

---

# CONCLUSION

*If you don't like the way the world is, you change it.*

*You have an obligation to change it. You just do it one step at a time.*

– Marian Wright Edelman

---

In many ways, the well-being of women and girls across King, Pierce, Snohomish, and Whatcom counties today is better than it was several decades ago. Women continue to enjoy greater opportunities in the workplace than ever before and they contribute significantly to the economic strength of the region. Educationally, women and girls are excelling: in the four-county region, more women are enrolled in college and have earned degrees than in previous generations. Washington women have better overall health than females in other states. Women not only comprise a substantial proportion of the region's political, business, and civic leaders, they also make significant philanthropic contributions to their communities.

A vast network of programs, initiatives, and collaboration among community organizations, service providers, and volunteers supports these accomplishments. This network provides critical assistance and services to women and girls in each county.

But better is not good enough. Not when nearly 180,000 women and girls in the four-county region are living in poverty; not when access to education is limited for low-income women, women and girls of color, immigrants, and refugees; not when girls are falling short in academic fields critical to higher-paying jobs; not when women of color disproportionately experience the burden of disease and illness in our society; and not when a significant proportion of women report a history of intimate-partner abuse and sexual assault.

Significantly more work is needed to create the conditions that will allow *all* women and girls in the region to thrive. Ultimately, this goal will only be achieved through comprehensive, coordinated, and collaborative efforts of government, community organizations, policymakers, funding organizations, and the general public. Furthermore, we must address the needs of women and girls within a holistic framework, recognizing that the challenges they face do not develop in “silos,” but result from the complex interplay of numerous factors across many areas critical to their well-being, including, but not limited to, those examined in this report.

## WHAT YOU CAN DO...

For ideas about what you might do to help the region's women and girls move forward, turn to the back pages of each chapter in this report to see a set of recommendations for action. Taken together, these recommendations add up to grand staircase of potential “next steps.” Summarizing across chapters, they include:

- **Support programs, initiatives, and collaborations** that acknowledge and support the complexity of women and girls' lives, including supportive services such as education and job training, child care, housing, and transportation that are culturally and linguistically competent; assistance for women and girls in navigating the employment, health- and human-service systems; prevention and education programs that increase understanding of areas critical to well-being; and leadership programs aimed at increasing women's and girls' community involvement.
- **Support public policy efforts** that facilitate family-friendly policies such as access to quality child care; address access to health services; reform welfare to increase the chances of long-term economic stability for low-income women and their families; reform immigration policies to support immigrants and refugees, including those who are undocumented; and address social justice issues for lesbians, bisexual women, and transgendered individuals.
- **Develop social-change strategies that:** change public perceptions about poverty, domestic violence and sexual assault, and immigrants and refugees; frame “women's issues” as social-justice issues and engage community partners, including male allies; increase voter registration, education and civic participation; and address sexism, racism, classism, anti-immigrant sentiment, and homophobia.

---

Funding organizations can play a critical role in supporting the vast network of programs, collaborations, and initiatives in the four-county region. Community sources across the four-county region made several recommendations to funding organizations that would improve services and programs to help women and girls. These recommendations include:

- **Offer multi-year grants (3 to 5 years)** to assure sustained funding that would allow community organizations to securely embed themselves in communities, develop long-term creative strategies for change, and reduce time spent on grant writing so staff can focus on providing critical services.
- **Create operating grants** that support the core organizational infrastructure (e.g., support staff, computing, and technological needs) required to run a sustainable, effective organization or program.
- **Simplify the grant-application process**, particularly for small community organizations that lack the staff to prepare large, detailed proposals.
- **Continue to support successful existing programs.** Community sources noted that focusing on new and innovative ideas sometimes takes away from the critical support needed for organizations and programs that are already working. Support for innovation should not come at the expense of tried and true strategies.
- **Fund new initiatives based on community-defined priorities.** Sometimes this means thinking “out of the box” by supporting pilot projects that may not appeal to traditional funders. Often these projects spring from grassroots initiatives, and involve building community/organizational capacity and/or melding direct-service and advocacy components.
- **Focus on long-term results**, recognizing that change is slow. Realistically, working to effect change for women and girls is “a lifetime partnership.”
- **Work in partnership with grantees** to identify emerging community needs. Funders should make site visits to the organizations they fund and work on developing flexible, collaborative, and trustworthy relationships with grantees.
- **Assist grantees by helping them build relationships with other funders** to fill unmet needs.
- **Support advocacy efforts.** Organizations need support at the “political table” to encourage policymakers to invest in programs, services, and policies that help women and girls.
- **Fund research projects** that will enable service organizations to back up their proposals with data.

Finally, women and girls across the four-county region can take the information from this report as a starting point for discussions with their families and communities. What changes would *they* like to see? What opportunities do *they* think are most crucial for helping all women and girls to thrive?

From this starting point, we can all dig deeper to enhance our understanding of the complex issues facing women and girls in our communities. We can learn more about existing state and local efforts to support the well-being of women and girls. We can brainstorm about new and innovative strategies to effect change. Last but certainly not least, we can engage the men and boys in our lives to create a shared understanding: the well-being of their mothers, sisters, wives, and daughters is inextricably tied to their own well-being. The sooner we start acting on that knowledge, the better off we’ll all be.

---

---

*Women see what’s possible  
and apply it to their lives...  
[they are] willing to change.*

– Community Source

---

---