

Breakfast Speaker Probes Health Care Inequities

The Women's Fund

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DID YOU KNOW?

Since its inception, the Women's Fund has given \$239,814 in grants to more than 70 projects designed to improve the lives of women and girls.

Rooted in racism, sexism and discrimination, health care disparities are nothing new, said legal journalist Jami Floyd in her talk at the Women's Fund's 2021 annual breakfast, held on line on June 25. But the COVID-19 pandemic has brought those inequities to light, as people of color have fallen to the virus at disproportionate rates.

"Now that they've been laid bare, we have an opportunity to address those inequities and, in turn, help to mitigate the disparate impacts of the pandemic and prevent further widening of the disparities," said Floyd, senior editor for the Race and Justice Unit at New York Public Radio and legal editor in the newsroom at WNYC in New York.

Floyd's talk on Zoom came one year after the pandemic forced the Women's Fund to cancel our 2020 breakfast, where she was scheduled to speak. It was disappointing not to hold the breakfast in person this year, in the name of safety, but participants appreciated the chance to hear Floyd speak on health care and life after the pandemic.

"I think the warmth and intelligence of the event were preserved pretty well, and it was still a meaningful, interesting conversation," said Rachel Coker, a member of the Women's Fund Leadership Committee who helped to plan the program.

Floyd offered statistics that demonstrate the pandemic's disproportionate impact on Black, Native American and Hispanic people, and she discussed the reasons behind those differences. She also pointed to research showing that health disparities generate \$93 billion in excess medical care costs and \$42 billion in lost productivity each year. "I believe that addressing the inequalities is important not just from a social justice standpoint, but for improving all of our lives, our overall economic health and prosperity," she said.

"Jami Floyd was outstanding. I could have listened to her all day," said Kate Fitzgerald, a member of the Special Events Committee.

Beyond the formal talk, Coker said she especially enjoyed Floyd's responses to audience questions on



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topics such as how women can make themselves heard in the workplace and how to persevere early in one's career. "Some of the advice and encouragement she gave were really nice," Coker said.

The Women's Fund also used the breakfast to mark our success in bringing our endowment to more than \$1 million. Since its inception, the fund has given \$239,814 in grants to more than 70 projects designed to improve the lives of women and girls.

A special thank you to all the sponsors who supported this year's breakfast, and thanks to the Special Events and Leadership Committees of the Women's Fund for providing a stimulating event despite the challenges everyone has faced this year.

Course Helps Women Farmers Boost Their Skills



Say you're a woman on a family farm. You might oversee a greenhouse, keep the books, handle payroll, manage relationships with customers or play a host of other roles.

If you want to strengthen your skills in those areas, one place to turn is Annie's Project, a six-week course in agricultural business, designed for women and offered throughout the US. For nearly a decade, farm women in south central New York have attended Annie's Project through Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE)—Broome County. Women who attend the course learn about topics such as agricultural production, farm business planning, financial statements, record keeping, marketing, estate planning and employee relations.

The Women's Fund recently granted CCE—Broome County \$6,760 to help Annie's Project buy supplies, pay fees to presenters and offer scholarships.

Annie's Project was founded in 2003 by Ruth Hambleton, an extension educator at the University of Illinois who named it to honor her mother, a woman who helped to run the family farm while raising the family. While the course covers topics of interest to any farmer, Annie's Project cultivates a learning environment designed particularly for women, said Laura Biasillo, agricultural economic development specialist at CCE—Broome County. "Only women are allowed to register. We try to make sure that the presenters are all women. The facilitators are mostly women. We want the women to feel comfortable having conversations and feel it's a safe space for them."

Besides teaching specific skills, Annie's Project gives participants the chance to form lifelong bonds with other women in agriculture. "When they have a problem on their farm, or they're encountering something in their family, they know they have peers or mentors they can call, or shoot an e-mail or text to," Biasillo said. The class also introduces women to lenders, agricultural organizations and other institutions that can help when they have problems or need to bounce an idea off someone, she said.

Due to the pandemic, CCE—Broome County moved Annie's Project to Zoom in 2021. While in-person classes are preferable, the virtual



format offered at least one advantage: it opened the course to women who otherwise couldn't participate because of challenges with child care or transportation, Biasillo said. More than 30 women registered, from throughout New York State. "It gave a great diversity, breadth and depth, not just of experience, but of types of enterprises and resources that the women were able to share with each other," she said.

Annie's Project helps women at all stages, from those who have been farming for just a few years to those who are looking toward succession plans and retirement, Biasillo said. Surveys of attendees show that it makes an important impact. "It empowers them to be able to go back to their husbands, or fathers-in-law, or whoever it might be, to say, 'I can take on these pieces. I'm not just the farm wife or the spouse. I can play a critical business role.'"

Said one former participant, "Annie's Project gave me the confidence and a system to start keeping track of our financials. This led to better recordkeeping and knowing how to track our expenses."

Another graduate praised the program's sense of camaraderie. "The experience of coming together with other women farmers each week was a breath of fresh air!" she said. "Knowing I'm not alone, and that there is a community of other women going through the same things I am, helped me be stronger.

2021 Women's Fund Grants

American Civic Association \$8,000 towards assistance for immigrant women who are victims of domestic violence (Broome)

Big Brothers/Big Sisters of the Twin Tiers \$7,500 for creation and maintenance of seven mentoring matches of women and girls (Broome and Tioga)

Cornell Cooperative Extension—Broome County \$6,760 towards operating expenses for Annie's Project, providing education and support for women engaged in agriculture (Broome)

Friends of Recovery Delaware and Otsego Counties \$8,000 for an educational and empowerment series addressing the needs of women in recovery (Delaware and Otsego)

WSKG Media \$2,277 for production expenses related to a documentary about the 1913 Binghamton Clothing Factory Fire, and educational support material for students (multiple counties)

TOTAL: \$32,537