

A Report On
The Charitable Giving Patterns of Houston Women
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Sponsored by The Women's Resource of Greater Houston
www.thewomensresource.org

INTRODUCTION

*There are “six C’s of women’s giving. Women give with the intent to Create new solutions, Change things for the better, Commit through volunteerism, Connect with those they affect, Collaborate with others, and Celebrate to have fun together... Recognizing that women’s roles in society and philanthropy have continued to evolve., there is another C to consider – **Capacity**. Women’s philanthropic potential, through earnings, marriage, and inheritance, has created an unparalleled capacity to give. Increased capacity enables women to:*

*Take control of their lives, their finances, and their philanthropy;
Gain confidence to become philanthropic leaders; and
Have the courage to challenge the old ways of doing things and take risks
with their giving to bring about change.”¹*

The Women's Resource of Greater Houston is committed to expanding opportunities for women and girls to become independent, productive and economically stable. Over the past 20 years, The Women’s Resource has worked to achieve this mission by providing grants to non-profits that serve women and girls, providing free financial literacy and personal finance classes, and by conducting targeted research on topics of significance to Houston women.

Aware of the growing role of women in philanthropy and their increasing capacity to bring about change, The Women’s Resource sponsored this study on the charitable giving patterns of women in Houston to better understand women donor’s interests, motivation for giving, and the extent of their support for organizations that benefit women and girls. This research, conducted for the first time in Houston, focused on answering six questions:

What causes do women donors in Houston care about?

What charitable organizations do they give to and why do they support the organizations to which they contribute?

To what extent do women donors support organizations that serve primarily women and girls?

How do the interests of women donors align with the needs of women and girls in Houston?

¹ Selected excerpt from Women’s Giving Circles by Sondra Shaw-Hardy¹ Underline added for emphasis.

What can be accomplished with increased and targeted giving to organizations that specifically benefit women and girls?

And finally, what organizations exist in the Houston area to specifically benefit women and girls?

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Women donors are a tremendous asset to the greater Houston community. They give an impressive amount of time and money to organizations that address a wide range of causes. Their giving is deeply personal, connected in some way to their lives or the lives of those they care about. And they are willing to give more, when they can, to improve the lives of women and girls in Houston. The results of this study demonstrate that there are many opportunities to address the difficult challenges that women and girls face, and that perhaps the most powerful opportunity to improve the lives of women and girls is to harness the power of women's giving to overcome the most critical challenges.

Charitable Giving Among Women Donors

Following national trends, women in Houston are a significant force in philanthropy. Ninety-five percent (95%) of women who took the survey on Charitable Giving report contributing time, money or goods to charitable organizations in the past year. Eighty percent (80%) of these women contributed money and more than 70% reported volunteering their time. Of the women who gave their time, they contributed almost 85,000 hours of service to community organizations last year. Of those who contributed financially, nearly half gave a total of \$1,000 and \$2,000 to charitable organizations.

Houston women donors give to a wide range of causes as well as to multiple causes, but an underlying theme is the personal nature of their giving. The majority of women donors in Houston support social service and religious organizations. Nearly half of women support educational issues - including traditional education institutions as well as organizations that provide financial education and job training. One third support health services and research. Regardless of the causes women donors contribute to, the vast majority are motivated to give for similar reasons: a personal belief in a cause, compassion for those in need, and a desire to contribute to their community. Nearly 50% of women donors were motivated to give to a cause because the issue affects their lives or the lives of people close to them.

Women donors also learn about the organizations to which they give in a personal way. The most common source of information about a charitable organization is that the donor, or someone close to them, has been affected by the organization. Appeals by places of worship and the recommendations of friends and associates are also important ways that women learn about the organizations they support. Notably, targeted solicitations by email, mail, workplace campaigns and media ads reached less than a third of Houston female donors. Together, these findings have important implications for organizations that are trying to reach women donors.

