



Women and Philanthropy

A Driving Force for Social Change

For change. For better. For all.

“Women are coming out as the ones who will determine how to make a difference through philanthropy, not in a passive way but in a strategic way for the good of society.”

– Women and Philanthropy Research, March 2026



Driving Social Change

Women philanthropists drive social change through investing in people and communities. Their generosity supports frontline services and delivers social and policy change.

Community foundation Ireland is privileged to support many visionary women on their philanthropic journeys. It is an important story not often told, and seldom reflected upon.

Partnering with researchers at Trinity College, Dublin, we can now provide insights on the pioneering work of women philanthropists and women-led funds that the Foundation is privileged to work with.

Women philanthropists are empathetic, strategic with their giving deeply rooted in fairness and justice. Their philanthropic journeys are dynamic, with relationships, life experiences, and events directing and shaping their action.

The impact they have is real and life changing. Children and women are accessing trauma supports, places of safety and greater legal protections from gender-based violence. Local and national actions are being taken to address the emergency in climate and nature. Families fleeing war have a safe place to call home.

This giving often takes a longer-term view delivering policy change. Acting to lift barriers, giving single parents the opportunity of education and training. Prompting national conversations on consent leading to the introduction of classes across all educational curricula. Confronting and combatting modern-day online exploitation, abuse and harm.

Deeply rooted and resilient, this giving can be a long-term relationship with a keenness to be an active partner, an advocate, leader or catalyst delivering positive change for people, place and planet.



Denise Charlton

CEO

Community Foundation Ireland

Women and Philanthropy: From Hidden Presence to Recognised Influence

New pioneering research into how women in Ireland engage with, shape, and lead philanthropy

Women and Philanthropy in Ireland: From Hidden Presence to Recognised Influence is the first in-depth qualitative exploration of contemporary women's philanthropy. Prioritising improved data, research, and inclusion, this partnership between Community Foundation Ireland and Trinity College Dublin aligns with the National Policy on Philanthropy.

Approach

Drawing on a scoping literature review, consultation with scholars and practitioners, and 38 semi-structured interviews (30 women philanthropists and eight philanthropic advisors), new insights are offered on how women engage with, shape, and lead philanthropy.

Thoughtful, Values-driven, Personal and Strategic

Donating in ways that are thoughtful, personal and strategic, women contribute financial support, time, networks, advocacy, and leadership. Whether data driven or personal motivation, importance is placed on values alignment with an emphasis on transparency and measurable impact. There is an aim to strengthen people, place and planet by addressing systemic challenges and investing in long-term solutions.





Sonya Lennon, Designer, business-woman and social entrepreneur; and Denise Charlton, Chief Executive, Community Foundation Ireland

Meaningful Philanthropic Journeys

Neither static nor institutionalised, participants set out clear giving journeys, from early experiences, to building trust, engaging with organisations, and leaving a legacy.

Each navigating a series of meaningful considerations between visibility and privacy, collaborative and individual giving, evidence and personal passion, early giving journeys and seasoned leadership. There is dynamism over time, with relationships, life experiences, and events shaping philanthropic action.

Clearly identified is an appetite to educate the next generation to engage in giving.

Practice and Policy

Early phases of the giving journey include searching for learning and engagement opportunities. Access to knowledge, insights and expert support to align personally held priorities and goals with organisations and causes is recognised and valued.

For practitioners, the value of relational, trust-based approaches, tailored stewardship, and collaborative models of giving are highlighted. In terms of policy and practice, the study underscores the need for gender-inclusive strategies and greater visibility of women's leadership in philanthropy.

“For me, I’ve always felt it is a privilege and a learning opportunity to support and invest in solutions that make an impact.”

- Woman philanthropist

Women Philanthropists and Community Foundation Ireland

Strategic and intentional, Community Foundation Ireland partners with and supports women philanthropists to shape priorities and inform decisions that drive impact. With expertise, connectivity and a convening role, the Foundation supports women to give to key social issues.

Across family and personal philanthropy, they are decision makers and leaders, with a particular interest in legacies and next generation involvement. The Foundation also partners with women leaders in corporate funds as well as other trusts and foundations.

These relationships based on trust matter for our women philanthropists. Many interviewees welcomed the thought-leadership and expertise offered to align their priorities and goals with causes and areas of need.

“Right now, I’m interested in systemic change... I’m interested in solutions that can solve multiple problems at once and ideally make organisations more financially sustainable...I’m much more interested in thoughtful approaches to solve underlying issues, or solutions that will help with adaptation or resolution over time.”

