When a Grant Becomes Something More - Finding Strength and Gratitude Through Art

A Gift from Maria Louise
A grant from the Sari A. Rosenbaum Fund for Women and Girls made it possible for Maria to have an artist mentor her as she explored her own talents and gifts. For her final project, she chose to paint a portrait of Community Foundation and Fund for Women & Girls founder, Sari Rosenbaum, from a photo we provided. The portrait captures Sari’s spirit, strength and kindness, and it is displayed proudly in our office. Maria gave permission to share her story and for that we are extremely grateful. (Note the hand print in the lower left corner of the portrait - that’s Maria’s daughter’s hand.)

An open letter to all whom this may concern:
I learned of Sari’s drive and passionate work to help victims of domestic violence only through discussion after this painting was completed. I couldn’t get these words out at that time, as this is a very personal and emotional struggle so many of us have gone through or are still enduring. Now aware of Sari’s mission, I feel compelled to tell this story.

I began painting this trapped and living in an extremely violent, abusive relationship. I had convinced myself I could leave at any moment, however reality continued to prove otherwise. Through numerous and difficult attempts, I caved at some point not able to bring myself to leave or even speak about the abuse. I lived with it. We lived with it. For our 5 month old daughter, it was all she knew. Everyday life was chaotic, dangerous and terrifying. Yet I had chosen this man, this life … so I felt the need to do my best, hoping we would all come out stronger as a family. The violence and many forms of abuse only got worse. I kept thinking about the painting of Sari I had started. I knew I needed to finish it, but every day I was made to believe I couldn’t do anything right. Every moment I thought about my daughter and what kind of a mother – what kind of a person I needed to be. I thought about what kind of a person I know I am. Everything in my life was conflicting.

It became apparent Sari’s painting would never get finished under those circumstances.

For me, painting is a form of prayer. The unfinished painting was constant proof of how unhealthy a life we were living. I felt desperate to raise my daughter in the best ways I am able. I was not a bad person, nor a bad mother, but I was an enabler for allowing the situation to continue. I realized that choice was mine alone to make. Nobody can decide your fate but you.

We left suddenly and didn’t look back. We couldn’t. I had endured (and my daughter had witnessed) four endless nights of violence and suffering leading up to this moment. I felt in my core we would both be dead unless we left that day. And so we left.

With a determined mind and faithful heart, anything is possible. It was never easy and it is still tough-going, yet I am grateful every day to see my daughter and know we are safe from the attacks. She is the most incredible blessing I’ve ever known.

(Continued on page 2)
When a Grant Becomes Something More ...

(Continued from page 1)

After finally leaving, I allowed myself to read about abuse and realized that this was “textbook.” Most cases actually are. Now I know what to look for and I will teach my daughter so she won’t be naïve as another person tortured by that cycle comes along. In our community, in our nation, and in our world, domestic violence is an epidemic. I had no idea of this problem, of this reality, until I lived through it. I am lucky to have lived ... and even more lucky that my daughter is healthy and alive. Your choices directly construct your life and your effect on others.

You cannot force another to choose something, but you can encourage and hope. Even from a distance.

This portrait of Sari directly helped me leave my abuser. With every brush stroke it helped me regain strength I rendered lost and had forgotten. I had become comfortable living a nightmare, and this painting was proof I needed to wake up, especially for the sake of my infant daughter (whose handprint is underneath my signature).

We are forever grateful to Sari for her life and legacy, to the Community Foundation of Middlesex County, who funded this piece and so much more ... to the Buttonwood Tree, for allowing me the honor of painting her, and to everyone who finds strength within to make the choice of never enabling abuse. It can be an incredibly heart-wrenching decision, maybe the hardest decision of our life, but it is for the good of our community and to the benefit of all.

With sincerity and love always,
Maria Louise and Indica

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Welcome to the Team!

Kaye Davis joined the CFMC staff as Director of Finance in mid-January. Kaye comes to CFMC from the United Way of Southington where she served as Chief Financial Officer/Chief Professional Officer. Kaye previously worked as Senior Accountant for Progressive Specialty Glass Company and as Controller for the YWCA of Waterbury.

