



Diane

The Magazine

**The Struggle for
Affordable Housing
in Indiana's
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Supporting Women
in Indiana's Adult
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**Elevating Women's
Voices Through
NIGHT OF 100 WOMEN**

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November 2024

Women's Fund of Central Indiana convenes, invests, and advocates so all who identify as women or girls living in Central Indiana have an equitable opportunity to reach their full potential no matter their race, place, or identity.



Diane B. Brashear, Ph.D. was the founding force behind Women's Fund of Central Indiana. Photo courtesy of IUI University Library Special Collections and Archives

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Letter from the President

As I reflect on the stories in this issue of *Diane*—the pressures of finding safe, affordable housing or the insidious abuse and extortion Hoosier women in the adult entertainment and sex industry face—I'm reminded of how often women's lives are ignored. Despite the critical roles women play in our communities, our stories are too often dismissed. Society does not always listen to women, and it rarely takes the time to adequately research the unique challenges we face.

A recent study found that only 30% of economic research focuses on issues specifically impacting women (source: National Bureau of Economic Research). This gap reflects a broader problem: How can we solve issues like housing affordability, safety, and economic equity when the experiences of women are often hidden from view?

This is where our first "State of Women in Central Indiana" report comes in (to be released this month). This report is not just another set of statistics; it's a comprehensive look at the real, lived experiences of women in our community. It will offer insights into their struggles and successes, focusing on areas like health, economic mobility, career, and personal safety/intimate partner violence, while also centering the voices of women who too often go unheard.

The value of this report lies in the method used to create it: community listening. We've engaged women from across Central Indiana to contribute their stories, their perspectives, and their hopes for the future. Their input will not only guide our work at Women's Fund of Central Indiana, but also provide crucial data to share with decision makers, including legislators and community leaders. We hope this will deepen their understanding of the unique challenges women face and inspire meaningful change.

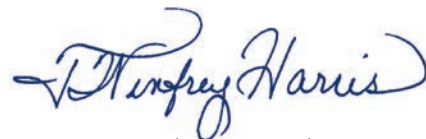
Much like the struggles for affordable housing we discuss in this magazine, our report sheds light on how Indiana's low-wage economy disproportionately affects women. Housing costs continue to rise, and low-income labor impacts women's ability to secure safe, affordable homes. These realities cannot be ignored if we are to create lasting change and broader prosperity.

I invite you to reflect on these stories, to hear the voices of women in our everyday spaces, and to join us in amplifying those voices. The "State of Women in Central Indiana" report will serve as a vital tool to push for systemic changes that address these invisible struggles and pave the way for opportunities that women deserve. If you are not registered to receive email updates from Women's Fund, go to womensfund.org to sign up and be among the first to receive the final report in mid-November.

Thank you for your continued commitment to this important work. Together, we can ensure that every woman has the opportunity to thrive.

As with all things Women's Fund, this is your magazine. This space will evolve as you tell us what you want to read and learn.

We hope you enjoy this new offering and that it will inspire in you the commitment to women and girls in our community exemplified by our founder, Diane B. Brashear, Ph.D.



Tamara Winfrey-Harris
President
Women's Fund of Central Indiana



Want more information about the lives of women and girls in our community? Visit these resources:

The Indiana Girl Report – girlcoalitionindiana.org
State of Aging in Central Indiana Report – cicf.org

The Struggle for Affordable Housing in Indiana's Low-Wage Economy

This past July, Prosperity Indiana and the National Low Income Housing Coalition released the 2024 "Out of Reach" study for the state of Indiana.

Executive Director of Prosperity Indiana Aspen Clemons said the study "is meant to clarify two things: How much most Hoosiers are making and how much it costs to live comfortably in our state."

The study lists the state's most common occupations, each of those occupations' median wage, and the wage required to comfortably afford a two-bedroom home at fair market rates.

Statewide, that two-bedroom "housing wage" was put at **\$22.07** an hour. For the Indy metro area, it was **\$25.95** an hour.

However, among Indiana's 20 most common occupations, only six (indicated in the graph) pay a median wage that meets or exceeds the state's \$22.07 an hour housing wage; that's down from ten occupations in last year's study. Only four of the 20 most common jobs meet or exceed the Indy Metro housing wage of \$25.95 an hour. (Find the full study online at nlihc.org/oor/state/in).

The social impact of that mass low-wage economy is felt in every Indiana community—even our most affluent. At Women's Fund of Central Indiana, we recognize the need to highlight the outsized impact this dynamic has on women, especially women of color.

