

## Leadership and Service

### Engagement of Voices with Lived Experience

Community Foundation carries out several grant cycles. We **engage community members** on review teams to read and review the various applications and to make recommendations to our board for funding. Applications only tell **part of the story about the needs in our community**. Our review teams get a more thorough idea of needs and the services carried out to meet those needs when our teams are **diverse and inclusive** of people who have utilized local services themselves or live alongside those who do.

Being on a review team is a lot of work. It involves many hours of reading and learning in depth about organizations and their programs and **assessing their effectiveness** in meeting needs in our community. Team members assess to what extent a program is serving a community concern, is the program able to meet its desirable outcomes, is the budget reasonable and is there meaningful collaboration going on?

Several years ago, Janet Cotraccia, Program Officer, Community Foundation, and Margo Hittleman, Co-founder and Coordinator, Natural Leaders Initiative (NLI), started talking about how to engage graduates of the [Natural Leaders Initiative](#) on our review teams. Natural Leaders Initiative (NLI) provides a program and a platform for **“everyday leaders” and emerging leaders**.



NLI Graduation photo (provided)

What has resulted has been a wonderful opportunity for **relationship building, new connections, inspiration, insight and lasting impact**. Community Foundation has engaged over 10 graduates of the Natural Leaders Initiative on grant review teams.

**Jessica Custer-Bindel and Eddie Moran** participated on our Spring Grant Cycle supporting youth programming among other things. Jessica’s teaching experience and her role as a mother of a young child helped her **inform the team about the value of the Downtown Ithaca Children’s Center**. This resulted in funding which supported needed renovations for their playground. Eddie shared the importance of Catholic Charities role in helping **young men and women overcome barriers** as they navigate college and strive for self-sufficiency.

**Katie Cox and Larisa Camacho-Lillie** have been on multiple review teams for our Women’s Fund Grant Cycle. Their **role on the review team was invaluable** and resulted in grants supporting:

Young women-built mobile Farmer’s Market Stand by the Youth Farm Project

Computer access for the women living at Tompkins Community Action’s Magnolia House

Critical Safety Needs (like changes in locks on doors or windows) for women who have experienced domestic violence at the Advocacy Center

Bus passes for young moms to take their babies to doctor’s appointments at the Child Development Council

**Fabina Colon**, who we all know as a **dynamic leader** of the Multicultural Resource Center, has played a leadership role on many of our review teams. She has chaired our spring grant cycle review team, been a member of and recent chair of our Community Impact Committee and has been a board member of the Community Foundation for the past three years. In these roles, Fabina has:

**encouraged the diversity of our board** and other leadership roles

**educated her colleagues** about systemic racism and the need for systemic change

**championed a self-assessment process** for our board to learn about and evaluate our culture of diversity and inclusion, which was included in our most recent strategic plan



*NLI's 10th Anniversary Celebration*

## Summary

These NLI graduates, among many others, have made **invaluable contributions** to our work at Community Foundation and its impact on the organizations for which we **provide informational, relational and financial support**.

Community Foundation encourages each community member to raise their voice - engaging with Community Foundation and other local organizations.

**Recognize the valuable experience** NLI graduates bring

**Take on leadership roles**, to recognize that as you **search for your own voice** around the table, you also allow others to dare to find their own voice

**Take risks in saying** what others don't know how to say, to create invitations and safe places for people to have **hard conversations**, to **raise the social capital** of our community

**Strive for equity and equality;** and to improve the quality of life for all in Tompkins County

We look forward to continuing to work with NLI graduates and others, who raise their own community voices.

Learn more about Community Foundation at [www.cftompkins.org](http://www.cftompkins.org)