- Woman philanthropist





Impact Areas:

With over 900 projects benefiting from more than 25 women-led funds, over €20 million has been focused on a number of areas:

- Education and training accounting for 30% of grants is the primary thematic focus with priority placed on prevention, early intervention, and long-term opportunity creation.
- Climate and Biodiversity grants supporting local community stewardship and global climate resilience, combining education with practical environmental gains.
- Combatting poverty through meeting basic needs such as housing, food, financial hardship, both domestically and internationally.
- Ending Domestic, Sexual and Gender Based Violence is also a keen focus area, with investments in policy change, public education, frontline support, and safety infrastructure.

We ensure that individually, and collectively, donor commitments combine to drive wider, structural change. This approach allows us to show not just isolated acts of generosity but the cumulative power of women's philanthropy in shifting systems, strengthening rights, and improving outcomes at scale.

Case Study: **The Bechaire Fund**

A structured, strategic approach to philanthropy, a professional woman created a fund which in the past decade has contributed over €2 million addressing educational inequality.

A recognition of the need for multi annual grants delivered support for programmes targeting STEM engagement, numeracy and literacy development, and early childhood education.

Guided by the Foundation, groundbreaking research supported by the fund identified obstacles facing lone parents in accessing community education, while also offering a practical way forward with childcare, financial supports, and structured learning time.

Further effective initiatives included education access through One Family; Longford Women's Link, delivering an accredited programme for 20 lone parents; and St Catherine's Community Services Centre, supporting the Moving On QQI programme for young mothers returning to education.

Community Foundation Ireland used its connectivity with communities, advocates and researchers to offer strategic advice and thought leadership coupled with expertise to manage administrative and due diligence requirements, ensure transparency and providing ongoing reporting to demonstrate impact.

A decade of strategic, high impact giving continues to transform lives.

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Case Study: **The Greenleaf Fund**

Anonymity and fund management were primary motivators for a donor in selecting Community Foundation Ireland to set up her philanthropic fund.

'Choosing a project is such a personal thing. It's so individual and there is no wrong way to give. I would advise 'donor-advised funds'.

Informed by our deep knowledge of issues facing communities, the philanthropist went from providing small initial grants to seed-fund projects delivering significant impact. The Foundation worked with the donor interest in capital projects and a motivation to respond to domestic violence to support a women's refuge, the West Cork Beacon.

A first for the region it provides a safe haven for women and children. This philanthropic support strategically allowed the leveraging of further support from Cuan, the statutory agency tackling domestic, sexual and gender-based based violence (DSGBV).

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'Knowing my support helped open the first refuge in West Cork gives me a deep sense of pride. It is proof that philanthropy can meet urgent needs while shaping the future.'

- Community Foundation Ireland Donor

Social impact through Collaboration

With services reporting unprecedented levels of domestic, gender-based and child sexual abuse, donors working with Community Foundation Ireland are collaborating to strengthen safety, healing and prevention.

This support is expanding crisis counselling, widening helpline access, and improving safety and dignity in refuges through secure access systems, trauma informed spaces and essential informed spaces and essential needs hubs.

Donor funding also enables specialist therapeutic support for children and teenagers, including play and art psychotherapy, sensory rooms, group programmes and parent–child work, reducing waiting times and helping young people stabilise and reconnect with school and community life.

A focus on prevention is facilitating consent education and positive masculinity programmes, equipping schools and communities to challenge harmful norms and support healthier relationships.

Survivors' economic stability is strengthened through hardship funds, legal supports and financial literacy programmes.

Together, donors have created fast access to safety, deeper healing, stronger prevention and meaningful progress toward long term, systemic change.



Helen Clark, former Prime Minister of New Zealand and Chair of the Global Leadership Foundation; and Denise Charlton, Chief Executive, Community Foundation Ireland

Together, We Can Achieve More

About Us

Community Foundation Ireland is a philanthropic hub delivering for people, place and planet.

Supporting donors on philanthropic journeys we provide trusted expertise for individuals, families and organisations seeking to maximise the impact of donations.

Based on the long-standing and successful model of international community foundations, we offer thought-leadership, knowledge and connectivity to networks to donors.

There are many ways to engage with us. By establishing a Donor Advised Fund or making a donation, you can directly support women's voices, ideas, solutions and continue to drive meaningful progress for generations to come.

You could also consider leaving a legacy gift to Community Foundation Ireland. This pledge is a lasting reflection of your values and hopes for the future. In choosing to pledge your legacy gift to the Foundation, you can ensure that positive change in communities can happen, now and into the future.

You can rest assured that with our track record of over 15,000 grants since the year 2000, we continue to be informed by best-in-class research, expertise, top advocates and our charitable and community partners.

Get in Touch

Let's start a conversation today. Contact us to learn more about the Community Foundation and how your support can make a meaningful difference in communities all over Ireland.

You can call us on +353 (0)1 8747354 or email us in the Development Team.

For change. For better. For all.

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