Median Wages for Indiana's 20 Most Common Occupations

	Number employed	Hourly wage
1. LABORERS AND FREIGHT, STOCK, AND MATERIAL MOVERS, HAND	99,990	\$18.68
2. FAST FOOD AND COUNTER WORKERS	98,670	\$13.68
3. MISCELLANEOUS ASSEMBLERS AND FABRICATORS	91,510	\$19.59
4. RETAIL SALESPERSONS	80,330	\$14.80
5. REGISTERED NURSES	68,850	\$38.68
6. OFFICE CLERKS, GENERAL	68,190	\$19.66
7. CASHIERS	67,470	\$13.82
8. STOCKERS AND ORDER FILLERS	66,890	\$17.47
9. HEAVY AND TRACTOR-TRAILER TRUCK DRIVERS	56,960	\$28.30
10. CUSTOMER SERVICE REPRESENTATIVES	53,070	\$19.23
11. GENERAL AND OPERATIONS MANAGERS	49,470	\$50.76
12. WAITERS AND WAITRESSES	44,570	\$11.82
13. HOME HEALTH AND PERSONAL CARE AIDES	44,390	\$14.79
14. JANITORS AND CLEANERS, EXCEPT MAIDS AND HOUSEKEEPING CLEANERS	43,340	\$16.79
15. MAINTENANCE AND REPAIR WORKERS, GENERAL	35,270	\$23.47
16. SALES REPRESENTATIVES, WHOLESALE AND MANUFACTURING, EXCEPT TECHNICAL AND SCIENTIFIC PRODUCTS	33,510	\$31.82
17. NURSING ASSISTANTS	29,800	\$18.12
18. INDUSTRIAL TRUCK AND TRACTOR OPERATORS	29,330	\$21.46
19. BOOKKEEPING, ACCOUNTING, AND AUDITING CLERKS	28,330	\$22.11
20. COOKS, RESTAURANT	26,170	\$15.06

Data from National Low Income Housing Coalition

Median wage meets or exceeds the state's housing wage



THE WAGES OF LOW-INCOME LABOR

Two of the study's top Hoosier occupations—fast food labor and retail—are some of the only industries where women make up a majority of the workforce. Black women, specifically, are employed at disproportionate rates in these and other low-paid industries.

Consequently, Black women are also more likely to work full-time at or near the minimum wage—\$7.25 an hour in Indiana. While many hospitality jobs pay above minimum wage, we should also acknowledge that minimum wage isn't what it used to be. The current average wage for Indiana fast-food workers (\$13.68 an hour) is actually *below* the minimum wage of 1968 (today, worth about \$14.39 an hour when adjusted for inflation)

Plus, while some may not think of those positions as representing lifelong careers, low-wage job sectors make up a core part of the state's economy in two important ways.

First, they employ more Hoosiers than other job sectors. Behind freight/stock movers, fast-food labor is Indiana's most common occupation. And the state's largest single employer of any kind, public or private, is Walmart, paying an average of \$14.38 an hour in Indiana.

Second, and just as important, is the *reason* these low-wage job sectors employ so many Hoosiers: They support broader economic strategies.

Let's use Indianapolis as an example—the state's largest city and the economic engine for our region.

Over the last 50 years, a significant part of the city has been built around sports and convention tourism. To succeed, that requires hospitality and service staff for hundreds of restaurants, hotels, and shops—not to mention large-capacity sports venues, the Indianapolis International Airport and the Indiana Convention Center.

According to Visit Indy, the tourism economy supports 82,900 "full-time equivalent" hospitality positions in Indianapolis. It also produces an estimated \$1.26 billion in tax receipts each year, including \$725 million in state and local government taxes.

Women—especially women from under-represented communities—play an outsized role

in the often low-wage labor that facilitates that revenue.

As leaders expand the Indiana Convention Center, add several downtown hotels, and lobby for a potential major league soccer team, the region's need for hospitality and service labor will continue.

What kind of homes will the women working these jobs be able to afford?

After considering the results of the "Out of Reach" study and speaking with those working in Hoosier housing affordability, we believe that mass low-wage employment combined with public policy that neglects basic needs contributes to housing that is scarce, substandard, and unstable, especially for women of color.

SCARCE

Amy Nelson is the executive director of the Fair Housing Center of Central Indiana (FHCCI). She points to housing scarcity as a major contributor to the growing affordability gap.

"We have a very low vacancy rate within Central Indiana," she says. "There are not enough housing units available, especially affordable ones."

The result?

"People are forced to stay in substandard housing because they can't move elsewhere—either because of affordability or a lack of available options."

One potential cause for scarcity was mentioned frequently in our conversation: the current real estate investment market, especially investment groups without any in-state offices.

Armed with a pool of cash, no requests for home inspection and quick turnarounds, these groups are known to contact current homeowners before a home is even listed, reducing available stock and raising the floor on affordability.

"It's dangerous," Aspen Clemons at Prosperity Indiana said. "Any progress we're making toward addressing the affordability gap is severely hindered by the unregulated market for out-of-

Mass low-wage employment combined with public policy that neglects basic needs contributes to housing that is scarce, substandard, and unstable, especially for women of color.



