

GCC to host new CEO of Women's Fund of Western Mass.

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GREENFIELD — After advocating for issues related to women's rights and immigrants on the national level, Elizabeth Barajas-Román has switched to promoting change and creating partnerships locally as the new CEO of the Women's Fund of Western Massachusetts.

An experienced leader in policy and advocacy, Barajas-Román will now lead one of the top social change philanthropic organizations dedicated to women's rights and equality in western Massachusetts.

On Sept. 3, Greenfield Community College will have a reception with Barajas-Román and President Bob Pura from noon to 1 p.m. at the GCC Downtown Center as they announce the Franklin County Women's GARDEN Project.

The GARDEN Project is a partnership among the school and Montague Catholic Social Ministries, the New England Learning Center for Women in Transition and Seeds of Solidarity Education Center in Orange to teach low-income women in transition how to grow their own food and sell it through a food co-op business.

In her first four weeks at the Easthampton-based organization, Barajas-Román's time has been focused on the \$240,000 grant commitments to the four western counties that were recently awarded. The grant is dedicated to collaborative projects that address women's issues in Franklin, Hampshire, Berkshire and Hampden counties.

"We know by working together there is the possibility we can reach a solution," Barajas-Román said. "We wanted organizations to work together and work collaboratively to move the needle on issues they care about.

This year, the Women's Fund awarded a grant to the Franklin County Women's Growing Agricultural Resiliency and Developing Economic (GARDEN) Project.

The project is designed to provide educational access and address economic concerns for women.

Each partner organization will recommend women for the project. About 42 women will participate in the program over three years, taking courses at GCC in organic gardening, permaculture landscape installation and food preservation. The Women's Fund will pay for instructor costs, allowing the students to take the classes for free. GCC will also arrange for instructors to attend a training at NELCWIT and Montague Catholic Social Ministries to learn the trauma triggers and to recognize the signs of physical and emotional domestic violence.

Another grant is awarded to the Prison Birth Project, which would address economic justice and educational access issues for all four counties. The project works to provide support, education and advocacy to women and girls who are incarcerated or formerly incarcerated.

Barajas-Román brings a wealth of experience to the Women's Fund.

She most recently worked for Pew Charitable Trusts in Washington, D.C., where she managed a program that campaigned for state and federal policy change on issues impacting children's health. While working for Pew Charitable trusts, one of the biggest philanthropic organizations in the world, Barajas-Román commuted between western Massachusetts where she lived and D.C.

Before that, Barajas-Román served as director of Policy at National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health, where she directed the organization's Washington, D.C.-based office.

"When this position came up it spoke to me. I could do the work I love here in the community I love," Barajas-Román.