

# AURORA

Women and Girls Foundation

*Celebrating 25 Years*



***Celebrating the Past.  
Strengthening the Present.  
Shaping the Future.***

**YOUR 2025 IMPACT REPORT**

## A SPARKLING 25TH ANNIVERSARY!



2025 offered the opportunity to celebrate Aurora's accomplishments and rededicate to our commitment to Greater Hartford's women and girls for the coming decades.

Aurora's story began in 2000 with five of Hartford's extraordinary women leaders -- Leah Bailey Moon, Felice Gray-Kemp, Paddi LeShane, Marie O'Brien, and the late Eileen Kraus -- who recruited other "Early Believers," raised crucial funding and support, and launched the Aurora Women and Girls Foundation, with the goal of increasing economic security, educational attainment, and leadership for women and girls in Greater Hartford.

Since then, the Aurora Foundation has provided more than **\$2.7 million** in community investments over the past 25 years to more than **10,000 women and girls in 100+ organizations.**

Founders, Early Believers, and the current and future generation of Aurora's supporters raised a glass to toast the goal of a world where women and girls have the opportunities they need to shine and thrive.

# AURORA

Women and Girls Foundation

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Left to Right: Marie O'Brien, Leah Bailey Moon, Jennifer Steadman, Paddi LeShane.

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Women and Girls Foundation



Jennifer Steadman

Dear Luminaries,

Aurora's Silver Anniversary year was a sparkling celebration of YOUR support of women and girls! We invested your generosity back into the women and girls in our community at our highest levels ever. Our latest research report, *Toward Equity: Investing in Women and Girls for Connecticut's Future*, traced the status of women and girls over the past 25 years and proposed strategies for building the brighter future that Connecticut's women and girls, and their families, deserve. Aurora provided the thought leadership that brought this collaborative project together, convening foundations and nonprofits across the state to share their insights and set priorities. And then we took the report on the road—you can read all about it!

We continued to build Connecticut's first Young Women's Initiative (YWI), an innovative national program focused on high school age participants' leadership development, college and career readiness, and financial literacy. The young women attended our Women's Leadership Forum at CT State Capital alongside college students and Aurora supporters—it was a terrific day of mentoring and connection.

Aurora's founders and supporters dazzled at our Luminary Celebration—what a great birthday party with our special guest, Secretary of State Stephanie Thomas! The 100 Men Campaign turned out so many new men standing up for women and girls who were able to gather and hear from Hartford Mayor Arunan Arulampalam.

This spring saw a season of graduations as our Aurora-funded College Success programs supported women to reach their goals. Our Enhanced College Success program provides even more intensive support, offering direct assistance to cover housing, childcare, transportation, and technology to reduce the barriers that can keep single moms from graduating and setting their children up for a brighter future. New funding for Disability Justice initiatives has expanded our equity efforts.

Our Women's Giving Circle met the moment and set a record for membership and fundraising while focusing on Immigrant and Refugee women, awarding \$40,000 to support legal clinics, grass roots advocacy, and food access for vulnerable community members. I'm inspired by the generosity and empathy that met this urgent community need.

Building these educational, economic, and leadership opportunities would not be possible without our amazing supporters, volunteers, and staff. In 2025, Aurora's board members provided thoughtful guidance and dedicated support under the leadership of Chair Amy Miller. Program Officer Anisah Colón led the Young Women's Initiative with care and dedication and stepped into a full-time role after graduating from Wesleyan University—congratulations! We bid a fond farewell to Marie McNamara and Michelle Murphy and can't wait for you to meet our new team in 2026.

THANK YOU for making Aurora's Anniversary year shine. Here's to the next quarter century of building a bright future for women and girls!

With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jennifer".

**Jennifer Steadman, Ph.D.**  
Executive Director

# AURORA WOMEN'S GIVING CIRCLE

## Collective Action. Real Impact.

When women come together with a shared purpose, generosity becomes power. The Aurora Women's Giving Circle is built on a simple, but transformative idea: when we pool our resources, listen deeply, and act together, we can create meaningful change for women and girls in our communities.

This circle brings together moms, professionals, activists, and everyday changemakers who believe that philanthropy should be inclusive, value-driven, and rooted in community. Every member has an equal voice. Every dollar goes directly to local organizations. No minimum donation. No red tape. Just a collective impact.

Through shared learning, open dialogue, and democratic decision-making, members don't just give — they engage, reflect, and decide together how to move resources to where they are needed most.

### How It Works

Members are invited to join three consecutive weekly virtual sessions and one in-person event where they will:

- Explore pressing issues affecting women and girls
- Hear directly from community organizations tackling these challenges
- Decide together how our collective giving can make the greatest difference

Whether you give \$5 or \$5,000, your voice matters. Your gift counts. This is more than philanthropy—it's learning, community, and action.

