



Community Foundation
of Eastern Connecticut

*The Status of Women and Girls
in Eastern Connecticut*



a catalyst
for action

DEFINING EASTERN CONNECTICUT ►

In this report, Eastern Connecticut is defined as the area served by the Community Foundation of Eastern Connecticut, which covers:

42 towns = 453,000 people

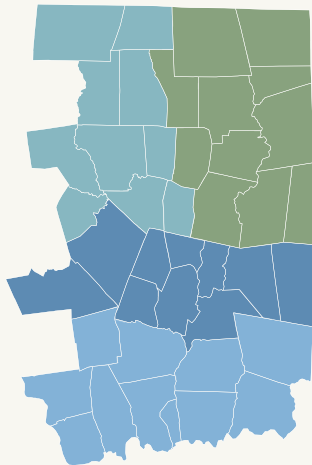
Within this population: **227,000 are women**

80% White | 9% Latina | 4% Black | 4% Asian

33,700+ residents (7%) are foreign born

The senior (65+) population is expected to grow **44% by 2025**

THE COMMUNITY FOUNDATION OF EASTERN CONNECTICUT'S FOUR WOMEN & GIRLS FUNDS pursue a common goal—to empower women and girls and remove obstacles that prevent them from achieving positive and productive lives for themselves and their families.



- 1 Windham Area
Women & Girls Fund
- 2 Northeast Area
Women & Girls Fund
- 3 Norwich Area
Women & Girls Fund
- 4 Southeast Area
Women & Girls Fund



Maryam Elahi
*President & Chief
Executive Officer*

In 2017, the Community Foundation of Eastern Connecticut commissioned DataHaven to develop a report on the Status of Women and Girls in Eastern Connecticut. The full report (available at cfect.org/WGreport) is rich with data and context that speak to both the challenges and opportunities of advancing gender equality across our region.

The purpose of this summary report is to help inform and guide thoughtful conversations and inspire local ideas for social and policy advancements and investments.

To help facilitate meaningful conversations, we have included questions and prompts in each section. We encourage you to reflect on the public policies, social norms, and community investments that could help advance each insight category explored.

Truly, women's equality is not just a women's issue. It affects the wellbeing and prosperity of every family and community.

Individually and collectively, there are attitudes we can shift, actions we can take, and investments we can make to raise up our women and girls so that we can reach our full capacity and advance thriving communities in Eastern Connecticut.

Thank you for being part of this important conversation and effort.

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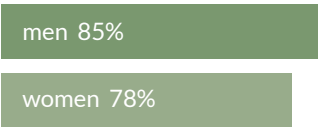
Advancing
and Investing
in Women
and Girls

How can you more equitably support women and girls in Eastern Connecticut and advocate for equality through your attitudes, actions, and investments?

Financial security is one’s ability to provide today, build assets for the future, and cope with the unexpected. What are the current economic conditions in Eastern Connecticut and how do they particularly affect women?

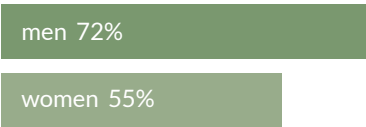
1 Workforce participation and compensation are critical to establishing and maintaining financial security. In Eastern Connecticut:

PARTICIPATION IN THE WORKFORCE

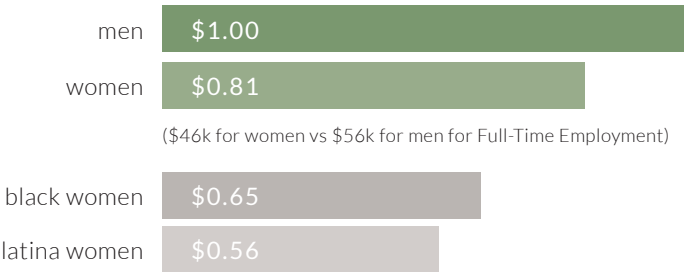


(ages 20-64)

FULL-TIME EMPLOYMENT



COMPENSATION PARITY



17% of women were under-employed in 2015, meaning they were either unemployed and looking for work or working part-time but preferring full-time work.

2 Struggling households are disproportionately comprised of single mothers with children, women of color, and elderly women. One in ten households (10%) in Eastern Connecticut is under the poverty line. That’s 9% of the male population and 11% of the female population—including 18% of women ages 18-34 and 6,200 girls.

90% of single-parent households are headed by a mother.

25% of all children in Eastern Connecticut live with a single mother.

ADDITIONALLY, MANY WOMEN IN THE REGION ARE “ALICE”—Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed. Coined by the United Way, ALICE describes working households that are above the federal poverty line, but are unable to cover basic living expenses.