Continued on page 6

state investors buying up properties.”

FHCCI estimates that 27,000 single-family rental properties in Marion County are now owned by corporate investor groups. About half of those are owned by out-of-state investors.

Building new homes is one obvious way to alleviate high demand and reduce costs. But can added homes be made affordable to those working the state's most common occupations? A lower profit margin and just as many zoning restrictions can make affordable housing construction nearly prohibitive.

Both Prosperity Indiana and FHCCI point to a need for better development incentives to produce more affordable housing.



SUBSTANDARD

There is more to consider beyond an increase in the stock of homes. The condition of those homes, for one, must meet a basic standard.

“Landlords [in low-income areas] don’t have to keep [units] up because there are so many low-income consumers in the market who need a home,” Clemons said. “[Renters] will settle for things that may be unsafe because there may be nowhere else they can go.”

Ideally, frequent code violations and regular inspections would prevent both the renting of unsafe units and the exploitation of vulnerable communities.

Clemons, again: “In Indiana, there’s a level of preemption aimed at city and county government, preventing them from doing things like requiring landlords to do annual inspections of their units... Cities in Indiana aren’t allowed to require that.”

Amy Nelson with FHCCI: “Unfortunately, it has been the Indiana General Assembly that have passed laws preempting cities from having options available to combat the housing crisis.”

In 2021, the Indiana Statehouse passed a new and far-reaching law prohibiting any local ordinance from regulating the tenant-landlord relationship. This was soon after a 2020 Indianapolis tenant-protection ordinance sought to combat the city’s growing reputation as a U.S. eviction capital. Neither Governor Eric Holcomb’s veto nor the testimony of local officials could prevent the law’s passage at the statehouse.

“The only legislation that passes is what has been endorsed by the housing industry,” Nelson lamented.

Under these laws, even state agencies can have trouble bringing negligent landlords to justice.

In 2021, the Indiana Attorney General’s office lost a suit against the ownership of Nora’s Lakeside Pointe Apartments. That was despite years of complaints, documented code violations, and visibly unsafe living conditions. After their loss, the AG’s office cited “the limited authority for intervention in this matter provided by state statute”.

In February of 2022, hundreds of tenants at two Indianapolis properties temporarily lost their water service—and nearly had their buildings shuttered by the Marion County Public Health Department—after their homes’ New Jersey-based ownership repeatedly missed payments to Citizens Energy. A payment from the City of Indianapolis forestalled a mass-eviction, but the crisis reemerged that September, sending hundreds of households into upheaval. Due to a state law that forbids tenants from withholding rent from negligent landlords, renters had to keep current with payments—even as property owner negligence threatened their housing.

Eventually, Citizens Energy and the state attorney general’s office joined with the City of Indianapolis in legal action. Mayor Joe Hogsett said at the time: “It should not require a three-way lawsuit by local government, a utility, and a state-level official to bring justice in such a clear case of landlord neglect.”



UNSTABLE

These particular cases are indicative of a more general lack of housing stability for low-income households in Central Indiana.

“Housing is a basic need,” Clemons said. “When you have a basic need whose cost outpaces wage growth, those most affected have to start rationing their income.”

Rising costs combined with low or stagnant wages too often end in eviction for Central Indiana families, especially Black families.

Research from the Eviction Lab at Princeton University showed that more than half of all eviction filings in the U.S. are against Black renters despite their making up less than 20% of the renting population. Furthermore, according to estimates from the Eviction Lab as part of the “State of Women in Central Indiana” report, 61% of evictions in Marion County are filed against

women, but only 52% of Marion County renters are women.

Emily Benfer, professor at George Washington Law and a research collaborator with the Eviction Lab, has shown that the presence of a child in the home is the most common factor shared by evictions across the nation.

That makes non-White, working, single-mother households uniquely vulnerable in states with mass low-wage employment and few tenant protections.

"The data shows us that Hoosiers of color, women, and the elderly have to make [income rationing] decisions more than others," Clemons said. "They're deciding on things like, 'Do I pay my rent this month or do I pay for childcare so I can go to work? Do I pay my rent this month or do I pay for my prescriptions?'"

Indiana has been home to some of the highest eviction rates in America in the years before, during and after the pandemic. From June 2023 to June 2024, Indianapolis was ranked fifth in eviction filings among thirty U.S. cities tracked by the Eviction Lab.

During that same period, Indianapolis also saw some of the highest rent increases in the nation for middle income apartments, according to Indy-based real estate data firm CoStar.

In newly developing neighborhoods, those rising values often pushed out long-time residents. That, Amy Nelson said, "just puts people further and further away from gainful employment and amenities."

HOUSING SOLUTIONS

Good health, high educational attainment, steady employment, even escaping an abusive relationship—these all require us to have an affordable, safe and stable place to call home.