### 2025 Focus: Supporting Immigrant & Refugee Women

Women and families in our communities are facing fear, uncertainty, and barriers to safety and stability. Through the Giving Circle, we answer the need with compassion, care, and collective action. Community stories show: mothers skipping food pantry visits out of fear, children missing school not because of illness, but because of uncertainty, and families navigating complex systems with limited support.

### Real Impact, Together: A Record-Breaking Year

This year, 70 Giving Circle members raised \$40,000 for organizations transforming lives across Greater Hartford.

**Make the Road CT:** Legal clinics, outreach, and organizing support for Immigrant families

**Hartford Deportation Defense:** Court support, rapid response, and advocacy for equitable access

**Angel of Edgewood:** Mobile community food support and trauma-informed support for families

**CT Students for a Dream:** Statewide legal intake, emergency preparedness, and wraparound support

Every story, every grant, every session demonstrates the power of women coming together to see, hear, and uplift each other.



### INTERESTED IN JOINING?

All are welcome, there is no minimum donation, and 100% of every contribution goes to community organizations. Together we can build a future where all women and girls thrive.

Contact Anisah Colón at [anisah@aurorafoundation.org](mailto:anisah@aurorafoundation.org) to join our collective impact.

# 100 MEN CAMPAIGN CELEBRATION: Breakfast with a Purpose!



Hartford’s charismatic Mayor, Arunan Arulampalam, was the keynote speaker at the 100 Men Campaign celebration on April 24<sup>th</sup>, 2025 closing out the successful campaign that raised nearly \$30,000. Thanks to the efforts of Chair William Pennoyer and the dedicated Host Committee, nearly 100 attendees gathered to network at the breakfast event held at the Mandell JCC—we are so grateful for their dedication to building a brighter future for women and girls!

Mayor Arulampalam cited data from Aurora’s own research reports and connected the insights to policies necessary to address poverty for women and their families in Hartford. He also shared deeply personal insight into how gendered roles and expectations shaped his experience as a husband, father, and leader.

Highlighting the impact of Aurora’s grant-funded College Success programs, Gabi Morris, a Sports Management major in the LEAD program of the Women’s Advancement Initiative at the University of Hartford shared how the program had helped her to secure an internship and set her up for success.

Thank you to our 100 Men Campaign donors for supporting Aurora’s efforts to increase educational, economic, and leadership opportunities for women and girls across Greater Hartford.



## Host Committee

### Chair

William Pennoyer, MD

Dean Andrews, *Bank of America*

Gordon Binkhorst, *Pure Earth*

Scott Burns, *UBS*

James Healy, *Cowdery, Murphy & Healy*

Lee Hoffman, *Pullman & Comley*

Jeff Macel, *Lodestar Energy*

Tom Murphy, *Cowdery, Murphy & Healy*

Bill Stahl, *Investment Advisor to the UConn School of Business*

Tim Steadman, *The Hartford*

Peter Towey, *City of New Britain Fire Department*

Vincent Williams, *The Hartford*



# BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Senior Vice President/Advisor  
Wealthspire Advisors

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Partner and Chief Operating Officer,  
Secondaries Group Ares Management

### **Kyra Dorsey, Second Vice Chair**

Owner/Principal Consultant  
Glory Group LLC

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Chief Operating Officer, Senior Management  
Fiducient Investment Advisors, Retired

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Data Integration Strategist,  
Connecticut Data Collaborative

### **Trisha Pitter, Member at Large**

Director of Community Learning and Engagement  
UConn Health Disparities Institute

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College

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Leader, Connecticut State Legislature  
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Executive Director  
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### **Renée Williams**

Professional Chef and Founder  
Simply Fresh Food



## Staff

**Jennifer B. Steadman, Ph.D.**  
Executive Director

**Anisah Colón**  
Program Officer

**Marie McNamara**  
Program Manager

**Michelle M. Murphy**  
Development Manager

## 2025 NEW BOARD MEMBERS



### **SAMIA AMEUR**

Samia Ameur is a Senior Analyst specializing in International Tax Compliance at RTX. Originally from Algeria, she immigrated to the United States in 2017 where she pursued a bachelor's degree in Accounting from CCSU and is currently completing her master's degree in Business Analytics at Syracuse University. Samia was introduced to Aurora through one of our sponsored programs, and since then, has been passionate about helping women in her community. In her free time, she enjoys running, exercising, cooking, and spending time with my family exploring new destinations.



### **HEATHER LASHWAY**

Heather Lashway is a Managing Director at PwC, a global accounting, tax and consulting firm, with wide-ranging experience across the financial services industry. She is currently part of PwC's Northeast Asset Management practice where she specializes in serving private equity, venture capital, fund of fund and real estate advisors. She holds a bachelor's degree from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. Heather is married and has three children. In addition to spending time with her family, she enjoys playing golf, running, and reading.



