Advancing Women's Issues Through Fort Lewis College

In October, The Women's Resource Center (WRC) Board of Directors voted to endow a Women's Resource Center scholarship at Fort Lewis College with $25,000. The center cites research that indicates a good education is the key to economic self-sufficiency. The more education a woman attains, the greater her chances that she earns a sustainable income, allowing her to purchase a home, accumulate assets, and help ensure she remains in "the cycle of opportunity" for the future and for her children's future. "Education is the first step," notes Liz Mora, WRC Executive Director and FLC alum, "that will empower her to grow and be successful." The funds will be invested by the Fort Lewis College Foundation, with interest used to provide scholarships and build the endowment. "The more money in the endowment, the more revenues generated – and the more scholarships we can award," Liz assures us.

Women's Resource Center will establish three funds: One for a La Plata County high school graduate who plans to attend Fort Lewis as a first generation student; another for a non-traditional La Plata County woman who will attend Fort Lewis; and a third Educational Opportunity Fund for women who could benefit from training or classes they otherwise couldn't afford. "Time and again, we see women whose primary barrier to economic self-sufficiency is a lack of education and training," said Liz. "With our new Educational Opportunity Fund, we can provide one more powerful resource to help women overcome that barrier and, we hope, affect future generations." A committee of WRC board and community members will determine scholarship qualifications. The WRC expects to offer the first scholarship to a Fort Lewis College student in Fall 2012 as part of the center's 25th anniversary celebration.

Liz Mora graduated in 2007 from Fort Lewis in Human Services. Helping provide support for FLC was a logical choice, one that provides reward in "giving back" in support of her educational roots, but also helping advance women's issues. "The late Dr. Reese Kelly and Dennis Lum were all key in helping me formulate what my path would be. I was passionate about women's issues early on," Liz recalls, "and this passion and the advice of these mentors ultimately helped point me towards Women's Resource Center."

Assisting Liz with the advancement of WRC ideals and policies is another Fort Lewis graduate, Deborah Uroda, Fund Development and Marketing Director for the Center. Deborah provides insight on the more extensive effort the WRC applies in helping middle school girls in our community. "Girls to Women, Women to Girls," Deborah notes, "is our comprehensive effort to reach out to middle school girls facing challenges that could deter them from earning a high school diploma and going on to higher education." Deborah's research indicates girls at this age struggle with self-esteem, self-respect and setting goals. It's in this arena that WRC can step in and reassure young girls, particularly those from a lower income bracket, to work through these obstacles and ultimately succeed.

The partnership between Women's Resource Center and Fort Lewis College broadens the path towards a sustainable income that for many women might not have been accessible. Liz Mora and Deborah Uroda believe local resources, internships, a strong community supporting education and willing young students adds up to a winning formula that, for women, empowers them to succeed in life today and look ahead to a better future.