



Princeton Area Community Foundation
FUND for **WOMEN** and **GIRLS**

How A Grant from The Fund for Women and Girls is Helping Millhill Child and Family Development Corporation

At the 2016 Grantmaking Dinner last fall, voting members of the **Fund for Women and Girls** awarded a \$75,000 grant payable over three years at \$25,000 per year, to the [Millhill Child and Family Development Corporation](#). This grant continues our mission of improving the lives of economically vulnerable women and girls in our community.

Our grant to Millhill supports its Female Trenton PEERS (Performing, Educating, and Engaging about Responsible Strategies) Empowerment and Education Program. The PEERS Program is a year-round teen peer education and weekly support group for approximately 12 female students that provides intensive mentoring and leadership development in a supportive environment. PEERS's purpose is to provide Trenton's vulnerable youth with the information, skills, and support needed to find confidence, develop leadership skills, establish healthy relationships, and avoid violence and risky choices.

The PEERS Educators work in the community by developing and performing skits and interactive workshops that depict how teens think, feel, react, make decisions during times of conflict, and they serve as role models to peers. Presentation topics include gang awareness, substance abuse, anger management, bullying, HIV/AIDS awareness, postponing sexual involvement, mental health, self-esteem, dating violence and sexual harassment.

Impact of FWG Funding

Support from the Fund for Women and Girls has impacted PEERS the following ways: 100% of PEERS moved onto the next grade level and 100% who were considered seniors graduated high school. Of those graduating seniors, 100% were accepted into higher education institutions or post-secondary pathways (employment or military). Additionally, none of the PEERS are gang members or have participated in gang-related activities; none have been suspended, and there have been no reports of incidents of violence outside of the school

Since December, eight new female PEERS were recruited into the program from Trenton schools, bringing the total to 11 female PEERS. PEERS has been very active since receiving funding from the Fund for Women and Girls, including:

Presenting eight educational workshops to 200 students at Dunn Middle School in Trenton on the following topics: bullying, self-esteem, substance abuse prevention and mental health stigma as part of the sixth grade health education curriculum.

Volunteering to help youth participants at the Trenton Summer Youth Employment Program Job Readiness Training: PEERS Educators demonstrated their leadership skills by providing guidance and assistance, language translation and job readiness workshops.

Learning from monthly guest speakers from several professional industries including: Finance and Operations, Early Childhood Education, Data Processing, Urban Politics, and Career Services and Alumni Relations.

Regarding the monthly guest speaker events, Millhill Executive Director Cynthia Oberkofler explained “we are excited to partner with the Fund for Women and Girls so we can prepare and nurture confident girls who are ready to join the next generation of professional women.

“If you can’t see someone like you there, you can’t see yourself there,” commented Oberkofler. “The ability to listen and talk with a successful professional gives girls a real life example of what they are able to achieve, which can change their entire future.”

PEERS at Work in our Community

Patience, a PEERS alumna and cancer survivor, is now a student at Kean University. She credits the Female PEERS program for opening doors and providing her with staff mentors and a support system. She shares that “[she] went from being a shy kid,” upon joining PEERS, and while she was in the program “you had to open up, you have to give yourself, you have to connect... it was more than a troupe going around educating people, we were our own little family who pushed for academic excellence, because their ultimate goal is to get you into college.”

The ongoing violence in Trenton remains a part of the PEERS’ lives. As such, program participants are discussing and addressing the trauma involved with violence in Trenton. For example, the Trenton standoff in May was on the street where a PEERS member lives. Despite being surrounded by violence and substance abuse in her community, she maintains honor roll status and is the captain of her swim team. She recently attended the Trenton Prevention Policy Board meeting held at the Trenton police headquarters to participate in the discussion to reduce juvenile crime and violence, and promote positive youth development.