### **TRISHA PITTER**

Trisha Pitter, MS, is Director of Community Learning and Engagement/Instructional Designer at the UConn Health Disparities and a Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) E-Learning Institute (ELI) Fellow, where she leads the design, development, and implementation of transformative learning solutions. She is a Parent Advisory member for the West Hartford Community of Concern, Vice President of the Board for the Connecticut Oral Health Initiative (COHI), and is a member of the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving's Black Giving Circle. Trisha holds an MS in Electronic Media (now Interactive Media and Communications ) from Quinnipiac University.



### **RENÉE WILLIAMS**

Chef Renée is professionally and classically trained with a special focus on Whole Food Plant-Based Nutrition. Simply Chef Renée is her catering company and she is also chef owner of Café Chef Renee @ 280 (located at 280 Trumbull Street in Hartford). She has authored two books, hosted a cooking show, and started a magazine for Black Women and Women of Color and is a former television and radio host. She is a mother of 3 and married the love of her life 30+ years ago. She resides in both Windsor, Connecticut and Princeton, New Jersey.

## **MISSION**

The Aurora Women and Girls Foundation galvanizes resources to increase economic security, educational attainment, and leadership for women and girls in the Greater Hartford region.

## **VISION**

We envision strong, equitable communities in which all women and girls realize their potential and are full, valued, and sought-after participants -- economically, politically, and socially.

## **STRATEGIES**

Aurora has a strong track record of strategic investment in economic and educational opportunities. Using a focused gender and racial equity lens, Aurora looks to engage individuals and institutions in philanthropy, develop and share cutting-edge research, direct grant-making and capacity-building resources to nonprofits, and convene and mobilize community partners for action.

*Our mission, vision, values, and strategies support all women and girls inclusive of sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression.*

# COMMUNITY PARTNER SPONSORS 2025

We are so grateful to the people and places who provide full-year support to Aurora's operations through their commitments as Community Partner sponsors.

## PRESENTING (\$25,000)



## VISIONARY (\$10,000)



## PILLAR (\$5,000)



Thank you for your visible leadership and belief in the investment in women and girls.

## INNOVATOR (\$2,500)



JENNIFER W. PENNOYER, M.D.  
Medical, Cosmetic and Laser Dermatology



## CHANGE AGENT (\$1,500)



# AURORA FINANCIAL REPORT FY 2025

## Income

Individual Donor Support . . . . .	\$208,199
Charlotte & Hy Goode Family Fund Supporting Women’s Potential . . . . .	\$257,500
Corporate Community Partnerships . . . . .	\$89,000
2025 Luminary Celebration . . . . .	\$69,602
Foundations and Support for Grantmaking . . . . .	\$116,000
Other Contributions and Income . . . . .	\$325
Women’s Giving Circle . . . . .	\$40,192
100 Men Campaign . . . . .	\$29,463
Young Women’s Initiative Funding . . . . .	\$161,490
<b>Total Revenue . . . . .</b>	<b>\$971,771</b>

## Expenses

Community Investments Grantmaking . . . . .	\$479,163
Research and Women and Girls Data Platform . . . . .	\$29,801
Operating Expenses . . . . .	\$485,552
<b>Total Expenses . . . . .</b>	<b>\$994,516</b>

## Assets

Designated Endowment . . . . .	\$911,119
Cash and Operating Reserves . . . . .	\$592,042
Other Assets . . . . .	\$11,148
<b>Total Assets . . . . .</b>	<b>\$1,514,308</b>

## AURORA'S ESG INVESTMENT STRATEGY

Aurora’s commitment to driving positive change extends beyond Greater Hartford to the global investment landscape. In 2023, we adopted an Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) investment strategy for our endowment portfolio. Here’s why:

**Mission Aligned:** An ESG investment strategy aligns perfectly with our mission and core values because it allows us to actively support companies that prioritize gender diversity, environmental stewardship, and social responsibility.

**Creating Impact:** ESG investing allows us to leverage our financial resources to create meaningful social and environmental impact. Through careful selection of investments, we can contribute to positive change in areas like

gender equality, climate action, and community development.

**Risk Management:** Integrating ESG criteria into our investment process helps us identify and mitigate potential risks associated with environmental, social, and governance issues.

**Enhancing Returns:** ESG investing has demonstrated the potential to generate competitive financial returns while simultaneously advancing social and environmental objectives.

**Leading by Example:** By embracing ESG principles, we hope to inspire other organizations, investors, and donors to join us in advancing gender equality, sustainability, and social justice.

