

BOSTON WOMEN'S FUND

OurVoices

NEWSLETTER 55 - WINTER /SPRING 2012

INSIDE

Community Focused Grantmaking **pg 2**

A Message from the Executive Director **pg 3**

Three New Grantees Tell Their Stories **pg 4**

5 Year Strategic Plan **pg 6**

Vision, Mission & Core Values **pg 6**

Co-Chair Letter **pg 7**

Men Take A Stand Event **pg 8**

The Network/La Red and the Occupy Movement

by Beth Leventhal, Executive Director of TNL

The Network/La Red (TNLR) is a survivor-led, social justice organization working to end partner abuse within lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, BDSM, polyamorous, and queer communities.

Inspired by the Egyptian Tahrir Square uprising and the Spanish acampadas massive demonstrations by young workers, the Occupy Movement began in September 2011 on Wall Street as a nonviolent, leaderless resistance movement to end corporate greed and corruption in the United States. In the few months since its inception, the movement spread to hundreds of cities world-wide. The main slogan of Occupy, "We are the 99%", refers to the fact that those in the top 1% income bracket control almost half of the wealth in the country. While those who occupy the encampments are activated around a wide variety of social and political issues, the "99%" campaign focuses first and foremost on capitalist-based oppression.

As an organization concerned with oppression, we at TNL see important connections between our work addressing partner abuse, and Occupy's work addressing corporate corruption. At TNL we believe that the sense of entitlement to control one's partner that is characteristic of abusers both reflects and

perpetuates the oppressive culture at large: through various forms of oppression, such as racism, classism, sexism, heterosexism, ableism, and others, US culture condones and rewards interpersonal, institutional, and corporate abuse of power in order to control and exploit specific groups of people.

At TNL, we understand that corporations exploit workers by taking advantage of workers' vulnerabilities (often based on criminal background, class, ability, veteran, immigration and familial status, etc.), in a way that mirrors abusers who take advantage of their partner's vulnerabilities due to homo/bi/transphobia and other forms of oppression in order to gain control in the relationship. Control is assured through a complex web of tactics meant to undermine the worker/partner's emotional, financial, sexual, physical, and cultural well-being, autonomy and sense of self-worth. Just as some corporations deny a living wage and benefits to workers with impunity, so too do some abusers deny their partners access to their bank account or medications. Because

(continued on page 7)



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Community Focused Grantmaking

This year, the Boston Women’s Fund gave out grants totaling \$350,000 to 20 community organizations led by women and girls in Greater Boston. These organizations submitted proposals that were reviewed by the Allocations Committee which recommends the funding distribution to the Board of Directors. This year’s allocations committee was comprised of 22 women with a diversity of backgrounds, ethnicities and experiences. Some included direct involvement with grassroots communities.



It is important to the Boston Women’s Fund that funding decisions are made by community members who understand and/or appreciate the challenges of working in grassroots organizations. As one member of the allocations committee put it, “The allocations process is an excellent example of inclusive and thoughtful community grantmaking.”



The committee meets together in early March for an orientation, and then divides into two groups for two day-long meetings in April and May. They carefully and thoroughly review proposals from a broad range of community based organizations. Committee members discuss and develop questions for the organizations to answer in phone interviews or site visits. Through this process, they critically decide on the organizations to be recommended as BWF grantees for the coming year.

All of the grantees uphold a strong connection to our mission and core values by satisfying our grant requirements: focus on women and/or girls; build leadership among women and girls; provide opportunities for women with the least access to resources to empower themselves and to take the lead in creating their own solutions; support strategies involving movement building among women and girls and the broader community; and when involved in public policy work, connecting issues of oppression.



Although the process is long, it provides a deeper understanding to committee members of the notable work of those grantees chosen. One member commented: “My experience serving on the Allocations Committee of the Boston Women’s Fund was enriching, challenging, and rewarding. It was a unique opportunity to engage with a diverse group of women and become acquainted with organizations involved in the innovative women-focused grassroots movement in the Boston area.”

Dedicated to the success of the allocations process, a small group of women formed an ad-hoc committee to improve the process for next year. The group is working to streamline the entire process, from an organization’s application to their evaluation and finally to the review process of the committee.

The upcoming year promises to be an even more exciting year to be involved! If you are interested in joining our 2012 Allocations Committee, please email your résumé and letter of interest to Amy Leung, Program Officer, at amy@bostonwomens-fund.org.

“The allocations process is an excellent example of inclusive and thoughtful community grantmaking.”



