WOMAN'S OPPORTUNITY FUND

Many times the decision to open a fund at the Community Foundation is not something done 'out of the blue,' but is instead the natural culmination of values that have formed over the lifetimes of the donors. This was true for the anonymous donors who created the Woman's Opportunity Scholarship Fund (Fund).

The Fund will provide scholarships to female graduates of Ukiah area high schools who are first generation college students (neither parent having attended college). Young women who fit this description are very familiar to the donors, who have spent their careers as educators and have mentored many students along the way. "We have known a lot of young women who have numerous things holding them back – maybe their English skills aren't good, or their parents don't see a reason for a girl to consider college. But they also have certain qualities that make them want to succeed in life. They are eager to know about things and to be involved with school activities. They are like sponges – they want to learn all they can. These are the girls we want to help."

Having decades of experiences in encouraging young people, the donors' philosophy is empowerment. "We worked as community organizers early on. We don't want to present people with solutions, but want to help them learn and take on leadership roles so they can do things on their own. This is one way of doing that. We aren't telling the girls what they should be, but empowering them to figure that out for themselves. We don't care if they go to a trade school, a two year college, or a university. The important thing is that they do something that helps them lead a fulfilling life and contribute to society."

The Community Foundation seemed like a good match for two reasons. "Now that we no longer have direct contact with students, we felt the Community Foundation and their connections would be valuable in identifying good candidates for the scholarship. We also like the fact that we can give back anonymously. The priority is to encourage others; it is consistent with the way we have lead our lives."

The donors understand that women's empowerment is a long-term challenge. "Think of how long we have lived in a world where women are undervalued. It's clear how pervasive that cultural dynamic is. Our hope for the scholarship is that women who are fostered with our help end up having more influence politically and culturally. We think they have a lot to contribute."