



community development partnership

Creating opportunities for people to live, work, and thrive on the Lower Cape

Supporter Highlight: Mary Kay Leonard - helping people reach their full potential

"Without the CDP, there would be fewer thriving businesses, less affordable housing and more people living in substandard housing, and fewer people working together to improve our communities."

*Mary Kay Leonard
CDP Advisory Council Member*



For over thirty years Advisory Council member Mary Kay Leonard has worked to ensure families have the resources they need to be healthy and financially stable.

Prior to establishing a consulting practice in which she helps organizations anticipate and manage change, Mary Kay served as President and CEO of the Initiative for a Competitive Inner City, a national nonprofit that works to grow businesses in inner cities. She led the integration of the Community Initiatives and Property Management functions for Community Builders, a developer and manager of affordable housing. She spent almost a decade with United Way, as the COO and Interim CEO of

the United Way serving greater Boston, and as the leader of Investor Relations at United Way Worldwide. Prior to this she held senior management roles at Work Family Direction (WFD), Inc., a for-profit company that was at the forefront of the work life industry, developing community-based child and elder care programs for Fortune 500 companies. Mary Kay started her management career in state government, as the Commissioner of the Mass. Office for Children, which regulated over 12,000 child and youth-serving programs, and shaping public policy for state agencies as Chief Counsel to the Mass. Executive Office of Human Services.

Mary Kay, and her husband Rick, fell in love with the Cape in the late 1980s when friends introduced them to the area. They both had very demanding jobs and needed a place where they could relax and recharge. It started with renting a home in Truro and by 1991 they had bought a permanent home. Although Boston is still home-base, Mary Kay both relaxes and works part time out of her house in Truro.

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It was about six years ago, through CDP Board member Barbara Wood, with whom she had worked at Work/Family Directions, that Mary Kay learned of the CDP. Her background fit well with the mission and programmatic work of the CDP. “What drives me is helping people reach their full potential: I do that by helping organizations reach their full potential” she says. “I was attracted to the work of the CDP...and it’s cross cutting nature between programs such as the (business) micro loans and educational workshops.” She points out that one of the things that sets the CDP apart is that it “connects to the strengths of the region and its core industries,” such as our work with shell fishermen.

Economic development is critical to the sustainability of our communities, which is a key focus area of the CDP. “Connecting jobs with housing is critical and it needs to move beyond seasonal,” says Mary Kay. “We have to consider what the jobs of the future will be - and what kind of support, investment, and training of people do we need to do?”

She also appreciates the recent partnership established between the CDP, Cape Cod Children’s Place and Homeless Prevention Council, in which a formal Strategic Alliance was established in November 2018. “There is a real connection between housing and child care,” says Mary Kay, and she sees the partnership as a way for non-profits to be more efficient and effective, noting that the Cape has an over-abundance of non-profits.

Mary Kay and Richard support the CDP through the Community Investment Tax Credit program, which provides a 50% tax refund on the amount donated. When asked why she supports the CDP and why she joined the Advisory Council, Mary Kay points out that “The CDP is a very strategic organization,” which she says is exemplified by the CDP’s efforts to provide communities with the tools they need to address housing issues through the Lower Cape Housing Institute. Although there are other organizations that offer some of what the CDP does, Mary Kay believes that “the reason why the CDP is effective is because we work towards sustainable and systems change and that work is informed from our experience at the ground level.” When asked what she thought the Lower Cape would look like without the CDP Mary Kay replied, “Without the CDP, there would be fewer thriving businesses, less affordable housing and more people living in substandard housing, and fewer people working together to improve our communities. Because of the CDP, there are deep solution focused conversations about people in need, and smart, coordinated work to address those needs.”