



WOMEN AND GIRLS
FOUNDATION

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Women and Girls Foundation to celebrate 20th anniversary *Milestone year will culminate with a change of leadership*

PITTSBURGH (Sept. 29, 2021) -- The [Women and Girls Foundation of Southwest Pennsylvania](#) will celebrate its 20th anniversary throughout the next year, highlighting achievements and impacts from its first two decades of service.

WGF was established in 2002 by a founding board, including **Susan Chersky, Hilda Pang Fu, Marlene Gary Hogan, Catherine Raphael, Judith Ruszkowski, Cecile Springer** and **Patricia Ulbrich**.

Longtime CEO Heather Arnet, who was hired in 2004 as WGF's first executive director, also announced today that after nearly 18 years in her role at WGF, she will step down at the conclusion of the current fiscal year in June 2022 -- in the hopes that as WGF celebrates its past, it can seed the future with the announcement of a new leader.

"During her tenure, Heather helped lead our organization's efforts to pass dozens of laws at the state and local levels to increase rights and opportunities for women and grow WGF's member base to include thousands of donor activists," said **board chair Len Caric**. "With her leadership, we were able to transform a fledgling start up with \$50,000 in the bank into a thriving organization with a strong national reputation as a champion for gender equity, with an annual budget exceeding \$1 million, and that annually invests over \$100,000 in local grassroots organizing efforts."

"It has been my honor to work in partnership with the community in steering this organization through its first stage of growth. Now it is time to create space for others to lead," **Arnet** said. "It will be exciting to see new leadership bring their own lived experience, and a deep understanding of the intersectionality of racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, ageism and ableism, to our work breaking down barriers for all people facing gender-based oppression."

"Heather is the embodiment of empowerment. She has used her knowledge, skills and passion to elevate the voices of marginalized communities," said **Dr. Josie Badger DHCE, CRC, director of WGF's TRAIL Program**. "Her work has changed the life trajectory of countless individuals and has improved Pittsburgh as a whole."

“Throughout her tenure at the Women and Girls Foundation, Heather Arnet’s passion and commitment for equality for women across all identities has been nothing short of amazing,” said **Rochelle Jackson, founding Executive Director of the Black Women’s Policy Center and Black Women’s Policy Agenda, and current WGF grantee partner on the Family Care Campaign**. “I cannot express how deeply appreciative I am for her belief in me, as a Black woman, since she first met me over 17 years ago as a welfare advocate. It was her investment in me and the work that I do that helped shape me to be the advocate I am today and the work that I do on behalf of Black women in our region. Heather was the first to see and believe in my vision for the Black Women’s Policy Agenda and under her leadership, WGF was the first to make a financial commitment to the BWPA. I will never forget the love she has shown for me and women all across the Pittsburgh region.”

The impact of Arnet’s and WGF’s work has touched not only all corners of the region but also reached across the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and the U.S.

“How fortunate are #GirlDads like me – as well as other men who care for, teach, coach and support girls – that we’ve had a fierce and uncompromising advocate for women and girls like Heather Arnet right here in Pittsburgh over these past two decades,” said **Gregg Behr, executive director of The Grable Foundation and co-chair for Remake Learning**.

“Heather’s leadership extends far beyond Western Pennsylvania, too. Across America, Heather – and the Women and Girls Foundation she leads – is celebrated for breaking down barriers in support of the women and girls in our very own lives.”

“Heather Arnet acknowledges that the feminist fight cannot be won if any woman is left behind. Equal rights must be achieved for all races, religions and socioeconomic classes, in order to truly create a society where women thrive,” said **Heather Hopson, senior consultant for WGF’s [Femisphere](#) program and Founding Executive Director of Single Mom Defined**.

“While some leaders just talk the talk, she walks the walk to advance equity and invests in and supports women of color. She never speaks for us, but rather carves out space in conversations we were left out of. Because of this, and her ability to form authentic relationships with all women, the Women and Girls Foundation’s work is impactful and sustainable.”

Since its inception, WGF has strived to break down barriers so every girl can rise and women can soar. Its evolution has included training more than 1,000 teens through **WGF’s award-winning [GirlGov program](#)** to become changemakers today and leaders of tomorrow.

“Thanks to Heather’s support, I have organized successful advocacy campaigns, lobbied for comprehensive sexual education in Harrisburg, conducted legal research for a Brooklyn Museum event honoring Ruth Bader Ginsburg’s legacy, organized rallies, interned at the Department of Justice and so much more,” said **Serena Zets, a past GirlGov participant**. “Thank you, Heather, for your leadership, mentorship and allyship in the fight for justice for young women and girls in our region.”

“As we look toward 2022, we look forward to honoring WGF’s first 20 years of impact and celebrating Heather’s legacy, while also preparing for and seeding WGF’s future,” said **Vanessa Thompson, WGF board secretary and chair of the governance and strategic planning committees**. “The board and staff look forward to working collaboratively with the community to develop a collective vision for the future.”

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