

The Russell Chowder

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In Other's Words: The Economic Crisis

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With so much at stake right now for our country and the world—a global food shortage, a historical election nearing an end, and a major economic crisis at hand — one thing is clear: people are feeling the pressure.

Non-profits, community activists and foundations among many others are facing a tough economic climate. These difficult times present a new set of challenges as organizations attempt to persevere in their missions. Here, in quotes, are a few words from TRFF stakeholders and friends on how they see the current economic conditions affecting their work:



“The world is in a dynamic situation right now. Our fundraising is not dramatically off but it’s incrementally off. It’s been coming in a little lighter and the impact is cumulative. It seems clearer that we have a recession. I’ve heard expressions of concern from funders which has raised anxiety around here. There is one specific funder, however, who has made a conscious decision *not* to follow the market pattern, recognizing that when times are tough, nonprofits needs are that much greater. They made a decision to hold steady their funding.”

—Dan Cantrell, Futurewise, www.futurewise.org

“We haven’t experienced the direct effects yet, but it’s what the future holds. The question is: how much have foundations lost in their endowments and how much have people lost in their retirement accounts? We all have to keep this in mind as we are fundraising and putting together our strategies on how to raise money; we must think of more creative ways to raise revenue and get done what we need to get done.”

—Laurie Valeriano, Washington Toxics Coalition, www.watoxics.org

“This situation highlights how important natural capital is: the Puget Sound is a natural capital asset and it is here for

the long run, it doesn’t disappear quickly. Washington Mutual Savings and Loan fell from over \$300 billion in January 2008 to \$1.2 billion in October 2008. Natural capital is not easily created or destroyed. Financial assets are inextricably tied to real physical assets. A dollar is really a future claim on physical assets. For example, retirement is an investment in monetary assets with the expectation of redeeming them for physical assets. It is all the more important *now* that we pay attention to our natural assets upon which those future claims will be based. The fact is:

the Puget Sound is one of our most important real, physical, economic assets.”

—Dave Batker, Earth Economics, www.eartheconomics.org

“It’s the best of times and it’s the worst of times. Many of our families are already struggling and now they are at a point where they have nothing. While gas prices are dropping, food prices are still going

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Captain's Log

Richard Woo
CEO

Investing in People Pays Dividends

On September 17th, Washington Women’s Employment & Education (WWEE) hosted its 2008 benefit breakfast to recognize and celebrate the success achieved by WWEE graduates. WWEE is a Tacoma-based nonprofit that helps break the cycle of poverty so people can become self-supporting through education, training and employment. One of the WWEE graduates featured at this year’s breakfast was Jesse Miller, who recently joined the staff at The Russell Family Foundation as a program manager for Jane’s Fund and Jane’s Fellowship Program. The foundation staff was pleased to cheer on Jesse from the audience of several hundred and to hear how WWEE had helped her overcome adversity early in life.

In 1989, Jesse was a struggling 16 year old mother living in Tacoma. In her words: “I was surviving in an environment

that was dealing with serious crime, drugs and gang issues. My life was torn between the streets and trying to create a better life for my child and myself. I knew I wanted something better and as a teen mother I needed to take steps to become self sufficient.”

Fortunately, Jesse’s case manager at the Department of Social & Health Services referred her to WWEE. She describes the experience in this way: “WWEE stepped into my life when I needed some positive direction. Thanks to the people I met there, I was able to look at the positive possibilities for my future.”

With guidance and support from WWEE, Jesse earned her certificate in radio broadcasting from the National Broadcasting School of Seattle. She was also able to stabilize her housing when WWEE assisted her through a program called “Operation Bootstraps,” a rent subsidy project.

According to Jesse, “There have been many ups and downs in my life since I went through the program at the age 16, but WWEE has always been there for me. The self-confidence and inspiration I received from WWEE has helped me through some really tough times. My life now is filled with the things I really am proud of and love: my family, music and a career that lets me give back to the community.”

Jesse’s life today reflects the lasting influence of WWEE. This year is the 10th anniversary of the independent record label she founded through which she has produced seven rap albums. She has also served as the Chair for the Statewide Poverty Action Network working to eliminate the root cause of poverty in Washington State. Combining her passions for music, media and justice, Jesse has produced voter registration concerts, as well as public service announcements on preventing predatory lending practices.

