

Networking with a mission

'100 Women Who Care' has raised \$320,000 (and counting) for nonprofits who need a boost



Haven Box, a nonprofit that provides comfort boxes to survivors of sexual violence, was the beneficiary of the 100 Women Who Care Rhode Island's fall event.

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SIERRA BARTER TERRY

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By Julia Stearly

When you put a hundred driven, selfless, passionate women in the same room, good things happen. This was certainly the case earlier this month, when 100 Women Who Care Rhode Island hosted their quarterly event, which ended in a donation of approximately \$7,500 to the Rhode Island chapter of nonprofit Dress For Success, who aim to support the professionalism and confidence of less fortunate women.

Amidst a whirlwind of networking, anticipation and excitement, 100 Women steering committee member Kirsten DiChiappari took a moment to reflect on what this organization means to her. Throughout her time as a member, and now on the steering committee, she's embraced themes of "inspiration and motivation," finding great purpose in the collaboration and overall goal of 100 Women — to strengthen their impact through collective giving.

Nationally, The 100 Alliance brings together giving circles of a hundred people in one area with a shared commonality — be it their gender, age, career, what have you — to donate \$100 to one nonprofit of their choosing, chosen through a voting process, creating a large, lasting impact. Nearly 12 years ago, this model was brought to Rhode Island by Marilyn Edwards, birthing 100 Women Who Care Rhode Island, which has since donated more than \$320,000 to nonprofits statewide.

Each quarter, members are invited to a meeting, often held at cafés, restaurants, speakeasies, and the like. Upon arrival, they are excitedly greeted, and make their way into the first part of the evening, focused on networking and socializing. Steering committee

IN THREE WORDS ...

Elizabeth Zimmermann gave three words to describe 100 Women Who Care RI.

1. "Education: I am constantly learning about new-to-me nonprofits in our state, and the inspiring work they are doing to better our community."

2. "Connection: To amazing philanthropic-minded women, to leaders of nonprofits, and between members and nonprofits"

3. Impact: "Knowing that my small donation can amplify in impact when joined with the many other women in our organization. And that through 100 Women, we have given \$320,000 to so many great organizations."

member Brenda Shannon said, "I think what people don't understand is that it's not just a place you go to write a check. It's a very democratic process. It's also a networking event for women. Some women run nonprofits, some work or volunteer for nonprofits, and some are just really interested in them. So a lot of us are really involved in that world."

It goes to a vote

As the night progresses and members find their seats, the steering committee reintroduces the nominated nonprofits, and open the polls for voting. Steering committee member Elizabeth "Zim" Zimmermann said, "It's an entirely democratic process. Members are eligible to nominate nonprofits. All the nominated organizations go into a hat. We pick three randomly from the hat. We bring them to our members. The members educate themselves either through what we give them or their own research. And then we vote. Whichever nonprofit has the most votes wins, and all the women collectively donate to that organization for the quarter."

By utilizing this system, the money ends up where the majority of women, representing many areas of the state and a variety of communities, believe it should be. Shannon said, "Members tend to vote for smaller nonprofits, as opposed to, say, an organization that gets nominated that has a large budget or big operating expenses. Those don't go over as well," she laughed. "Members seem to enjoy voting for smaller organizations, who may not have someone on their staff who can write the grants, take the time to develop the nonprofit, or do any form of fundraising at all. To get this donation – it's a big deal because of that. Nonprofits are always stretched for time and money, so to have someone present them with a check is huge."

Small commitment, big impact

With high hopes of building a wider group of philanthropic women from all walks of life, 100 Women puts a strong focus on making membership as accessible as possible. "What I think is so interesting about the organization," Shannon said, "is the great impact you can have with

such low commitment. We meet four times a year for an hour, hour and a half, and on top of that, there's no administrative fees; all the money goes directly to the organization, so you can really make a big impact."

Also within the realm of accessibility, 100 Women has expanded their membership opportunities past the standard \$100 mark branded by The 100 Alliance. Now, members can join at one of four levels, with commitments of as low as \$25 per quarter, and as either an individual or as part of a team. Zimmerman said, "You can be a member for \$50 a quarter, but you're part of potentially over \$7,000 of donations, so this small thing becomes part of something much larger."

Sierra Barter Terry, also on the steering committee, heard about the organization through a nonprofit she was on the board for, and, inspired, wanted to be a part of it. Having not been to a meeting, however, she didn't exactly know what to expect.

"I'd always hear about 100 Women, and it seemed to be this very prestigious, mysterious, secret society comprised of incredible, wealthy women who donated money to great causes, and I was like, 'Goals.' Then when I joined, I realized, it's not elusive, in fact it's very welcoming, and you don't have to be wealthy. Regardless of your age, ethnicity, financial situation, this is a place where we can all come together and make a difference."

Beyond the meetings, voting, and check signing, this organization is making real impact in real lives in the real world. Reflecting on the early days, Zimmerman said, "I remember our very first meeting. We gave to an organization called We Share Hope. They had no budget at all. They were down to the last \$700 in their checkbook, and that's when our check came in. It was an \$11,000 check, which, for them, was a huge gift. It was incredible."

"It's an interesting group of women," Shannon said. "When we get together, it's really powerful."