



Many Hands is pleased to submit two grants together into consideration for a 2023 Spotlight Award:

- 2022 Impact Grant (\$100,000) to [My Sister's Place](#) (MSP)
- 2022 Partner Grant (\$67,000) to [Capital Area Asset Builders](#) (CAAB)

My Sister's Place has sheltered, supported, and empowered survivors of domestic violence for over 40 years. It is unique in DC in offering a full continuum of care, from emergency shelter through transitional-to-permanent housing. The Many Hands grant supported MSP's Fresh Start Fund, which offers one-time financial support to survivors to help them establish and retain secure housing. For vulnerable families, expenses like security deposits, moving costs, car repairs, job recertifications, or school uniforms can put their housing, financial independence, and ultimately, safety, at risk. Launched at the beginning of the pandemic, the Fresh Start Fund has been a lifeline for many survivors and their children.

Capital Area Asset Builders seeks to close the racial wealth gap by creating opportunities for low- and moderate-income individuals in the greater DC region to build financial security, savings, and wealth. CAAB provides financial education and coaching and manages matched saving and cash transfer programs to help residents meet their financial goals. CAAB also advocates for measures, such as EITC expansion, that advance economic justice. The Many Hands grant provided unrestricted funding for CAAB's work.

These grants mark a turning point in the evolution of Many Hands' grantmaking over two decades. The 2022 grant to My Sister's Place was our last project-based grant. Under the strategic plan adopted later that year, all grants now provide general operating support. In addition, the selection of these grantees reflected important changes in the way members think about risk and impact. The twin pandemics of COVID and racism have deepened interest in racial equity and trust-based philanthropy within Many Hands. One outcome of this process has been greater understanding of the importance of trust, empowerment, and systems work in the nonprofit sector, as these grants show.

However, what is truly transformational about these grants is what happened after they were made. Following the 2022 Annual Meeting, featuring presentations from the year's grantees, CAAB CEO and executive director Joseph Leitmann-Santa Cruz reached out to Many Hands' Grants Chair to explain that CAAB might be able to help MSP supplement the resources available through the Fresh Start Fund. She introduced him to Mercedes Lemp, executive director of My Sister's Place, who had been thinking for some time about how cash transfers could help domestic violence survivors. That summer, Mercedes and Joseph met for the first time, over a *cafecito cubano*, to talk about how their organizations could work together.

That conversation ultimately led to the February 2023 launch of the **RISE Trust**, the first unconditional cash transfer program nationwide targeted specifically to domestic violence survivors. My Sister's Place raised the funding; CAAB provided the technical expertise. The pilot provides 45 families with \$500 per month for up to two years. In addition, CAAB offers financial education and coaching, as well as the opportunity to have savings matched 3-for-1.

The RISE Trust helps keep families safe. As Mercedes explains, “Abusers use finances to keep their victims with them. A lot of times they can’t leave because of the money. Or they go back because of the money....We’re not just talking about poverty. We’re talking about life or death.”<sup>1</sup>

The program also gives survivors not just a financial boost, but financial agency, sometimes for the first time. As Joseph says, it recognizes that “yes, we can and we should trust the ability of low-income families to determine what is best for them.” That, he observes, is a radical notion in a system where typically, “we are making them jump through hurdles, we are making them fill out endless paperwork, we are making them recertify and recertify and recertify, and we are always reminding them, ‘You are poor, you are stuck there.’”

The approach MSP and CAAB are taking is very different. It starts, Joseph says, with a simple question: “How can cash play a key role to liberate somebody or enable them to liberate themselves?”

Many Hands is honored to have had the opportunity to bring these two organizations together to collaborate on this innovative program with equity at its core. We believe these grants and the partnership they fostered exemplify the true power of collective giving, which is measured not only in the dollars we grant, but in the relationships we create, inside and outside our circles.

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<sup>1</sup> All quotes from [Pasmanick, Anne, host. “Capital Area Asset Builders & My Sister’s Place.” \*Power Station\*. 13 Mar. 2023.](#)