

# Giving Circle promotes focused philanthropy

JAN  
VARNER

UNITED WAY



girls in our Region. In the Fall of 2010, the group gave grants of \$3,000 each to three organizations for programming for young girls and women from rural townships. United Way then worked with these not-

for-profit organizations to ensure that success could be measured and tied to United Way's strategic priorities – a win/win/win situation.

## Big impact

The impact of giving circles is well-proven in the U.S. In a 2009 study presented at the U.S. Forum of Regional Associations of Grantmakers, Angela Eikenberry and Jessica Bearman pointed out that giving circles influence members to give more, to give more strategically, and to give to a wide array of organizations.

The study also points out that giving circle members like Amanda are highly engaged in the community, and that their involvement in the circle increases their knowledge about philanthropy, nonprofits and the community.

The giving circle is not about business networking or about the public relations value of making a donation. It's about personal leadership, and the chance for participants to marry their donations with a focused strategy that influences where their money goes.

## Boys are welcome too

Men's giving circles, sometimes called community investment clubs, are also on the rise, and United Way is looking to pilot a men's group in September. While a 2009 study by the Fidelity Charitable Gift Fund indicated that women are taking an

increasingly prominent role in determining the household's charitable giving, men find the focused, outcome based approach of a giving circle appealing.

Slightly more than half of the 160 giving circles studied by the Forum of Regional Associations of Grantmakers were all-women, and 47 per cent were men and women or all-men.

## A social bonus

The unexpected bonus for Amanda was the strong social connections she built with women from all walks of life. Her circle included entrepreneurs, consultants, small business owners and professional women looking to give outside of - or in addition to - a traditional workplace campaign or employer.

These strong, creative women worked for several months to determine their focus and strategy, sharing inspiring stories and building new friendships along the way.

"This was a way to work with remarkable women, combining our energy and resources to make the community a measurably better place."

*Note: I'm 'taking reservations' for this column. If you'd like to meet me for breakfast and a discussion, please drop me a note at [jvarner@uwaykw.org](mailto:jvarner@uwaykw.org).*

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