## STATEWIDE IMPACT: Aurora's Latest Research

With your support, Aurora published **Toward Equity: Investing in Women and Girls for Connecticut's Future**. The report evaluates the status of women and girls in Connecticut and places that status within the historical context of the first quarter of the 21st century. Investigating key metrics for women and girls -- including poverty, economic participation, childcare, safety, and education -- the report also offers case studies on nonprofits addressing key inequities, as well as policy recommendations for lawmakers and strategy recommendations for philanthropic institutions for effectively improving the lives of women and girls across the state. Working with research partner Demographic Perspectives, LLC, Aurora convened stakeholders, including women's funds, non-profits serving women and girls, educators, and legislators to gather qualitative data and input on the priorities and final form of the report. The report produced vital information on the current status of women and girls and provides a roadmap to increased gender and racial equity for the next decade. You'll find the Key Findings and link to the full report on the next page.

### #Where Was Aurora and the Toward Equity Report?

Aurora's Annual Meeting launched the report to the public with a special panel featuring Senior Advisor to Governor Lamont Thea Montanez, Executive Director of She Leads Justice Janée Woods Weber, and YW Career Woman Student Shamyia Douglas.

**Toward Equity** was presented at a special legislative briefing hosted by the Women's Caucus of the Connecticut State Legislature.



The YWCA New Britain featured the report as the centerpiece of its Women in Leadership Discussion event.

Additional presentations were made to:

Gateway Community College in an event that was live streamed to all Connecticut Community College students

Liberty Bank in celebration of Aurora receiving the McRae Diversity Award

The Old Guard in West Hartford

West Hartford Rotary

Seabury Retirement Community

## THE CONNECTICUT WOMEN & GIRLS DATA HUB

The Connecticut Women & Girls Data Hub is more than just an interactive platform—it's a catalyst for equity.

### EXPLORE THE DATA.

**There's power in numbers and strength in action.**

The CT Women and Girls Data Hub is an interactive, online platform that provides access to publicly available data at regional, city, and statewide levels—disaggregated by gender and race—to drive informed decisions and equitable change. This isn't just about numbers—it's about impact. Every data point tells a story, and together, we can turn those stories into solutions. Thank you to M&T Bank Foundation for support of the yearly update of the Hub's data.

The **M&T** Charitable Foundation

# TOWARD EQUITY:

*Investing in Women and Girls for Connecticut's Future*



Scan here to view the complete *Toward Equity* Research Report.

## KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The data in this report focuses on specific areas where increased equity can make a difference in the lives of women, girls, their families and their communities. Those areas include: **poverty, education, economic opportunity and labor force participation, childcare and caregiving, and safety.** Our research takes a comparative view over time of key markers to ask how the status of women and girls has changed over the first 25 years of the twenty-first century and what strategies and policies can be put in place to accelerate the pace of change toward gender and racial equity.



Women in Connecticut have made considerable advances in the last 20 years but still face inequities that often prevent them from reaching their full potential.

Since 2010, there has been only minimal improvement on the percentage of women in the state living in poverty (in 2023: 11%, approximately 198,000 women). Poverty rates for women aged 18 and over in the state's three largest cities were more severe (in 2023: Bridgeport: 21%; Hartford: 27%; New Haven: 25%).

Since 2000, a higher percentage of women have bachelor's degrees. In 2023, 44 percent of women aged 25 and older in Connecticut have a bachelor's degree or higher, an increase of about 8 percentage points since 2000. Nationally, 1 in 5 female students are mothers and 71% of student mothers take out student loans. The average student loan debt per borrower is \$35,971 in Connecticut.

As of 2023, 78 percent of women in Connecticut aged 25 to 64 were in the labor force, compared with 86 percent of men. These numbers have fluctuated but there has been minimal change for women since 2010. Women make up 48% of Connecticut's labor force.

A growing share of employed women in Connecticut are in managerial or professional occupations, which tend to require a four-year degree and often have higher wages and employment benefits. In 2023, about 47 percent of these positions were held by women. However, a significant gender pay gap exists for these positions, with women making only 74% of the median salary of men in similar jobs.

STEM is the fastest-growing occupational category in Connecticut, but the proportion of women in STEM has declined (2010: 28%; 2022: 26%). The median woman earns 81% of the median man in STEM.

42% of working mothers in Connecticut would look for a higher-paying job if they had adequate and affordable childcare. Connecticut ranks fifth highest for childcare costs in the US, with the average annual childcare cost in 2023 being \$15,000.

One in four Connecticut women will experience domestic violence at some point in their lifetime. Member organizations of the Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence serve nearly 40,000 violence survivors and their children annually.