In addition to the households below the poverty line, another 25% percent are ALICE.

In 7 Eastern Connecticut towns, more than **40%** of households are ALICE or in poverty.
(Killingly, Mansfield, New London, Norwich, Putnam, Stafford, and Windham/Willimantic)

ALICE SURVIVAL BUDGET

Single adult
\$22,143
1 adult + 1 child
\$37,720
2 adults + 2 children
\$54,636



Housing and Child Care are the two largest expenses in our region.

15% of households spend more than 50% of their incomes on housing costs.

At about **\$15K/year**, CT is the 6th most expensive state in the country for infant care.

WINDHAM AREA INTERFAITH MINISTRY*A lifeline for struggling households*

According to United Way's ALICE report, a whopping 89% of single female-headed households in Windham County live on the edge—just a sick child, a minor car repair, or a lay-off away from disaster.

Windham Area Interfaith Ministry, known as WAIM, offers a safety net that many of these families don't otherwise have. Since it was founded over 30 years ago, WAIM has been helping thousands of struggling families with emergency financial assistance, as well as, gently used goods like clothing, furniture and appliances. Grants from the Windham Area Women & Girls Fund in 2016 and 2017 are helping dozens of families cover one-time, critical bills like rent, heat or electricity that, left unpaid,

could start a domino effect of negative consequences, from eviction to job loss to custody of one's children.

Kim, a recovering addict, is pregnant with her second child. She's been working to take care of herself and her family with a job at a local restaurant and a move into a decent apartment closer to her mother, who will help after the baby arrives. The hourly job won't pay Kim during her month-long maternity leave, so she came to WAIM for help covering her rent for a month.

WAIM serves lots of people like Kim and her family. Executive Director Victoria Nimirowski explains that, "Challenges that are minor to some of us can be life-altering for many struggling moms. They're constantly forced to make choices between rent and food, or car insurance and heat. They have no resources for a backup plan. WAIM is here to help reduce the instances of them having to make these hard choices. We do what we can to be the safety net for those who need it most."

► Visit waimct.org for more information about this organization.

BIG QUESTIONS

- 1 How can we help more women overcome economic barriers and achieve financial security?
- 2 How can we achieve equal representation and pay equity in the workforce?
- 3 A rapidly aging population will be affected by these economic conditions. What supports or protections will they need?

SOCIAL NORMS TO EXPLORE

- What does the dramatic wage disparity imply about the values we assign to types of occupations?
- How do current employment and family leave policies reinforce or challenge traditional gender roles? What are the implications for women in the workforce and their families?
- How do we take advantage of the vast experience that our aging population brings to the table?

POLICY IMPLICATIONS TO DISCUSS

- Affordable childcare
- Universal preschool
- Paid family leave
- Affordable housing
- Accessible transportation

Education and career development are key to converting one's potential into financial security. How can we enable more students and working-age women to construct their pathway to success and gain solid economic ground?

- 1 **Racial disparities in educational attainment** are stark, despite women outperforming their male counterparts overall in high school and college. In Eastern Connecticut:



90% of girls in the region's class of 2016 graduated high school within four years, yet **nearly 20% of women in New London and Windham/Willimantic** lack a high school diploma.

Women over age 25 without a high school diploma

6% White

20% Black

24% Latina

Nationally, only 38% of all mothers under 18 receive their high school diploma.

White: 33%

Black & Latina: 16%

Black and Latina women earn a bachelor's or higher degree at roughly half the rate of White women.

- 2 **Community colleges** are an accessible gateway to further higher education or a career with a livable wage. At Eastern Connecticut's two community colleges, Three Rivers and Quinebaug Valley, most students enrolled are women.



▲ Three Rivers Community College graduate Karen Sanquedolce, center, said she was proud to graduate with her daughter, Miranda Cirrito, left, and niece Heather Barber, all of Bozrah.

- 3 **Degrees** in science, technology, engineering and math are likely to lead to stable, well-paying jobs. While girls and boys achieve relatively similar test scores in math on state assessments throughout high school, a persistent gap exists for women with degrees in STEM fields. In Eastern Connecticut:

Overall, 51% of men vs. 30% of women majored in science and engineering fields.

The good news: Of 25-39 year-old women with degrees, 37% majored in the sciences. This is higher than previous generations.

Computer, engineering and science jobs are only **22% women-occupied.**

COLLABORATING TO BUILD PATHWAYS TO SUCCESS

Improving family economic security, one woman at a time



A 2017 grant from the Northeast Area Women & Girls Fund is seeding a new collaboration between Interfaith Human Services of Putnam and Quinebaug Valley Community College to empower women to become self-sufficient.

