Welcome to the April 2014 edition of our newsletter. This issue shines a light on work we are doing to affect the lives of women locally and nationally.

In my role as the executive director, I have the privilege of collaborating with women who understand we are stronger together than apart and that it is truly our responsibility as women to be our sister's keeper. One such woman is Christine Wagner. Christine contacted me last year to ask if the Research Center could assist with her natural mentoring program pilot. Christine’s passion was electric as she shared how important it is for women to help girls walk in their power. We are proud to play a small part in helping Christine and her team change the lives of women and girls across the country.

Christine Hill and I met in January of this year. Christine is the executive director of Future Milwaukee, a leadership program that motivates and empowers diverse, ethical leaders to create positive changes in greater Milwaukee through effective civic engagement. Christine invited me, a Future Milwaukee alum, to share part of my professional journey with the intention to encourage students to identify and pursue their own passion and purpose. Christine's dedication to mentoring and guiding the participants of the program to be leaders in this community is inspiring.

It was in the fall of 2012 when Professor Linda Olszewski shared with me information about a critical thinking model she developed. She was using her business courses to assist women to develop "hard skills." She shared feedback from students who expressed the transformative impact of applying the model in both the classroom and workplace. I was so moved by her innovative teaching model, sparked by a passion for wanting women to succeed in education and business, that I asked her to consider sharing her findings with our audience. She agreed in hopes of advancing women everywhere.

I am proud of the relationships with these three remarkable women who have agreed to share a few words about their work and their connection to the Research Center with you. They are each playing an active role in advocating and uplifting women and in doing so are advancing our common well-being.

Thank you for sharing in our successes,

Rhonda M. Ware, Executive Director
Research Center for Women and Girls
Teenage girls and young women can flourish through positive, sustained and meaningful relationships with adults beyond their own family. Christine Wagner, founder of Power2Thrive, located in New Mexico, designed a program focused on natural mentoring. Through workshops, assessments and activities, training is provided to increase women's self-awareness and reveal their capacity as mentors who can cultivate a sustainable, mutually satisfying relationship with a girl in their life.

In developing the program, Wagner understood the importance of creating a pilot program that would measure and establish effectiveness. In spring 2013, she contacted the Research Center and met with Rhonda Ware and Nancy Athanasiou, dean of the School of Education and Research Center curriculum advisor. “I was already aware of Alverno’s work. I knew they could provide input, as well as structure the work to assess outcomes,” says Wagner. Both sides were impressed with the impact each could have on women and girls and the project was quickly underway.

Wagner’s program consists of six workshops: three for mentors and three for mentors and girls. Athanasiou developed assessments for each of the workshops, including pre- and post-workshop evaluations for each group. The first pilot program took place in Wheaton, Ill., and Wagner is using the data to assess the overall program.

To further support the natural mentoring program, Ware facilitated a discussion between Wagner and the PEARLS for Teen Girls, Inc. in Milwaukee. As a result, this June PEARLS staff will participate in the second natural mentoring program. “Right from our first meeting I knew this was going to be a strong relationship. The Research Center team was so receptive to the idea of natural mentoring,” says Wagner.

Wagner encourages other organizations to seek out the Research Center for assistance in development and assessment of programs. “Throughout this project, there has been a constant validation of the work. It is reaffirming to be heard and respected,” says Wagner. Just like natural mentoring.

When Christine Hill, executive director of the Future Milwaukee Community Leadership Program at Marquette University, sat down to talk with Rhonda Ware, program alum and executive director of the Research Center for the first time, there was an immediate connection. Recognizing that Ware’s insight and wisdom aligned with Future Milwaukee’s philosophy, Hill wanted to bring that insight to the program’s students.

Future Milwaukee is a community leadership program with more than 1,500 graduates. Participants have been making an impact on the Greater Milwaukee area for more than 35 years through their leadership positions in government, business, education, religious and nonprofit institutions.

Hill invited Ware to share her personal journey with the Future Milwaukee class during a session focused on creating a personal vision. Ultimately, what happened at the session went far beyond merely a speaker in front of an audience. Ware spoke to the group about her personal decisions, her philosophy on how to create the life you want, and the path she chose that eventually led her to the Research Center. “By so articulately and passionately talking about her own journey, Rhonda gave the students the inspiration and motivation to recognize theirs,” says Hill. “Her personal stories transformed members of the audience, offering them a roadmap to create their own rich and purposeful lives.”

Students reported that after hearing Ware’s story, they understood how they could identify their dream job and define the possibilities and paths to achieve that goal. After the evening ended, more than five Future Milwaukee students approached Ware. Would she be willing to coach them? Ware readily agreed.

“The gift Rhonda gives by coaching these women and providing her expertise is immeasurable,” says Hill. “They are so fortunate to have someone like her in their lives, to influence, guide and inspire them.”
Linda Olszewski ’98, ’08, combines her professional years of experience in a quantitative technological IT career with the practice and research as an educator in the School of Business.

Through her research and data collection, Olszewski noticed a recurring behavior of students trying to solve a problem without having understood fully what they learned first. Many women approached learning with strong emotions of apprehension, fear and self-doubt, and lacked confidence in their “hard skills.”

The student’s measure of success was focused on getting the “right” answer. Yet, when Olszewski asked students to explain their learning process and communicate the meaning of their answer, she often found they could not. This behavior ignited a passion in her to change the learning process. She set a goal to develop a depth of knowledge within the learner that is translatable, transferable and ultimately valuable.

The basis of Olszewski’s new critical thinking model has three significant stages:
Knowledge (“WHAT”)  
Application (“HOW”)  
Evaluation (“WHY”)

The first level of knowledge focuses on the learner developing her foundation of knowledge through a process of what Olszewski calls creating her “own language of learning.” The second level of application is where the learner draws from her knowledge foundation and puts it into action. After achieving the first two levels, Olszewski believes only then can the learner fully realize her potential in the last level of evaluation. The depth of the learner is seen through the value she can create with her thoughts and ideas.

“A student must learn first, must understand first, and must be able to communicate first before she can do or before she can apply her knowledge,” says Olszewski. “Rooted in the foundation of her knowledge and demonstrated in her application, only then can she achieve the true value of knowing.”

Olszewski’s model is flexible and speaks to many audiences. “I see the opportunity to transform learning across all ages of women,” says Olszewski. “When you understand the problem and are equipped with a depth of knowledge you can communicate and access, it’s an empowering and inspiring process.” Olszewski wants to help change and improve the way girls and women learn so they are competent, confident, and powerful in their hard skills. Her next step is to work with the Research Center to take the model outside the classroom and help local women-focused organizations.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Eat, Learn, Give
Rhonda Ware will facilitate a Q&A session built upon the keynote address, “Butler vs. Bullying: Making Friends not Enemies,” from LeRoy Butler.

Wednesday, May 21
5:30 p.m. to 8 p.m. at the Italian Conference Center

Visit www.alverno.edu/research/howtогive/ to donate

How to Donate
The Alverno College Research Center for Women and Girls relies on generous donors to support our research, curriculum development, community organization evaluation and outreach initiatives.

All support helps achieve our goals to raise awareness about issues that impact the lives of women and girls and identify strategies to address these issues. By making a gift to the Research Center, you join a community of individuals across the nation committed to creating a better world for us all.