

Women Giving; Energizing Philanthropy to Build Community

A report from AiPhilanthropy for Positive Change to The San Diego Women's Foundation

Introduction

This journey began with grant follow up visits to SDWF Community Partners where we were struck both by powerful stories of results and by a clear, consistent message that Philanthropy is not just about the money – that personal relationships and connections are both valuable and key to sustaining the impact of our financial gifts.

We began to develop an appreciation for Philanthropy as a whole system of people who, in many different ways and roles are investing themselves in others. So we set out to better understand this system – to discover what motivates people to give, to explore what's at their core as individual contributors and to imagine what kind of future we might have if we were able to expand and energize this philanthropic community.

In depth personal interviews with over 100 San Diegans – SDWF members, Community Partners, participants in their programs and friends in the community – were conducted over a period of three months by a committed group of women who invested their own time and money to develop an understanding of ways to energize Philanthropy to build community. The stories from these interviews – about times when people made a difference – are a goldmine.

Sharing these stories and “mining” them for meaning, in a series of roundtables and forums with groups of six to sixty people at a time, has been both inspiring and informative – a chance to convene and engage a broad community of givers.

The real value of the process will be a function of the extent to which we, as individuals and organizations, use what we're learning to inform what we do,

This report, focused on the San Diego Women's Foundation, is based on interviews with more than fifty SDWF members and is structured around themes that emerged from their wishes for the future – i.e., responses to the question “what, if we could, would make your philanthropy even more alive and powerful?”

These five themes, developed with SDWF members, are threads (not labels or levels) that are interwoven throughout many members' stories and experiences. The quotes and stories selected to illustrate them in this report provide only a glimpse of the many faces and facets of philanthropy that we discovered.

We sincerely hope that these insights and experiences will inform, inspire and enable SDWF to engage more women in more significant philanthropy.

Energizer # 1) Knowing you make a difference by seeing results through shared experiences

A desire to measure results was, as noted earlier, the first step in this journey. SDWF members describe knowing that they make a difference in very personal terms – seeing childrens' faces, hearing students' voices, rather than reading statistical reports - and through shared experiences, often with family members. There's a very natural element of joy, of fun, of feeling part of some greater good. Two other aspects stand out. First, that personal validation and feedback on the “return” from a good philanthropic investment can lead to more giving. Second, and most importantly, that we, as women must build confidence in and “own” the fact that what we do every day counts...and that, collectively we can make a significant difference.

Quotes– what we say

- I'd wish for a 10-15 year window in which everyone would get enough feedback to keep it going. When students have called and told me how something I said or did affected their lives it is huge payback and makes me feel wonderful.
- I wish that everyone would say thank you more often to let people know that their good deeds are appreciated so they can see the return on their investment
- I like having a little “snap-shot” that I can pull up in my mind's eye that make up a collection of great moments in my life. A lot of the giving that I do has those little moments...I want to see something more tangible, that is something that I can associate with a snap-shot and remember. Whenever I can do that I feel happy and I would like to have more opportunities to create those snap-shots.
- I wish for the ability to see & understand how small things that I do make a difference in the big picture. If I could do this, I might be more committed to giving and re-prioritize my giving.
- We still need a better sense (collectively) of what we do to make a difference. If women appreciate what we give, even the small ways we give, it would be different.

What would happen in the absence of humility – if we really were a culture that laid bare those contributions? Would it be contagious?

Stories – what we do

There was one in Southcrest – a really tough community – where the Recreation center lost funding for the pool. We funded it for three years. There were hundreds of kids who got to swim, take lessons. Lots of them didn't have bathing suits, so I went out and bought 150 bathing suits. The fun was to see the pool open. My stepdaughter came with us. The pool had been opened and it was a normal day, free swim hour. The kids were lined up along the fence, waiting to get in. We recognized some of the bathing suits. My stepdaughter got to see the kids so looking forward to the swim.

It was something tangible, where I could go and see a child engaged in something happy, safe, with good role models. Other things we donate, the kids like it, but we don't see it.
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My examples are little ones. I don't think I've ever had a master stroke that caused a giant ripple. Two stories, in parallel, come to mind.

