocates for investment in community programs that responsibly and effectively treat drug addiction, provide pathways out of domestic violence, develop job skills, and improve the physical and mental health of women, as well as for prison reforms to more humanely and effectively meet the needs of Alabama's imprisoned women. By keeping women out of prison and in their communities, crucial, restorative family and neighborhood bonds remain intact and recidivism decreases. In addition,

thousands of Alabama children benefit from having their mothers remain an active part of their day-to-day lives, as over 70 percent of female prisoners have children.

Female Incarceration

From 1977 to 2004, Alabama's female prison population grew 645 percent, with most women being incarcerated for non-violent offenses. This ranks Alabama as the state with the 15th highest female incarceration rates. (The top three states are all southern: Oklahoma, Louisiana, and Mississippi.) The women served are disproportionately women of color (41 percent), and very often survivors of violence (57 percent of women in prison are victims of very serious physical and/or sexual abuse). The Commission on Girls and Women in the Criminal Justice System, assembled to offer recommendations to the Alabama Department of Corrections, reported: "Among women, the most common pathways to crime are based on survival needs, general abuse, poverty, and substance abuse." The

female prison population is increasing significantly more rapidly than the male prison population statewide, and the likelihood of a woman going to prison is now three times higher than it was 20 years ago.

Ms. Supported Programs

The Ms. Foundation has supported AWRN with two grants totaling \$120,000 since 2008. During this time, AWRN has proposed legislation that established the aforementioned Commission—a 25 member body with representatives from the legislature, state departments and community organizations—to develop a comprehensive, evidence-based plan to help illuminate and resolve the gender discrepancies facing women and girls in Alabama's criminal justice system. The Commission released their report and recommendations in 2008 (*One Size Does Not Fit All: Research and Recommendations for Gender-Responsiveness in Alabama's Criminal Justice System*), and many of AWRN's recommendations were included. AWRN also persuaded the Alabama



Additional Illustrations of Impact and Innovation



Department of Corrections to solicit the help of an independent expert in decarcerating Alabama's most inadequate facility for women, the Julia Tutwiler Prison for Women.

Closing Prisons

AWRN's primary objective in the coming 18 months is securing the recommended closure of Tutwiler Prison. Built over 60 years ago, Tutwiler is recognized throughout the system as in desperate need of replacement. AWRN, supported by the recommendations of the Commission, is working to secure a therapeutic 750 bed replacement facility, rather than the state-proposed 1600 bed warehouse-style replacement. They are simultaneously trying to add 400 slots in community corrections/alternative treatment programs, and implement systemic re-entry practices to assure all women leaving prison can meet their basic survival needs. Kaneisha Lane, a 24-year-old mother of two, was convicted of burglary at age 19, then a single mother without a high school diploma. She received a

10-year suspended sentence with two years of probation, but was sentenced to prison six months before completing probation because she was too poor to pay the required restitution to the court, \$50 per month. Despite an otherwise clean probation record, Kaneisha is now serving her 10-year sentence at the taxpayer's expense.

"When I was arrested, my daughter was one week shy of her first birthday, and my son was four years old. I pleaded for the judge to consider this, and my being on food stamps and welfare as proof of why I did not have enough money to pay a probation officer, court costs, and also take care of my family... If you are on welfare, obviously you are poor. These things should be considered.... I will... miss 10 years of my children's lives because I could not come up with money I did not have."



Data Resources and References

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“Social Justice Organizing in the South: The Southern Scan Research Project.” The Institute for Southern Studies, March 2009: <http://www.southernstudies.org/iss/2009/04/organizing-for-social-justice-in-the-south.html>

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Additional Illustrations of Impact and Innovation

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Photos: Elizabeth Rappaport