

A Short History of the Young Woman's Home Association as a Private Foundation

The original, 1877 mission of the Young Woman's Home Association was to provide respectable shelter to young women who were coming to Detroit in search of employment. A temporary facility was opened immediately, while the Association raised money to build a new building at 164 W. Adams. It opened in 1887 as The Young Woman's Club. From that time onward the Association provided shelter to hundreds of women each year until they were ready to move on.

During World War II Detroit became "The Arsenal of Democracy" and respectable women were doing jobs which had traditionally been held by men. The sheltered and regulated Young Woman's Club was less appealing to these more independent minded women when the war ended and more housing was available. By the late 1960's the Young Woman's Club was losing \$2000 each month, and in 1968 the Association began the process which would lead to amending the Articles of Incorporation, changing the mission from providing shelter to disbursing funds to charity. The Carnegie Institute came with a last minute offer to buy the old building, but an agreement had already been reached with Bagley Associates. The building was sold on July 9, 1969 and the contents were disposed of.

Agnes Crow, YWHA president at this time, oversaw the entire process of selling the 90 year old building and reorganizing YWHA into a charitable trust. The 19 members formed committees for Gifts, Constitution, Finance, Membership and Printing. There were still some loose ends from the sale to settle, mostly involving severance and unemployment claims, and the sale of the furniture netted \$5271.91. They decided to hold their meetings at the City Club, and in her year-end report in June, 1970, Agnes Crow reported that YWHA had successfully transitioned from operating a home to disbursing income to worthwhile charities.

During the year 1971 the Foundation disbursed \$12,000. Members would propose worthy organizations and money was granted throughout the year. During that year recipients were YWCA (\$600), Ruth Alden (\$100), Detroit Music Settlement (\$100), Father Ward (\$3600), Hutzel Hospital (\$5000), Bay Court Camperships (\$1500) and Grace Beuitey Camperships (\$1100). The group also added an Entertainment and Program Committee and changed "Gifts Committee" to "Projects".

In 1972 there were 16 Board members, and categories of Honorary and Life members were added. The group celebrated its 100th Annual Meeting in June, 1977, at the DAC. During the decade of the 1970's the proposed projects to fund were considered throughout the year, and the total amount given away depended on the income for the year. Most grants were in the \$1000-\$2000 range, although Ruth Alden dress drive seemed to have earned a \$100 donation year after year. Occasionally there was a donation of \$5000. The group would meet at recipients' facilities from time to time. For example, in 1979 the Foundation met at Camp Oakland and took a tour.

By 1980 Trustees had decided to increase their number to 22, and the treasurer reported about \$375,000 in assets. Four years later the portfolio had grown to \$555,482, and President Marianne Endicott noted the organization's obligation to aid the increasing number of needy women and children.

Joan Hanpeter, a business woman and President of the Grosse Pointe Public Schools Board of Trustees, became a trustee of YWHA at this time and chaired the Finance Committee. She realized that the assets would be better managed in professional hands, and Mr. Mannle of Dean Witter was chosen by the Board for his long experience as a manager and stock broker. All funds were moved to Dean Witter except for a Comerica checking account, and general guidelines for investing prioritized safety, income and growth. Investments were 60% bonds, 40% stock. By 1989 the portfolio had grown to \$1million and total awards topped \$50,000. The Finance Committee did not see a reason to meet, since the assets were managed conservatively.

There were other changes during the 1980's. The bylaws were revised to adopt a one year term of office, increase the number of regular meetings from four to six, and increase the number of required meetings for members each year from two to four. The job of Projects Chair had become formidable, and the group added an Assistant who would take over the Chairmanship the following year.

In 1985 a decision was taken to award grants in October with a September 1 deadline, and April with a March 1 deadline, and 51 agencies were notified about this change. It was also during the 1980's that the tradition of "Christmas Giving" began. These were small, unsolicited gifts, usually about \$250, that members recommended for consideration in December. They always went to charities, but for things like Christmas parties or perhaps for a worthwhile cause outside the main mission. In 1985 out of the \$47,000 awarded, \$3000 was at Christmas.

Agnes Crow was honored in 1988 by the Detroit Garden, which created a Horticultural Learning Center in her name, and Young Woman's Home Association joined in honoring her by contributing to the Center. Ms. Crow attended the 1990 Annual meeting and must have been moved to see the Foundation which fell to her to create back in 1969 now had assets of \$1,380,000. She died the following year.

By the time the 1990's rolled around, the Foundation had been in existence for a full 20 years. The members had gone from overseeing a large shelter to overseeing a portfolio valued at more than \$ 1 million, and evaluating requests to disburse more than \$50,000. The women were proud of their work and of the organization, and members took their assignments very seriously. Annual reports mentioned repeatedly how much members enjoyed participating in this group.

Ruth Zinn in her President's report of 1993 stressed the continuity of purpose and action of YWHA over the years. During its 75 years of operation 50,135 women registered for assistance at the Young Woman's Club and the Association continues to make donations to the Ruth Alder Dress Drive for 50 years. Also in 1993 the group celebrated the 90th birthday of Marge Jewell, one of the Foundation's original Board members. Still an active member of the board, Marge was honored with a special donation to the Detroit Symphony Orchestra education programs.