Executive Director's Letter

Dear Community,

As a people from diverse cultural backgrounds mostly identifying as part of the 99%, we historically find ourselves witnessing unimagined poignant times. Across this country we witnessed how those of us, trained in watching and waiting, decided to take a stand and created a movement from coast to coast on our own terms. The Boston Women's Fund maintained a close look at Occupy Boston, from day one up to December 10 and beyond, by seeking information as to where our grantee community of activists' stood: where were those organizations and groups led by women and girls in relation to Occupy? How were they now envisioning their grassroots efforts in relation to Occupy, if at all? In our lead article, Beth Levanthal of The Network, La Red grappled with the issues of a movement still seeking to understand its common ground.

Although, this movement appeared to be predominantly white men and the extent of safety for women and girls joining ranks remained an issue, nevertheless, the reverberating impact it created from New York to Oakland throughout Latin America and Europe, clearly replicated lessons learned from Tahrir Square. It continued into Occupy the Hood, Occupy Northeastern, Occupy Harvard and Occupy Homes for those losing

their homes. The extreme greed of the 1% and their resolve of utilizing the media in supporting their message of correctness for their misdeeds became intolerable. Those banks and corporations seeking solely their financial advancement on the backs of those who lost their jobs, homes or both, benefited by risking the livelihoods of the 99%. The 1% needed a wake-up call and got it.

Occupy throughout the country successfully lifted the banner of economic justice by promoting the needs and issues of the 99%. It lacked a strong message on the need for racial justice so that the voices of communities of color could be heard. Yet Occupy placed a magnifying glass on the culprits who created the massive 2008 meltdown, resulting in the massive bailout of corporations and banks for the purpose of reversing the harm perpetrated on the 99%. But, instead of reversing the harm, life for the 99% became worse.

This movement changed the flow of direction from media focused on the few corporate 'movers and shakers' to the issues impacting the 99%. Meanwhile, BWF's grantee community became involved at different levels. Even with the criticisms surfacing due to the discomfort at a leader-

less movement including issues around gender and color, we accepted this long awaited opportunity of growth and failure and success of a new social movement that provided the majority of people a true sign of hope in social change.

I remain excited with the fact that our future potential for creating a better world became brighter with Occupy and it also became stronger because we took control

of our destinies by starting to snatch our lives back from the banks and corporations whose greed kept on suffocating our workers, our students, our immigrants, our movement. Your support now more than ever can make a critical difference for our current and future grassroots' grantees, who lift their voices to be heard whether within or without Occupy. Let us work together in creating social change by being bolder in your philanthropy.

Sincerely,



Josefina Vázquez
Executive Director



Josefina Vázquez

“Occupy throughout the country successfully took the banner of economic justice by promoting the needs and issues of the 99%.”



Three New Grantees Tell Their Stories

These stories from three of our new grantees detail the positive impact that their organizations have on their members. They write in their own words about the importance of the work that they do. The Brazilian Immigrant Center is a grassroots organization whose mission focuses on the training, advocacy, and organizing of immigrant workers. Gedakina is a multi-generational endeavor to strengthen the cultural identity and knowledge of Native American youth and families of New England. The Genki Spark is both an arts and advocacy organization that aims to share the art of Japanese taiko drumming and to promote the voice and visibility of Asian women.

Brazilian Immigrant Center

The Brazilian Immigrant Center (BIC) works to organize immigrant women domestic workers. For Brazilian women, as for many other immigrants from Latin America, no matter what their class origins, if they do not speak English, chances are their first job in the United States is domestic work such as cleaning or babysitting. Sofie is one such domestic worker involved in BIC. She is a housecleaner who has lived in Boston



“The Brazilian Immigrant Center (BIC) works to organize immigrant women domestic workers.”

for almost ten years. Like many immigrants, she came in search of a better life for her family, who she initially left behind in Brazil.

Before her involvement with BIC, Sofie participated in community affairs but, in the background, in a very quiet way, through church and friendship networks. During the last few years with the Brazilian Immigrant Center, Sofie has shown greater strength, determination and commitment to progressive social change and has become very engaged. She has grown from being a shy individual to someone who is willing to speak up for herself and others. She has also taken on leadership roles in organizing and carrying out collective events in the community, and has brought many other people from her church and personal networks into the forefront of the movement.

Sofie has become a dedicated and caring organizer, always making sure that everything is done right, regardless of the amount of work that is involved. The impact of her commitment and skills, and the leadership she shows greatly inspires others. She also brought her sons and her partner into the movement, and with them she is an active participant in demonstrations and rallies for immigrant rights in the Boston area. Recently, she was an active participant in the summer training institute of the Women’s

Institute for Leadership Development, as well as a delegate representing BIC at the national Jobs with Justice/Caring Across the Generations conference in Washington, DC. These are the first explicitly political events that she has ever attended but she aims to attend more.