Only 19% of donations by women donors went to causes and organizations that specifically benefit women and girls, yet 89% of women donors say they would give more to organizations that serve women and girls if they could. Among these women, the issues they wanted to support included: Addressing the needs of vulnerable women, improving the education of women and girls, and

increasing health care services and research. A common thread among survey respondents was the emphasis on the theme of ‘empowerment,’ by which they meant that women could have the power to decide how they act with other girls, free from the effects of peer pressure and bullying, and how they act with the men in their lives, making the decisions about their bodies and their sexuality, and freeing themselves from the subjugation that often accompanies domestic violence.

Opportunities for Investment

Recent Census data on the status of women and girls in education, health, and employment is quite consistent with what Houston women donors see in their personal lives: women who do not get the education they need and engage in unhealthy behaviors are relatively powerless in the face of the forces they encounter at home, at work, and in the community. While many of the indicators in education, health, and employment show women and girls in difficult situations, a few are particularly severe:

- In education, the dropout rate and the low SAT scores are indicators of low educational performance. Without a good education, all the other issues that women experience in life are harder to address.
- In health, the Census data highlights the degree to which women are engaged in risky behaviors; leading relatively inactive lives, carrying too much weight, burdened by stress, and drinking excessively. Women are also subject to health issues that men do not have at all, such as breast cancer and unwanted pregnancy. While cancer occurs independent of attitude and behavior, unwanted pregnancy is highly related to women’s feeling of powerlessness in the face of peer pressure and male domination.
- In employment, the increasing number of women in poverty is the most telling statistic that describes the difficulties women face. Single mothers and their children are the most prevalent demographic among the poor. Poverty itself is a function of other issues, such as a lack of education, unhealthy behaviors, and an overall feeling of powerlessness.

Organizations with a mission to meet the needs of women and girls have an acute awareness of the needs of women and girls. From this perspective, the needs are quite detailed: In health, more is needed to address unwanted pregnancies, breast cancer, and eating disorders. In employment, job readiness skills and the lack of available and affordable child care and after-school care are the biggest challenges to women pursuing and retaining gainful employment and achieving self-sufficiency. Organizations that work with girls noted a particular concern for aggression and bullying, a theme that was consistent with the overall attention given to unhealthy behaviors.

From each of these views on the needs of women and girls in the Houston area, we can identify a number of opportunities for investment that can specifically benefit women and girls.

Education:

- Develop strategies to address self-image and relational issues including motivation, self-esteem, aggression and bullying.
- Increase investments in college readiness.

Health:

- Invest in strategies that encourage healthy eating, lifestyle and self-image.
- Increase access to mental health supports.
- Invest in more education on issues relating to sexuality.
- Continue to invest in education and screenings for breast cancer.

Employment:

- Continue support for life skills training, including financial planning, money management, and investing.
- Support professional development and mentoring to allow for job and salary advancement.
- Invest in strategies to offer more child support options for women, including child care and after-school care.

Empowerment:

- Invest in programs designed to build self-esteem, self-image, and healthy relationships in order to reduce violence and abuses against women.
- Invest more in legal services for abused women seeking to leave unhealthy relationships.

Women donors in Houston care deeply about issues that affect them, their families, and their communities. They are willing to give substantial time, money, and goods to help women and girls lead full and healthy lives. However, the multiplicity of interests on the part of women donors can dilute their voice and, hence, their power to resolve the challenges they want to address. As women emerge as a critical force in philanthropy, perhaps a greater opportunity to address the needs of women and girls in Houston is to bring women donors together to prioritize issues of importance. Bringing together the voices and experiences of women, and engaging their abilities as solution builders and leaders, can harness the power of women's giving to overcome the most critical challenges.

CONCLUSION

Decades ago, women came together and found their voice by bringing light to the social and economic challenges that women and girls uniquely faced. In the years since, women have worked to address these issues and, because of these efforts, women have come a very long way. Yet much more needs to be done. As one service provider noted, "women in Houston need to keep talking about issues that are important to them and get their voice back." Agreement on priorities, and a renewed and unified voice can magnify the capacity of women donors to reshape the future of women and girls in the Houston area.