



Diane

The Magazine

Caring for Caregivers

P4

Women in Health grantee:
Exodus Refugee

P10

Indiana:
**Women's Sports
Capital**

P12



Women's Fund answers the call of community by investing in systems change, advocating for women's rights, and building collective power for women and girls.



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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Contents

- 3** President's Letter
- 4** Cover Story: Caring for Central Indiana Caregivers
- 8** Staff Picks: What We're Watching, Reading, and Listening To
- 9** Report: Home Macro-Economics: Caregiving and the Wage Gap
- 10** Grantee Highlight: Exodus Refugee
- 12** Feature: Women in Sports and the Power of Progress
- 13** Feature: Women's Foundation of Fort Wayne
- 15** Local Author Profile: Dheepa R. Maturi (OPTIONS Class 9)

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Letter from the President

The responsibility of caregiving falls heavily on women in Central Indiana. It has for generations. And today, that demand is growing while support remains out of reach for too many.

We know that women are often expected to keep everything together. From the time we are young, we are taught to care for others, to quiet our needs, and to give more than we have or ask for. By the time we are raising children, supporting aging parents, helping partners heal, or guiding our communities, we are doing it without the structures we need to thrive ourselves.

The *State of Women in Central Indiana Report* makes this reality plain. Nearly one in four women in Indiana reports providing care to someone with health issues. Black women face the greatest caregiving load, with more than 31% providing over 40 hours of care each week. More than 30% of all caregivers say they feel isolated or unsupported. And access to care is limited. Marion County can meet only 84% of its licensed childcare demand. Next door in Hancock County, it is just 46%.

Layer on top Congress' cuts to Medicaid, and the pressure only compounds. As reported by the *Indiana Capital Chronicle*, changes to state and national Medicaid programs are poised to create more gaps for women already teetering on the edge. Women, especially those in caregiving roles, will feel the brunt of these policy decisions.

This is not theoretical. It is personal.

As someone who manages caregiving within my own life, I understand the complexity. I also know I have access to support, flexibility and resources that many women do not. This privilege doesn't remove the emotional impact. It reminds me who is most vulnerable when care systems fail and who must be centered when we speak about solutions.



This is why the work of Women's Fund matters. We are committed to lifting up those women, to funding the programs and advocating for the policies that see and support them. Whether it's through accessible childcare, caregiver respite services, or bringing women's stories to the front of public discourse—our mission is rooted in the belief that no woman should have to choose between caring for someone she loves and taking care of herself.

Thank you for being beside us in this mission.

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



Caring for Central Indiana Caregivers



For the first time, U.S. Census projections show that Americans over the age of 65 will outnumber those 18 and younger within a decade. On top of that, according to the US Department of Health and Human Services, about 70% of older Americans will need some kind of long-term service or support. That need will not be experienced equally; financially burdened Americans typically experience longer stretches of need for paid care than their wealthier counterparts.

Meanwhile, according to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and others, a shortage of childcare continues to limit parents across the nation. In last year's *State of Women in Central Indiana Report (SOWR)*, we learned that Shelby and Hancock counties cannot cover even 50% of their need for licensed childcare.

For residents young and old, any time access to care falls short, informal caregivers fill the gap. Many are unpaid family or friends, providing care to an extent that, while sometimes rewarding and fulfilling, may limit their social, professional, economic and even physiological wellbeing.

What challenges do these caregivers face? What do they need to thrive? How does it benefit the broader community for us to support caregivers?

To answer these and other questions, we turned to the *SOWR* and spoke with several Women's Fund/CICF grantees who serve caregivers and their loved ones.

Who is a Caregiver?

The *SOWR* defines a caregiver as anyone providing care—freely or professionally—for those who cannot fully care for themselves due to age, illness, or disability. Caregivers are parents, grandparents, grown children, spouses and passionate professionals like the women we spoke to.