Fixing our housing crisis will require more homes, yes, but it will require specifically affordable homes for those who work some of the state's most common, low-wage jobs.

And importantly, as Aspen Clemons said: "We can't just build our way out of this issue..."

We have to work on that tenant protection piece."

Tenants' interests are underrepresented in federal, state and local legislatures. In Central Indiana, that dynamic joins with economic strategies built around tourism and warehousing/distribution; those strategies are fueled in part by low-wage labor.

Altogether, the occupations in the "Out of Reach" study that pay less than Indiana's housing wage represent a fifth of Hoosier employees.

Their interests must be better represented in our communities.

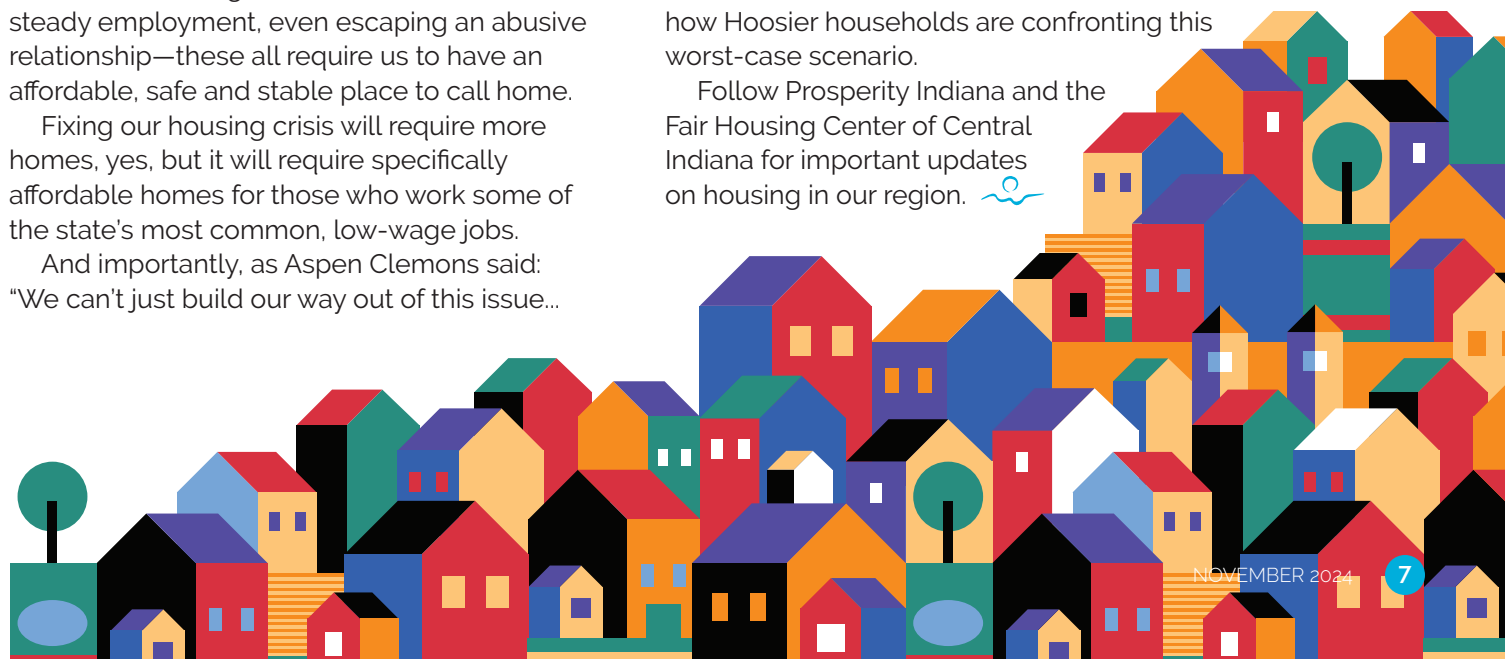
Women's Fund joins Prosperity Indiana and the Fair Housing Center of Central Indiana in advocating for effective and achievable measures that could begin resolving our housing affordability crisis, including:

- ▶ Updated zoning laws that allow for more and denser housing in high-demand areas
- ▶ Allowing tenants to pay rent to third-party escrow accounts where landlords fail to address substandard housing
- ▶ Allowing cities to require regular inspection of rental units, combined with meaningful enforcement for code violations
- ▶ Mandating in-state offices for out-of-state property owner groups, thereby promoting a more active ownership and clearer accountability for violators

Finally, no discussion about a lack of affordable housing is complete without an examination of homelessness. In future issues, we will look at how Hoosier households are confronting this worst-case scenario.

Follow Prosperity Indiana and the Fair Housing Center of Central Indiana for important updates on housing in our region.

