

## **What does it mean to be a young woman in philanthropy?**

On April 2, three Founders Fellows and Ellan Bernstein, co-chair of the Founders Fellowship committee, trekked to Boston, MA to find out. We attended the 2016 Young Philanthropist Conference, hosted by the Philanthropy Connection, a sister organization of Impact100. Upon entering the conference, it was overwhelming to see more than 150 young women, committed to spend their Saturday learning about their community and philanthropy through a series of workshops and plenaries. Through conversations with some of the participants, we learned that anyone can be philanthropic. The Philanthropy Network conference set out to engage women with this idea and to provide opportunities to channel their deep passions for public service.

The conference started on a high note with an opening address from Ayanna Pressley, Councilor-at-Large with the Boston City Council. Pressley is the first woman of color to be elected to the Council, but as she noted “that shouldn’t be celebrated.” Pressley charged the group to think differently about what it means to be a philanthropist and what it means to give. She shared how she overcame her fear of asking for campaign donations during her first election because people who give, give with a purpose. They were giving to support what she would accomplish on Council. She understood, as a recipient of philanthropy, that it was important that she accept funding support and allow others to give; and that has encouraged her as a philanthropist.

She also talked about the importance of having a vision. She cautioned us to not be dreamers, because “dreaming is a sleep state”, but to be visionaries. Being a visionary requires action, she shared. She challenged us to move deliberately toward our visions, to recognize those who have supported us along the way, carrying with us the lessons they taught, and to never be discouraged.

After Ayanna’s rousing call to action, we set out to a series of educational breakout sessions that covered issues from how to join a nonprofit board to innovations in philanthropy. We all had the opportunity to attend two sessions of interest to us, and we left those sessions with lessons about nonprofit leadership, issues about women in philanthropy and innovations that are changing the nonprofit landscape. The women presenting in the various sessions came from all walks of life: politics, business, and the nonprofit sector. And the interaction with our fellow young philanthropists was inspiring and the energy in each session was catching!

The day concluded with remarks from Makeeba McCreary, Chief of Staff for the Boston Public Schools and Marla Fletcher, President of The Philanthropy Connection. McCreary designed and managed philanthropic investment for certain global brands including the Jordan Brand. She spoke about how she chose to push boundaries and step outside of the box to help the brand rethink its philanthropic strategy. For example, instead of making small \$2,500 grants to multiple schools,

barely supporting school projects and programs, she reformed the brand's giving by providing for much larger grants so as to deepen impact over time. McCreary has had varied professional experiences and successes, of all which she attributes to her commitment to authenticity, truth telling and determination. Marla Fletcher closed the conference by sharing her journey to creating The Philanthropy Connection, which included a commitment to foster the next generation of philanthropists. The first Young Philanthropist Conference was a manifestation of that vision and we were so happy and excited to be part of that vision.

We left the conference with several overriding thoughts:

- There is a need for deeper understanding of the role of young women in philanthropy, and on how to diversify philanthropy's ranks. There are many young women with a passion for changing their communities, but they need direction and information about how they can become strong philanthropists.
- A person does not have to be wealthy to be a philanthropist. Many of the speakers at the conference spoke about how, in retrospect, they'd been philanthropists long before they ever gave away a dime. In addition to donating money, philanthropy also means volunteering in your community or church and also mentoring family members or young women. We learned we are all philanthropists and have been "granting" those in need with resources and support much longer than we might have realized.
- The Philanthropy Connection's community of young philanthropists inspired us. Their energy, creativity, collaboration, and most of all, their strong bond stemming from their passion for helping others, was exciting. During our time as Fellows, we hope to make our mark on Impact100 and empower others to engage in philanthropy.

We would like to offer a special word of thanks to Impact 100 and the Founders Fellow Committee for providing us at this opportunity.