Last week I got a call that one of our (homeless) kids was to meet with a US Senator. If I have a strength, it's building relationships that last. Two groups thought of me to find the student. I took the little girl shopping. Nothing else mattered if she felt poorly about herself in that moment.

I was struck by a woman at another function, who was hitting the wall because she wasn't dressed properly. She was a young woman I worked with, who wanted so badly to succeed. I took her shopping and watched this very small wardrobe literally transform her. It instilled confidence not because it should, but because someone had confidence and believed in her. I remember feeling both sad and pleased when she said several times “No one's ever done anything that nice for me.” I was so struck. She came back in, stood taller, saw herself through someone else's eyes.

The little girl wanted a pin-striped suit. I said, you'll look like a Republican (the Senator's a Democrat). But she had an image of what success looked like.

I'm not a big vision person. I have a mental image of a popcorn necklace. You take a kernel, see it pop. It feels good to have effected a moment in a positive way. It sounds so silly. When I see someone in need, I pretend like I just found a \$20 bill and ask "Did you drop this?" It's natural. It's like finding a quarter. It's fun, exciting. We hide this and we shouldn't.

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My husband and I have both been involved in Education and trying to make it an equal playing field for all. The focus of our giving has been doing things that will give people a chance to be the best that they can be.

We began to focus our efforts on education and we were able to make some things happen. Our goal was to even the educational playing field for all by helping people remove the barriers to learning. I am dyslexic and I know how difficult it can be to learn when you have a learning disability of some kind. We started by setting up scholarships for people with dyslexia. We have worked with both USD and SDSU to influence their literacy programs. I was the President of the San Diego Council on Literacy. We are working to set up a Literacy Chair at USD.

The high point for me comes from hearing the success stories of the individual learners – from seeing something really change. I had a conversation last week with someone who was going back to college on a scholarship. At first her husband thought it was a stupid idea but now he too has returned to college and is getting a computer science degree. Their daughter is also looking at attending a University which is huge for this family. Their new education will change their lives dramatically. It's like a ripple effect. It's like throwing a pebble into a pond and seeing how that one small action affects the whole pond. It's creating ripples of hope.

My husband and I are results oriented. We are doers more than talkers. The peak is when you can see some measurable result as a result of your action – when something is different as a result.

Energizer #2) Opportunities to apply professional & personal skills and leverage them, along with those of others, to meet identified challenges.

Building from knowing that we can make a difference to acknowledging the unique gifts and talents of others is important. SDWF members enjoy leveraging their own and others' skills to meet identified challenges. They are conscious of their strengths and limitations and appreciate what others bring. Making a difference in ways that balance professional and personal aspirations is key. Success is finding the confluence of professional skills, work and values.

Quotes – what we say

- We need to equally value what we bring to the table. Each of us needs to value ourselves and each other for our unique gifts and equally value the contributions made with those gifts... Working to each others' strengths, in addition to choosing to be with people who have a really positive attitude and focus, would grow the vitality of my core value.
- Take more risks to create opportunities and success...this is based on the power of choice and making a conscious effort.
- How can I leverage myself – finding others who share my passion and values (connectedness)...the intense intelligence and commitment of the SDWF members to make a difference.
- Committed members with significant shared values and vision
- Maximizing everyone's potential

Stories – what we do

When my daughter was 16, she was in soccer in Mission Viejo – it was an exclusive program, and she made the team – there were kids from everywhere. The first year we were a part of it, we kind of watched & waited, not getting too involved. We won State Championships – then went to Regionals and lost 3 straight. With that, the politics came out – it wasn't pretty. Finally, my daughter asked me if I would "Do Something" – she knew what I did for a living (although she'd never asked me to help with anything before). So I organized a debrief with the kids and the coach – no parents. It was good feedback for the coach – the girls said "show us you care about us", asked him 'who are you' – good conversation. And then agreed to leave the "trash" in the middle of the room. I worked with them on what their goals were for the future, their vision, what they wanted to take forward. They did goal setting for the next year & decided "we want to go to Nationals" They set rules for parents, the coaches, for workouts.... They did win State, the enthusiasm was great – One dad (Mondo) painted his head green & white, face painting took hold! They went to Nationals where there was a round robin – they won all their games – and then lost in double OT after a 2nd round shootout.... It was all so great because the parents backed off –the kids took charge and did it. To watch them handle it all – including the losing at the end – so incredibly well...it was amazing.

