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# As women claim more wealth, they see giving back as a way out for others not yet at the table

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[Donna Bellew](#), [Jennifer Sik](#) and [Judy Pigott](#) come from vastly different backgrounds — and share a powerful bond.

Bellew grew up on a farm in Oregon and landed a job at **Microsoft** in the 1990s after graduating with a sociology degree from the **University of Oregon**.

Sik grew up in Hong Kong and emigrated to the United States after earning a master's degree in Australia.

Pigott is a teacher who comes from a well-known Seattle family and runs her own nonprofit.

The three are devoted to supporting women's philanthropy — not only with their dollars but with a passion for advocating for the improved lives of women all over the world.

And like many other women, they don't want to do it alone. They thrive on joining like-minded women in philanthropic activities that involve community, learning and sisterhood.

"We see among women donors a desire to connect with 'women like me,'" said [Liz Vivian](#), executive director of the Women's Funding Alliance, a Seattle organization that brings women together to support organizations dedicated to improving the lives of women and girls.

"They love to come together over a cup of tea or a glass of wine and talk about the issues with other women," Vivian said. "That's uniquely female. Women love it when we invite conversations about the work and when we ask them to talk about their own life experiences and their hope for themselves and their daughters. We talk about our work as, 'We have to be the ones to do it.'"

A confluence of challenges and opportunities for women and philanthropy is taking place right now. Increasingly, more wealth is being held by women. They are becoming more highly educated than men, and they are living longer. More are starting their own businesses and

rising to executive positions.

At the same time, however, women continue to be more economically disadvantaged, experience more violence, earn less and be dramatically underrepresented in leadership positions, in business and in government.

This all means that those women who hold the wealth, are educated and are living longer are increasingly becoming interested in helping those less fortunate. They're concentrating much of their efforts on improving the lives of women and girls across the world as a way to improve the lives of everyone.

Pigott, who grew up in the philanthropic Pigott family and who founded and runs the nonprofit Personal Safety Nets, has spent the past few of her 64 years honing a personal philanthropic philosophy, a pyramid-shaped idea that succinctly sums up what many of her sisters think as well.

At the top of the pyramid: "Everyone needs a safe place to sleep every night. That includes everything from being safe from domestic violence and having shelter."

The next layer: "Everyone needs a reason to wake up, which includes everything from education to a faith tradition to health care."

The third layer: "We need a healthy Earth on which to wake up."

The bottom: "If we don't change the policies we currently work with, we will continue to have the same problems."

Pigott, like Bellew and Sik, is a contributor to the Women's Funding Alliance and a member of the Washington Women's Foundation, which pools the \$2,500 annual donation each member contributes in a grant pool the members vote on each year. The foundation, one of the largest and oldest of its types in the country, with more than 500 members, focuses on women's education, leadership and participation in philanthropy, said Executive Director [Carla Lewis](#).

Like Vivian, Lewis notes that women thrive on the camaraderie and community the foundation offers. "The model that we have of collective giving resonates strongly with women, and as more women hear about it, people are attracted to join," she said. "As women work together, they form bonds, network together. Informal and formal mentoring goes on."

Bellew believes so strongly in her philanthropy that she pledged \$1 million as part of the Women Moving Millions campaign, started by two Texas woman who urged others to donate \$1 million to charity.

A human resources consultant, active community member and mother of three, Bellew, 47, became a Microsoft millionaire almost accidentally, applying for a human resources job at the software behemoth after college at the suggestion of a friend, enjoying an 11-year career there.

She said she had to step out of her comfort zone to pledge the \$1 million: \$75,000 a year for 10 years to the Women's Funding Alliance and \$250,000 in her will. "This was a really big deal. This gift 'outed' me in a way, both in terms of the dollar amount and what it said about my priorities," she said. After the "noise went away, I felt energized to be part of this network of women giving boldly to women and girls."

Increased interest in women's philanthropy is not just happening at the foundation and nonprofit level. Financial services firms have recognized it and are offering programs to appeal to this new audience.

USTRust, for example, has found that women give more to charity than men, especially high net worth women, said [Kevin P. Fox](#), senior vice president and private client adviser for US Trust, **Bank of America** Private Wealth Management in Seattle.

"The motivation for philanthropy between men and women differs as well," he said. "Women focus more on empathy and care rather than tax benefits. If more decisions around wealth are being made by women, we should be responsive to that, and we are. We are pursuing more female clients and focusing more on that."

Pigott is one of his clients. He helped with her estate-planning philanthropic efforts.

Sik, a wealth management adviser with **Merrill Lynch** in Bellevue, not only embraces the concept of women in philanthropy with her leadership roles in the Women's Funding Alliance and Washington Women's Foundation, but also recognizes it in her business.

During consultations with couples, she asks the wives if they understand what's going on, and she asks for their opinion on financial decisions, making sure they're part of the process. She also runs monthly workshops for her female clients, many of whom are "suddenly single" and having to make financial decisions for the first time.

A lifelong learner, Sik, 46, said she became involved in the local women's philanthropic organizations to improve her own leadership skills so she can help other nonprofits. And she wants to help facilitate change to make the world better for women.

"I hope when I pass away that I can make an impact. I think women like the idea of collective giving so they can make an impact. They don't have to be the highest donor, but collective giving and working together works for women."

## **Ways to get involved**

Want to know more about women in philanthropy? Check out the following resources:

" [The Case for Womenomics](#)" (U.S. Trust)

" [Women and Philanthropy: The Secret to Social Change](#)" (U.S. Trust)

[Women Moving Millions](#)

[Women's Funding Alliance](#)

[Washington Women's Foundation](#)

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