IHSP runs a food pantry, a diaper bank, and a clothing closet, offerings that were initiated as emergency supports but have become supplemental services. Long-time volunteer and board president Karen Osbrey says, “That scares us because it’s simply not sustainable. IHSP is here to help people in crisis situations, but we know that helping them increase their earning capacity will improve their families’ economic security over the long term. Education and job opportunity make all the difference.”

Through Osbrey, who is also on the board of the Quinebaug Valley Community College Foundation, a partnership was

born: Pathways to Success will help women enroll in and complete short-term certificate programs at QVCC, such as Certified Nurse Assistant, phlebotomy or advanced manufacturing machine technology, that lead to jobs that offer good wages. The partnership will target women who don’t qualify—often by just a few dollars—for the state’s Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Employment & Training program. With the Women & Girls Fund grant, IHSP will work with the QVCC Foundation to pay tuition. IHSP will also cover other costs like gas, uniforms or even child care that can be major hurdles to women with limited resources.

In addition, IHSP volunteers will be “Partners for Success” to each participant through tutoring, mentoring, or whatever individual support is needed. “A small amount of money and time invested on our part can get these women through the program and make a real difference in their lives and their families’ wellbeing,” says Osbrey. “We at IHSP believe in supporting people to empower themselves. Through this grant, we’ll do it one woman at a time.”

► Visit ihspputnam.org for more information about this organization.

BIG QUESTIONS

- 1 How can we engage young women to better understand the unique challenges and needs they have in persisting through higher education?
- 2 How can we help more girls and women, especially those of color, attain the education they need to succeed in the workforce?
- 3 How can community members, organizations and businesses contribute to the educational and skill attainment of girls and working-age women?

SOCIAL NORMS TO EXPLORE

- What career attributes and cultural attitudes shape the perception that certain career paths are better suited for women or men?
- How can we help eliminate gender-biased perceptions of career paths in school and in the professional field?

POLICY IMPLICATIONS TO DISCUSS

- Tuition at community colleges
- Incentives for business-hosted training programs
- Two-generation approaches to education and economic security

While personal choices certainly influence wellness, so do many factors outside of one's control, including genetic, environmental, and socio-economic factors. How can policies and access to resources positively affect the wellbeing of women?

1 Health + access to health services

- Women in our region have a life expectancy of about **82 years**, slightly above the national average but below the state average.
- Women are more likely than men to report not getting the health care they needed in the past year. They attribute this to cost, lack of time, caregiving responsibilities, and limited access to transportation.

2 Reproductive health

- Women report higher rates of adequate prenatal care than in the state as a whole.
- Overall, teen birth rates are at an all-time low throughout the state and region. However, **six towns in the region have significantly higher teen birth rates:** Groton, Killingly, New London, Norwich, Putnam, and Windham.

3 Mental health

- **35%** of female students reported feeling hopeless or depressed vs. 19% of male students.
- **Women are 3x more likely to attempt suicide than men.**

4 Domestic violence

- In 2015, municipal and state police made arrests in 3,685 family violence incidents, including 806 assaults and 3 homicides. **7 in 10 victims were female.**
- **Almost 5,000 women** in Windham and New London counties received services from domestic violence shelters.
- All three of the region's domestic violence shelters operate near or at full capacity.

BIG QUESTIONS

- 1 What can we do to support women's health equity so that they can have a fair opportunity to reach their most positive health outcomes?
- 2 How can we better support the mental health of our women and girls?
- 3 How can we lower teen birth rates in Eastern Connecticut's most affected communities?
- 4 How can we better support organizations that help women and their children escape from abusive relationships and rebuild their lives?

SOCIAL NORMS TO EXPLORE

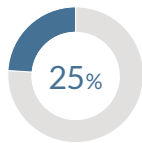
- How can we convert the nationwide focus on sexual harassment and abuse into new, more positive social norms?
- How do we want the media to portray women?
- How can men and boys help shift attitudes towards women?
- How can we help empower adolescent girls to develop stronger self-esteem and resilience, and healthier relationships?

POLICY IMPLICATIONS TO DISCUSS

- Access to health and mental health care
- Access to birth control and reproductive health services
- Sex and healthy relationships education
- Protections and preventative strategies for victims of domestic violence

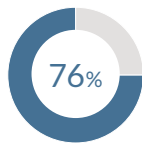
A just society can only be achieved through equal and egalitarian representation. How can we cultivate more women leaders and achieve parity in corporate, nonprofit, and civic leadership positions?