From June 2023 to June 2024, Indianapolis was ranked fifth in eviction filings among 30 U.S. cities tracked by the Eviction Lab.





What We're Watching, Reading and Listening To

As advocates, conveners, community members and investors in women and girls, it's essential that we focus on continued learning. Staying up to date with critical issues keeps us informed and inspired. Here is a list of books, articles, videos and podcasts focused on women that Women's Fund and OPTIONS Alumnae recommend.

WHAT WE'RE watching

"What protected me was the innocence of a child": Ruby Bridges reflects on 1960 school integration

In an exclusive interview with Meet the Press, civil rights activist and 2024 Power of Women guest Ruby Bridges reflects on the day she made history by attending a newly desegregated Louisiana school in 1960. | YouTube

Black Barbie: More Than Just a Doll

Tracing the origin of the first Black Barbie back to the filmmaker's aunt—who asked why Barbie couldn't look like her—this documentary explores the quest for representation and diversity through one of America's pop culture icons. | Netflix

A 3-step guide to believing in yourself

Sheryl Lee Ralph is a force, delivering iconic performances both on stage and screen. But she didn't always know if she'd make it big. In a lively talk sparkling with actionable advice, she shares how her struggles taught her what it takes to believe in herself -- and how we can all find the self-confidence to keep moving forward. | Ted Talks

WHAT WE'RE reading

"Weathering" Is Affecting Black Women's Health. What Can We Do About It?

Experts speak to the impacts on Black women of living under the strain found at the intersections of race and gender, as well as under oppressive systems. | Article from *Essence*

The Many Lives of Momma Love: A Memoir of Lying, Stealing, Writing, and Healing

Bestselling author Lara Love Hardin recounts her slide from soccer mom to opioid addict and her unlikely comeback as a ghostwriter. | Available wherever books are sold

Allyson Felix launches first-ever Olympic Village nursery for Paris 2024

Discover how Olympic track star and 2023 Power of Women speaker Allyson Felix advocated for women athletes at the 2024 Olympics. | Article from [NBCOlympics.com](https://www.nbcolympics.com)

WHAT WE'RE listening to

Beautiful Chorus: "Inner Peace"

A Florida-based, all-female vocal ensemble formed in 2011, Beautiful Chorus blends sacred traditions with new age sounds called "high frequency love music" by fans. | Streaming on all major music platforms

How They See Us: "The State of Women and Girls in Indiana"

Host Denise Herd is joined by Mackenzie Pickerrell, Executive Director of the Girl Coalition of Indiana, and Tamara Winfrey-Harris, President of the Women's Fund of Central Indiana, for an in-depth discussion on the current state of Indiana girls and women. | Available on all major podcast platforms

Locatora Radio: "We're Girls"

In this January episode of the Latina-hosted podcast, Mala Muñoz and Diosa Femme look at how both girlhood and womanhood are being defined socially, professionally, and personally. | Available on all major podcast platforms



Tele, 2024 OPTIONS Alumnae Scholarship Recipient



Every four years, a committee of OPTIONS Alumnae awards a scholarship intended to fully fund the cost of college, usually amounting to \$12,000 a year for a four-year degree. Eight outstanding women have received this award since 2002. This year, the committee has the pleasure of awarding the OPTIONS Alumnae scholarship to our ninth student, Oluwateleyo Ikheanosi Olubiyi or, as she prefers to be called, Tele.

Tele finished her high school career in the summer of 2024 and is starting her first year at Depauw University this fall. Her journey to graduation is a testament to her intelligence and perseverance.

Three years ago, Tele's mother, Sarah, decided to relocate to the United States from Nigeria. This decision was tough and came with many setbacks, but Tele and her mom pushed through. Fast-forward to today and Tele has thrived in the education environment while juggling clubs like the National Honors Society, Key Club and working part-time.

The OPTIONS Alumnae Scholarship helps Tele solidify her attendance at Depauw University. Tele was accepted into the Bonner Program, which will cover much of her housing and tuition. Even with this program, other fees and payments will have to be covered, such as technology expenses and travel abroad. The OPTIONS Alumnae Scholarship ensures Tele will have no additional out-of-pocket expenses.

As Tele shared with us recently, this is a big deal for a student who thought she might never go to college. "It means so much... Coming to the United States has been a difficult journey, and there were times when I was apprehensive about if I would be able to go to college. It lightens the financial burden."

The financial burden of a college education

is a major hurdle for many students. Available funding is not always as widely known as it should be. For Tele, a teacher at her high school would play a pivotal role.

"I heard about the scholarship from Mrs. Lewis," she said. "She connects students who have financial difficulties with opportunities to apply for scholarships for college."

One of the unique parts of the scholarship is the connection to OPTIONS Alumnae, including a pairing with an OPTIONS mentor. Tele has nearly 500 women cheering her on. Tele had some moving words to say about this support: "Being connected with people in my area of study and women who I can talk to and look up to is just beautiful. It's just perfect, like a dream come true."