The Family Caregiver Alliance estimates that three out of five caregivers in America are women. In Indiana, about a quarter of these women provide care for someone with an illness or disability. And while many men operate as sole caregivers, on average, Hoosier women spend twice as much time each day as do men caring for someone else.

"Women will put everybody before themselves," said Janet Mackins, Founder/CEO of Silver Citizens Inc., a non-profit organization providing social wellness programming for elders and caregivers at locations throughout Marion County.

"Our program has helped some women to change that mindset, to learn how to love themselves. Some have cared for others for so long, they just didn't even think of loving themselves. This idea can be eye-opening. Once you feel good about yourself, and doing for you, it's so much easier to give to someone else."

Caregiving often makes different demands at different ages. Women between 30 and 50 may care for older children as well as their aging parents; women over 45 are most likely to care for someone with complex needs, such as dementia (*SOWR*).

For many women, though, their experience as a caregiver begins in motherhood before turning 30.



Continued on page 6

Continued from page 5

Healthy Parents, Healthy Children

Originally, New Beginnings in Indy's Haughville neighborhood focused only on daycare for children. But in a zip code where 22% of adults have no high school degree, where per capita income is only half the metro's average, and where more than a quarter of children live at or below the poverty line, the organization's director Evelyn Evans decided to expand services.

"Five years ago, we realized that daycare was not enough," she said. "With some of the challenges we see in our families, you have to include services for parents."

Those expanded services created the most lasting and positive impact for parents and children who encounter significant socio-economic barriers.

"Most commonly, it's housing instability, job instability, legal challenges and little access to convenient transportation. If a parent is going through these issues, all of that will supersede a child's education. So, when they drop the kids off, they aren't asking me what their child will learn. They want to make sure their kid will eat or be able to take a nap—the basics."

100% of the parents with children enrolled at New Beginnings qualify for government vouchers from Indiana's Family and Social Services Agency.

In the past, applying for and receiving these vouchers would take one or two months. But in December 2024, the FSSA said all new applicants would instead go onto a waitlist, citing increased demand as well as policy changes instituted by the Indiana General Assembly earlier that year.

That change will challenge lower-income Hoosier communities. Parents like the ones served at New Beginnings need childcare if they hope to work a job. A 2022 Women's Fund grant to New Beginnings helped parents bridge gaps while waiting for voucher funding. But unless resources are opened up at the state or federal level, more will be needed.

While children stay at daycare or after-school

care, parents enrolled in New Beginnings' Parenting Academy receive services that allow them to search for and obtain housing, a job or educational credentials.

In many cases, intervention from New Beginnings has redirected a household's trajectory.

"One of our mothers was living in a shelter, unemployed and with their driver's license suspended," Evelyn said. Alongside this, their child was failing at school.

After four years of engagement with New Beginnings, the family is now housed, Mom has her high school diploma, an information technology certification, and a job paying \$18.50 an hour. Her child's grades went from F's to C's.

"Plus, she successfully completed a driver's license renewal program through the prosecutor's office," Evelyn said. "That's important because now she doesn't live in fear of being pulled over and having to start back at square one. She can still drop her child off, get to her job or any appointments without completely relying on public transportation."

Caring for Caregivers

Tina McIntosh is president and founder at Joy's House, a nonprofit adult daycare serving families who live with life-altering diagnoses. She insists the two main things caregivers need are knowledge and empowerment, especially those working in elder care.

"We aren't great as a society at preparing for these stages of life—whether it's our own aging process or caring for someone special in our lives who experiences a life-altering diagnosis. We don't like to think about it, but when it happens, people need to know where to turn."

For various reasons, whether financial or emotional, family caregivers often delay reaching out to a caregiving facility. When they do, it is often because the demands have become overwhelming.

"They just can't do it anymore," Tina said. "They often need coaching that lets them know that it's okay to get help and support, whether from us or others."

According to the Indiana Family and Social Services Administration, about 60% of all family caregivers report elevated levels of stress, with 40% reporting issues related to anxiety or depression.

