

December Newsletter

Cylburn Walk

On a beautiful November day, roughly 30 Circle members got together and hiked the wooded trails at Cylburn Arboretum. Nell Strachan and another Cylburn volunteer led the hikes, which made them great learning experiences and added to the fun! Everyone thoroughly enjoyed seeing the tranquil park's beautiful trees, shrubs, and woodlands while spending time with one another and practicing social distancing. It was a much needed and safe opportunity to connect outdoors during these COVID times!



Grantee Connect Forum on Outcomes

The Circle's Grantee Connect Committee fosters learning and networking among grantee alumni by presenting programs of special interest based on the expressed preferences of the grantees themselves.

On November 5, 2020, fifty-six representatives of non-profit organizations previously supported by the Circle convened via ZOOM for a presentation on "Outcomes." Three dynamic and experienced panelists presented the "[Logic Model](#)", a tool that focuses on

qualitative as well as quantitative outcomes. The three speakers were Sarah Hemminger, chief executive officer of Thread; Danista Hunte, executive director of Child First Authority; and Cynthia Weaver, a senior associate at the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

The silver lining in having to meet by ZOOM was the ability for the attendees to “chat “ with one another and the presenters. Katie Kriss of Asylee Women commented that it was exciting to see people from other organizations for whom she had so much respect. Other attendees concurred that the engagement offered by this Forum was a welcome break from the sense of isolation being felt during COVID. James Merritt of Byte Back found the workshop extremely helpful in giving his organization a tool that it could use immediately.

A post-forum survey suggested that this program met the hopes of the planning group. Many attendees noted the need for reliable data on outcomes, both to check in-house performance and to use when soliciting donors.

A Meaningful Birthday Gift

Adrienne Bannon, a nurse consultant for National Care Advisors, recently turned 60 and received a membership in the Circle from her sister, Marla Felcher. The story that led to this gift may inspire other Circle members.

Marla and Adrienne are both native Baltimoreans. Adrienne got her nursing degree at Johns Hopkins and lives with her family in Pikesville. Marla and her husband settled in the Boston area. In 2011, they drove across country to spend her husband’s sabbatical year in California. During that time, Marla helped with fundraising and mentoring of low-income children for a program called “Summer Search” in Sonoma. Summer Search was considering applying for a grant from a women’s collective giving organization; this inspired Marla to think about creating a giving circle in Boston. Even before she moved back to Boston in 2012, Marla and two friends discussed plans for what became The Philanthropy Connection (TPC). Its goal was to have 100 members within a year; instead, it had 131 members in 6 weeks! At a national convention of women’s collective giving groups, Marla met Peggy Shapiro; this led Marla and her colleague Linette to visit with Peggy and other BWGC members in Baltimore. They shared information about BWGC’s robust grant review and selection process, which TPC adopted. One part of the TPC organization that Marla is most proud of is its young philanthropist fellowship program, which adds youth and diversity to its membership.

Working as a nurse in Baltimore City for over 20 years, Adrienne has in-depth knowledge of the needs of so many of its residents. And now that her children are grown, she has more time to “give back.” We welcome Adrienne to BWGC and look forward to the possibility of collaborating further with Marla’s giving circle in Boston!



Marla and Adrienne

Save the Dates

To celebrate the Circle's 20th year of philanthropy, we are planning to hold four ZOOM events that will trace the Circle's history. Each event will be hosted by a different committee and will feature the development of that committee, along with the overall Circle's growth. These events will begin at 5:00 p.m. and include time for breakout rooms and socializing. So grab a glass of wine or a cup of coffee and join us.

January 27, 2021	Circle Co-chairs
February 17, 2021	Education Committee
March 24, 2021	Communications Committee
April 21, 2021	Membership Committee

Circle Connectors

The Circle's former mentoring program has a new name, "Circle Connectors," and an expanded agenda. The membership committee is always seeking innovative ways to communicate with new and established colleagues, so it has adapted an idea from our circle friends in Portland, Oregon. The goal is to strengthen bonds of recruitment, improve welcoming techniques, and increase retention. The new program will involve organizing a team to contact individual members during the year, to share information and remind members of important meetings and other special updates. Hopefully this will create very personal relationships among our sisterhood. Although a new member will automatically be assigned a Connector, an established Circle member - perhaps someone who is rejoining or hasn't been active on a committee yet - is always welcome to request a Connector for some one-on-one attention! Thank you, Portland, for sharing your ideas.

If you are interested in becoming a Circle Connector, please contact Susie Reichmister at sreichmister@aol.com .

New Members

Laurie Beck, Lisa Cohen
Anne Huber, Maria Darby Johnson

Grantee Profile

St. Mary's Outreach Center Aging with Dignity

St. Mary's Outreach Center (SMOC) provides services to older, low-income adults in Baltimore City who are aging in place. Its clients include homeowners living alone, grandparents raising children, residents of senior housing apartments, and some who are at risk of becoming homeless. The agency provides information and referral services, benefits assistance, educational programs, and case management.

Before the COVID epidemic, these clients were able to access services by coming to the office. Although a few clients still come to the facility with masks and practice social distancing, most of its contacts have been through remote means. This is a particular problem for SMOC, as its clients may not have either the knowledge or the technology to interact in this way. In addition, SMOC often needs to refer clients to government agencies such as Social Security or Medicare, and these offices are also experiencing difficulty and may not be easy to reach.

As one of SMOC's clients said, "I don't have anywhere else to turn when I have questions about a program or get paperwork that I don't understand. You've all been life savers for me, and for so many people in this neighborhood."

Thanks to the dedication of Executive Director, Tasha Cornish, Case Manager, Fred Gorman, and many volunteers, St. Mary's Outreach Center is meeting the challenges of this very difficult time.



St. Mary's Outreach Center Volunteers

REDI Committee

In a majority Black city, the lack of racial diversity among the membership of BWGC has long been a concern. As a result, the Circle does not benefit from the input and perspective of all citizens of Baltimore. It is in this context that the Steering Committee approved the creation of a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Summer Study Group to formulate first steps toward a better understanding of the importance of racial equity.

Through its work, the Study Group recognized that much greater racial diversity in the Circle's membership could not realistically be an immediate goal. Rather, racial diversity should be a longer-term goal that would result from carrying out the Circle's mission with a racial equity focus.

The better the Circle identifies and understands systemic racism and bias, the more effective it can become in recommending grants with the potential to address the issue. In accomplishing this, the Circle can foster genuine relationships among a diverse group of stakeholders, become better grant-makers, and have a more positive impact on women and their families in the Baltimore area.

In September, the Steering Committee unanimously approved the creation of an independent, Steering-level Racial Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (REDI) Committee, dedicated to leading the Circle toward its goal of centering its work on racial equity. The REDI Committee sees its role as collecting and synthesizing input from all of the Circle's stakeholders, creating a framework for convening diverse voices to explore the results, and collaborating to create change within our membership and our organization.

While this process will require time and patience, we believe that woman-powered relationships and collaboration will lead to a more equitable Baltimore.

Contributors: Judith Arnold, Holly Burke, Mary Grossman, Melanie Hagan, Phyllis Kolman, Beth Lebow, Vivian Manekin, Susan Reichmister, Yvette Scorse, Barbara Portnoy Spector, , Salli Ward, Crickett Woloson,