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The Maine Women's Fund Awards nearly \$80,000 to nine non-profits investing in women and girls

Portland – The Maine Women's Fund awarded nearly \$80,000 in social change grants to nine organizations in Maine promoting lasting social change in Maine. The Fund intends to triple grantmaking over the next three years and use collaborative approaches to bring more community resources to strengthen these efforts.

"We believe that investing in women and girls unlocks opportunities for broader economic development across the state. We champion these beliefs through our grantmaking where we build economic independence for women and girls and through our leadership programs that provides resources and build community. Both are essential if women and girls are to reach their full potential and imparting these gifts to others," said Elizabeth Stefanski, Executive Director of the Fund.

The Fund uses grantmaking to invest in education, better jobs and wages, asset building and financial literacy, and entrepreneurship. The impact of the grants the fund has given out has been huge, according to Stefanski.

"We are helping Maine women and girls create their own stability so that they can pursue healthy, prosperous, independent lives," comments Stefanski. "When you change the life of one woman, you also impact the life of her children and indeed the community. The change can be tremendous."

The Maine Women's Fund awarded the following grants:

Cobscook Community Center, \$5000 – The Passages Program of the Cobscook Community Learning Center serves out-of-school pregnant and parenting young women in Washington County through a home-based, self-paced high school diploma program. Each year, in Washington County, approximately 45 children are born to young women who range in age from twelve to eighteen. Offering these young women a way to complete high school, without compromising their ability to be parents at the same time, is a critical way to tap into the high motivation they experience during this period of their lives, bolstering their ability to enter post-secondary education, the workplace and adulthood in general. Based on the success of the program supported by a 2007/08 grant from the Maine Women's Fund, we will continue to invest in this project in 2008/09. Visit www.makingchange happen.org to learn more about how the Cobscook Community Learning Center is fostering empowerment.

Caring Unlimited, \$4,500 - It is the mission of Caring Unlimited to work with the community to end domestic violence in York County. This includes providing support and safe haven to women, their children and men whose lives are affected by domestic abuse in a manner that honors their essential worth, nurtures their inherent strengths and respects their right of self-determination. Through the Maine Women's Fund grant, Caring Unlimited will provide a savings match to battered women living in transitional housing. For women who stay the full 24 months, they will leave with up to \$1,200 in savings which can be used to secure permanent housing, transportation, and other needs.

Dress for Success, \$5000 – Dress for Success is a critical intervention, enabling women to get access to, and win, better jobs. Getting that job and retaining it is an important first step towards self-sufficiency and building a career. Dress for Success serves a critical market – 80% of their clients have an income of less than \$12,000 a year. Most are young, single mothers who have not previously held full-time jobs. With our continued support, Dress for Success will provide disadvantaged, low-income job-ready women with the attire and self-confidence they need to enter the workforce. While located and serving the needs of women in Southern Maine, the program also serves women from as far North as Belfast and as far West as Rumford.

Greater Portland CA\$H Coalition, \$5,000 - CA\$H Greater Portland, managed by United Way of Greater Portland, is a partnership of community leaders and industry experts encouraging individuals and families in Cumberland County to increase income, reduce debt, save for the future and achieve financial stability. This program serves 90% of the New American population, helping women navigate the banking system, as well as informing bank and credit union representatives about the needs of this diverse customer base. The program will also provide a 5-part financial literacy series for the target audience.

Hardy Girls, Healthy Women, \$10,000 – Girls see more than 3,000 media images each day and the themes of those messages are that girls need to be thin and sexy, they need to use their bodies to attract boys and men, and they need to find someone to take care of them. These messages make it hard for girls to believe they can be independent, economically secure, and safe without being in a relationship with a man. Through direct service programming, education, and leadership development, Hardy Girls Healthy Women (HGHW) helps girls create positive environments and develop the skills they need to aspire to independent, secure futures. This grant will help HGHW expand statewide and nationally.

Immigrant Legal Action Project, \$3,000 – The Immigrant Legal Advocacy Project (ILAP) is Maine's only provider of free and low-cost immigration information and legal assistance to low-income Maine residents. ILAP's skilled legal assistance helps Maine's immigrants keep their families together, gain protection from persecution and domestic violence, attain residency and work authorization, and become proud U.S. citizens. With support from the Maine Women's Fund, ILAP will provide the advocacy required to enable undocumented battered women in Aroostook, Washington, and Androscoggin counties to leave their domestic situations, attain immigrant status, get access to public housing and enter the workforce.

Maine Equal Justice Partners, \$10,000 - Maine Equal Justice Partners focuses on the issues that affect women's daily lives – access to adequate health care, food assistance, income supports, housing issues, fair working conditions and higher education and training opportunities. With support from the Maine Women's Fund, Maine Equal Justice Partners will work to improve benefits and supports for families on TANF and those transitioning off the program so that they can achieve economic independence; improve access to health care for low-income families; and increase opportunities for low-wage women workers to attain education and training that will improve their employment options.

Maine Women's Policy Center, \$15,000 - The Maine Women's Policy Center encourages women's participation in public policy, amplifying both their voices and their power. With our support, the Maine Women's Policy Center will champion economic security for women across Maine through increased flexibility at work, adequate paid time off, the end of unfair profiling practices, and equal pay. The grant amount represents the second year of the 2007-08 grant and the 2008-09 grant.

Women, Work and Community, \$20,000 – Women, Work, and Community's received a second year grant (\$10,000) to support the Kennebec Corridor Creative Enterprise Project, which targets the needs of low-to-moderate income women artisans and emerging entrepreneurs in communities along the Kennebec Corridor that includes the towns of Augusta, Waterville, Skowhegan, Gardiner, Richmond, and Bath. Additionally, they received a \$10,000 grant to support the expansion of this program to the Crown of Maine Creative Enterprise Project, which provides small business

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networking and skill building opportunities for women entrepreneurs in Aroostook County. These enterprises account for 20% of all employment in Aroostook County and are in need of market outlets to grow and expand. The project will increase business management and technology skills, improve marketing success, link entrepreneurs and catalyze networks and shared action through mini-grants which will be matched by the entrepreneurs.

About the Maine Women's Fund

The Maine Women's Fund is a public foundation creating lasting social change by investing in the power of women and the dreams of girls. In fact, we are the only public foundation in Maine that invests in women and girls specifically. In 20 years, we have granted over \$1.5 million to organizations across the state. Through grantmaking, we build economic independence for women and girls and foster economic development. Through seminars, mentoring, and learning communities, our leadership programs strengthen the power of women and girls to lead in their professional environments and in their service to others. Learn more at www.mainewomensfund.org.

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