Gedakina

As human beings, we are all related and carry important responsibilities to kin and the health of the whole community. Traditionally, women are instrumental in shaping our communities politically, socially and economically. Given our very nature as creators of life, our work and role in society during substantial portions of life had to be compatible with child rearing



“Activities such as the community garden initiative, engage our women and families in traditional principles of sustainable agriculture”

and that which is, in contemporary times, often reduced to “domestic” work. A progressively devalued contribution with the coming of our non-native relations, our women, through this work, were primarily responsible for the production, transformation and distribution of food sources and medicines that sustained the entire community. Our labor and economies were essentially based on a sisterhood that spanned generations.

Gedakina’s Native Women and Girls Wellness Circle of Greater Boston works to sustain the traditional relationships of women to each other and our communities. Through the exchange of artistic traditions and traditional knowledge, and in coming together for healing, ceremony and cultivation of food and medicine, our circle provides solidarity in a society that so often works to suppress and undermine our profound contributions to sustainability. We are engaging not only a network of women indigenous to the lands of Boston, but an intertribal community of Native women displaced from their ancestral lands. Activities such as the community garden initiative, engage our women and families in traditional principles of sustainable agriculture, promote healthy relationships and good nutrition, and highlight our historical contributions to community, providing our future women leaders with a knowledge historically set forth and honored by our grandmothers and all our relations. Keely is a young person involved with Gedakina, and she shares her story of why Gedakina is important:

“When my dad moved to New Mexico last fall, I lost my main connection to the native community. For me Gedakina has played a major role establishing connections to the native community of Greater Boston. Last spring Kristen (the staff person for

Gedakina) asked me to be a consultant to start a gardening program. At 17 years old I felt incredibly honored that she would ask me, a youth, for support. Despite my young age, Kristen trusted my experience, making me feel like a valued contributor to the Gedakina Community. I have been farming with The Food Project since 2008, and until Kristen approached me, I hadn’t realized how valuable my knowledge of farming was to our people historically and culturally. My relationship with Kristen and Gedakina has been one of learning from both sides. Each time I go to an event or help with a different project, it is both a learning and teaching process. Both sides always have so much to gain from one another, and I wish that all of my relationships with adults could be this dynamic and valuable.”

The Genki Spark

The Genki Spark strives to create a safe, open, and supportive environment for



Asian women through taiko and sisterhood. For some of the women in the troupe, joining The Genki Spark has been a life changing experience. Kumiko and Mayuko are mother and daughter members. Neither one imagined that they would ever be part of a taiko group together and never thought they would ever have the ability to share their experiences with each other or other people.

When Kumiko left Japan with her children years ago to live in the United States, she did not leave under normal circumstances. She made a choice to remove herself and her children from an abusive environment. After years of hardship that damaged her self-confidence, she has finally emerged from the experience with the strength to tell her story. After keeping this experience to herself for so long, The Genki Spark and taiko have empowered Kumiko to speak out and advocate for herself and other women.

As a young woman, Mayuko has had her own battles with self confidence and acceptance. She never expected that joining a taiko group would have such a huge impact on her life. Being involved with The Genki Spark together has also strengthened the communication and relationship between mother and daughter. This is just the beginning of their new journey together. The positive change and self empowerment that Kumiko and Mayuko have experienced is just an example of the power of a supportive environment created by taiko and sisterhood.

“The positive change and self empowerment that Kumiko and Mayuko have experienced is just an example of the power of a supportive environment created by taiko and sisterhood.”

5 Year Strategic Plan January 2012 - December 2016

During the past year the Board of Directors of the Boston Women's Fund together with the executive director kicked-off a strategic planning process for the purpose of developing a clearer direction of our work as a progressive foundation aiming to strengthen the grassroots movement through the leadership of women and girls. A retreat in the early Fall incorporated board, staff and volunteers for a broader input into the strategic plan. In addition, donors, volunteers, former staff, and members of other foundations were contacted for their input.

In the following 12 months, we will share key areas of our plan with our community of supporters in upcoming editions of our newsletter. We intend to continue to use this column as a focus area to share different portions of the Boston Women's Fund Strategic Plan. Over the past ten months, board members, staff and volunteers supported the development of this important process of moving forward in our organizational work as a progressive foundation.

Please take the time to review our Vision, Mission, Core Values and Core Constituencies. Your feedback like always would be greatly appreciated.