"Caregiving can be incredibly beautiful," Tina said. "This time together can heal old wounds and revive relationships. It can also be incredibly difficult, no matter your relationships, experiences, or even your income."

Last year, to help more caregivers find the answers they need, Joy's House unveiled Caregiver Way, an online resource and social hub. (Find it at visitcaregiverway.com)

Caregiver Way offers videos and articles about caring for oneself as a caregiver, tips on medication and medical equipment, legal concerns, what to do when a loved one passes and much more.

"Even as a caregiver myself, I've turned to this site for guidance," Tina said.

It is also a quickly growing social hub where caregivers can teach, learn from, and share with one another.

Tina also co-hosts Caregiver Crossing, a weekly radio show and podcast from WIBC that speaks to experts and takes calls about the caregiver experience.

"We aren't great at the 'How am I doing' part of being a caregiver," Tina said. "The truth is, caregivers often die or get chronically ill before their loved one. And studies show that it has a lot to do with the stress."

Tina pointed to research showing three primary needs every caregiver requires: "Good healthcare for themselves, eight consecutive—and it must be consecutive—hours of respite and, finally, community."

"This time together can heal old wounds and revive relationships. It can also be incredibly difficult, no matter your relationships, experiences, or even your income."

Janet Mackins at Silver Citizens agrees that stress and mood play a huge role in successful caregiving. At her program, she focuses on self-affirmation, both for elders and their caregivers.

"Mood is so important for populations that can fall victim to social isolation. At Silver Citizens, we get people in a room and focus on positivity together, as a group. Positive affirmations, like 'I love myself, I will be kind to myself:'"

For many she serves, this act alone is enough to lift spirits.

"Your own words are so powerful," she said. "Everything starts with how you think and what you speak."


The Bottom Line

Undergirding each of our conversations is new government policy impacting childcare, healthcare and public services. In an attempt to cut spending, we risk undermining a critical support system with respect to our paid and unpaid caregivers.

According to the SOWR, Hoosier caregivers of every kind contribute a combined \$10.8 billion worth of unpaid labor. "This figure is derived from the collective 740 million hours of care provided, valued at an average hourly wage of \$14.61."

Nationally, the wage value of unpaid caregiving is an estimated \$600 billion.

In many cases, some form of assistance is necessary to provide that care. Yet, even with this funding, stress and anxiety among caregivers is a recognized public health crisis.

Investing in more resources for caregivers—whether parents, grown children or professionals—will be essential to ensure both they and those they support will receive the care that helps our community thrive. 



What We're Watching, Reading and Listening To

As advocates, conveners, community members, and champions for women and girls, it's essential that we support media created by and for women. Staying connected to current issues and engaging with thoughtful, creative content helps us stay informed and inspired. Below are books, articles, videos, and podcasts recommended by Women's Fund; some are insightful, some are entertaining, and others offer a bit of both.

WHAT WE'RE watching

The Residence

Set in the White House, Cordelia Cupp, an eccentric detective, arrives on the premises to solve a murder that occurred during a state dinner. | [Watch on Netflix](#)

Dr. Sharon Malone on Women's Health, Vaccines, and How to Protect Yourself

Dr. Sharon Malone joins Michelle Obama and Craig Robinson to talk about the urgent issues around women's healthcare in the U.S. | [Watch on YouTube](#)

One Day

Beginning at their 1988 graduation from the University of Edinburgh, the show tracks the 14-year relationship of Emma and Dexter. | [Watch on Netflix](#)

WHAT WE'RE reading

Women Are Shaping Philanthropy, and It's a New Era of Impact

Women are stepping forward to transform the ways in which money is donated, how it's distributed, and who it benefits. | [Read at AllianceMagazine.org](#)

I Who Have Never Known Men

This newly trendy novel follows a young woman who escapes captivity to explore a desolate world, seeking meaning in freedom and isolation.. | [Wherever you get books](#)

U.S. Gender Wage Gap, State-by-State Ranking

After a historic widening in 2024, the U.S. gender pay gap has narrowed by just one cent this year. | [Read the report at FutureForwardWomen.org](#)

WHAT WE'RE listening to

"Success" Looks Different for Every Family with Glennon Doyle and Abby Wambach

Author Glennon Doyle and soccer legend Abby Wambach sit down to give advice about what an IMO listener should prioritize while figuring out where to move her young family. | [Listen to IMO with Michelle Obama and Craig Robinson on Apple Music or Spotify](#)

Help, I Said the Wrong Thing!

