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THE ASTRAEA FOUNDATION: 
A NEW RESOURCE FOR WOMEN
By Nancy Dean

In 1977 a group of 12 women from New York and Connecticut formed The Astraea Foundation to support the efforts of women to develop economic independence and foster personal well-being. The by-laws establish the Foundation as multiracial and multiethnic; its Central Board as at least 50 percent minority in membership; and its aim to provide financial assistance to those who have little access to funding. Now incorporated and tax-exempt, the Foundation has established its first disbursement cycle, awarding $5,000 to groups from the Northeast region of the country who fulfill its multiracial, multiethnic, and feminist criteria.

Where does the money come from? The Astraea Foundation raises funds through various activities and through personal donations. While women as individuals may be poor—and as a “class” may be far below their brothers in economic power—still, leagued together, they can achieve important goals.

A review of The Astraea Foundation’s first disbursements:

The Azalea Collective, New York City: $1,000 to a literary collective of Third World lesbians who publish the literary journal Azalea.

Geneva Women’s Resource Center, Geneva, NY: $550 to a center serving a mixed ethnic community of Hispanics, Blacks, and whites, to develop bilingual audiovisual material through a Community Video project. The material will educate viewers about violence against women.

Hestia Art Collective, Northampton, MA: $350 to a group of women artists and art historians for their work researching, designing, and painting a mural.

Lesbian Mother Custody Center, New York City: $850 to one of very few centers in the United States offering peer counseling and legal information to lesbian mothers facing custody battles for their children.

Mulaneh, Mujeres Latino Americanas de New Haven: $850 to a collective of Latina women organized to serve the Latinos of the Greater New Haven area, to help provide educational resources to Latina women.

New England Women’s Symphony, Allston, MA: $200 to a group devoted to encouraging the development of new music by women and to correcting the historical appraisal of women as musicians.

North Country Women’s Center, Canton, NY: $750 to one of the spinoffs of an energetic women’s collective in upper New York State, that has provided emergency housing, information and referral, and peer counseling and assistance for battered women for two and a half years.

Third World Newsreel, New York City: $450 to help support the making of this group’s first film to be made entirely by women, a documentary about violence in the society of the United States and its causes, focusing on the battering of women and children.

Grants by Anonymous Donors

Some proposals received by The Astraea Foundation arrived after the group had begun its procedures, or after its disbursements had been concluded. In a few cases, anonymous donors came forward to support these proposals or to suggest their own. When the donor-directed grants agreed with the Central Board’s guiding principles, the Board was glad to act as facilitating agent. The following grants were funded by anonymous donors:

Abortion Rights Action Week, New York City: $550 to support a week of workshops, lectures, demonstrations, and discussion groups informing women about the need for reproductive freedom and the increasing limitations presently imposed upon women’s reproductive rights.

DES Daughter Identification Project of Massachusetts: $300 to support a project that attempts to seek out and identify the daughters of women who received DES.

Geneva Women’s Resource Center, Geneva, NY: $100 to assist the Rape Education Project described above among the Astraea Foundation grants.

Project Women Alcoholic, New York City: $300 to permit lesbians of that group to participate in the National Lesbian and Gay March which took place in Washington, D.C., in October.

Procedures, Deadlines, and Guidelines for Funding

The guidelines of the Foundation aim to support the efforts of women to gain independence and skills, as well as spiritual, physical, and financial well-being. The Foundation is determined to reach women of all classes, races, ethnic backgrounds, and sexual orientations. Grants are focused on the Northeast region, within a radius of 500 miles from New York City, so that on-site visits are practical for the Board. At present grants are awarded only to groups or organizations, not to individuals.

The deadline for the next cycle of proposal considerations is November 1, 1980; for a grant proposal form, write to The Astraea Foundation, Inc., Box 37, Bronx, NY 10464. All final decisions are made by the Central Board. The Astraea Board aims to support not those who have strong credibility through previous support received from foundations, but grassroots groups just beginning or seriously struggling to do important work for women.

The Central Board Members

Stella Alvo is a Field Director for a management consulting firm for New York State, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands. Nancy Dean is a Professor of Medieval Literature at CUNY and a teacher of creative writing. Susan Eenigenburg is Executive Director of a social service agency in Connecticut. Joyce Hunter, a CUNY B.A. student in Health Services and Counseling, mother of two children, was one of the two National Staff Coordinators for the Gay March on Washington, D.C., October 1979. Roberta Kosse is on the faculty of the Mannes College of Music. Cynthia Long works as an electrician’s apprentice in the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Union Local Three. Dorothy McCormack is a full-time writer. Betty Powell, former co-chairperson of the Board of Directors of the National Gay Task Force, teaches sociology at CUNY. Joan Watts, a former teacher of art history and studio art, paints full time now. Gwendolyn Naomi Rogers Weindling, a doctoral candidate in clinical psychology, describes herself as a Black lesbian feminist and mother of Francesca. Marlene P. Williams is a political activist and writer who does public relations work for small businesses in Harlem.

This varied group of women is united in its vision of what the world should be for women and in its willingness to work for that vision. The group takes its name from a passage in Ovid’s Metamorphoses, early in Book I when Ovid describes the golden age of men followed by the silver, the bronze, and finally the iron age. The depth of the iron age is signaled when Astraea, goddess of justice, “last of the immortals, abandoned the blood-soaked earth.” Astraea, we are told, now reposes in the heavens as Virgo, but her supporters are here on earth doing what they can to draw her spirit down again to walk among us.