As Finance Director, Kaye will manage all financial related information and reporting and associated office workflow of the Community Foundation.

Kaye holds a BS in Business Administration/Accounting and has an MBA from Southern New Hampshire University. She is a Certified Management Accountant (CMA). Please join us in welcoming Kaye to the CFMC team.

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“Through Her Eyes”
Emerging Artists Program

A grant from the Sari A. Rosenbaum Fund for Women and Girls to North End Arts Rising (NEAR) / The Buttonwood Tree Performing Arts and Cultural Center in Middletown provided a mentoring arts experience for emerging women artists in Middlesex County. The goals of the program were to educate women and girls on how to bring their raw, creative artistic concepts to a final stage so their art could be exhibited and sold; to empower women and girls to further their art careers; to build community by bringing local artists and art professionals together; and to introduce emerging artists to other artists and art professionals who could help further their personal artistic skills and goals.

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A Round of Applause...and Bon Voyage!

You know we’re surrounded by Good People - no - Great People. Volunteers get involved in all aspects of nonprofit work, and CFMC is particularly lucky to have an incredible group of individuals who give their time and talent to so many of our projects, committees, and events.

Today we want to give a special “Round of Applause” to a remarkable young woman who has been volunteering at CFMC for the last seven months. Sophie Ohaus, newly graduated from college and looking to give back during her search for a full time career, joined our team in October 2014. Sophie has willingly and enthusiastically taken on any task, any project, any need – from the critical to the mundane – to keep CFMC going.

So we say THANK YOU, Sophie, your time and your talent. We will miss seeing you and wish you great success in your next great adventure, working in Bhutan for eight months.

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Remembering Daniel

Mental health issues impact everyone, not just those struggling with these challenges. Families, friends, colleagues, and neighbors are all touched in some way. For many families the challenges can bring heightened awareness, advocacy, and opportunities, to help others right in their own communities. Just ask Cathy and Jim Probolus of Portland.

Cathy’s nephew, Daniel Howe, grew up in New Jersey, spent time exploring the Rocky Mountains in Colorado and went on to study engineering at Cal State East Bay in San Francisco. Daniel’s life path would bring him to a passionate study of world religions and finally a career as a spiritual and life counselor. Yet, throughout this varied and adventurous life, he lived with mental health issues. His personal struggle touched his aunt and uncle, Cathy and Jim, deeply. His difficulties provided them with a deeper understanding of what so many other families face when a loved one is diagnosed with mental illness. It also led them to reach out and give back in their own community.

Cathy and Jim became long-time supporters of and volunteers for Gilead Community Services. Their personal connection with Daniel enhanced Cathy’s and Jim’s connection to and advocacy on behalf of Gilead Community Services. They truly understand the important part Gilead plays, not only in the lives of individuals battling mental illness, but in the lives of families and friends who work every day to support their loved ones and to bring attention to this issue.

Daniel recently passed away and Cathy and Jim wanted to do something to honor his life and support a local organization providing essential services and programs to the community they care so deeply for. Cathy and Jim are very familiar with the mission of the Community Foundation and its work with donors and local nonprofits. Working with CFMC, they established the Daniel G. Howe Memorial Fund for Gilead Community Services.

This endowed fund will help Gilead meet the needs of their clients and their families for years to come and will honor the life’s work of an inspiring individual. Daniel will be fondly remembered by his family and his life will be honored by supporting others in mental wellness through Gilead’s good works. Thank you, Cathy and Jim, for caring.

Legacy Through the Lens

The Nicholas Ramcke Fund made its first grant in the fall of 2014 to the Valley Regional High School Graphic Arts program. Established in memory of Nick Ramcke, this Fund takes Nick’s love of photography and provides support to the VRHS Graphic Arts program and the students who share his passion.

Cobi O’Connell has that passion, and thanks to the Nicholas Ramcke Fund, she now has the opportunity to explore her photography more fully with advanced photographic equipment. Cobi has explored cinematography and photography, using her talent and skills both in school and in her community.

