

## **Ann Fisher commentary: Women's Fund reaches out to young Commentary**

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By [Ann Fisher](#)

The first thing you notice about Kelsie Geyer is her handshake. Not only is it full and firm, but she leans in to grasp your hand with her other hand as well, sort of cradling the moment.

If she doesn't understand a question, or does but doesn't have adequate knowledge to answer it, she tells you.

That's an 18-year-old with poise. But she's more than just another savvy honor student. Throughout high school, Geyer has worked with the Women's Fund of Central Ohio, helping to decide who gets grants for programs that promise social change for women and girls in the region.

This is a rare role for one so young.

The fund first worked with teenage girls in 2002, when they were included in a project to promote philanthropy and community service among young women.

It made sense to include teenagers then, and ever since, the group has made them part of the fund's very core by routinely including girls as young as 14 in the grant program.

Since 2002, the fundraising group has handed out 72 grants totaling more than \$630,000.

It's easy to generalize about teenagers: They think they'll live forever and take risks, and they think they know it all.

Eventually, they'll get old and, like many of us, become more averse to change and risk. Some will try to fit in by quashing the very spirit that sets them apart.

The fund's organizers recognized the value of these fleeting traits.

A choir teacher recruited Geyer, who has grown up with the fund, giving up time and taking away knowledge about how women of varied means and ethnicities sometimes struggle in central Ohio.

"When I joined, I think I was the youngest member to participate with the Women's Fund," she said. "That was definitely unexpected."

She still helps with grants but also recruits other young women and serves on the ticket-sales committee for the fund's annual celebration of women and girls, a sold-out event Thursday evening at the Capitol Theatre in the Vern Riffe Center.

This year's theme -- that the lessons girls learn today shape the women they become tomorrow -- underscores the long-term commitment to girls such as Kelsie. The scheduled speakers are the two female authors of *The Daring Book for Girls*, a compendium of lessons for today's girls, including such varied topics as the definition of an atom and the history of women spies.

A senior at Westerville North High School, Geyer plans to enter Ohio University in the fall. Distance probably will limit her role with the fund.

But nothing will eclipse the experience. Her work there has reinforced her desire to pursue a college degree in social anthropology. It has broadened her view and clarified the many ways women fit in our society.

"It's not like we're done," Geyer said of the women's movement that began long before she was born. "There's still a lot of imbalance between the two genders, and we still need groups like this to fill in the gaps."

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