At the reception, a few of the OPTIONS Alumni surprised Tele with gift cards so she could go shopping for her dorm room essentials. This is one of the first ways they hope to support her during her college experience.

Women's Fund is proud to support such a deserving young woman and can't wait to see her grow through this journey. While the OPTIONS Alumnae Scholarship is only open for applications every four years, Central Indiana Community Foundation and its affiliates award more than 500 different scholarships every year.

If you or someone you know is interested in applying, go to [cicf.org/scholarships](https://www.cicf.org/scholarships).



Tele with her mother at a reception with Women's Fund staff and OPTIONS alumnae.

Unconditional: Supporting Women in Indiana's Adult Entertainment Industry

Unconditional, a 2023 Women's Fund grant recipient, offers support and resources to Hoosier women in the adult entertainment and sex industries. By and large, that refers to dancers and strippers at adult clubs, but the term (and Unconditional's service base) includes those working as prostitutes.

Operating since 2012, Unconditional and its staff are trailblazers in Indiana. Still unique for our state, their work is sorely needed. According to in-house surveys, Unconditional found that nearly half of their clients began sex work as minors, 82% have experienced domestic violence, and 42% claim domestic violence played a role in their decision to enter into sex work.

As founder and CEO Sarah Daniel puts it: "We meet women wherever they are with whatever they need. If they're leaving sex work, staying—it doesn't matter."

In practical terms, that assistance often starts out with a group of volunteers who go into local strip clubs once a month to distribute gifts for employees along with a message about

Unconditional's services to anyone interested.

Those services are as varied as the women who take up the offer. In some cases, that includes financial assistance for those who want to leave the adult industry but don't have the resources to absorb what is often a large pay cut.

"The population we serve may differ from a lot of other nonprofits," Sarah said. "While a majority of dancers may have grown up in poverty, many don't live in poverty while they are dancing. After they decide to leave, that is when they have to navigate a significant financial drop."

Before that decision, some of Unconditional's clients are making middle-class incomes or better—an increasingly rare opportunity for Hoosiers without a post-secondary degree. But if and when they leave the strip club, many find themselves starting over from scratch.

"Sometimes, after leaving the industry they have to learn how to be broke again," Sarah said. "You go from fistfuls of cash, working nights, your kid sleeping at a friend's house, to fifteen dollars an hour before taxes and trying to pay for daycare. Some of our clients get their first paycheck and are like, 'Is this a joke?'"

Wall of shoes from women served at Unconditional office.





That's why at Unconditional, women find resources for housing, employment, financial planning, business development, document assistance, and even childcare assistance.

Some of Sarah's clients have gone on to run successful businesses, often returning to employ other women from Unconditional.

That sisterhood is an outgrowth of the family atmosphere the organization has cultivated. For some, it's the most important service Unconditional provides.

"We can over-think this sort of work," Sarah said. "A lot of times, the best thing you can do is just hang out and listen. Many of the women we serve have been on their own since they were thirteen. Some are runaways from abusive homes. They don't have family support systems. Everything they have, they got for themselves, often without any help. They are proud of that. But you never outgrow a need for family."

Unconditional serves that role. The depth of impact is easy to hear in the testimony of those who have spent time with Unconditional. Clients credit the group with everything from being a rare source of affirmation to providing life-saving intervention.

Sarah notes, however, that this level of trust and credibility takes time.

"For the first three years, I felt like I wasn't making any traction. Women were polite, but hardly anybody was responding."

Her tenacity paid off. Today, with a growing staff and an expanding facility on Indy's eastside, Unconditional reaches nearly 200 women a month at seven different partner strip clubs.

That growing capacity is fortunate. Like many industries, the pandemic severely reduced profitability in adult entertainment. The need Unconditional fulfills is growing.

"Women are coming to our food pantry now

who are in the industry," Sarah said. "That was never the case before the pandemic. We didn't even have a food pantry."

The destabilizing impact of the pandemic also pressed some women into more illicit and dangerous parts of sex work. Unconditional's doors are open to them, too.

However, even working at legitimate clubs, Sarah's clients deal with a level of abuse and extortion that is treated far more seriously in other industries.

"One hundred percent of our clients have

been assaulted at work. The vast majority can't even count the number of times. Indiana has no-touch laws in place but it doesn't matter. People do it anyway. If somebody touches you without consent, that's assault. It's the same as if you worked at Target. But I've seen law enforcement just laugh it off or even take part in it."

That treatment, combined with misperceptions about the sex industry itself, contributes to what Sarah refers to as "the most marginalized group of women in our community."

