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# Efforts aim to demystify the term 'philanthropist'

Foundations focus on involving the next generation

Kansas City Business Journal - by [Chris Grenz](#) Staff Writer

A couple of years ago, Dan Fromm reached a point in his life where he had a little time and money to give back to his community.

But Fromm, the 36-year-old president of events and sponsorships at Kansas City-based ad agency **Barkley**, said he felt like he didn't have a whole lot of either. Certainly not enough to make what he considered a significant impact.

So together with childhood chums David Dickey and Greg Wolf, Fromm developed a charitable fund through the **Greater Kansas City Community Foundation**. The fund, called **Impact KC**, has emerged as a vehicle for emerging philanthropists to pool their resources to make an immediate and significant impact in the community.

"People like the Helzbergs and the Blochs are making a big difference and have invested a lot," Fromm said of signature Kansas City families that are longtime philanthropists. "But where is the next generation of philanthropic leaders going to come from? This is an opportunity for us to say, 'Hey, let's make sure that we're getting people engaged early on.'"

Finding, motivating and engaging the next generation of givers is a constant challenge, said Laura McKnight, CEO of the Greater Kansas City Community Foundation.

"It's very hard to find entry points," McKnight said. "It sounds very time-consuming. It's kind of hard to know where to start. We try to give people avenues to get involved that are not time-consuming or expensive."

One way McKnight said the community foundation is working to get more people involved is by expanding its base. The foundation is looking to enhance its regional affiliate operations in the Northland, Eastern Jackson County, Johnson County and Wyandotte County because people often want to give where they live, McKnight said. The foundation also is working to increase its outreach to potential donors and activists in minority communities, particularly among African-Americans and Hispanics.

"For too long, (philanthropy) has been associated with just sort of the core Kansas City, old Kansas City," she said. "We want those same opportunities to extend to a much broader base of philanthropists going forward. I think it's important for Kansas City to have the enthusiasm of not just a few, but of many."

McKnight said the single biggest barrier to getting new people involved in philanthropy is moving them past the idea that they have to have mountains of cash to make a meaningful impact. No one expects an emerging philanthropist to give millions, she said. Donors can start at any level.

"It's hard to see your place in making a difference when you equate making a difference with dollars," she said.

Even the terminology can be a hurdle for someone who hasn't been highly involved, said Whitney Gee, director of community investment for the community foundation.



Dave Kaup | KCBJ

Dan Fromm (left), president of events and sponsorships at Kansas City-based ad agency Barkley, and Greg Wolf, a lawyer and childhood friend, satisfy their desire to give through Impact KC, which they formed with another friend.

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"'Philanthropist' is an intimidating term," she said. "You have the stereotype that it's little old ladies with big purses. The community foundation wants everyone to be involved in philanthropy."

Gee is one of two people at the community foundation spearheading efforts to get younger people involved. Gee said the effort began informally last year with attempts simply to generate excitement among young people about philanthropic causes. Now, the foundation is working more actively to increase participation.

For example, Gee expects to increase marketing efforts to minority communities, perhaps launching "giving circles" similar to Impact KC that are directed toward blacks and Hispanics. In another program, the foundation, working with the Greater Kansas City Council on Philanthropy, has developed a training initiative to help young adults identify boards of directors on which they might want to serve -- and what to do once they join.

"Studies show that if you're not involved by age 30, you're not going to be involved," Gee said. "So it's really important to be involved early on."

One trend growing in popularity is the fund-raising birthday party, Gee said. Instead of bringing presents, guests make a contribution to a cause chosen by the person celebrating a birthday.

Patrick Hosty of Prairie Village planned such a party for his 30th birthday in October to benefit The Arts Incubator of Kansas City.

Hosty invited 200 people and hoped to raise a couple of thousand dollars for the nonprofit charity that supports emerging artists with studio space, equipment and business skills training. Hosty said he got the idea after attending a similar birthday party for a friend whose 30th birthday was a benefit for **The John Wornall House Museum**.

"I thought it was such a cool idea," Hosty said. "It's not only a good way to celebrate a special day in your life but also to give back to an organization you care about. And it makes you feel good."

Fromm's Impact KC is a more advanced step for emerging philanthropists. It has a steering committee and a board of directors that target its grants. Every member of the group commits a \$1,000 tax-deductible donation. The first year, the fund had 44 members and made two grants of \$22,000 each. Last year, the fund grew to 65 members, and it made three grants, each worth about \$20,000. The short-term goal is to increase membership to 100 and to make \$100,000 in grants soon.

The organization also has begun hosting recruiting events and having informative sessions to educate members about various area charities. Longtime Kansas City philanthropist Barnett Helzberg Jr., former owner and president of **Helzberg Diamonds** in Kansas City, spoke to members recently, too.

"We want to make an impact now, and that seems to be working," Fromm said of Impact KC. "But the other goal is to get people engaged and hopefully to make a long-term commitment that, quite honestly, I don't know that we'll be able to measure. But if the community is healthy, that's great, and maybe we played a role in that."

### **Cutting-edge donations**

Officials with the Greater Kansas City Community Foundation say its online service called DonorEdge is one of the fastest and easiest ways to break into philanthropy. The online tool provides basic information about a wealth of charities and causes in the metro area. The site also rates charities on a range of operational and financial benchmarks. It even provides a simple way for donors to easily and immediately contribute via credit card. Donations of any size are welcomed. Check it out **online**.

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