

# Non-profit aims to improve the lives of women and girls on the Mid-Shore

By RICHARD McNEY  
Editor



**EASTON** — Talbot County native Alice Bower knew there were many needs for women and girls in the Mid-Shore community, but she was not sure of an effective way to meet them. During a meeting with then director of the Mid-Shore Community Foundation Michael Rawl concerning a grant request for a non-profit group, he sparked an idea. Rawl came from Chester County, Pa., where one of the most successful philanthropic efforts was the Women and Girls Fund. Bower investigated and found that the fund pooled the resources of women to make the most impact, a technique which was one of the fastest growing in philanthropy.

"It seemed like a good thing to do," she said. "This sounded like something that could work here."

### Founding the Women and Girls Fund of the Mid-Shore

In 2002, Bower began pooling together women she knew who also wanted to make a difference. She became the president of the Women and Girls Fund of the Mid-Shore, a non-profit donor advised endowment fund that is housed at the Mid-Shore Community Foundation and channels the pooled resources of individuals into a powerful legacy serving the needs of women and girls on the Mid-Shore.

"The advantage of having it housed with the Mid-Shore Community Foundation is they handle all of our investments and tax filings, which leaves us free to do what we feel we need to do, which is find out what the needs are," Bower said.

The grass roots movement was under way. The fund set out to provide grants to non-profit organizations that address crucial and underserved issues impacting women and girls in Caroline, Dorchester, Kent, Queen Anne's and Talbot counties. Five percent of the year-end balance under endowment is available for grants every year, Bower said.

According to the New England Women's Fund, less than six cents out of every traditional philanthropic dollar is given to organizations that target services to women and children. Less than 5 percent of all foundation grants are targeted for women and girls, according to the New Mexico Women's Foundation.

The Women and Girls Fund of the Mid-Shore takes a strategic approach to philanthropy that allows donor dollars to be leveraged effectively. This strategy puts money, time and talent where the need is most pressing and recognizes and builds upon the Fund's strong belief that improvements made in the lives and prospects of

Mid-Shore women and girls have a positive impact upon the community as a whole.

"Every dollar that is donated to the Fund goes directly into the endowment," Bower said. "In effect, we are creating something

that will be here long after all of us are gone."

The Fund was started with the idea of getting 1,000 donors to give \$1,000, raising an initial endowment of \$1,000,000, Bower said. For about nine months, the group held luncheons at different people's houses and the endowment grew steadily, she said. The first gift was given in May 2002.

### Growth

The Women and Girls Fund of the Mid-Shore has grown tremendously since its inception. The group has grown to more than 50 volunteers and has awarded 25 grants totaling \$86,462.

"Our goal was to raise a million-dollar endowment," Bower said. "I would say now our goal is to raise a large enough endowment to really have an impact on the issues that confront us in our communities. We keep moving our goal forward."

Instead of luncheons at homes, today the group has an annual luncheon in April at the Tidewater Inn, when the grants are announced. The first luncheon had less than 50 people attend. Last April the room was full.

"We have donors from all five counties, but we would like to have more," Bower said. "We are working very hard on increasing our visibility throughout the five counties."

Women and Girls Fund of the Mid-Shore Board Member Dorothy Whitcomb said the group has become more professional as it has grown.

"We are learning what we have to do to remain viable and to be sustainable," she said.

The group went through a strategic planning process for a year, which culminated in October when the group pulled together the evaluations at a retreat.

"We think it is terribly important to be looking at what we are doing and how well we are doing," she said.

By initially partnering with the Mid-Shore Community Foundation, the Women and Girls Fund of the Mid-Shore was financially sound from the start, Whitcomb

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