The Magic Potion of Youth Organizing
By Ruby Reyes, Co-Executive Director, The City School

This past February, youth organizers assembled a statewide 1,100 person march that swam through Downtown Crossing, made camp at the Statehouse steps and ended inside with incredible teenage leaders fanning out to meet with elected officials. They asked for their support in youth jobs, specifically for an increase in two budget line items: School to Career and Youth Works.

Sadly, our state and city government voted not to increase these line items. Most recently, I sat in the Boston’s City Budget hearing, representing the vast web of youth cemeteries, I couldn’t help but leave with my blood boiling from anger and frustration. Our youth leaders were asking for an increase in the number of $8.00 an hour jobs, without benefits. Our youth would use this money to support their families, because many have been propelled into care taker roles through our adult created economic crisis. I went back to the office angry that our elected officials wouldn’t invest in our youth.

As the elected officials talked about the increases for health care costs, pensions and

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who saw a solution to a problem. Like the Labor movement, youth leaders have also made the connection between resources and employment as an effective way to address poverty, violence and the need for mentored workforce development.

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At 4pm, a group of bubbling teenagers poured in smiling, singing and lifting me up with endless hugs, jokes and giggles in a wave of love. Their infectious joy is a magical potion that is desperately sought after in organizing. Youth

Please help us match $125,000 in September.
Executive Director’s Letter

Dear Community,

In this edition of “Our Voices,” the Boston Women’s Fund proudly introduces the 21 grassroots community-based grantees for Fiscal Year 2013. From this pool of grantees, we decided to focus our newsletter on the community work of youth organizing other youth.

During the summer I had the opportunity of visiting and talking to youth on the ground. The excitement I experienced in listening to their vision for social change and their ideas for the creation of better communities needs to be understood first-hand. With this in mind, it also makes me realize the importance of providing youth the critical backing for their well-rounded development as community organizers and advocates for racial, economic and social justice.

Your consistent support and feedback provides us with another perspective of viewing our responsibility as grantmakers. In other words, it solidifies our own commitment to the grassroots community that you help us fund. I can only ask you to try whenever you can to share in that experience of hearing about their successes and challenges first-hand by attending an ‘open house’ or a luncheon, when grantee representatives come together to share their stories.

You make this work at the community level viable because of your own foresight in recognizing the importance of the work we support with you as partners. I know the incredible importance of your support. Thank you.

Warm regards,

Josefina Vázquez
Executive Director

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BWF Awards Grants to Twenty-one Grassroots Organizations

The Boston Women’s Fund awarded $355,000 in grants to 21 grassroots organizations this fiscal year. The Fund welcomed 4 new grantees and re-funded 17 returning grantees. The Boston Women’s Fund strives to support organizations funded in the past while acknowledging new grassroots efforts.

One example of a new grassroots effort is Women Encouraging Empowerment, an organization founded in 2010. They bring together immigrant and refugee women across different languages and cultures in Greater Boston and the North Shore to improve their lives and their communities. A returning grantee that works with young women is MassCOSH’s Teens Lead @ Work (TL@W). TL@W builds the skills of young women to lead efforts to confront oppression at work, engaging them as leaders in a young worker rights movement and fostering the next generation of labor leaders. A common thread between these two grantee organizations is that both are focused on the leadership development of the populations with which they work. BWF believes that women and girls must be leaders within all movements if progressive change is to occur.

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Boston Tenant Coalition (BTC)
Boston $18,200
BTC works with local grassroots partners and public housing tenant advocacy groups to promote affordable housing in Boston and trains Latina leaders who may run for and serve on resident/tenant task forces. BTC has been a leading voice in defending, supporting and expanding the rights of tenants and standing with Boston’s low-income populations.

Brazilian Immigrant Center (BIC)
Allston $18,200
BIC is a grassroots organization whose mission focuses on the training, advocacy and organizing of immigrant workers. BIC actively supports current movement building among Massachusetts domestic workers—mostly immigrant women of color—to secure legislation and other policy changes necessary to advance and defend labor rights.

Centro Presente
Somerville $18,200
Fostering the empowerment of the Boston Latina population within their youth organizing program Pintamos Nuestro Mundo/We Paint Our World, Centro Presente offers a safe, inclusive and democratic space where young Latinas learn how to use analytic tools to explore the root causes of sexism, racism, and classism, and develops the skills necessary for Latina youth to become strong leaders in their community.

Chelsea Collaborative
Chelsea $16,904
The Chelsea Collaborative’s City-wide Tenants Association (CTA) organizes low-income tenants, primarily female, who occupy public housing and who are victims of predatory lending. CTA members work to maintain neighborhood stability and to preserve the community.

