



I grew up outside of Pittsburgh, PA in a small steel mill town. My parents were first generation American born. My grandparents immigrated from Greece in the early 1900s. The older I got, the more I came to take greater notice of the inequities around gender, race, sexual orientation, immigration status and so much more. In 2003, I traded my corporate job in marketing and advertising for the kinder, gentler world of nonprofit communication at M Creative—a small marketing and design firm in downtown Winston-Salem.

At M Creative we have the pleasure of working with nonprofits and foundations doing impressive work in this community and throughout the state and region--The Winston-Salem Foundation, the Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation, Hospice & Palliative Care Center, Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust, the North Carolina Institute for Minority Economic Development, Senior Services, Bethesda Center, Winston-Salem Industries for the Blind, the Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation, and Ronald McDonald House to name just a few. We even did early work for the Maya Angelou Center for Health Equity.

In 2005 I was fortunate enough to meet four fabulous women who believed as I did that our community needed to focus greater attention on the needs of women and girls. We started having conversations about a local women's philanthropy initiative, and learned that despite a strong connection between poverty, low self-esteem, inadequate healthcare, domestic violence and being female, gender-specific programs are seriously underfunded. In fact only 5-7% of total philanthropic dollars go specifically to address the needs of women and girls nationally. In 2006 we officially launched The Women's Fund of Winston-Salem, an advised fund of The Winston-Salem Foundation.

Today we have over 800 members of The Women's Fund and we've given away over a half million dollars to programs and initiatives that specifically address the needs of women and girls. I'm so proud knowing that we are educating women and girls in our community about philanthropy, the value of funding programs that create real social change, the intentionality we have had from the beginning about creating a fund that celebrates inclusion, and how good it feels when hundreds of women gather at our annual luncheon to celebrate our collective giving.

The Fund released a groundbreaking report this past spring on the economic security of women and girls in Forsyth County. This was the first time our community had looked at critical community issues through a gender lens. Having The Women's Fund in our community gives women an opportunity to see the power realized through our collective giving. It also gives us the opportunity to truly focus our attention on improving the lives of women and girls in Winston-Salem/Forsyth County.

My community work continues to evolve with a growing focus on what it takes to create an inclusive community. Conversations with local nonprofits challenging their current definitions of inclusion have led unexpectedly to a motivated group of LGBT members of this community coming together for the first time in a long time to plan a Gay Pride March in October 2011. We invite the greater LGBT community and our straight allies to join us in our work to become more visible in this community.

*Mary is the Director of Business Development at M Creative. She graduated from Kent State University with a PhD in Cognitive Psychology and lives on a retired dairy farm in Davie County with her partner of eleven years Starr Johnson and their four horses, two dogs and thirty plus cats. They have two beautiful children Julia, 26 and Michael, 21.*