Your comments that we're focused lately so much on the 'big picture' that there isn't enough personal – that's what brought it back. I was the only parent privy to all of it. I was there.

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There was a need to be filled in that there was no uniformly distributed information vehicle in the community and I had the skill, the background and the financial ability to do it. And I was able to do it without interrupting my parenting because my good friend was my partner. We ran a profitable business. It was the single vehicle for advertising to an affluent market.

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“I was the right person for the right time”! As the Chair of a non-profit Board of Directors, I first found myself as a “lost leader in a less than happy situation” with an organization teetering at “breakpoint”. I asked the question: “Had the organization exhausted it’s sense of purpose or was there a value and opportunity in crafting something more significant and alive?”

Recognizing the conundrum, I posed the question to the Board: “Should we die?” and gave them a copy of “The Tipping Point”. They resonated with the book and the idea to focus on “ process, issues and content”. After extensive discussion, the Board made a commitment to the rebirth of the organization and I made a commitment to “holding it together” through the transition with the timely skills of organizational development and facilitation.

In reflection, “I was able to be pregnant, but I did not have the skills to raise it”. I was the midwife in the change process and the subsequent Board Chair and Executive Director are “raising it” well. It was an honor of “right timing” for my strengths to be utilized “ full gear” in the reorganization and transition period.

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I have two older sisters and a twin. My oldest sister lives in Los Angeles and she called and asked me for help because she knows I work for a non-profit and could possibly be helpful to a friend of hers. Her friend, Marcie has a seven-year old daughter, Madison who had a tumor. While the tumor was not definitively diagnosed she received a great deal of help and support from the American Cancer Society. However, as soon as doctors told her the tumor was non-cancerous there was no more help. Marcie found that there was almost no information or help available on the web, in books, etc. to help her find answers and help for Madison.

Frustrated, Marcie set up her own Foundation to which my sister contributed some money and time. Since Marcie is part of the entertainment community, she had gathered some impressive money. However, they needed more to get a website up and running to disseminate information and they hoped to be able to fund some research into non-cancerous tumors.

My sister told her that I had experience writing grants and they asked me to help figure out a way to go after more money. I spent a few days in Los Angeles with Madison and Marcie interviewing them and gathering information that would allow me to prepare some narrative and talking points for grant applications to get them started. I spent about 20 to 25 hours pulling together the boiler-plate for a series of grant applications for their organization.

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This is hot off the press. On Monday I coordinated the media for the arrival of Fary Moini – a successful member of our rotary who built a school in Afghanistan for 1000 boys and 1000 girls. She was trained as a nurse and runs tuxedo stores here. When she saw the news, she decided that she had skills that could help. We sent her as a Rotarian. The Afghanistan government heard that her school is the best since the war. She has been there the past four months getting the school opened. She’s back now. She does have to work for a living.

A big part of the success has been media coverage – it’s spawned contributions. We were at the airport for six hours. It was a fabulous opportunity for us to use our talents for something way more powerful than ourselves, our clients. There were four camera crews waiting for her to come down the escalator. She had been traveling for three days. They got her descent, people hugging her – they all got footage, time with her. Channels 8 & 10 did really nice stories. 4 will air an extensive profile. People continue to call and tell me they saw it and ask if there’s any way they can help. I direct them to her. We’ve been doing it since November ’01. This is the culmination of 2 & ½ years.