Close to Home (C2H)
Dorchester $17,600
C2H engages all community members—youth, family, friends, neighbors, merchants and leaders—in designing and implementing community-centric solutions to prevent and respond to domestic and sexual violence.
Gedakina, Inc.
Hull $18,200
A multi-generational endeavor strengthening the cultural identity and knowledge of Native American youth and families of New England. Returning to traditionally Native American cultural values, Gedinka, Inc. cultivates the health and wellness of Native American women and children through community-based initiatives and regional alliance building.

Homes for Families (HFF)
Boston $18,200
HFF was founded on the belief that families and individuals who have experienced extreme poverty or homelessness must play an integral role in the movement to end homelessness. Their Leadership Development Institute educates, empowers and supports homeless mothers in their work to end family homelessness, to overcome poverty, and to promote social justice.

Mass Coalition for Occupational Safety and Health (MassCOSH)
Dorchester $17,600
MassCOSH’s Teens Lead @ Work provides young women with the tools and support they need to address the unique issues young women face in the workplace and in other aspects of their lives, such as sexual harassment/violence, self-esteem, and self-worth.

Merrimack Valley Project
Lawrence $17,600
The Merrimack Valley Project fosters the leadership capacity of women by working with local women and men to act together in fighting foreclosures and post-foreclosure evictions in Lawrence, Lowell, and the surrounding areas.

My Life My Choice (MLMC) at Justice Resource Institute
Boston $15,430
MLMC is a groundbreaking, nationally recognized initiative designed to stem the tide of commercial sexual exploitation of adolescent girls. MLMC offers a unique continuum of practicums spanning provider training, prevention groups for vulnerable adolescent girls, case consultation, and survivor mentoring to young victims of commercial sexual exploitation.

¿Oíste?
Boston $13,600
¿Oíste? addresses the lack of Latina political representation and civic participation in Massachusetts and aims to increase the political, economic and social standings of the Latino population. The Latinas Por El Cambio program advocates for Latinas’ empowerment within low-income communities to lead collaborative, local issue-based campaigns to solve community problems.

Project HIP-HOP (PHH)
Roxbury $18,200
PHH is a youth-led organization bridging artful expression and political organizing. Using hip-hop, the organization teaches youth to use the genre as a powerful tool to educate and motivate their community. This grant supports their work to increase the voices of young women who use hip-hop as a tool to challenge misogyny and all forms of oppression.

Reflect and Strengthen (R&S)
Dorchester $17,600
R&S is a grassroots collective of young working class women from the urban neighborhoods of Boston who take a holistic approach to organizing in order to create personal and social transformation. Their programming focuses on political education, creative expression, community building, and campaign work to end racial disparities in the juvenile justice system.

South Boston en Acción (SBEA)
South Boston $17,600
SBEA is a neighborhood-based, member-driven organization empowering Latino families to create change that will lead to personal and community advancement. SBEA promotes residents’ acquisition of information and other resources to achieve their individual goals and their development of leadership skills and collective power to achieve community improvement.
The Magic Potion of Youth
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Youth organizing is about holding adults accountable and doing it with this magic potion of creating a loving, caring community of support for one another and for the adult allies who stand by them. Youth organizers’ lives range from stomach-fluttering crushes to body-numbing murders of their friends. They hold their communities accountable by lifting each other up and caring for one another through healing. Their rallies are filled with songs, dancing and the wave of love that I get to feel every afternoon in my office.

Jumping from meeting to meeting, I have come to realize the difference between adult and youth organizing. Youth organizers bring something critically needed and breathtaking to organizing and the non-profit sector—brutal honesty and authenticity. This combination of pure honesty, seeing through facades and not knowing anyone in the room so they don’t have to spare their feelings or favors, makes youth organizing creative, daring and infectious.

This is the importance of youth organizing to the sector, a mass of youth who are experienced leaders now, who know how to build communities of love, and practice the hard work of being honest.

When I asked Tony, 19, what I should say in this article, he said, “tell them to come and see.” Consider yourself invited and you can also feel the wave of love that is youth organizing.
Dear Supporter,

As an elder I look back at the many years of my own contributions in doing my part of creating a better world. I would like to believe that my legacy will be used by all youth past, current and future to think critically of the path they are creating.

As a part of my journey, I served on the Boston Women’s Fund’s Board of Directors for over a year-and-a-half and will complete my first term of two years at the end of December. It continues to be an honor for me to have served as the Board Chair. I will step down as Chair of the Board and will focus my time in being the best example possible as a member of the Board through the end of my term. Aging makes time more elusive. And, just as I expect youth to seriously discern their actions and decisions, I too have come to a crossroad of determining my next steps.