Breaking news: humans make mistakes. Our mistakes are how we learn and grow; they are an uncomfortable part of the human experience. | [Listen to Thanks for Asking on Apple Music or Spotify](#)

Home Macro-Economics: Caregiving and the Wage Gap

Though first proposed by Republican Congresswoman Winifred C. Stanley in 1944, it would take nearly twenty years to pass a federal law prohibiting gender-based wage discrimination—the Equal Pay Act of 1963.

Since then, women working full-time have gone from making an average 59% of a man's wage in the 1960s to 83.6% in 2023.

But even after bringing an end to legal discrimination, a national pay gap of 16% remains. That is especially true for Hoosier women, who faced a 25% gap in 2022 (*State of Women in Central Indiana Report*, p. 81).

To find out why, economist Claudia Goldin looked at more than a hundred years of labor data. Her Nobel Prize-winning research is summarized in *Career and Family: Women's Century-Long Journey Toward Equity*.

In short, the ongoing gap was found to be caused mostly by American working women's unpaid and disproportionate at-home caregiving obligations.

Promotions and raises tend to go to those who can dedicate longer hours and weekends to the job. The advantage goes to employees with fewer at-home obligations, or to employees who have a partner willing to take on those obligations.

In Indiana, women report spending exactly twice as much time as men on caregiving each day (*SOWR*, p. 75). Goldin's research shows how workplaces that offer few professional pathways for caregivers contribute to lost wages and promotions for working parents, especially mothers.

But caregiving's impact on individuals is just half the story. In *Career & Family*, Goldin cites the COVID-19 pandemic as exposing the full social and economic importance that unpaid caregiving represents.

Here in Indiana, unpaid caregivers contribute \$10.8 billion worth of labor: "This figure is derived from the collective 740 million hours of care provided, valued at an average hourly wage of \$14.61" (*SOWR*, p. 74).

It bears repeating that many of these at-home caregivers are also working women with essential professional roles outside of the home.

In fact, many Central Indiana economic strategies rely on labor dominated by women. Take the health and hospital economy. In central Indiana, women make up 73% of all health care support roles and 63% of all health technicians. Crucially, their median annual earnings are \$30k and \$41k, respectively (*SOWR*, p. 85). Both of those totals sit below Indiana's ideal minimum housing wage of \$46k a year.

Or let's look at the region's convention and tourism sectors. You cannot imagine these industries without women's labor, especially if you took away their 15% majority in food prep/serving positions or their 10% majority in arts/design/sports/media. But again, these economically vital positions will not usually pay enough to support families.

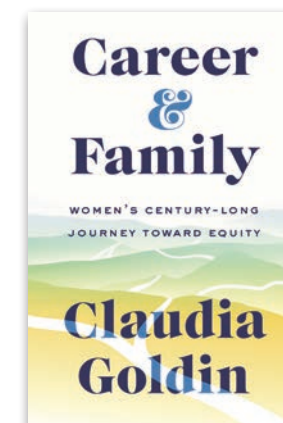
Our state is accustomed to a sizeable share of its workforce earning comparatively low wages; however, if Hoosiers accept that, then we also need to address the drawbacks of major economic strategies that rely on mostly female laborers who cannot readily afford housing, childcare, or continuing education.

To address the remaining wage gap, Goldin argues for greater flexibility for caregivers in the workplace. If we find productive ways to accommodate caregivers, that could increase professional options for more Hoosiers, especially Hoosier women.

Then, by expanding Indiana's range of employable talent, we could see a wider economic benefit for the state as a whole.