She continued: "A lot of people

don't want to deal with how complicated sex work is. Most women are in this work due to circumstances. There aren't other options for them for economic survival. Their entry into sex work didn't happen in a vacuum. For some women, sure, it might be by choice and making money for themselves. Many of the women we serve, though, are in this work because they were coerced. Many are forced to give their income to somebody else."

For Sarah and Unconditional, that complexity is exactly why the organization must keep its mission as expansive and inclusive as its name. Their approach has granted them hard-earned trust from their clients and growing support from organizations like Women's Fund.

"Indiana has no-touch laws in place but it doesn't matter. People do it anyway. If somebody touches you without consent, that's assault. It's the same as if you worked at Target. But I've seen law enforcement just laugh it off or even take part in it."



Women's Fund of Central Indiana Awards \$475,000 in Annual Grants to Support Women and Girls

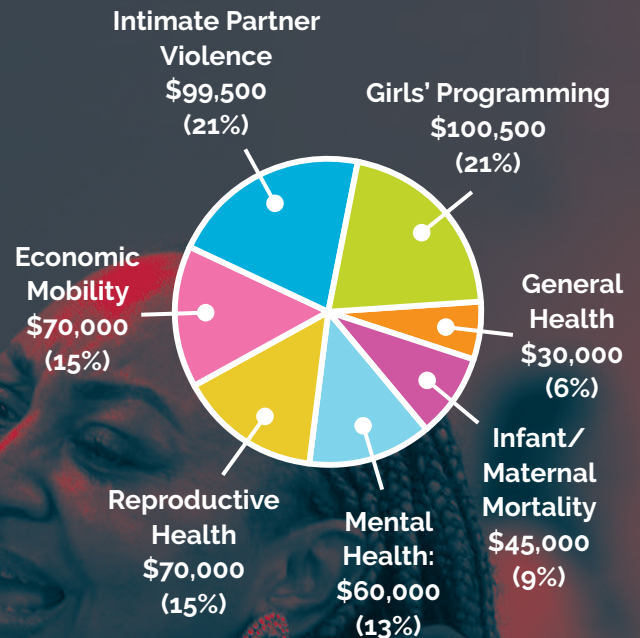
Women's Fund of Central Indiana is proud to announce the distribution of \$475,000 in grants to 30 organizations in Central Indiana. As part of its annual grant round, Women's Fund awarded critical financial support to not-for-profits and programs that empower and uplift women and girls across Boone, Hamilton, Hancock, Hendricks, Johnson, Marion, Morgan, and Shelby counties.

With a record number of applications this year, the grants were strategically directed to support key areas impacting the lives of women and girls in Central Indiana. Among the grantees, 11 are first-time recipients, and 6 are small grassroots organizations with revenues under \$250,000. Nearly half of the grantee organizations are led by people of color, reflecting the Women's Fund's commitment to fostering diverse leadership and inclusive initiatives.

"Last year we asked women in our community what issues were most important to them. They told us health, especially reproductive health and mental health. They were concerned about access to reproductive care, Central Indiana's tragic infant and maternal mortality rates and the emotional well-being of girls and young women," said Tamara Winfrey-Harris, President of Women's Fund of Central Indiana. "We listen to women. Our grants are an investment in lasting change focused on the areas that women have told us will be most impactful for them."

Women's Fund is committed to funding organizations that promote the health, economic stability, safety, and overall well-being of women and girls in Central Indiana, especially those who are most vulnerable. The organization also endeavors to address inequities in funding and support that leave women- and girl-serving organizations, and those they serve, under-resourced. Women and girls' specific issues receive less than 2 percent of all U.S. philanthropic giving. The needs of women and girls of color receive less than 1 percent. Each year, organizations serving women and girls in Central Indiana can apply for grants through Women's Fund's annual grant round. Women's Fund provides operating support to organizations whose mission focuses on women and girls, while other organizations may apply for project or program-specific funding.

Grant Distribution by Focus Area



37% OF GRANTS WERE AWARDED TO FIRST-TIME RECIPIENTS

The Power of Women Supporting Women

As those who identify as women in a society that wasn't designed for our success, we must lift each other through our words, actions and friendship. Women's Fund recently interviewed a few women connected to our organization to gather some examples of the power of help and support they have received from other women.

Rhonda Bayless, Executive Director and Founder of Centers of Wellness for Urban Women

"The transformative moment in my journey into community work occurred when a woman told me, 'We all have a story; these are just their stories.'

As someone new to working with women with diverse lived experiences, I found myself engulfed in emotions while listening to their powerful narratives. In that instant, I learned to see myself in every story and every experience while also respecting each individual's unique journey.

"This profound realization taught me that I can walk into any room and see myself reflected in others while still acknowledging and respecting our differences. I understood that listening to someone's story should not evoke pity but rather foster a shared perspective. We all have a story, and in recognizing that, I embraced the notion that we are all connected. I am the same. We are the same."