We're all really emotionally involved with her. Almost everybody in my rotary has figured out a way to support her. An architect drew up the plans. Whatever people could do, they did. It sounds ridiculous, but we've all fallen in love with her. She's an incredible person. It's like being inside the halo with her. It's gotten really personal. Everybody would do anything for her – short of going there. She looks like Audrey Hepburn – beautiful, elegant, and diminutive – but she goes to a construction site and kicks butt. She's incredibly inspiring, completely inspirational

Commentary

These are stories of goal-oriented team-builders, empathic “spark plugs” who leverage their skills and those of others to be agents of positive change. These women seek, find and value opportunities to employ their talents in the philanthropic or nonprofit world.

Energizer #3 *Opportunities to connect through giving with like-minded others and family.*

SDWF members want to be part of a community of givers, inspiring each other to act. They seek to pull others in to help them experience the potential from and participate in the process of giving. They have a keen understanding of the importance of family, especially the next generation, in reinforcing and sustaining their efforts. They understand that effective philanthropy is a system, a process and a sense of purpose to be shared. They believe in and value relationships.

Quotes – what we say

- Wow, there are unlimited possibilities. If people had a greater sense of the value of their caring as human beings, they'd be much more open and there would be a lot more kindness and caring in the world.
- Motivate others, be role models... it only works for others if they see in you something, the same abilities they have, and then they have to act. There's a difference between being an admired role model and actually instigating someone to act. Encourage others. Show them.
- You don't make a difference in a single life. It's a process. It's not what you give. It's not what you get. It's what you become.
- It's all about relationships...It's friends and enrichment...You'll never be lonely if you volunteer.
- You cannot give with a closed hand.

Stories – what we do

My Aunt died in 1998 after establishing an endowment fund at The San Diego Foundation. I remember sitting with her and talking about the planning process. Originally, she said she really didn't mind paying taxes, but as we talked I asked her “what about giving your money to charity instead of to the government?” She thought that sounded interesting, so we looked into it to see what options were out there and found that the Jewish Community Foundation & The San Diego Foundation made sense. We met with Bob Kelly, and as they say “the rest is history.” Because of her gift, (since I am the fund advisor) I have been given many opportunities to make a difference. I have come to appreciate what an incredible opportunity she gave me – I'll have that gift for the rest of my life. The opportunity to do things for this community that she would have wanted. My Aunt and I worked together on criteria for her grants, using the SMART principles for guiding future giving with the fund. (They had to be Specific, Meaningful,

Achievable, Realistic and Time Specific.) The criteria are broad but specific enough for me to make more targeted gifts that I know my Aunt would have approved of.

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About 15 years ago I was involved through my church in building homes with Habitat for Humanity. Our minister and his wife were our best friends and completely committed to a building project in Encanto. I was sparked by their enthusiasm and dedication to the concept. It took a lot of effort to organize my life and free up 5 full days to participate in the project. I did it because I wanted to be involved in that kind of “hands on” process and I wanted to expose my children to this type of philanthropy.

Jimmy Carter and his wife worked side by side with us and the power of their commitment moved us all. On the day of the Grand Opening of the homes we had built, I took my children ages 6 and 10 years, they met Jimmy Carter and believe it made a difference in all our lives.

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Getting involved at UCLA with the Women in Philanthropy group really made an impression. It started out that we'd made gifts to AIDs programs. They called focus groups for women who'd made gifts. At one with 25 women, 15 minutes into the process you could see everyone's face changing. "Oh yeah! (It's us, not our husbands giving.) and " We really don't need our name on the building. A pass to the parking lot would be nice."

We formed a group, developed criteria and raised \$800K in less than a year. Everyone committed \$25K over 5 years, and we could direct it anywhere on campus. We were included in things on campus. The difference in the predominantly male-controlled environment was great! If I went alone, they didn't even bother to talk to me. By the end of the year, a member of the Board of Governors actually climbed over chairs to greet me.

What made it a peak experience is the things that have changed. Members of Women in Philanthropy are now on the Board of Directors of the UCLA Foundation – it's still small, but we have seats. When half of the student body is women, it's essential. We showed the power of women & what they can do as a group. Women give differently. We need to get to know the impact.