A recent study from the American Economic Association showed that, when legal and social barriers to equal employment fell in the 1960s, as much as 20% of economic growth in the ensuing decades was attributable to the improved allocation of American talent.

Today, a similar economic gain is waiting, both for Hoosier households and our society at large.



Exodus Refugee and Women in Health Collaborative Fund

Recently, Women's Fund sat down with Cassandra Sanborn, Director of Development and Communications at Exodus Refugee Immigration Inc. In April, Exodus was awarded a \$35,000 grant from the Women in Health Collaborative Fund.

The grant went towards services for pregnant and new mothers in the refugee community, including case management, workshops and direct assistance.

While our conversation with Cassandra was meant to focus on new services, any talk about the refugee experience in 2025 will necessarily touch on a rising anxiety about basic rights and due process.

"It's been a stressful few months at Exodus," said Cassandra. "It seems like what you tell clients one week can totally change the next week. But we're here for them."

Cassandra noted the unique impact this landscape has on refugee mothers and mothers-to-be:

"Any time you're having a baby, that is obviously a time of huge change. When you combine that with what feels like a lot of anti-immigrant rhetoric, it all has an effect on your physical health or even your decision to seek medical care."



Image courtesy of Exodus Refugee

These concerns join other longstanding challenges that Exodus will work to address in their new pregnancy services.

Those other challenges include language barriers, navigating the American health system and providing a local support network for individuals who may be on their own.

"Compared to what many of our refugee mothers have experienced in other places, prenatal care in the U.S. is just really different. Keep in mind, some of the mothers we work with have waited in refugee camps for three, five, even ten or more years. This is often their first pregnancy—certainly, their first in the U.S."

But individually, refugee mothers are no different than any other.

"All new moms want the same thing for their babies," Cassandra said. "They want them healthy, happy and well cared for."

In lieu of traditional support systems like a spouse or other family, Exodus staff are able to provide services that help new mothers find their way.

"A lot of what we're doing for refugee mothers is through staff consultation and coordination."

That means sitting and talking with women about where to go, what to do and who to talk to.

"Transportation is also a huge factor," Cassandra said. "Getting to a hospital that's on public transit is hard enough, let alone if the bus is late or breaks down." Exodus staff provide



Image courtesy of Exodus Refugee

"It's been a stressful few months at Exodus," said Cassandra.

"It seems like what you tell clients one week can totally change the next week. But we're here for them."



Lyft and Uber when public transit isn't feasible. And while even many American-born residents feel tremendously stressed navigating the health system, refugee mothers are at even greater disadvantage.

"We provide classes about U.S. healthcare, what it looks like and requires," Cassandra said. Similarly reassuring are the connections with other refugee mothers that Exodus enables. Women who have already been through the refugee experience as mothers are able to offer guidance that is both practical and credible.

These connections are especially important for new and expecting mothers. In many cases, they have travelled to the U.S. without their spouse or family, expecting to be joined by them at a later date.

Due to U.S. pauses in refugee resettlement, that later date has become an indeterminate future for many refugee families. For the time being, Cassandra notes that the case manager funded by the Women in Health grant becomes that support.

