



BERKS COUNTY  
COMMUNITY  
FOUNDATION

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## NEWS RELEASE

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### POWER OF THE PURSE ANNOUNCES \$55,400 IN GRANTS AT 10TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

**READING, PA (May 12, 2022)** – Celebrating its 10th year of improving the lives of local women and girls, the Power of the Purse in Berks County Fund announced Thursday it recently awarded \$55,400 in grants to eight organizations in Berks County.

Administered by Berks County Community Foundation, this charitable fund has had 89 female members since its inception. The women have donated a total of \$385,983 to 24 organizations over 10 years.

A group of women started the Power of the Purse in Berks County Fund in 2012 to improve the lives of local women and children. The group awarded its first grants in 2013.

The group marked its 10<sup>th</sup> year of giving with a ceremony at The Nature Place, the headquarters of conservation group Berks Nature at 575 St. Bernadine St. in Reading.

“The donations of our members are combined and targeted toward specific programs so that we have a greater local impact than we would if we each gave

individually without a coordinated effort,” said Chiara Sockel Renninger, the group’s founder.

The women who give to the Power of the Purse in Berks County Fund have steadfastly sought to break the cycle of poverty for women and girls, said Franki Aitken, Chief Operating Officer at Berks County Community Foundation.

They do this by giving to programs that eliminate or address barriers for girls and/or women who want to enter or re-enter the workforce or seek the education they need to do so, Aitken said.

“While the impact of the Power of the Purse is measurable in the number of dollars donated and people assisted, the true impact – the extent to which lives were reclaimed, souls nurtured, and hope restored – is immeasurable,” Aitken added.

This past year, the 50 current members of the Power of the Purse reviewed grant applications, met with nonprofits, and voted to determine which programs received grants. For more information on the Power of the Purse, including how to join or contribute, go to [bccf.org/pop](http://bccf.org/pop).

This year’s grant recipients:

- **Safe Berks, \$12,000:** For the “Education, Employment, and Empowerment Program,” which helps eliminate barriers that survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault face in obtaining and/or maintaining employment. Direct costs to be covered for education and employment needs include program or application fees, books and supplies, childcare, transportation, and employment prerequisites such as photo identification, birth certificates, physicals/health-related costs, tools, uniforms, and technology to obtain education goals.
- **Berks Connections/Pretrial Services, \$10,000:** To remove obstacles to employment and education for women who were formerly incarcerated. Direct costs to be covered include bus passes, money for ride-hailing services, work boots, tools, and mobile phone minutes.
- **Opportunity House, \$10,000:** For the “Mom and Me Moving Forward through Education and Employment” program, which will have a social worker begin facilitating a Career Education & Exploration Program for girls who attend Opportunity House’s Learning Center. The program will include field trips and first-hand experiences. The social worker will also

offer a financial counseling program to parents of children who attend the center (primarily single mothers).

- **Reading Science Center, \$7,439:** To expand its offering of female-focused STEM work with specialized programming to reach girls from underserved and underrepresented families.
- **Clare of Assisi House, \$6,561:** For its Workforce Development Program for non-violent women who are transitioning into the community from incarceration. In its application for a grant, Clare of Assisi House included research showing women who were formerly incarcerated have much higher rates of unemployment and are less likely to have a high school education than men in a similar situation.
- **Hannah's Hope Ministries, \$5,400:** To run the Pathway to Progress program that helps mothers who are single and homeless overcome barriers to employment and financial stability by providing assistance with transportation, childcare, and education and training fees.
- **John Paul II Center for Special Learning, \$2,000:** For its Girl Talk 101 club for girls ages 10 to 21 with any disability category. The club will be a safe space where the girls will talk about anything related to their bodies, rights, safety, and self-advocacy with staff and community members who are subject matter experts.
- **Literacy Council of Reading-Berks, \$2,000:** To increase literacy skills among women, who will then be more employable and better able to advocate for their children with schools and other public institutions/systems.

“When we started the Power of the Purse, I was confident there would be interest among other local women in joining,” said Renninger, the group’s founder. “Still, it’s gratifying to see the group is still growing and adding enthusiastic members after 10 years.”



*Students Julianna, left, and Katie, will be part of the Girl Talk 101 club at John Paul II Center for Special Learning. The Power of the Purse in Berks County Fund is providing the club with startup money.*



*From left to right, students Julianna, Bella, Cynthia, and Katie will be part of the Girl Talk 101 club at John Paul II Center for Special Learning. The Power of the Purse in Berks County Fund is providing the club with startup money.*

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Berks County Community Foundation is a nonprofit corporation that serves as a civic leader for our region by developing, managing and distributing charitable funds aimed at improving the quality of life in Berks County. More information is available at [www.bccf.org](http://www.bccf.org).