The Women in Philanthropy process actually changed me. I do things that I never did before. There's something about the process of sitting with all these women of different backgrounds. Everyone has a timidness. It didn't matter how much money you had. Everyone's first reaction was "Will it be OK with my husband?") We laughed.

Commentary

These stories celebrate the power of women, experienced through teaching, modeling and sharing the experience of giving with others. Along with a strong appreciation for the “gift of giving”, there is a keen desire to get beyond what we know & expand our knowledge of the world.

Energizer # 4 Opportunities to give others possibilities

SDWF members' connections with the broader community stem from two fundamental beliefs 1) in human potential and 2) that privilege comes with a responsibility to level the playing field to provide possibilities for others. There is a deep recognition of interdependence – of the fact that we're all in the same boat. In many cases, that appreciation comes from having "been there", from having benefited from others' philanthropy. In all cases, there is involved, direct and often courageous action to improve others' circumstances, based on a strong sense that we're here to make life better for others.

Quotes – what we say

- I wish we could rid ourselves of the "entitlement" concept that seems to affect us and acknowledge what people do for us...be more sensitive to each others' feelings, not just focus on what we think they need. Involvement means taking the time from your own agenda for another human being.
- I learn a great deal about another whole "slice of life" and about myself. I live in a very sheltered environment – I need to get out into and participate in the world to help change things. I have to get involved, I can't just wish it away and it's not just money.
- If egos could get out of the way and people could talk to each other, it would change the types of collaboration. Just talk to each other and listen. Active listening, doing things about what you hear.
- More "we are all in this boat together"...a willingness to recognize that we're interdependent. We're not solo. A willingness to keep learning.
- It's important to teach your children that you have to care about others. It can't be all about what's inside your house.

Stories – what we do

I grew up in an Albanian family in Massachusetts. My Dad was one of eleven children and my Mom was one of four. I have 30 first cousins! I was only the second or third of those cousins to go to college. My family didn't have the means to send us to college. They were supportive but they weren't aware of the help I needed. It wasn't their world.

When I got out of high school I worked in the travel business for about ten years. It was fun but when I was 29 I decided I wanted something more so I quit and went back to school to get my degree. .. I got scholarships but often had little money to live on. Although I had little I felt very alive and it was fun! I kept on going, stopping only when I had my Master's degree in Marriage and Family Counseling. When I really needed help Scott, (who became my husband) and another friend helped me out. I want to do that for others.

When Scott died I set up a fund in his name to focus on helping non-traditional students. Education is such a huge, life-changing gift. I don't want to give a person their whole education. I want the person to be trying, to be working as I was. But sometimes you just need a little help.

I have started with my twin nieces. They are 19 and did not go right to college. Although my sister is probably the brightest in the family, she didn't finish college, leaving with only one semester to go. She has three children. She is not in a place to help them right now. She and my brother-in-law are just not available to their kids. They are not giving them the skills to figure things out so I have just begun to help them. I have funded their tuition for their first year of Junior College. I find that I am doing more than just writing checks. They need to learn about

responsibility and planning and scheduling, etc. I can tell them the things that my parents couldn't tell me. My hope is for them to do well in Junior College. If they do, I've told them I'll help fund the rest of their degree. Their older brother isn't interested in college yet but I'm planting the seeds.

My brother's children are younger. He didn't go to college. He has three sons and has taken in two of his wife's nephews who lost their parents. (Now that is a story of real philanthropy). I will set up 529k funds for them and encourage them to continue their educations as they get older.

I guess it just feels good to be able to do for them what my parents couldn't do for me. It's nice to see them come alive and begin to consider new possibilities for their lives.

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I met a lady at the Ranch who was one of the students we gave bicycles to 50 years ago. I saw kids walking to school (in Tecate). We asked teachers to recommend those who were really diligent, and every year we'd distribute 8-10 bicycles

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In the 80s my daughter began her Bat mitzvah prep class. As part of this effort, each child was assigned a penpal from behind the Iron Curtain. Because religious persecution existed in Russia and these rituals were impossible, these penpals would be Bat mitzvah "in spirit" with my daughter's group. Vika, my daughter's penpal, was from Kiev.