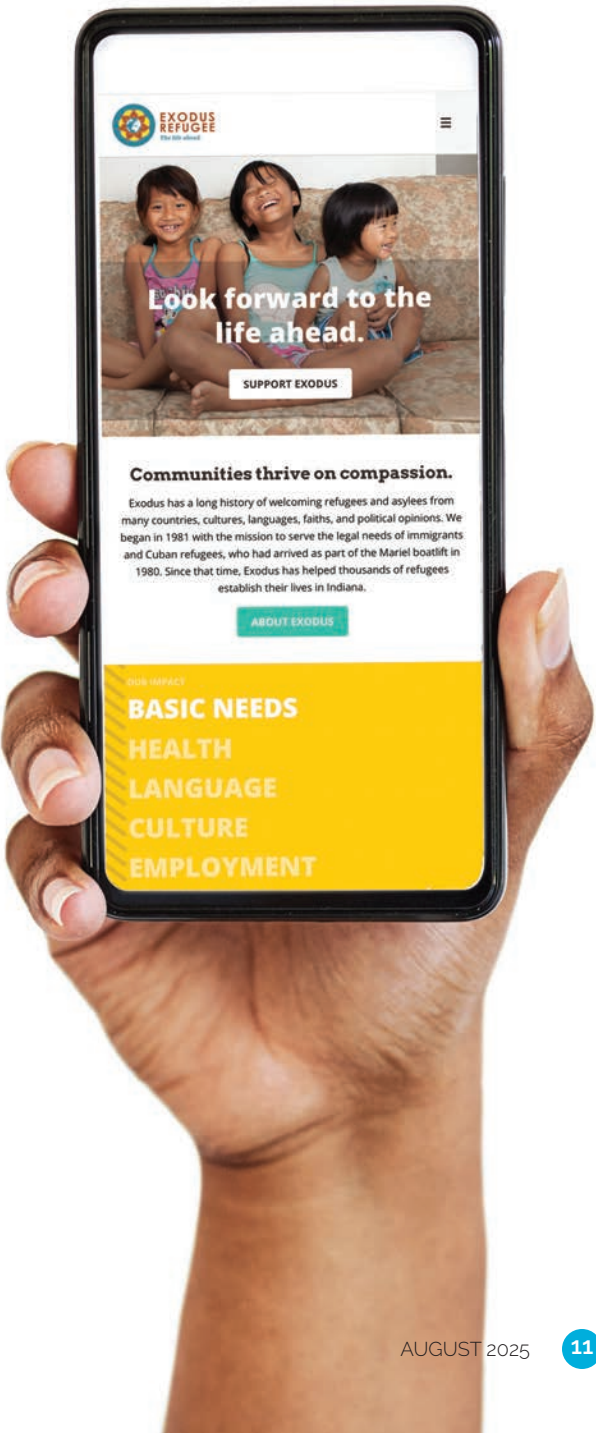
"Though they aren't a spouse or immediate family member, you have your case manager that you can reach out to. She's going to do everything she can to help navigate pregnancy, saying 'Don't worry, this is OK,' or 'Yeah, we should get this checked out.' Where there might have been nobody, now there's at least some trusted support."



Image courtesy of Exodus Refugee



To learn more or to support, go to exodusrefugee.org



Eyes on Her: Indiana's Women in Sports and the Power of Progress



Whether in high school gyms, college arenas or pro stadiums, women in Indiana are transforming how sports are played, coached, and managed.

We see obvious examples, like Caitlin Clark's meteoric arrival to the Indiana Fever and WNBA last year; or Central Indiana's newest pro team, the Indy Ignite, making it to the championship game in their first season in the Pro Volleyball Federation.

Outside the court we have figures like Caitlin Cooper, an Indiana basketball analyst who captured national media attention for her Einstein-level breakdowns of the Pacers' historic playoff run.

Even sports bars are coming around. When The Sports Bra opens in Indy later in 2025, it will be one of only five national locations for the franchise dedicated to women's athletics.

But winning on the court and in the wider sports industry is not the only way to measure success.

In Central Indiana, women athletes are also educators, advocates, and mentors. They

embody the same kind of leadership women provide across every sector.

For example, Tamika Catchings remains a towering (literally/ figuratively) role model, not only for her achievements with the Indiana Fever and U.S. Olympic team, but also her long-standing investment in the community through the Catch the Stars Foundation. Her work with Central Indiana youth blends fitness, literacy and goal setting. It reflects the intersectional needs identified in the *State of Women in Central Indiana Report*, where educational outcomes, physical health, and economic opportunity are deeply interwoven.