VISION

We strive for a world free of racism, sexism, poverty and other oppressions.

MISSION

The Boston Women's Fund is a progressive foundation that supports community based organizations and grassroots initiatives run by women and girls in order to create a society based on racial, economic, and social justice.

CORE VALUES

1. We believe that change starts at the grassroots level, and systemic change is necessary to achieve racial, economic and social justice
2. We believe that power and wealth must be redistributed to attain equity and systemic change.
3. We believe that the fight for women's rights is an integral part of a larger struggle to end oppression based on race, class, gender, age, religion, ability or sexual orientation.
4. We believe all movements must combat racism by being racially and culturally diverse in both membership and leadership if progressive change is to occur.
5. We believe that women and girls of color as well as those of extremely low-income must and can be leaders within all movements if progressive change is to occur.
6. We believe that educating and organizing a diverse donor base is a critical strategy for amassing broad support for social change movements.
7. We strive to reflect our commitment to shared leadership, equity and cultural diversity in all aspects of organization's operations.

SEVEN CORE CONSTITUENCIES

Low-Income Women; Women of Color; Immigrant Women; LGBTQ Community; Women with Disabilities; Elder Women; and Girls.

Our Mission

The Boston Women's Fund is a progressive foundation that supports community based organizations and grassroots initiatives run by women and girls in order to create a society based on racial, economic, and social justice.

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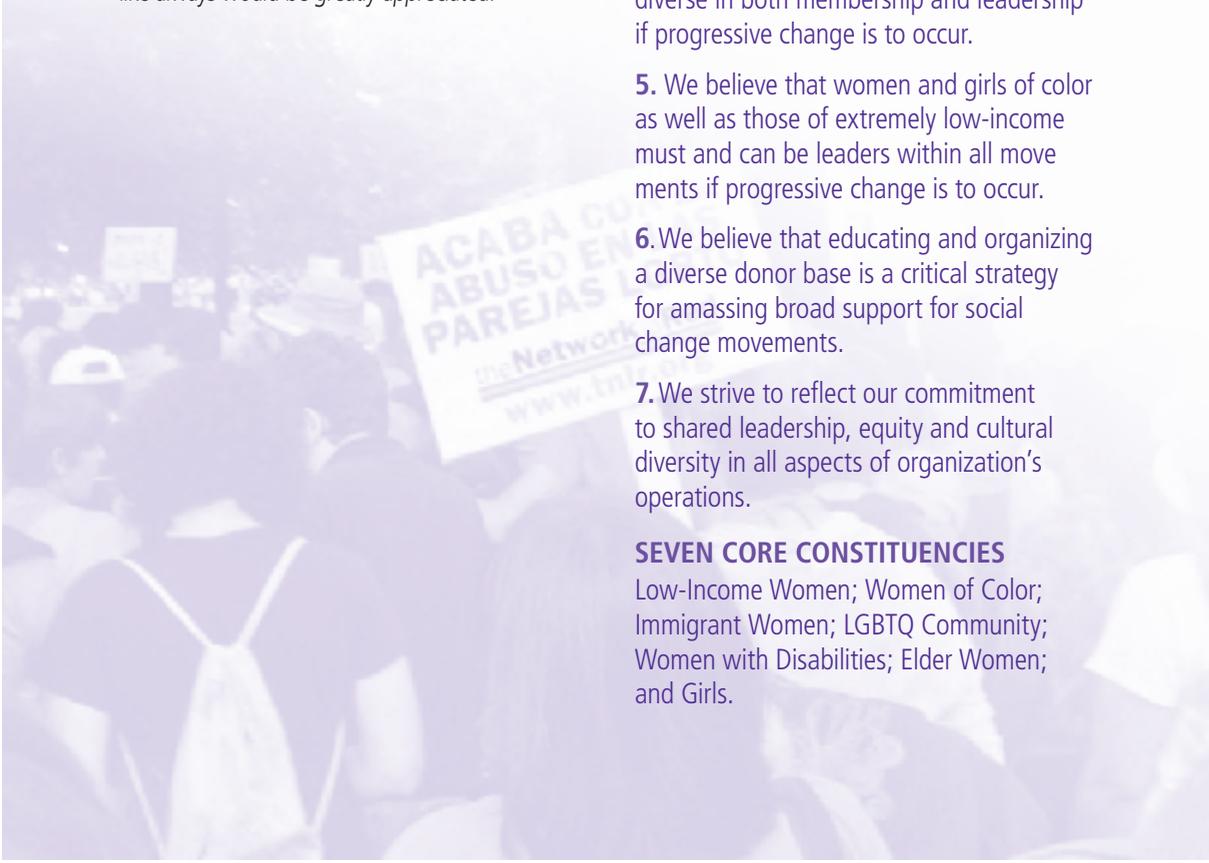
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Please note that Joyce King is currently the chair of the Board of Directors.