At The Russell Family Foundation we’re pleased to be colleagues with Jesse and are grateful for all that she brings to our work in service to the community. For more information about WWEE see: <http://www.wwee.org/>

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Jane’s Fellowship Program Updates

May: On May 22, the board approved our next class of fellows. To learn more about individual Class 3 Fellows, please see the TRFF website at <http://www.trff.org>.

June: Our alumni from Class 1 and Class 2 welcomed the new group of fellows (and their loved ones) at a dinner that included words of wisdom and Q&A. This opportunity for fellows to meet alumni and introduce loved ones to the program was created because of feedback given to us from the alumni. It was a hit!

July: Class 3 started off the fellowship with a retreat.

August: Fellowship Dialogues started and the group is looking forward to a busy fall focused on digital storytelling. One change the fellows made to the agenda is time for ‘open mic’ to tell about their individual passions and work. This has led to more support and ideas, and opportunities to work together outside the dialogues.

October: Lynne Twist, author of *The Soul of Money* (www.thesoulofmoney.org) came to the office for lunch and a Q&A with our fellows and alumni. All attendees thought Lynne was inspiring, full of wisdom, and a great storyteller. Thanks to Threshold Group for providing this opportunity for the foundation in conjunction with their event.

Class 3 kicked off with a retreat in July at the UW Pack Forest facility near Eatonville. The weekend was full of relationship and team building, telling stories, creating skits, and plenty of great conversation! During one break, fellow Ala Talo had us doing Samoan dancing in the playfield!



TRFF Staff and Class 3 Fellows

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up. It's made us realize we must do more to help to pull together community resources and keep our families encouraged. The economy is unstable but there are things they can do to make *themselves* stable. Our families don't know about healthcare plans or retirement investments... but they do know about gas and food prices. It becomes a good opportunity for us to teach them better and help them realize what they can do differently in their lives."

—Felita Poole, Jane's Fellow, Inspiration For Greatness Foundation, www.ifgfoundation.com

"Internally it's most effective for us to have conversations about acting intentionally verses reacting fearfully. One conversation we've had is with our investment manager. He referenced the movie "It's a Wonderful Life" where George is at the bank giving out money at a time when banks are closing and not lending to customers. George stayed steady and grounded and stayed the course and that's what the foundation community needs to do: staying the long course and not reacting in the moment. As Warren Buffet says—in greedy times be fearful and in fearful times risk more."

—Lenore Hanisch, Quixote Foundation, www.quixotefoundation.org

"Working with families and schools, we've definitely seen an impact. We run a program that provides shoes for children and medical support for families. We've seen a huge increase in requests already for shoes; and not only can families not cover their medicines, they can't afford their co-pay. In the community, there are non-profits closing. We can't imagine the impact that's going to have across the board, we already feel like there's a lack of resources—to be losing these non-profits right now is incomprehensible."

—Kate Frazier, Class 3 Jane's Fellow, Tacoma Public Schools, www.tacoma.k12.wa.us/information/departments/sfcpp/Pages/default.aspx

"Our staff and volunteers are nervous. But one thing we've done is look to our past record of donations. The YMCA has an annual individual donor campaign and history shows that campaign donations increase even in times when the economy is bad. It's something we turn to help ourselves remain confident even though we may feel uncertain. We feel strongly that by sticking to our methods of engaging donors and talking about the outcomes that we're looking for in our programs, we'll be fine."

—Jennifer Parker, YMCA, www.seattleyymca.org

"It goes without saying that we are living through a period of time different than anything any of us have ever experienced. But even more important than our financial capital, is our spirit and our human capital. None of us can avoid feeling the stress and pain we are going through, but we can choose to not let it overwhelm and redefine us as human beings, citizens and philanthropists. What we can do is be role models, we can persist, we can be the kind of people that don't lose hope and remember that history shows there is always a new and better day on the horizon, no matter how far off it may appear. Our wallets are not bottomless, but our courage, our optimism, and our fortitude can be."

—Paul Shoemaker, Social Venture Partners, www.svpseattle.org

Upcoming Deadline Reminder:
Letters of Inquiry for the
Environmental Sustainability Program
are **Due January 5th**.

Please visit www.trff.org
for instructions and information.

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