Yet Cobi has not been the only one to experience the benefit of Nick’s legacy. She recently sent an update about the difference the Nicholas Ramcke Fund grant to VRHS Graphic Arts program has made in her life. “Now that I have the opportunity to use more advanced equipment, I have handed down my old camera to my brother, and we are both able to learn about photography together. I love seeing him smile every time he looks through the lens of my old camera, and it makes me happy to know that I can help him pursue his passion, just like you [the Ramcke Family and the Nicholas Ramcke Fund] have helped me.”

Nick would have wanted to find a way to help his fellow VRHS students who shared his love of photography. He would have found a way to make sure they had the tools and equipment necessary to share their view of the world with their community through photos. Thanks to the Nicholas Ramcke Fund – Nick’s legacy – that creativity, passion and friendship is happening every day in Middlesex County.
Council of Business Partners Expands Reach with Campaign for Bully-Free Communities

What if every school had access to the tools for creating safe, positive, healthy learning environments? What if students, educators, business leaders and public officials joined together to stand up to bullying and all mean-spirited behavior? What if every community in Middlesex County were a bully-free community? Answering these questions is exactly what the Community Foundation’s Council of Business Partners set out to do when they expanded the impact of their No Bully Zone program into the Campaign for Bully-Free Communities. Born out of a collaboration with the Connecticut Association of Schools, EMPOWER, The First Tee of Connecticut, LiveKind, Rushford (A Hartford Healthcare Partner), Elizabeth Shulman, LMFT, with former NBA and UCONN basketball player Donny Marshall as spokesman, the Campaign is an ongoing effort aimed at increasing awareness of the issues while also providing access to resources that support and promote positive behavior in our schools and in our communities at large.

You can join all those who live and work in Middlesex County (and beyond) who have taken the pledge so far and Be An Agent of Change today.

• Take a few minutes and visit the Campaign for Bully-Free Communities webpage to take the pledge online - bullyfree.middlesexcountycf.org;

• Share the pledge in this newsletter with friends, family and co-workers, becoming agents of change and creating a bully-free community. Hundreds have already done so in just a few short months;

• Follow, Like and Share the Campaign for Bully-Free Communities on Facebook (www.facebook.com/Campaign.Bullyfree.Comunities); or

• Support and join the Council of Business Partners at the Community Foundation and bring the Campaign for Bully-Free Communities to your town.
Boys from Xavier’s EMPOWER Leadership Program helped set up and break down at the rally — and everything in between, including manning the t-shirt table.

Superintendent Ruth Levy and Region 4 jumped on board with the Campaign — showing off their orange and spreading the word through social media.

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**I WILL BE AN AGENT OF CHANGE.**

We are all different but we all deserve respect.

Silence is participation.

I refuse to participate in the problem.

No longer will I be silent if you need help.

If you need help, come to me.

If I think you need help, I will get involved.

I’ve got your back.

**I PLEDGE TO STAND UP TO BULLYING AND ALL MEAN-SPIRITED BEHAVIOR.**

(NAME) (TOWN) (DATE)

LEARN MORE AT BULLYFREE.MIDDLESEXCOUNTYCF.ORG
CFMC Leadership Society
President’s Society  •  Chairman’s Circle  •  Community Benefactors
It’s the little things that matter. Sometimes those “little things” remain invisible, or are just taken for granted. So we send a hearty “Thank you” to the Community Foundation’s Leadership Society for supporting those little things that matter; for making an investment in CFMC to help us:

• Improve our work with donors and nonprofits
• Plan our work and evaluate our grants’ effectiveness
• Build a better website to tell the many success stories of our region’s nonprofits
• Sit with donors and listen to their dreams, their passions and then put their ideas and funds to work in the community through grants to the nonprofits in Middlesex County.

Without you, so much wouldn’t get done – as corny as that sounds, it is true, or as Dave Preston puts it – “Our Boat Wouldn’t Float.”

“When you join the Leadership Circle, it shows that you believe in what is behind the work – you believe in the people it takes to make things happen. When you support our efforts, you are a true partner in everything that the Community Foundation does in Middlesex County.”

– Sharon Griffin, Leadership Society member since 2006

THANK YOU – our 2014 Leadership Society Members are “Partners In Giving”


Just remember that for every nonprofit consultation, for every donor meeting, for every grant that goes out into the community – Leadership Society members make that happen.

