



WINGS - LOCAL WOMEN HELPING LOCAL WOMEN (APRIL 2016) BY RACHEL MINSKE

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hen Jacqui Dorsey first became involved with the grassroots effort Women in Northfield Giving Support

(WINGS), there was no telling the impact the organization would someday have on the community.

“You never know when you get started with something on the ground floor if it will take off,” she said.

Dorsey was a founding member of WINGS and now serves as its president. WINGS which has grown to become the second-largest local grantor (just after Northfield Area United Way) since its inception in 2000 when it started with 63 members.

Sixteen years later, it’s safe to say the organization got off the ground floor just fine. To date, WINGS has given approximately \$600,000 in grants to area non-profit organizations.

“It’s thriving and it’s because of the women who are involved,” said Dorsey.

In 2001, \$20,000 was given to various organizations. In 2015, 27 projects received grants totalling \$73,868.

The organization – comprised entirely of women, all volunteers – raises money through its nearly 300 members. Through grants, it gives the money to local, non-profit endeavors that directly impact women and children, Dorsey said.

WINGS focuses on projects that address basic needs like housing and food stability, education, physical and mental health and entrepreneurship.

Past recipients have included the Rice County Mental Health Collective, programming at the Northfield Arts Guild and the Northfield Area Learning Center, among many others.

“It’s more than just giving money,” she said. “It’s about involvement and it’s also about teaching our members about philanthropy.”

WINGS accepts grant applications from January to mid-March every year and awards the money in June.

In 2014, WINGS introduced a new form of giving called the “Dare to Dream” grant – a one-time \$10,000 award given to a local non-profit with a dream to help women or youth in the Northfield reach their full potential.

Greenvale Park Community School, a program that offers free out-of-school programming for Greenvale Park Elementary School students and families, received the first “Dare to Dream” grant.

Zach Pruitt, director of the Healthy Community Initiative, the community school’s grant partner, said the “Dare to Dream” award played a large role in securing additional funding sources for the school.

“I would say that the WINGS ‘Dare to Dream’ was a catalyst that helped us secure a highly competitive 21st Century Community Learning Center grant from the Minnesota Department of Education,” he said.

“One of the components that the 21st Century grant reviewers were looking for was the community’s involvement and investment in the program. The WINGS Dare to Dream helped to make that case and, in the process, helped to secure five years of funding for the community school model.”

Pruitt said funding from WINGS helped fill in gaps and cover costs that the 21st Century grant couldn’t. Remaining costs like childcare staff, family programming, meals at the school and participation incentives were all covered under the “Dare to Dream” grant.

Kathryn Lozada, a co-coordinator at the community school, said she became a WINGS member last year and admires the work women in Northfield are doing to raise and allocate funds to support the community in a number of ways.

“It seems the influence of WINGS is omnipresent in this town, and I am looking forward to learning more about the organization and how it funds important community-building initiatives as I get more involved,” she said.

Dorsey previously served as president of WINGS in 2004 and 2005 and said one of the greatest challenges of being involved with the organization is taking a step back.

“Probably one of the hardest things was letting go,” she said of stepping away from the presidency after 2005. She stepped into the president role again in January 2016.

“I stepped back for a number of years, because it was really, really important for other people to have a say in what was going on,” she said. “This organization needs to change and grow with the women who are involved.”

WINGS members can enjoy a number of social events throughout the year – whether it’s stopping by a Northfield eatery for a glass of wine after work, or getting a morning caffeine fix at a local coffee shop.

Voting members donate at least \$120 a year, but WINGS welcomes donations of any amount; even those women who donate \$1 a year can be a member, said Dorsey, adding that sponsorships are also available.

For more information on WINGS visit wings-mn.org.

Rachel Minske is a multimedia journalist. When not writing, she’s usually drinking coffee and asking questions.