

Youth Engaged in Philanthropy -History (by Myra Gordon)

In 2007, I became the Executive Director of the Illinois Prairie Community Foundation. With no previous experience running such an organization, I spent some time in those early months researching other area community foundations. I got invited to the Rockford, IL foundation's annual dinner. A board member and I went up to Rockford for the event and we were so impressed with the involvement of youths from their youth philanthropy initiative, which is called "In Youth We Trust." Members of the group were assigned to each table at the dinner and they spoke eloquently and enthusiastically about their work in the group. I wanted us to start something here like that, but knew at the time, that we did not have the resources to do it.

The next year, Tracy Gary, a non-profit consultant from Texas spoke at IPCF's first Philanthropy Luncheon. While she was in town, she helped us plan for what eventually became our Women to Women Giving Circle, she did a board training exercise, and she went to dinner with a small group (Deborah Halperin, Jennifer McDade, and me) to discuss youth philanthropy initiatives. None of the three of us had the resources or time to get a youth philanthropy initiative going at that time, despite our enthusiasm for the program.

The Community Foundation was fortunate to have a generous donor who came in interested in creating a Youth Endowment Fund. We were delighted to establish the fund with her.

The following fall, Deborah Halperin called and said she had (through the Action Resource Center at IWU) an IWU freshman who had been in the Youth Philanthropy program in her home area (Sandwich, IL) and who was extremely interested in starting such a program here during her time at ISU. Deborah brought in Blair Wright and we talked about what would be involved in such a program. Blair was extremely enthusiastic, but as a student, would not be in town year round. We would need funding for the program. I agreed to contact our donor who had set up her youth endowment to see if she would consider funding such a program and said I that would contact a friend of mine who would be perfect to co-lead with Blair. That friend, Sandy McGhee had been a youth programs person for the Cooperative Extension Service here in McLean County for many years, and I knew that she had interest in setting up a program that would give youth more leadership experience.

The special donor agreed to fund the first year of the Youth Engaged in Philanthropy program, making a gift that covered both the costs of the program and \$10,000 that the youths would use to make youth grants for the Community Foundation (upon community foundation board approval). Sandy was enthusiastic and she and Blair proved to make an excellent team. Blair went to some of the local high schools to recruit our first group. Blair remained as a group leader for the remainder of her Wesleyan years, always doing a terrific job...coming back during vacations, if necessary, and sometimes bringing her parents with her for events. I am extremely grateful to both Blair and Sandy for making this program a part of the work of the Illinois Prairie Community Foundation and I am delighted that through my work, I was able to play a role in getting this great group established. Thanks also to the pioneer group of youths who led the way in establishing the program.