Women's Fund has also honored national and local leaders like Billie Jean King, Allyson Felix, Allison Barber and Olivia West, each of whom has moved the needle toward equity in



Tamika Catchings

Supporting women is about building systems of support, creating pathways for success, and ensuring that every girl and woman can fully step into her potential.




both high profile and behind-the-scenes roles. Their voices drive national attention to issues such as pay fairness, maternal health, and inclusive hiring, while underscoring the importance of grassroots action.

This year marks 52 years since the passing of Title IX, the landmark legislation that expanded educational and athletic access for women and girls. Co-authored by U.S. Senator from Indiana, Birch Bayh, its impact is pervasive today, from higher rates of girls' sports participation to more women in coaching roles and athletic departments. But the gaps remain. The *State of Women Report* shows that disparities in opportunity and representation persist across race, class and geography. These gaps show up in sports, and across systems women engage with every day, including childcare, healthcare, housing and career advancement.

Organizations like WISE Indianapolis and Indiana Sports Corp move this work forward. Both have deep connections to Women's Fund through past sponsorship, OPTIONS Alumnae, and board and committee service. These organizations help ensure that women are not only participating in sports but also shaping its future. Through professional development, mentorship and advocacy, they are strengthening the infrastructure that surrounds women in athletics and related fields.

Supporting women in sports is more than presence on the roster. It is about building systems of support, creating pathways for success, and ensuring that every girl and woman can fully step into her potential.

At Women's Fund, we believe sports can ignite confidence, belonging and lasting change. That is a future we are proud to support and celebrate. 

Sister Fund: Women's Fund of Greater Fort Wayne

Recently, we spoke with **Cassie Beer**, Director for the Women's Fund of Greater Fort Wayne. As our primary sister organization committed to advancing gender equity in Indiana, Women's Fund of Greater Fort Wayne is committed to the belief that communities thrive when women and girls are empowered. Cassie shared her thoughts on the group's origins, vital data for Northeast Indiana women, and what is giving her hope for the future.

Tell us a little about Women's Fund of Greater Fort Wayne's beginnings.

In 2018, the Community Foundation of Greater Fort Wayne launched a two-year listening tour, engaging local industry, nonprofits, and community. Through this, it became clear that no comprehensive research had been conducted on women and girls in Allen County since 1974.

In response, 16 founding members, together with the Women's Fund Steering Committee, initiated a new study in 2020. This research revealed deep disparities. The Women's Fund was created to meet that need.

From that study, the Women's Fund identified three critical areas where needs intersected with gaps in local resources:

- Economic security
- Personal safety, particularly related to domestic violence and sexual assault
- Support for young women and girls

Five years later, these remain our core focus areas—and our commitment to driving meaningful, lasting change is stronger than ever.

Speaking of data, you recently released your annual *Women in the Workplace* report. What are the key findings you'd like more people to know?

The survey measures four factors that influence women's ability to thrive in the workplace: leadership, compensation, supportive benefits & policies, and equitable hiring &

Continued on page 14

Continued from page 13

promotion practices. Each area includes objective criteria benchmarked against national trends, and we celebrate local employers that meet or exceed those standards.

In just three years, we've seen encouraging signs of progress:

- **Median starting wages** have increased from \$14/hour to \$18/hour
- The number of employers adopting a **"Do Not Ask About Salary History"** policy has risen by 33%. This change is critical, as salary history questions disproportionately harm women.
- **Survey participation** has grown from 27 to 75 employers.

At the same time, the report identifies areas where greater attention is needed. Our community continues to fall short of the national average of 7% of leadership roles held by women. No employers qualified for recognition in the category of women of color in top salary bands. Only one employer currently implements all five recommended practices for equitable hiring and recruitment.

Progress doesn't happen all at once—it happens one policy, one practice, one choice at a time. One employer expanding paid parental leave can support dozens or even hundreds of families. Increasing short-term disability pay from 40% to 50% could mean fewer families relying on public assistance. Removing gendered language from job descriptions might be the reason a young woman sees herself in a leadership role she may not have otherwise considered.

How can people in Central Indiana support your work?