As a mother of six, grandmother of eight, teacher of kindergarteners and executive director of an elementary school, I believe that all children and youth are valuable. In the 1970s, I joined with other parents and teachers who mobilized to keep the Saint Joseph’s Community School open. It was a marvelous alternative school that enlisted parents as partners in their children’s education. Because of community organizing, Saint Joseph’s Community School became an alternative to the Boston Public School system in the Roxbury community.

Adults should lead by example for the youth in their communities. Talking to one of my friends who researches youth activism, he quoted from a black youth’s statement: “How can you stick up for us, if you don’t stand up for yourself?” Youth know that we aren’t stepping-up enough to challenge the system. Community activism led by youth is therefore as important as activism led by adults. How much stronger would our efforts become through unity?

We foster youth activists by listening to them, by knowing their issues and by knowing our communities. We can value their voices and perspectives and support them as they navigate the systems of power within their community and beyond.

Trying to protect youth has never been enough. We need to value youth and foster their skills, talents and critical thinking. We need to support youth in protecting themselves and others and in learning to navigate the system. We need to believe in them — believe that there are no bad children or youth. We need to do something about the bad environments that surround them.

Please continue your support in partnering with the Boston Women’s Fund’s advocacy efforts in supporting youth-led programs.

Sincerely,

Joyce King, Board Chair
Youth Leadership Sets - a Pattern of Success
By Alexander Lynn, Staff, Social Justice Education

Birth
Youth Leadership Sets is a program of Social Justice Education (SJE). This program was born on the day a Boston Public School teacher brought an SJE activist into her classroom to perform what we call "Circle work." Circle work is a mode of Popular Education which understands literacy as a process reflecting the communication needs and abilities of the learner/student and her community.

This approach to learning, Circles, begins with the simple act of arranging the chairs in the room into a circle. The teacher becomes an equal participant in a process of community building. In the circle there are no big “I’s” and little “you’s.” Early on we adopted a Restorative Justice (RJ) approach to discipline which means that we do not throw children out of the classroom for misbehavior. Instead, we close the circle around them and give them the extra attention they need.

Growth
Within a year, through attraction rather than promotion, the entire eighth grade, both teachers and students, were participating in Circle work. At the end of the second semester (school year 2010-2011,) eighth grade students were going into seventh grade classes and facilitating circles.

The exercises and meditations, which have been developed by liberation educators in the Boston Public Schools over the past 20 years, draw from the liberation pedagogical perspective of the students being the subject matter of their study. In this context, there are exercises which come out of Dominican and Puerto Rican experience and meditations that come out of African American and Haitian history. Numerous exercises are directed at the specific issues of young women, and the youth developed even more to promote the leadership of young women and address their issues of community-building.

Development
From the beginning, as evidenced by the term Youth Leadership Sets (plural), the intention was for this model to grow beyond one classroom and beyond one school. In adherence to the Recovery Movement principle that “healthy self depends on healthy community,” the group began to build a community from the inside out. We take care of each other in the circle, and other people want to know how they can “be a part of” the circle.

Youth leaders from the first school began participating in forums about education around the City. They began to facilitate circles in other schools. They performed workshops, along with their adult mentors (both teachers and community volunteers) at various forums.

Others are attracted to Circle work. Now, at the end of the second year of the program, fourteen Boston Public Schools have requested SJE leaders, youth from the original Youth Leadership Sets, to come and train them in circle practices.

To continue our work, money was raised (from the Boston Women’s Fund and the Haymarket People’s Fund) to create a summer program where interns (paid youth leaders) could hone their skills as Circle work ambassadors. They identified three areas as targets for their organizing: build a “Jobs for Youth” campaign; spread the curriculum and practice of Circle work throughout the BPS system; and build a City-wide youth organization.

To meet these organizing objectives, the youth are building coalitions and exchanging trainings with other youth organizations. The youth are empowering themselves and making their voices heard.

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Save the Date for:

**Holiday Open House**

*Wednesday, December 5th from 3pm-6pm at the Boston Women’s Fund*

Mingle with grantees and other friends of BWF over snacks and eggnog.

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**Men Take A Stand**

*Thursday, February 21st location and time TBA*

Network with social justice activists, celebrate BWF, and help present *Social Justice in Action* awards to:

- **Noam Chomsky** – MIT Professor and one of the “world’s top public intellectuals,” publishing works of political criticism, including a recent pamphlet for, by and about the Occupy movement.

- **James Jennings** – Tufts University Professor whose scholarship and activism includes building bridges across Black and Latino communities on behalf of progressive policy.

- **Samuel Hurtado** – Executive Director of South Boston en Acción, a BWF grantee. He works to promote community and leadership among Latino families.

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