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## A CALL TO PHILANTHROPY

*Toward Equity* represents a collaborative effort among three women’s funds in Connecticut. Providing vital data on the status of women and girls to the nonprofit sector, the legislature, and to our corporate partners, we intend to offer information that will help to direct resources in a way that builds equity and opportunity. Women’s funds exist to address a fundamental inequity—only 1.8% of charitable giving is directed to programs serving women and girls, and less than 0.5% is directed to programs serving women and girls of color. Programs that are targeted are more effective, serving the specific needs of underserved populations. When innovative and creative programs address the needs of women and girls, they benefit the entire community as women share the resources with their families and their communities. The case studies included in *Toward Equity* are meant to show the impact of sustained philanthropic investment in programs designed to increase economic and educational opportunity for women and girls. Women’s funds have a decades long history of making these types of investments, and *Toward Equity* calls for the philanthropic sector to take our commitment and the demonstrated effectiveness of our investments as a model and join us to increase the dollars focused on women and girls to build a better and more equitable Connecticut. Centering women and girls, and particularly women and girls of color, when making philanthropic investments does not shortchange men and boys, but builds a thriving economy and sees opportunities extending to two generations.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PHILANTHROPY

Increase philanthropic dollars targeted to programs specifically serving Connecticut’s women and girls, including funding for general operating needs and multi-year support.

Create innovative cross sector philanthropic efforts to address economic disparities, such as low-interest loan funds for women entrepreneurs, or expanding and replicating YWCA New Britain’s Childcare Incubator.

Fund research efforts to determine the obstacles and opportunities for increasing gender and racial equity and convene key stakeholders, community, and decision-makers to propose strategic solutions and policy recommendations and advocate for implementation.

## A CALL TO POLICY MAKERS

Connecticut innovates with policies to build equity—now more than ever, we have a chance to show national leadership and demonstrate the impact on all residents of policies that reduce barriers to success for women and girls.

Connecticut’s history of policymaking designed to build equity can show the way forward. Past legislation that has focused on increasing economic participation and alleviating poverty can serve as a model and starting point for further improvement. Policies and strategies that build equitable access to opportunity can address the continuing economic, educational and leadership barriers for women, and particularly women of color, in Connecticut.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY

Strengthen support systems for vulnerable Connecticut residents to address persistent poverty and benefits cliffs, increase access to food and housing assistance, increase affordable housing options, establish a statewide child tax credit, fully fund the Menstrual Equity bill, provide safe housing for domestic violence survivors, and protect residents regardless of their citizenship status.

Increase equitable pathways to high-wage, high-growth jobs with a commitment to closing gender and racial wage gaps, require fair work scheduling, and prevent discrimination and harassment to build economic security for women and their families.

Prioritize supports for caregiving to the ultimate goal of universal childcare - from increased childcare spots, subsidies to make care affordable, increased pay for childcare and healthcare workers, expanding innovative business incubators for childcare business owners. These are necessary to support the full economic participation of a diverse, twenty-first century workforce.

**WOMEN'S FUNDS EXIST TO ADDRESS A FUNDAMENTAL INEQUITY—ONLY 1.8% OF CHARITABLE GIVING IS DIRECTED TO PROGRAMS SERVING WOMEN AND GIRLS, AND LESS THAN 0.5% IS DIRECTED TO PROGRAMS SERVING WOMEN AND GIRLS OF COLOR.**

Special thanks to the Richard P. Garmany Fund at the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving and the William and Alice Mortensen Foundation for support of this research.

# INVESTING IN COLLEGE SUCCESS AND AURORA'S 2025 GRANTEE PARTNERS

In 2025, Aurora invested \$100,000 in College Success Grants, supporting four programs that serve more than 230 women pursuing higher education in Greater Hartford. By addressing both academic and personal barriers, these programs help ensure that women don't just persist in college—they flourish and move confidently toward their goals.

## Barriers Can't Stop Us Program | Hartford Public Library



Empowering first-generation women, Barriers Can't Stop Us is a college access and success program at Hartford Public Library

that supports immigrant and refugee students as they transition from high school into higher education. In 2025–2026, the program served 70 students across Connecticut colleges through summer college readiness programming, leadership workshops, career coaching, resilience training, and individualized academic and personal support, including urgent assistance with immigration-related needs. Together, these supports help students persist in their education, navigate unexpected challenges, and move confidently toward degree completion and long-term goals.

