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Women Moving Millions (q&a with helen hunt-bio to come)

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Today Women Moving Millions is launched, an initiative catalyzed by Helen LaKelly Hunt and her sister, Swanee Hunt, heirs to the Hunt Oil fortune. The vision of the initiative is for the advancement of women's lives through a massive change in giving to girls and women. Over the next two years, Women Moving Millions will raise \$150 million through gifts of \$1 million or more and to propel the aggregate assets and grant-making of women's foundations globally past the billion-dollar mark.

Helen LaKelly Hunt has actively supported women's funds for over twenty years. Dr. Hunt founded The Sister Fund, a private women's fund dedicated to the social, political, economic, and spiritual empowerment of women and girls and is the author of Faith and Feminism: A Holy Alliance, published by Atria Books in 2004.

Helen, what has inspired you to give to women's funds for so many years?

My commitment was seeded in an experience I had as a young adult. I had been a teacher in Dallas in a low-income community. I experienced first-hand the disparity of funding that exists in American neighborhoods. My students were eager to learn, yet they had meager resources, and they often had one parent, most often their mother, who was working long hours and sometimes two jobs to make ends meet. I knew then that women were the pivotal transforming agents in our society. Women have to have a voice; otherwise the cycle of poverty just keeps growing.

I got involved with the Ms. Foundation and the National Network of Women's Funds and became aware of the statistics that become a motivating factor for many women. Women and girls suffer the greatest in our society, and yet receive such a small percentage of philanthropic dollars - at that time only 4%. I helped start the Dallas Women's Foundation and the New York Women's Foundation; then I began supporting other women who wanted to start women's funds. These funds have proliferated around the world, saying to me that this is a new consciousness of women helping women throughout the globe.

At what point did you decide that you would try and raise \$150 million for women's causes?

Talking about "women helping women" was empowering not only for them, but also for me. Early on I saw women pledging \$25,000 \$50,000 even \$100,000 gifts. In the last few years, I began hearing of a few brave women making million dollar gifts to women's funds. I could sense something new was happening.

Then, my sister, Swanee, called me. She wanted to write a big check, \$6 million, to raise the bar for women's giving. I realized this gift could be a powerful catalyst to create a movement! I thought, "Let's all circle Swanee and make her dream a reality."

In reading 19th history, I learned that high net worth women did not step up to the plate and help fund suffrage. It was at that moment that I saw that women funding women today are truly making history. Swanee's call to me was that trumpet call, a chance to bring women together in an historic moment of women funding women first!

What is the hardest obstacle you have encountered in getting this movement started?

Disempowerment happens across all economic strata. High net worth women are considered privileged, yet one friend in Dallas speaks of the "golden handcuffs" that these women wear. We were taught not to ask questions and to believe that we were stupid when it came to handling money. This initiative is about empowering high net worth women to become change agents in their communities through women's funds. Women Moving Millions has the heart of a woman with the mind of a big business.

Personally, how have you benefited from this?

It has reminded me of the power of the collective. Women outnumber men, and when women unite, we are even more powerful. Women all across the socio-economic spectrum are uniting their dollars in women's funds. We are amplifying each other's impact and leveraging each other dollars. This is a very smart way for women to make a difference!

How has women's funds shaped your perspective on life?

Women's funds bring me hope. It is bringing to the foreground a greater chance for peace on earth and the prosperity of all. As donors and activists come together to make funding decision, we sharpen our thinking and our solutions have greater impact. Instead of programs that keep people in a perpetual victim cycle, I see programs being developed that are breaking the cycle of poverty. Funding women first and raising the bar on our giving makes it all possible.

Your initiative is aimed at women who can give at the million-dollar level and above. What about the majority of women who want to help and contribute but do not have access to that amount of money?

Every gift at every level is important. The hope is to create greater commitment to women and girls and every gift matters. Also, we do want to start getting used to thinking about the word "million." Some women can write a million dollar check, but five hundred women can each write a \$200 check. We can pool our resources! But let's all raise our thinking. We have a chance to create a contagion of meaningful gifts for women and girls.

Whatever your level of giving, fund women first. In doing so, we're making history.

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