One of the most meaningful ways people in Central Indiana can support our work is by supporting the Women's Fund of Central Indiana.

By investing in the Women's Fund of Central Indiana, you're helping expand their capacity to co-lead critical statewide efforts with us—from producing impactful research to providing education and driving the advocacy our communities urgently need.



What's giving you hope right now?

Last month, we hosted our annual Take a Girl to Work Day. I felt an overwhelming sense of hope as I watched hundreds of girls ask thoughtful questions, imagine new possibilities for their futures, and see—many for the first time—that women who look like them and come from their neighborhoods are capable of extraordinary things.

I was equally inspired by the incredible number of women who volunteered to serve as mentors. When given the opportunity, so many in our community are eager to share their time, talent, and resources to lift others up.

That day reminded me of something simple but powerful: the bold dreams of our young people are what will carry us forward, if we will only invest in them today.



To learn more, visit www.womensfundfw.org

Author Profile

Dheepa R. Maturi

OPTIONS Class 9



Dheepa R. Maturi
Nathaly Tabares Photography

Dheepa R. Maturi is a New York-born, Midwest-raised Indian-American writer who explores the intersection of identity, culture and ecology. She has been nominated twice for the Pushcart Prize, and her essays and poetry have appeared in numerous literary journals and anthologies. She lives with her family in the Indianapolis area.

Tell us about your newest book.

108: an Eco-Thriller is about an Indian-American woman who learns she possesses an ancient ability that can stop a global ecological collapse—if she's strong enough to use it.

With so many stories treating total environmental destruction as a foregone conclusion, I wanted to write a more hopeful climate thriller, about our intelligence and efforts being used to prevent environmental catastrophe now, not just to survive it after the fact. Additionally, I was excited to feature a heroine who shared my background, ideals, and world view.

It's meant for readers who treasure the beauty and wonder of the natural world; who enjoy stories with mythology, magical realism, and mysticism; and who care deeply about leaving future generations with a healthy and thriving planet.

Your work often deals with the intersection of culture, identity and ecology. How are those things linked?

One of my primary writing goals is to show that each of us is part of the natural world and deeply interconnected with it. I want to show that human beings cannot be considered as separate from the planet that allows them to eat, drink, breathe, and live.

So many cultures, including my culture of origin, have deeply embedded practices honoring Earth from the moment of awakening and throughout the day. Through writing, I want to bring those principles and practices alive in today's world, where our digital absorption often makes us forget the landscapes and species around us.

How do you make time to honor your creativity and write?

Taking even a few minutes (but preferably longer!) to go outside, to experience the sun and wind and whatever else the natural world is offering, makes me feel like I'm in touch with the source of all creativity.

After I experience crisscrossing ecosystems in the soil under my feet, and the conversations among trees, and the medleys of birdsong, I return to my desk full of energy and ideas and words.

It's not always easy to make that happen—I get lost in the digital world with its rabbit holes of screens and platforms. When I do go outdoors, though, I remember what's real and meaningful. I remember I'm part of a wider world.

What advice do you give other women who want to become authors?

First, if you have a desire to write, please pay attention to that desire! It represents a part of you that needs to be tended and cultivated. It's a part of you that deserves to be *heard*. Second, remember that even a few words written daily add up more quickly than you may realize. On any given day, you might feel you haven't written much, but in a week, you might have a poem, and in a month, an essay, and in a year, perhaps your book!

I hope you will start soon, and keep at it, because your voice is important. It needs to be in the world. It needs to be part of the conversation.

What is a work by another woman author that you recommend?

In the ecology space, Robin Wall Kimmerer is one of my favorite writers. Her scientific background makes her deeply observant of the world around her and exquisitely precise in her descriptions. To that observation and precision, she brings the language, poetry, and generational memories of her indigenous American background.

Her words mirror my love for the planet and inspire me to protect it however I can. Most people know of her book *Braiding Sweetgrass*, but I also recommend *Gathering Moss* and *The Serviceberry*.

To learn more, visit DheepaRMaturi.com



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