Rhonda Bayless

Olivia West, In-Game Host for Indiana Pacers and Indiana Fever


"My mentor, Angela Freeman, has profoundly impacted my professional journey with her transformational advice. From the outset, Angela emphasized the importance of self-belief and embracing my unique strengths. Her wisdom and guidance have been instrumental in helping me navigate the complexities of my career. Angela's strategic insights

into effective networking, personal branding, and leadership have empowered me to overcome challenges and seize opportunities with confidence. She encouraged me to take bold steps, and her unwavering support has been a cornerstone in my development. Thanks to Angela's mentorship, I have not only grown as a professional but also as a person, fully embracing my potential and striving for excellence in every endeavor."



Olivia West

Katie Wiley, Chief Legal Officer, Chief Strategy Officer and Corporate Secretary, Round Room, LLC and The Cellular Connection, LLC.

"I don't know this woman personally; however, the author/speaker Laura Vanderkam fundamentally changed the way I navigate work-life integration. The book *168 Hours* helped me put down the weight of expectations that I had about being a woman who carries many titles (wife, mother, friend, along with the ones on the business cards). Ms. Vanderkam writes about how we each get 168 hours in our week. We are the one to choose how those get spent. There is time for a full professional life, sleep, family, friendships, healthy movement, hobbies and more. It may have to fit in spaces and times that aren't traditional or combine two things at once, but it is possible! Because of this book, our family does family breakfast rather than what I felt was the pressure of fitting in a traditional family dinner. We are each the authors of our own lives ... pick up your pen!" 



Katie Wiley



Elevating Women's Voices Through Night of 100 Women





Women's Fund hosted its second annual Night of 100 Women in July. For those in attendance, it was a night equal parts joy and vulnerability. Women were wowed by vocalist Tiffanie Bridges and poet Januarie York. They even got to express themselves through a haiku wall and roundtable discussions. More than anything else, a feeling of connection was present throughout the event.

President of Women's Fund Tamara Winfrey-Harris was emcee for the event and kicked off the night saying, "We invited you here for Night of 100 Women because of the value women in Central Indiana provided to our strategic plan. While this was originally a one-off event last year, you all made it such a success we just had to bring it back."

This year, the activities, questions and performances were centered on mental health. Women wanted to know about the availability of resources, where there are gaps and barriers, and what can positively or negatively affect our mental health. Even with such emotionally charged questions, the acceptance and love for others was infectious.

Women participated in five activities throughout the evening facilitated by Community Solutions, issue experts, as well as Women's Fund staff and advisory board members. To support those discussing potentially triggering topics surrounding mental health, there were trauma-informed, culturally competent providers on-site.

Activities included the haiku wall, a patchwork mural station, a photo booth and roundtable discussions. With so many outlets for feedback, we ended

the night with a ton of passionate and insightful responses.

When asked what positively affects their mental health, women said:

- Community, family and friends
- Freedom
- Choices
- Balance
- Music and art
- Movement
- Self-care

When asked what negatively affects mental health, women said:


- Stress
- Comparison
- Lack of resources
- Hatred
- Lack of appreciation
- Financial burdens
- Pressure of responsibilities

Some offered haiku and other poetry:

*I have all the space
I don't need fancy or lace
I can listen to me
I am me... just who I am 'posed to be
I am me...beautiful and carefree
I am me...love me, let me love you...it's free
I am me... uniquely me, unapologetically
I...*

Women's Fund appreciates the positive feedback we received from participants and those involved with the evening. The comments and stories we

compiled throughout the night will be used to inform our "State of Women in Central Indiana" report, out this fall. This report is intended to help inform the decisions of women- and girl-serving organizations throughout Central Indiana.

Thank you for another successful Night of 100 Women! We're already looking forward to next year! 

The comments and stories we compiled throughout the night will be used to inform our "State of Women in Central Indiana" report, out this month.





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OF CENTRAL INDIANA

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615 N Alabama St. Suite 300
Indianapolis, IN 46204



**We need
your
help!**

WOMEN'S FUND
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Women and girls deserve equitable opportunity to reach their full potential no matter their place, race, or identity. Your gift can help make it happen.

You asked Women's Fund of Central Indiana to execute its mission more boldly. Moving forward, we are focusing on:

- Amplifying the experience of women and girls, especially those often ignored.
- Harnessing the power of women's and girls' work, wealth, and wisdom because we are stronger together.
- Cultivating a robust and healthy ecosystem of women- and girl-serving organizations.

And Women's Fund will continue the work that has allowed us to award more than \$10 million to women- and girl-serving organizations and programs since 1996.

Give to Women's Fund Today.

We need your support to sustain our present and power our future. See the impact of your dollars at womensfund.org.

To give, place your check in the envelope enclosed with this magazine, or visit womensfund.org/donate.