*"After arriving in the U.S. from Syria with no understanding of the language or systems, the Hartford Public Library became my family's first home of support—helping my parents learn English, guiding us through citizenship, and supporting me from homework help to college applications. Today, I'm a senior at UConn and a library volunteer, grateful for a place that didn't just help us integrate, but helped shape who I am."*

**Heba, Barriers Can't Stop Us Student**



## Women in Transition Program | Charter Oak State College



Supporting underserved working single mothers, the Women in Transition (WIT) program at Charter Oak State College helps women earn associate and bachelor's degrees through financial assistance and comprehensive wraparound supports. In 2025, Aurora funding supported six single mothers, achieved an 85.7% retention rate, and celebrated two program graduates, despite participants balancing caregiving, employment, and significant financial constraints. Through academic support, leadership development, and career-focused programming, WIT advances long-term economic stability for mothers, their children, and future generations.

*"Because of this support, I'm not only pursuing my degree—I'm modeling resilience and possibility for my children. Aurora's investment is changing our future, and I'm determined to pay it forward."*

**T. J., WIT Student**

## YW Career Women Program | YWCA Hartford Region

Advancing women pursuing economic mobility through education and career development, YW Career Women at YWCA Hartford Region provides intensive coaching, academic guidance, and career readiness support to students at CT State Community College. In 2025–2026, the program served 44 students, offering bi-weekly coaching, transcript and graduation planning, networking opportunities, and crisis support—including housing stabilization and immigration-related challenges. Through strengthened campus partnerships and individualized mentorship, YW Career Women helps participants overcome personal and structural barriers while staying on track toward graduation and sustainable careers.



*"Maya Angelou said people may forget what you say or do, but they will never forget how you made them feel. You made me feel seen, supported, and capable—and that is something I will carry with me always."*

**Shamyia, YW Career Women Graduate**

## LEAD Program | The Women's Advancement Initiative at University of Hartford

**UNIVERSITY OF HARTFORD**

**THE WOMEN'S ADVANCEMENT INITIATIVE**  
CONTINUING THE LEGACY OF HARTFORD COLLEGE FOR WOMEN

The LEAD Program supports women's academic success, leadership development, and persistence by addressing both educational and essential life needs. In 2025–2026, the program served 112 students across all undergraduate cohorts through one-on-one coaching, leadership training, career readiness support, and referrals for emergent needs. Grounded in student data and responsive care, LEAD helps participants build confidence, stay engaged on campus, and remain on track toward graduation and career success.

*"Thanks to Aurora's support of LEAD, I was challenged to step outside my comfort zone, connect with inspiring women, and grow in confidence. Aurora's volunteers created a space where students felt seen, supported, and encouraged to pursue our goals. I am deeply grateful for Aurora's investment in opportunities that help young women grow into strong leaders."*

**Ari, LEAD Student**



# ENHANCED COLLEGE SUCCESS PROGRAM

**Reducing barriers. Accelerating degrees. Strengthening families.**

Aurora’s Enhanced College Success Program continues to demonstrate powerful results for non-traditional, parenting, and low-income women pursuing higher education. Through a holistic, wrap-around model that combines financial support for tuition, housing, childcare, transportation, physical and mental healthcare, technology and other expenses with financial and life coaching, legal services, and career readiness, participants are not only persisting in college—they are graduating, securing family-sustaining employment, and creating lasting stability for their families.

In 2025, Enhanced College Success participants outperformed national persistence trends for student parents—raising GPAs, accelerating degree completion, and staying enrolled despite major life disruptions. The impact reached entire families, reducing financial stress and increasing housing stability, food access, transportation safety, and long-term financial confidence.

One student who had been in and out of college for over 15 years—on the verge of leaving higher education altogether—was able to double her

course load, raise her GPA from 2.91 to 3.15, and cut her projected graduation timeline in half.

Another participant, a single mother pursuing a degree in cybersecurity, leveraged Enhanced College Success support to graduate early and secure a full-time position—complete with benefits and retirement contributions—dramatically

improving long-term financial security for herself and her child.

While Aurora continues to refine and strengthen this model, the evidence is clear: the Enhanced College Success Program works.

By addressing the real barriers student parents face, this program

empowers women to earn degrees, secure meaningful careers, and build brighter, more stable futures for themselves, their children, and their communities—honoring Charlotte Goode and her family’s enduring commitment to women’s economic security through education. Aurora is grateful to the Charlotte and Hy Goode Family Fund Supporting Women’s Potential and the Barbara V.G. Coffin Fund, both at the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, for their support of this program.

**As one participant shared,  
“This program didn’t just  
support my education—it  
protected my children’s  
childhood.”**



## LEAD LUNCH & CONVERSATIONS

The Aurora-funded LEAD program at the Women's Advancement Initiative at the University of Hartford creates a vibrant, supportive community where women thrive together. Through community service opportunities, professional conferences and workshops, leadership retreats, and engaging team bonding activities, participants build meaningful connections while developing essential skills.