So we say Thank You. We want you to know that your support is very important to not just CFMC, but also to the nonprofits we partner with and TOGETHER we’ve made a difference. You, our members of the CFMC Leadership Society – the President’s Society, the Chairman’s Circle, and the Community Benefactors - truly are our Partners in Giving. Your support of CFMC helps CFMC find ways to make great things happen every day in Middlesex County.

What does your support do? Just look at what you have helped us accomplish in 2014 alone.

• CFMC staff provided more than 350 hours of one-on-one consulting with nonprofit organizations serving Middlesex County.
• Eleven (11) new funds were established to give back now and forever.
• CFMC set new levels of grant making and working with donors and our grants committees to award 202 grants totaling $656,848.
• CFMC’s investment in Middlesex County since 1997 reached more than $4 million through 1,295 grants.
• Eighty-one (81) individuals have informed the Community Foundation of a planned gift.
• CFMC’s pooled assets are at $12.3 million – more than three times what it was when the Leadership Society was established in 2006.

Since 2006, you and your colleagues, the CFMC Leadership Society, have invested more than dollars in our work, in our mission. Each in your own way has invested your trust and your confidence in CFMC. Thank you for investing in CFMC, enabling us to play a part in leveraging resources to solve problems.
Great things are possible and are happening throughout Middlesex County. Thanks to you. We are making an impact – together – in every one of our fifteen towns. So we say Thank You, thank you for being ambassadors, champions, and true partners in philanthropy.

Each fall members of the Leadership Society gather for an information luncheon – an opportunity to meet and network with other members and to hear an update on all the great things happening in Middlesex County. What makes these luncheons so special is that each year a member of the Leadership Society steps forward to sponsor them – bringing friends and colleagues together to celebrate the incredible impact our partners in philanthropy make each and every day.

We extend a very special thank you, first, to Dave and Barbara Preston who established the Leadership Society in 2006 and for so many years sponsored the annual luncheon.

We would like to thank Bill and Sharon Griffin for sponsoring the annual luncheons in November and December 2014. Their belief in the work of the Community Foundation and the importance of investing in its operations is apparent through the many ways CFMC is working within our communities today.

"Directly supporting CFMC operations allows more dollars to be available for grants and programs. We believe it is one of the most powerful investments we can make in our community." – Sharon Griffin

“UP-Standers” at WesU

The Wesleyan University Student Athlete Advisory Committee (WesU SAAC) recently became the newest group of "UP-Standers" in Middlesex County. WesU SAAC chose the Council of Business Partners Fund and its Campaign for Bully-Free Communities as the recipient of the proceeds from the spring dodge ball tournament.

WesU SAAC set up two Campaign for Bully-Free Communities pledge posters at the event and asked all the tournament registrants to take the pledge and become "UP-Standers" – standing up to all mean spirited behavior.

From CFMC and all of Middlesex County, we say a hearty THANK YOU to the WesU SAAC and everyone at the April dodge ball tournament for working to make our community bully-free.
Thank You Just Isn’t Enough to Describe a Career Filled with Good People and Great Things

It is hard to find a single word to describe fourteen years of service, the dedication, the passion and the commitment to the fifteen towns CFMC serves, but on February 26, CFMC staff, board of directors, and former board members found the right word – Janice. After fourteen years of service to the people of Middlesex County, Janice Kalkreuth retired from CFMC. Janice joined a fledgling Community Foundation in 2000 as its second staff member, sharing a single office and a single computer with then president Patti Vassia. She embarked on a career of always helping good people throughout Middlesex County do great things to improve the quality of life for all.

During her tenure, Janice approached every project, every task, every growth opportunity with a sense of importance and a need for accuracy. She worked with board members, committee members, volunteers, donors, and nonprofit organizations to grow the Community Foundation and increase its ability to serve Middlesex County – then, today, and forever.

Everyone at CFMC is incredibly grateful for all Janice has done, and continues to do, for CFMC and Middlesex County. We wish her all the best in the future.

THANK YOU is inadequate, but, THANK YOU JANICE!