



## SPIRIT OF ST. LOUIS WOMEN'S FUND

### For Immediate Release

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### **HELPING THE HELPERS: SPIRIT OF ST. LOUIS WOMEN'S FUND SUPPORTS AREA NONPROFITS AS PANDEMIC CHALLENGES PERSIST**

*Women's Collective Giving Organization Celebrates 15 Years and \$3 Million in Grants*

**ST. LOUIS:** After two years of pivoting and responding, one might think St. Louis nonprofits could finally see the COVID-19 pandemic in the rearview mirror. But the road to recovery is long for many organizations, especially those who were already working on shoestring budgets before the coronavirus crisis hit.

As these organizations struggle to recover, the question becomes — who will help the helpers?

One powerful collective of more than 200 local women has proudly taken on that role, acting as a quiet but mighty force for change in the region. The Spirit of St. Louis Women's Fund has given **\$3 million** to **95 St. Louis area nonprofits** since its start in 2006, with no slowdown of generosity during the pandemic.

At a time when government funds and donations were uncertain, SOS grants helped 20 local nonprofits, buoying these groups as they found innovative ways to help the region's neediest people — many of whom were disproportionately impacted by the pandemic.

More than \$400,000 in grant funds were distributed during 2020 and 2021 alone.

Those grants went to organizations like Eye Thrive, which had to adapt its delivery model to ensure low-income children had glasses. Funding also supported the ID and Birth Certificate Program through St. Francis Xavier College Church, which realized a need to reach people for whom travel or in-person visits are difficult. These nonprofits received SOS grants of \$25,000 and \$14,000 respectively.

**On May 18, as SOS celebrates 15 years of collective giving at its annual Spirit Awards ceremony at the Touhill Performing Arts Center**, the ongoing impact of the pandemic on nonprofits will be on many minds.

It will be a chance to mark the achievements of these diverse and determined nonprofits, while also raising awareness of an ongoing need for funding. In addition to recognizing past grant recipients, SOS will announce 2022 grantees.

“The question of ‘who will help the helpers?’ is always on our minds at SOS, and we are always looking for ways to support these tireless nonprofits who do so much good in our region,” said Katy Dowd, SOS board president. “This role we play — as behind-the-scenes investors for positive change — has taken on a more significant role since the beginning of the pandemic as we try to ensure these groups can continue helping the people in our region who need it most.”

### **Pivoting During a Pandemic**

When the coronavirus pandemic hit, Casa de Salud knew it needed to pivot to ensure its largely immigrant and low-income patient population could still receive quality primary care and mental health services.

Many staff and patients were unable to be physically present in the midtown St. Louis clinic, and the organization lost half of its volunteer licensed medical staff, either due to COVID-19 risks or because their primary jobs became too demanding.

The case management program was significantly hampered. With hospital systems prioritizing COVID care, case managers struggled to find appointments with outside service providers, leading to increased wait times for patients.

While telehealth became the answer for many health providers, this wouldn't work with many of Casa's patients who had limited access to the internet or computers.

“Like many other organizations across the region, we started by ensuring that telehealth was available to continue providing vital medical and mental health services. We soon learned that, while it removed some barriers to care like transportation, it presented others like access to reliable technology,” said Diego Abente, president & CEO of Casa de Salud.

So staff designed a hybrid telehealth model where patients could go to Casa to use patient rooms equipped with a laptop and high-speed internet connection to safely engage with doctors.

More recently, the challenge has been convincing a population that has grown wary of the healthcare system to still seek out care when they need it. Casa de Salud also saw an influx of new patients as people began returning to work, suddenly exposed to new COVID-19 risks. Some patients had delayed care in order to get back to work.

“Casa's ability to respond to the ever-evolving needs of our immigrant community depends on the support of partners like SOS. With their support we were able to deliver on our commitment to be there for our constituents during a time of tremendous uncertainty,” Abente said, of its \$10,000 SOS grant.

The need for Casa's services continues to grow as the pandemic shifts in nature.

“With continuing support from key stakeholders like SOS, we are confident that we can deliver on our mission to provide access to high-quality medical and mental healthcare to our regions under- and uninsured,” he said.

To learn more about SOS and the difference these women are making in the community, visit [www.spiritstlwomensfund.org](http://www.spiritstlwomensfund.org).

## **Additional Information on the Pandemic's Ongoing Toll on Nonprofits:**

A December survey and report by the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis painted a startling picture of the pandemic's ongoing toll on the region's nonprofits.

More than 70 percent of respondents across multiple industries reported "significant disruptions" during the peak of the pandemic, with 61 percent indicating continued challenges one year later.

Demand for essential services went up, but many organizations struggled as their operational needs changed and there was a decline in traditional revenue sources like donations and fees.

The Federal Reserve study found:

- Staffing decreases were reported by 40 percent of respondents.
- More than 70 percent of organizations reported an increase in expenses
- Individual donations went down 16 percentage points, and corporate donations and fees both went down by 24 percentage points.
- A staggering 62 percent of organizations predicted a need to reduce services, lay off staff, close locations or shut down entirely within the next year if current resources remain as they are.

Other studies have found nonprofits are struggling to retain qualified staff who can find higher paying work with remote opportunities elsewhere. They are witnessing staff burnout and record-high stress levels as they try to continue to perform the same services despite having fewer resources. Some are no longer accepting new clients or referrals; others have had to cancel programs or screenings.

One SOS grantee, CHADS Coalition for Mental Health, had to institute wait lists for all of its programs as the pandemic took a massive toll on youth mental health. Demand for mental health services skyrocketed, yet CHADS grappled with a shortage of therapists.

Part of CHADS \$10,000 SOS grant was earmarked for retaining a leader in the field of youth suicide prevention as an ongoing consultant.

"SOS is aware that many of these nonprofits are still very much in a crisis state due to the pandemic," said Katy Dowd, SOS board president. "We not only feel a responsibility to help these groups financially and through networking opportunities, but also to spread the message of their ongoing needs. If we can all contribute just a little — whether through a collective giving organization like SOS, or a one-time direct donation — our entire community will be better off."

## **Additional Resources:**

<https://www.stlouisfed.org/on-the-economy/2021/december/nonprofits-struggle-in-face-of-covid-19>

<https://www.councilofnonprofits.org/data-how-the-pandemic-and-economic-crises-are-affecting-nonprofits>

<https://info.npconnect.org/blog/nonprofit-connect-blog-2403/post/survey-results-how-is-covid-19-affecting-kansas-city-nonprofits-23312>