Leadership disparities persist nationally and regionally, as women are under-represented from the C-suite to the legislature. In our region:



BUSINESS

Only 25% of businesses are women-owned, including 1,394 firms with employees, with 10,269 jobs and \$259,914,000 or 10% of the combined payroll

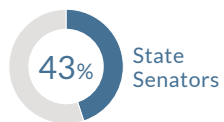


PUBLIC K-12 EDUCATION

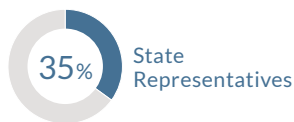
Women comprise 76% of educators, but only 11 of 41 superintendents

GOVERNMENT

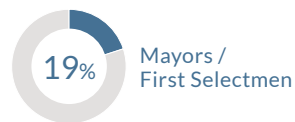
Women-held seats in Eastern Connecticut:



State
Senators



State
Representatives



Mayors /
First Selectmen

A recent study found that women in Congress are “more results-oriented, more likely to emphasize achievement over ego, and more concerned with achieving policy outcomes rather than receiving publicity or credit.” Despite this, they are vastly underrepresented in national politics, holding only 19% of the seats in Congress.

STEPS

Empowering girls to discover their voices and the leader within

There are no maps or blueprints for helping a young person build a better life. But a program called STEPS, Inc. —Striving Toward Empowered Personal Success—is guiding many teenage girls onto the path to serving as leaders in their communities. STEPS offers a powerful combination of mentoring, leadership training and other workshops to more than 100 girls in grades 7 to 12 in New London and Groton.

Program Director Erin McDonald helps girls overcome their individual and collective challenges. She listens to the girls, encourages them to use their voice, and teaches them to communicate effectively and apply their leadership skills to overcome the many challenges they face. She witnesses the positive impact the program has on the young ladies and loves to see when they turn around and become mentors themselves.

Take the example of Sheneva, a five-year participant in STEPS who has built her confidence with the help of STEPS mentors. “STEPS has helped me conquer my fears and learn not to be held back by social norms and standards. I recently became a lead facilitator in a New London High School mentoring program, where I became a positive influence on middle school girls. Taking on this leadership role would not have been



possible if it weren't for STEPS and the inspirational mentors that pushed me to always be the best I could be.”

Beatrice Jennette, president of STEPS, has seen living proof of its positive impact in the ten years since she founded the organization as a grassroots effort in her own living room. Many girls who have been through the program—now young women enrolled in college—often return to visit their former mentors or participate in a program.

“It's so rewarding to hear them say, ‘If it hadn't been for STEPS, I might have taken a very different path in life,’” she says. “We are so thankful to the Community Foundation for believing in the work we are doing and for being our partner as well.”

► Visit stepsct.org for more information about this organization.

These women lead so that others can flourish.



Dr. Elsa M. Núñez

A native of Puerto Rico, Dr. Elsa M. Núñez was named president of Eastern Connecticut State University in 2006. Her commitment to access and inclusion has resulted in Eastern having the highest percentage of minority faculty among all Connecticut colleges and universities, and in being a welcoming campus for all, particularly under-represented and undocumented students.

Dr. Núñez asserts that “Gender equity is a battle not yet won, therefore society as a whole benefits from having women impact public policy and social progress. Women serve as important role models not only for girls and young women, but also for young males whose attitudes and behaviors can be informed by seeing how women manage in positions of power and influence.”



Lisa Tepper Bates

From international relations to homelessness in Connecticut, Lisa Tepper Bates' career has focused on empowering families. She served as a diplomat, working to combat human trafficking, train women leaders to fight corruption, and develop the Dayton Peace Agreement. She became executive director of Mystic Area Shelter & Hospitality in 2009 and developed the now-statewide Coordinated Access Network that assists families in housing crises. Lisa now leads the Connecticut

Coalition to End Homelessness and is on the team that earned federal recognition of Connecticut as one of only two states to have ended veteran homelessness.

She believes that “Women’s leadership matters because we lead with our hearts as well as our minds, and we put our shoulder to the wheel to collaborate and achieve results. This is the type of leadership needed in these challenging times.”

To advance thriving communities in Eastern Connecticut, we must inspire and empower more women and girls to lead.

BIG QUESTIONS

- 1 How can we help more women access the funding and mentorship required to start and grow new businesses and enter politics?
- 2 What policies, practices and skills might encourage more women to pursue leadership tracks in the education, nonprofit, government and business sectors?

SOCIAL NORMS TO EXPLORE

- How can we help people identify and change the aspects of workplace cultures that deter women from pursuing a leadership track?
- What are the roles that male and female allies and mentors can play?