So when my mother, a career politician, was planning a trip to Russia we asked her to track down Vika and her family. She did so and invited them to her hotel for lunch. They arrived with generous gifts, a difficult effort under their dire living conditions. Most distressing was that Vika was paralyzed on the left side and had been refused medical treatment for religious reasons. We were determined to do something about Vika's situation. My mother knew how to work the system, I provided the finances and we got the family to the United States within a year. We brought them to San Diego for a wonderful Thanksgiving picnic at the Cove. It was a very emotional weekend for all of us. On a humorous note: Vika's grandmother wanted most of all to see a supermarket. She was absolutely blown away by so much STUFF on the shelves.

What made it a peak is knowing that you can have a vision, act on it, have success and see the results. Vika got her surgeries, a scholarship to Stanford and is now married and spearheads a new immigrant orientation program. Her mother got a job and stock with Oracle.

Commentary

These connections with others require courage and openness to change and learning – a desire and willingness to step outside of a controlled environment!

Energizer # 5 SDWF are role models who touch the future, are risk-takers and are catalysts, teaching the value of philanthropy within the greater community.

A striking majority of SDWF members articulated bold, visionary, positive wishes for the future. They expressed a desire to widen the circle, to redefine philanthropy and to test new approaches to catalyze contribution and build community.

Quotes – what we say

Touching the future

- It would be great to look at a broader membership base
- To embrace philanthropy in a different way – to define philanthropy to children in a different way. It's the web of life.
- To remember to “pay it forward”...to practice random acts of kindness...to remember how good it makes you feel to help others
- To continue to act as a catalyst to encourage others to contribute
- To help a kid decide to buy a Toyota, rather than a BMW and give some away.

Visionary risk-taking

- to be more of a visionary...I've been around those who are truly visionary 'd like to have some of that gift...to be able to see the possibilities that others scoff at and turn those into reality. Thinking even bigger – outside all the norms. Some are so visionary that they can envision/create whole new worlds in their minds. I'm not there yet, but I'd like to be.
- Connecting the dots so people can see the vision. All sorts of things – self-sufficient communities, cultural diversity, sharing, prosperous
- Traditional philanthropy has to become more open to risk-taking and to changing roles. It's about trying something new and not just giving dollars (isn't the answer). Need a strong constitution to do the risk taking. It teaches us what we need to know, shapes an opening and creates a learning organization. Learn together, know the “culture” and then makes changes.

Catalyst

- Caring beyond yourself, willingness to connect beyond your own needs – need to know what and go forward. To go out of their way to make these things happen. They will if it's put in front of them. I wish for catalysts to show people what can be done. Grow that in the community – people who will make the effort and share it.
- I want to be able to influence and stimulate others to care. Many people seem numb. I took a year's hiatus from bit picture giving and just focused on the one on one giving.

Commentary

While there were many stories of members mobilizing whole “systems” to make a difference, the group chose to share more direct quotes about what members want to be and to reflect on what SDWF might do. Their comments follow:

- Touch the future – teach the children about values by setting a good example. Energize the community.
- Be a visionary and a risk taker. Ignore the naysayers.

- Be a catalyst – inspire others to engage.
- Don't wait. Do it now!
- Make San Diego a better place for everyone.

Conclusion

And so we come full circle, back to the notion that what we do really counts and that we can, individually and collectively, make a difference. There is a growing sense that it's time for women to own and value their contributions, connect with others and step up to the challenge of creating a world where everyone contributes.

This report is a gift to SDWF and the community – one which, like any gift, can be appreciated and used, put into storage or recycled. It is our sincere hope that it will inspire and embolden individuals and organizations to take bold action to build the community we *all* want to live in.

We wish to thank all those who volunteered their time, talent and treasure - as interviewees, interviewers, illustrators, writers and analysts – to the creation of this report and the process that made it possible. These stories are ours. We can and do make a difference!