

Good afternoon! I am honored to be here. Thank you for coming out today to support the Fund.

It is more than apropos that this event is the Make a Difference Luncheon. The Fund's mission is to improve – to essentially make a difference – in the lives of women and girls and their families in Chester County through grant giving, education and community collaboration. At our best the Fund empowers Chester County. The Fund is driven by a common passion and a common purpose – women and girls: we work to inspire more donors and foundations to support organizations serving them, to pursue inclusion and equity for them, and to effectively address their needs.

In order to effectively carry out our mission we must not only have an understanding of what is going on around us but we must also work to raise an awareness within our community. In a recently released report entitled *State of Girls: Unfinished Business* we learn some interesting facts:

- Poverty is a critical issue for girls in the country, as one in five girls in the US lives below the poverty line. 42 percent of girls live in low-income families. Girls growing up in poor families face a number of significant physical, emotional and behavioral risks compared to girls living in more affluent families. Policies need to be in place to minimize poverty and afford girls opportunities that optimize their healthy development.
- Physical health and wellness is critical to girls' development, academic achievement, happiness and overall well-being. While girls report a fairly healthy diet and reasonable levels of physical activity many girls in this country are overweight and some don't have access to health insurance. Obesity rates are highest for African-American and Latina girls, and Latina girls are less likely to have health insurance compared to peers from other ethnic groups. All girls need access to health care, better access to healthy food, and opportunities for exercise and physical activity.
 - To bring it to a local level, Chester County is the only county in this area where the share and number of children without health insurance rose by 7% over the last 5 years. This is bad news as health insurance is a critical pathway for children to maintain or improve their health. Children with health insurance are healthier than

children without coverage, have better access to health care, lower rates of avoidable hospitalizations and less childhood mortality.

- From 2008 to 2012 the proportion of obese and overweight children in Chester County increased from 24.3% to 29.8% - Think about this for just a moment – this is almost 1 in 3 children. Racial, ethnic and socioeconomic disparities in the prevalence of obesity are well document. Lack of affordable, healthy foods and access to clean water, over consumption of sugary drinks and unsafe neighborhoods that discourage outdoor play contribute to these statistics.
- On a wonderful note - Chester County had the largest drop in infant mortality in the region – a 20% rate decrease from 2007 to 2011.

Most of us are really lucky to live here. Chester County is a beautiful place to live. Thanks to people like Bonnie and Alice we have open space preserved for generations to come. We have a solid business base to help support our needs and most of us have access to numerous healthcare options. Moreover, while it sounds corny, people here are, on the whole, really nice. We live in the wealthiest county in the Commonwealth, and in fact, one of the wealthiest counties across the United States. And this is somewhat a blessing and a curse as it tends to shield pockets of significant need right in our backyard. How is your average citizen supposed to know the reality of poverty for 1 in 5 girls when she is surrounded by ample means? Even when we hear these statistics do we honestly want to know them? Are we prepared to bear the burden of need in our community?

Wilful blindness is a legal concept that if there is information that you should know and could know but you somehow manage not to know the law deems that you are wilfully blind. You have chosen not to know. On a large scale we have witnessed wilful blindness - Mortgage crisis – Catholic Church abuse. These are examples on an epic scale. But wilful Blindness can exist on small scales in families and communities as well. I can attest that the Fund challenges wilful blindness with its whole existence. And I will tell you how. Not in full depth today because that is more than a luncheon. The Fund finds non-profits that address issues that dare to cross the line. Oh, my friends ignorance is not bliss when you learn that there are some things that just cannot be tolerated.

To give but one example of life at the Fund there was a week that I was going out on site visits during our grants allocation process. One day I met 3 girls – one Latina, One White and One African American. All smart and curious and all around 15-16 years old. The first girl lives with her mother. The mother goes from relationship to relationship and none seem to last too long. Her mother is undocumented and has a substance abuse problem. She does not have a permanent address and neither does her daughter. Why is this a problem? Well you need a permanent address to be able to go to school today. This young lady is unable to go to school. We fund the organization that is helping this girl.

The next young lady lives in a trailer with her grandmother and mother. This family was indeed grateful for all of the snow this year because it provided a source of water for them. They have no running water. However, she comes to a non-profit agency to shower and do her laundry. We fund the organization that is helping this girl.

The last girl I could tell was extremely intelligent. Full of questions about the Fund and how it works. In speaking with her about school she said that she really wants to go to college. She was really studying hard. She confessed to me that she had attempted suicide the year before. In speaking with the Executive Director of the organization he shared with me that the girl had been raped by her father when she was 12 and has been having self-harm problems ever since. We fund the organization that is helping this girl.

These girls indeed put a face on what we do. Their stories do not permit wilful blindness on our part. There are many people who need help and issues affecting women and girls ultimately affect the health of our entire community. There can be no tolerance for apathy, indifference or the mantra “it is not my problem”. I suggest to you the awareness we bring around these issues and the money we give to agencies who are focused on fighting this fight are at the crux of what we want Chester County to be.

With your support we seek to be agents of social change. Please help us to break this thermometer! I promise you that in Chester County the Fund will:

- Cultivate traditions of giving and increasing the flow of resources regarding women and girls

- Advocate on their behalf and
- We will work tirelessly to support organizations and leaders within our community that might otherwise be overlooked.

The empowerment of women has always required immense persistence and incredible patience. Alice and Bonnie your discussions around the Kitchen Table and your persistence and patience have been a gift to us all. The Fund will not be blind nor silent and I can assure you we are incredibly persistent and patient. Please join us in our mission to improve the lives of women and girls and help us to make a difference.

Thank you again for sharing your time with us today.