Agencies were still inviting the whole board to their premises for tours, and in 1994 the idea was floated that sending a few members to visit might work better, since the whole group was so large. A few years later groups of three began to visit different agencies, making a point to visit every agency rather than just those which could accommodate the entire board.

The group lost several trustees in 1998, forcing it to simplify some of its procedures. Recommendations such as not having a business meeting every time, requiring only a quarterly treasurer's report, letting the Grants Committee set geographic limits for applicants, and simplifying the application were explored.

By 2000 YWHA had brought in three new trustees, and was giving to 46 agencies plus 5 Christmas gifts. Total grants were around \$140,000, most under \$3000. Edith Smith chaired the Finance Committee and was working closely with our new broker, Marcia Moore, after Mr. Mannle's retirement. Through the years the original guidelines had been set aside and by 2004 Sally Spitzley, the new Investment Committee Chair, reported an investment ratio of 30% bonds, 70 % equities. When the stock market made a major downward adjustment, the group realized that its oversight was outdated and procedures had to change.

2004-2005 was devoted to this task. The bylaws were updated to reflect the state laws protecting trustees from lawsuits regarding normal business decisions, and the fiscal year was changed from March 31 to April 30. The group agreed to accept no applications from new agencies until the overhaul was complete, and officers consulted with the Council of Michigan Foundations to determine best practices for private foundations. A Conflict of Interest policy and an Investment Policy were adopted, the grant application was revised, checks over \$500 had to be co-signed, and an email address was established.

After investigating potential storage for the group's archives, which had been passed from person to person through the years, the Reuther Library at Wayne State University was chosen. Historian Tish Collett gathered the boxes of papers, weeded out duplicates, and made a gift to the Reuther in 2006.

Laura Huebner 's concern about members' fiduciary responsibilities provided momentum for change, and Ruth Zinn worked with a Constitution and Bylaws Committee to make the recommendations a reality, all overseen by President Debby Smith. Once the foundation was in place, the group turned to its grant process. The number of applicants had increased to nearly 50 and it was difficult to review so many applications thoroughly or to determine that an agency's projects and purposes had changed from the original application. It was difficult to find members willing to take on Grants Chair. For the most part the grants were still smaller than \$3000, even though our total disbursements were over \$100,000.

The group began to discuss the possibility or desirability of reducing the number of recipients, and in 2009 Beth Spina led a task force to make recommendations to the group. The recommendations included (1) limiting grants to agencies serving younger women and children primarily in Wayne County (2) drop Christmas Giving (3) use a one/year giving cycle (4) give up to \$10,000 (5) divide money between education (60%), basic needs(20%), cultural (10%), camperships(10%). The Board agreed to try these guidelines and evaluate them as needed.

New member Liz Ottaway, a financial professional, agreed to chair the Investment Committee, and the committee recommended a new investment policy to the Board. The account was rebalanced to reflect the investment ratio of 60% equity, 40% bonds. The portfolio value dropped by about \$548,000 during the downturn of 2009, and the group decided to change its meeting time and place to save money and to attract working women to be trustees. At this time most of the trustees lived in the Grosse Pointe

area, so Trustees began to meet at 8:30 a.m. in Grosse Pointe locations. The following year the group decided that a web site was becoming a necessity, and by 2011 it was up and running.

All of these changes streamlined the work of Trustees dramatically, and fewer meetings were needed to accomplish the work of gathering information from Grant applicants. Speakers from new applying agencies were required to give presentations to the Board before money could be awarded, and the Grants Committee rotated through familiar applicants to refresh the trustees' knowledge.

After a search and interview process, Seizert Associates was chosen to be financial advisors to YWHA in 2012, and the fiscal year was changed to a calendar year since there was now an annual grant cycle. Laura Huebner formed a Development Committee to investigate ways the group might attract unsolicited donations. This turned out to be limited for a private foundation tax status, but a rack card outlining the history and work of YWHA was created to use when appropriate. Debra Partrich and committee drafted a Document Retention Policy to guide future trustees as to what to archive and what to keep on a temporary basis.

The Young Woman's Home Association Board has a long history of collegiality. Members have been invited to join because they are known to have an interest in the agencies in the area who serve women and children in so many ways. Members need to have time to attend meetings and visit agencies. They need to be curious, and able to read a balance sheet. They need to share their knowledge and talent. Before computer communication, effort was made to create beautiful invitations to annual meeting luncheons, and social conventions to make individuals feel valued were in place. Those personal interactions, and certainly the elegance, have been sacrificed somewhat to efficiency of communication, but the Board has made a point of having one totally non-business meeting each year in addition to the Annual Meeting luncheon each May. Although Christmas Giving was dropped, the idea was not, and members pool their own money each Christmas to buy a supplementary gift for a chosen agency.

As I write this summary of the history of the YWHA Foundation, I am confident that the group will continue to update the grant processes, as grants are the purpose of the organization and there will always be new ideas to try. If history is an indicator, the group will be looking at another update in about 20 years, and those trustees will be up to the task. Being a part of a group whose sole purpose is to help worthwhile causes in the community is a wonderful dose of optimism in a fast changing world, and I am confident this Foundation will continue to thrive and do its valuable work.