For the third consecutive year, Aurora staff, board members, and supporters had the privilege of attending "Lunch and Conversations" and what an inspiring experience it continues to be! This luncheon brings women together for authentic community connections and thought-provoking discussion. Participants openly explore the challenges we face, exchange practical strategies, and celebrate the successes we achieve as women supporting one another on our professional and personal journeys.



## EXPANDING EQUITY: DISABILITY JUSTICE EDUCATION AND FUNDING

With funding from the New York Women's Foundation, Aurora invested in disability-affirming solutions across Connecticut, recognizing disability justice as inseparable from gender, racial, and economic justice. Aurora advanced its commitment to equity by centering disability justice in three key areas: supporting women with disabilities in higher education, community support with a disability lens, and statewide disability justice education and advocacy.



Aurora prioritized disability-centered grantmaking by awarding \$10,000 to community partners addressing unmet needs and systemic barriers. Aurora awarded \$5,000 to CT State Manchester to address a critical barrier for women students with disabilities: reliable

transportation. Aurora awarded \$5,000 to Angel of Edgewood in support of its community outreach and support efforts for families with children with disabilities.

Aurora supported statewide learning and advocacy by funding Advancing Disability Justice: The Collective Path Forward, hosted by the Connecticut Collective for Women and Girls. The event examined federal funding cuts to vital health and human services, their community-wide impacts, and the intersections of race, gender, and disability. The panel featured Ayesha Clarke, Executive Director, Health Equity Solutions; Eileen Healy, Executive Director, Independence Northwest; and Moderator Janée Woods Weber, Executive Director, She Leads Justice.



# YOUR SUPPORT FUELS OPPORTUNITY FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS

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### Rita Ortiz

*"I am a strong believer in collective impact and in supporting organizations that are dedicated to developing our community's future leaders by providing essential resources," she says. "Workplace giving makes it simple to contribute through payroll deductions, allowing me the flexibility while ensuring a steady stream of financial support for the organization, all with the added benefit of a company match."*

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*We are grateful to the following companies that generously match gifts made to Aurora and to the donors who take the time to request the match.*

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***Aurora is humbled to be the recipient of donations made in honor or in memory of cherished luminaries in our community.***

## Gifts in Memory

Eileen Kraus  
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# Luminary Celebration

## LIGHTING THE PATH FORWARD: AURORA'S 25TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

On October 25, 2025, Aurora illuminated the Bushnell with an inspiring evening celebrating 25 years of empowering women and girls in the greater Hartford area. The event brought together past, present, and future generations united by a shared commitment to lighting the path forward for women and girls and creating lasting change in our community.

The evening showcased the transformative impact of community engagement and investment. Young leaders from the Young Women's Initiative (YWI) demonstrated how getting involved early shapes confident, civically engaged changemakers. Their voices joined those of the women who are supported to reach their higher education goals through the College Success Program. The evening ended with a powerful message from Aurora's trailblazing founders, whose vision 25 years ago ignited a movement that continues to invest in countless women and girls toward a brighter future.

Keynote speaker Stephanie Thomas, Secretary of the State of Connecticut, captured the evening's

essence: "Aurora's YWI gives young women the skills, confidence, and understanding of civics they need to see themselves as leaders. When young women know their voices matter and engage in their communities, they begin shaping their world in ways that inspire others and strengthen our democracy." Secretary Thomas's personal journey to leadership showed the audience how they could get involved and inspired more than one guest to imagine running for office herself!

The celebration honored women who participated in Aurora's College Success Program, where comprehensive wrap-around support eliminates barriers and opens doors to graduation and career achievement. Each story reflected how proactive intervention and community investment creates ripples of positive change.

This informing, exhilarating, and celebratory gathering of Luminaries proved that when we actively engage in supporting women and girls, we don't just light individual paths - we illuminate entire communities, inspiring others to step forward and make a difference.





### Luminary Celebration Committee

- Rauchell Beckford-Anderson, Co-Chair
- Katherine Killen Hall, Co-Chair
- Karen Binkhorst
- Tracey Flynn
- Elaine Leshem
- Maureen Kennedy
- Mickey Mattei
- Michelle O'Connell
- Chef Renée Williams

### Luminary Celebration Ambassadors

- |                            |                     |
|----------------------------|---------------------|
| Samia Ameer                | Beth LaChance       |
| Rauchell Beckford-Anderson | Heather Lashway     |
| Karen Binkhorst            | Mickey Mattei       |
| Meghan Burns               | Marie McNamara      |
| Kyra Dorsey                | Amy Miller          |
| Michele Dyson              | Leah Murchie        |
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| Janet Bailey Faude         | Ellen Robinson      |
| Tracey Flynn               | Gilda Roncari       |
| Katherine Killen Hall      | Bobbi Schmidt       |
| Sivan Hines                | Tina St. Pierre     |
| Karen Jarmoc               | Jenny Steadman      |
| Maureen Kennedy            | Ann Thomas          |
|                            | Chef Renée Williams |



## WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP FORUM A CELEBRATION OF CONNECTION AND GROWTH

On November 20, 2025, women of all ages came together for the Women's Leadership Forum hosted by Aurora Women and Girls Foundation, CT State Community College Capital, and YWCA Hartford Region. It was a vibrant afternoon of learning, networking, and inspiration sponsored by Nutmeg State Financial Credit Union.

