

Women Reinventing Philanthropy: The Everychild Foundation Model at Work

Los Angeles, CA, May 2009 – Picture a society where every child can grow up to be a productive, contributing member of the community, unencumbered by poverty, disease, disability, abuse, neglect, or lack of prospects. That is the vision that inspired the founder of The Everychild Foundation, Jacqueline Caster.

Caster's passion for children's causes motivated her to start Everychild. After becoming a mother, her interest deepened. When she saw children suffering, she would imagine them as her own. Caster was moved to action.

By implementing the giving circle model, The Everychild Foundation effectively directs the energies and dollars of its 200 members. Instead of planning costly and time-consuming fundraising events, each member annually contributes \$5,000 and has an equal vote in the final selection of grant recipients. Grants support nonprofits in the Los Angeles metropolitan area.

By pooling their funds and keeping operational costs to a minimum, Everychild is able to annually award a \$1 million grant for a dream project at one non-profit in the Los Angeles area. Since 2000, Everychild Foundation has allocated over \$6.5 million in targeted grants - changing the lives of over 350,000 children in the community to date.

One dream project was a universally accessible playground at the Los Angeles Orthopedic Hospital. The playground allows children with disabilities to engage in the kind of play that they usually cannot access. Caster explains the playground's impact: "Not only has the playground provided a chance for children with disabilities to connect with one another, the playground encourages tolerance and invites all the neighborhood children to utilize it, as well." So, children both with and without disabilities learn to play together.

The playground was particularly powerful for a young boy, born with limb deformities. Before, physical activity was too difficult for him. Now, he loves playing and making new friends. Because of how the playground has changed their family's life, his mother now serves as a motivational speaker. She encourages other parents to advocate for universally accessible playgrounds in their neighborhoods. Additionally, the playground has inspired replication in both Mexico and Canada.

According to the Forum of Regional Associations of Grantmakers, Everychild Foundation is one of the larger giving circles in membership and in total dollars granted. Of the 160 giving circles surveyed in 2006, Everychild was responsible for 7% of the total dollars granted.

The group's tagline, "Women Reinventing Philanthropy," emphasizes the opportunity that the giving circle model provides members: to give back to their community in a more stimulating, efficient, democratic, and effective way. Caster explains that "with its democratic voting system, lack of hierarchy, and flexibility, Everychild sets the new standard for high-level donor engagement."

A diversity of donors are engaged in The Everychild Foundation. The women range from lawyers and business executives to artists and stay at home moms. Ages range from the 20's through the 70's. Everychild also represents the racial diversity of its Los Angeles community.

The Everychild Foundation is unique in its low rate of membership attrition. In a typical year, the normal attrition rate at Everychild ranges from three to five percent. During the current recession, the annual figure will be closer to seven percent. Everychild's membership retention is quite an achievement, especially during difficult economic times. The leadership believes donors remain involved because the giving circle model allows them to know that their contributions are making a difference.

Everychild empowers women to take on leadership roles. The women find great fulfillment in focusing their attention on the grant process, reviewing proposals from organizations throughout the year. However, women who do not participate in the grant process are still welcome; this is particularly appealing to women who lead busy lives.

The Grant Outreach Committee works with the agencies to prepare letters of inquiry, the first step in the grant application process. Then, the Grant Screening Board carefully reviews the applicants and chooses two finalists. In order to be inclusive and avoid entrenched hierarchy, the Board has a rotating membership.

The process culminates in the presentation of the two finalist agencies at the annual fall grant hearing, and the membership-at-large votes. On most occasions, funding has also been secured for the runner-up agency; individual members have provided contributions— and more than once, a full million dollars.

After allocation, Everychild stays involved with the grant recipients. To ensure compliance with grant agreements, the Grant Monitoring Committee reviews financial documents, interviews organizational leaders, and conducts site visits. The committee, then, reports their findings to the membership. This process addresses members' frustrations with prior philanthropic experiences, in which they felt unaware of their donations' impact.

Because of the members' significant involvement in the outreach, screening, and monitoring components of the grant process, the women have become more deeply interested in the need areas that their grants address. Motivated by members' increased interest, Everychild has branched out into the public policy arena. For example, the members have promoted legislation and policy changes in the areas of juvenile justice, aging-out foster youth, and investment in children aged zero to three.

Everychild serves as a model philanthropic organization inspiring the founding of 7 other giving circles - 2 In Santa Barbara, 1 in Las Vegas, and 4 locally. The Everychild Foundation hopes to demonstrate to other philanthropic organizations that it is possible to pool brain power and financial resources together in a meaningful way in order to make a greater impact in the community.

| For further information, please visit www.everychildfoundation.org.