History is replete with examples of women who found a problem and joined other women to solve it. One of the most effective levers of social change has been the women who empowered themselves and achieved the capacity, resources, courage and skills to bring about positive change in their communities. The founding members of the Boston Women's Fund recognized this truth and focused their philanthropic efforts on supporting grassroots organizations dedicated to the development of women's leadership. Our founders sought to connect women-led community organizations with a donor community committed to promoting social justice and change. This coalition of wise women (community activists and principled partners) understood that the more women came together in an organized way, the more influence they exercised.

Women's involvement in promoting social change yields several important benefits:

- Women's unique knowledge related to their own experiences and struggles in oppressed communities remains key. "Real" knowledge is a pre-requisite to developing "real" solutions. Grassroots women's organizations know what is going on within their communities.
- When women become involved in creating change, they become empowered to challenge societal and governing structures impacting their communities. In gaining access to decision-making, women can influence resource allocations, the selection of community priorities and the need to hold legislators and municipalities accountable.

The work of women's grassroots organizations have tended to focus on areas that have the greatest impact on the lives of families. Women activists organize around health and safety issues including domestic and community violence, the lack of affordable housing and the specific needs of women and their families without homes, the improvement of educational outcomes in oppressed communities, and leadership skills development for women interested in becoming conduits of community change. The Boston Women's Fund's role in the struggle for social justice epitomizes the work of our grantees, all of whom demonstrate an enduring commitment to improving the lives of women and their families.

We support our grantee organizations for the critically important work they do and appreciate your generosity in committing to the longevity of the Boston Women's Fund.

With warm regards,

Joyce King Virginia M. Meany
 Joyce King and Virginia Meany
 Chairs, Board of Directors

“One of the most effective levers of social change has been women who empowered themselves.”

corporations and oftentimes abusers are financially in control in their relationships with workers and survivors respectively, the latter depend on the former for their livelihood. Consequently, workers and survivors alike lack power to negotiate better terms or to leave their abusive situation.

Apart from our common roots in anti-oppression organizing, we see in Occupy a reflection of our own struggles with coalition work. Much of the attention paid by the alternative media to Occupy has been highly critical of oppressive power relations that are occurring within the movement itself, focusing on everything from who runs the General Assemblies, to the very name of the movement. Many of our own internal conversations at TNL about Occupy Boston have resonated with those arguments. But while we may not approve of every single thing that goes on at Occupy Boston, it is important to remember that we are concerned by it because we find connection to it.

This is both the beauty and the heartache of coalition work. Occupy reminds us that coalition building is difficult and takes time. It is inherently risky. Bernice Johnson Reagon wrote, "You don't go into coalition because you just like it. The only reason you would consider trying to team up with somebody who could possibly kill you, is because that's the only way you can figure you can stay alive." So yes, coalition work necessitates that we confront the ugly - in our tent, and in the tent next to ours. It is also, therefore, a declaration of faith in the future. To do broad-based coalition work, the kind that is happening at Occupy, people make a commitment to talk through that ugly with one another. We commit to sitting with the discomfort of discovering that not only have we been stepped on by others, but that we, too, have done some stepping on of others. And together, we all must move forward into trying to figure out how to be accountable to that, so that our violence should be an opportunity for transformation, rather than more violence.

In the end, a strong coalition does not work towards comfort, but rather leans into discomfort. As Audre Lorde wrote, "We don't have to be the same to have a movement, but we do have to admit our fear and pain, and be accountable for our ignorance. In the end, finally, we must refuse to give up on each other."





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The Boston Women's Fund (BWF) remains resolute in reaching out to progressive men in a united effort with our grantee community to end violence in our homes and on our streets. Our initiative, Men Take A Stand, engages men of diverse racial and economic backgrounds and ages to promote peace by preventing domestic and sexual violence through the act of promoting the leadership of women and girls. It is a partnership in the struggle for racial, economic and social justice.

This year, our Men Take A Stand Social Justice in Action award will be presented to Jarrett Barrios. Jarrett is committed to communities empowering themselves, particularly around issues of anti-gang violence, anti-bullying, LGBTQ youth and women's health.

The event will be at 6pm, March 21, 2012. More details about the event coming soon; please check our website www.bostonwomensfund.org.