POLICY IMPLICATIONS TO DISCUSS

- Enforcement of equal opportunity hiring and pay laws
- Family leave and benefits
- Workplace performance evaluation and promotion

The range of factors explored in this report influence the overall wellbeing and success of Eastern Connecticut's women and girls. Our commitment to advocate for and equitably invest in these factors will determine, in part, how we continue to move towards equality.

Upon examining the full report's findings, members of the Community Foundation's Women & Girls Funds identified several ways in which they will strive to support the progress of our region's social norms, public policies, and investments in women and girls.

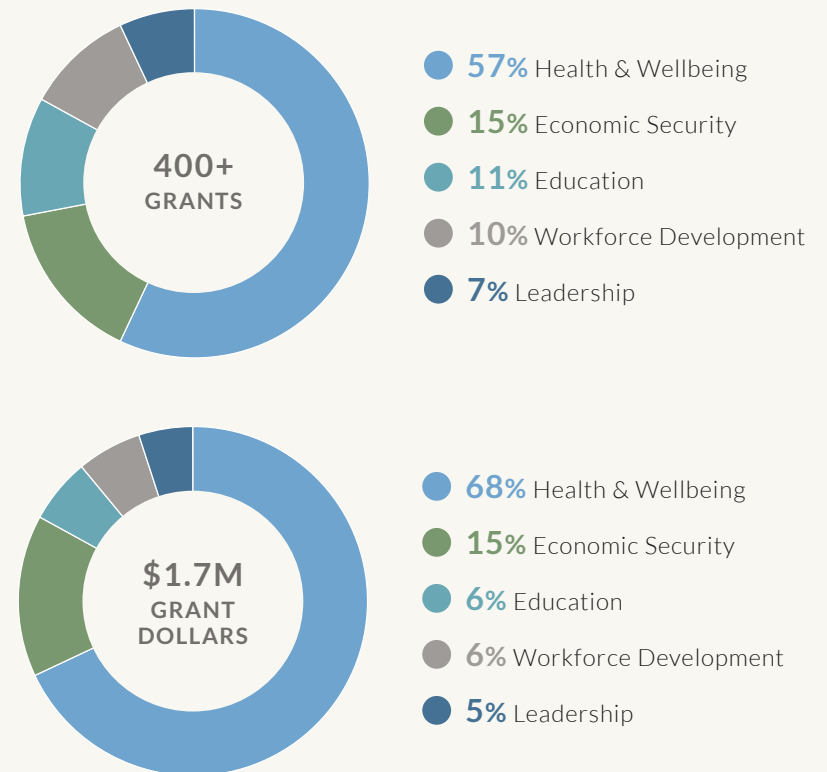
WE WILL INCREASE OUR RESOURCES AND GRANTMAKING IN SUPPORT OF:

- Scholarships for college and job training programs
- Mentorship programs and leadership training for women and girls
- Education around healthy relationships and attitudes towards women and girls
- Pregnancy prevention programs for teenage girls
- Women's shelters and other domestic violence programs

WE WILL ALSO INCREASE OUR SUPPORT FOR POLICY ADVOCACY THAT EXPANDS:

- Enforcement of equal opportunity hiring and pay laws
- Health, mental health, and reproductive health services
- Paid family leave
- Affordable early childhood care and education
- Affordable housing and public transportation
- Funding for eldercare
- Protections for victims of domestic violence

Together, our four Women & Girls Funds have invested more than \$1.7 million in these areas to advance the wellbeing and success of women and girls in Eastern Connecticut:



There is strength in numbers and in collective action.

Let's continue our work together by creating a community-wide agenda that advances equity and fairness for all.

THE STATUS OF WOMEN AND GIRLS IN EASTERN CONNECTICUT ►

Download the full report and data sources at cfect.org/WGreport



Community Foundation
of Eastern Connecticut

CONTACT US ►

For more information, call us
at **860-442-3572** or email
admin@cfect.org.

ABOUT THE COMMUNITY FOUNDATION OF EASTERN CONNECTICUT ►

Serving 42 towns and comprised of over 490 charitable funds, CFECT puts philanthropy into action to address the needs, rights and interests of the region. CFECT stewards assets of over \$80 million and has awarded more than \$48 million in grants and scholarships to area nonprofits and students since its founding in 1983. To learn more, visit cfect.org.

DataHaven

DataHaven's mission is to improve quality of life by collecting, sharing, and interpreting public data for effective decision-making. The DataHaven Community Wellbeing Survey, supported by over 50 funders including CFECT, provides a rich source of local-level data including unprecedented metrics on adult health and well-being, as well as other measures used throughout this report. For more details, visit ctdatahaven.org.