It was an informative afternoon with a panel of professionals comprised of Laura Cely, Member Service Manager at Nutmeg State Financial Credit Union and Dr. Sharale Mathis, Campus President at CT State Community College Capital and Tunxis. The afternoon buzzed with energy as attendees networked with local professionals, including current and past Aurora board members, supporters, and community partners. Aurora's Executive Director, Jenny Steadman, shared a beautiful reminder with everyone: to seek out and



celebrate the glimmers of joy in our everyday interactions. The room full of women was an example of Aurora's community connecting and supporting each other across generations.

It was an afternoon filled with encouragement, possibility, and the power of women supporting women!



The Women's Leadership Forum was generously sponsored by





*"My experience as part of the Leadership Forum student panel was fantastic. I enjoyed sharing my tips and experiences with an audience that was in the same position I was in during my freshman year of college. The opportunity helped improve my public speaking and networking skills, as well as my ability to handle unexpected questions. Most importantly, it strengthened my passion for women supporting and uplifting other women."*

**- Cam Quach LEAD Student Panelist**



# AURORA YOUNG WOMEN'S INITIATIVE: BUILDING BRIGHT FUTURES



The Aurora Young Women's Initiative (YWI) empowers young women and gender-expansive youth of color across Greater Hartford. Brought to Connecticut through the National Philanthropic Collaborative of Young Women's Initiatives (PCYWI), YWI creates pathways for students to lead with confidence, purpose, and impact.

Hosted at the YWCA New Britain's House of Teens, the program offers weekly workshops in leadership, financial literacy, college and career readiness, and civic engagement. Our participants are given the tools to not only imagine a better future but actively build it.



## Youth-Led Change, Real Community Impact

YWI is unique because of its commitment to youth leadership in action. Through a hands-on youth-led grantmaking process participants identified community needs, evaluated proposals, and awarded \$20,000 to local organizations addressing mental health and youth advocacy. Their work helped launch a peer mediation program at New Britain High School and a community advocacy initiative—demonstrating that young people are not just future leaders, but leaders right now.



YWI's curriculum is designed to build civic leadership and college readiness, helping participants see themselves as capable change-makers with clear post-secondary pathways:

Belief in their ability to make a difference in their community increased by 11%

Interest in attending college after high school rose by 13%

"I like this program because it educates me on womanhood, building relationships with others, and how to create a resume to get a job. This program has taught me how to be a leader and how to be myself; including how I am empowered, beautiful and kind."

**–Beautiful, YWI Participant**



## Learning Translates into Leadership

This year the program includes a three-part financial literacy series, led by expert Patrina Dixon, which resulted in a 48% increase in financial confidence and a 66% increase in understanding business planning. Recognizing the need for financial skill building, Ares Charitable Foundation's generous support of the program included funding to license Dixon's curriculum as an engaging online portal with age-appropriate personal finance lessons, interactive budgeting and debt-tracking tools, financial calculators, printable worksheets, and 20 on-demand courses. The platform also provides decision-support tools for navigating complex financial choices and a course creator for instructors to tailor lessons to their students. The Financial Literacy Toolkit will be shared with the other women's funds in the PCYWI across the country.

Through their participation in YWI, participants' perception of their current financial stability improved by **27%**.

Special thanks to the Ares Charitable Foundation for their support of YWI programming that reflects their vision of a world in which equitable access to knowledge, resources, and opportunities enables people to achieve their full potential.



# You're Invited to Luminary 2026!



**Wednesday, October 14, 2026**  
**The Bushnell, 166 Capitol Avenue, Hartford**

Join us for an enchanting evening as we honor the brilliant Luminaries who light up our community - the remarkable women and girls whose lives have been transformed, and the dedicated champions who've opened doors for them to flourish and shine.

Your presence will help fuel Aurora's vital work: community investments, advancing research, and advocating for women and girls throughout the state.

Please save the date - we can't wait to celebrate with you!  
Registration details to come via email  
and Aurora's social media accounts.

**Let's Build a Brighter Future for Women and Girls Together!**

P.O. Box 370537, West Hartford, CT 06137  
Phone: 860-969-3435

[aurorafoundation.org](http://aurorafoundation.org)

 AuroraWomenandGirlsFoundation  @aurorafoundation  aurorawomen