

## Grant to Wellesley's Women of Means will help change lives of many women, children

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Newton — On Jan. 14, the CVS Caremark Charitable Trust awarded \$6.3 million to nonprofit organizations across the country. During a “Day of Giving,” nonprofits serving children with disabilities and the uninsured received surprise notification of grant awards. Women of Means, a Wellesley-based nonprofit that provides free health care for women and children in Massachusetts homeless shelters, was a grant recipient.

During what she thought was just going to be a CVS site visit to Rosie’s Place in Boston, one of the shelters where Women of Means provides services, Dr. Roseanna Means, founder of the organization, learned that it was the day the winners of large grants would be announced.

“We just about fell on the floor. We were so excited,” Means said after being presented with a large cardboard check for \$50,000.

Having applied for the grant last summer and not having heard anything by fall, Means said she called CVS to see where they were in deciding, and was told that no decision had been made at that point. Looking back, Means said that she thought Women of Means’ chance for winning the large grant was definitely lower than 50 percent, considering the funding environment and all the needy organizations out there.

“We were dancing around,” Means said, when she got the very welcome news. “This is big for us.” She noted that Women of Means’ administrative budget is only 10-12 percent. The grant will help the organization to increase its nursing hours — a big relief, since Women of Means was forced to lay off nurses last year.

“We have no fat in our budget at all,” Means said. Women of Means’ budget this year is \$570,000.

Women of Means has a team of volunteer doctors supported by paid nurses. The organization also has a very robust training program for medical students and nurses. From Wellesley College, for example, Christina Sun, a premed student, is working with Women of Means, from which she learns clinical material. But Sun is also making herself available to be a health-care companion. At her church, the Wellesley Congregational (Village) Church, Means has been building up a core group of lay volunteers to accompany women to the doctor and to offer them emotional support, among other things.

Women of Means does about 10,000 visits a year. The organization doesn’t charge anything for its services or the health-care products it provides, such as over-the-counter medicines and Band-Aids, and it does all its teaching free of charge.

“It’s an important example of mentoring for future caregivers, doctors and nurses, who see us giving back to the community,” Means said, noting that Women of Means has a waiting list of doctors who want to work with the group. They save hospitals millions of dollars from emergency room use and offer chronic disease care for people who are falling through the cracks.

Women of Means cares for approximately 2,000 women. More than 50 percent are over 50 years old, and nearly 10 percent are over 70 — “one calamity away from being back on the streets,” Means said.

For example, one woman simply ran out of money before she came to Women of Means with an infection in her foot. She would have become septic, Means said.

Means’ days sometimes resemble that of any other doctor — she is a primary care doctor at Brigham & Women’s Hospital, where she works part time on Wednesdays and Fridays in women’s health. But Tuesdays find Means at the Women’s Lunch Place, a shelter on Newbury Street, while on Thursdays she can be found at Rosie’s Place. The staff and volunteers of Women of Means see people at several domestic violence shelters. Their patient load includes a lot of children at a family shelter in Waltham and at the Second Step, a group that provides transitional housing for families who have experienced violence. “We really do love these women,” Means said, “and it’s so sad to see these children displaced ... “

Because Women of Means is in these shelters every day of the week, they form long-term relationships with women. They really excel at working with people with mental illness — two psychiatrists come in every week, Means said.

Working with approximately 500 doctors in primary care, Means said, “We’re like the glue to keep them from falling through the cracks.”

Women of Means has started a pilot program to target 100 of the women they care for. Called the Aging in Shelters Collaborative, it includes two Boston shelters, the Dimock Center and Hearth, as well as the Metropolitan Boston Housing Partnership, and HomeStart, an organization to help people get housing.

The collaborative has received a grant from Blue Cross and the S.W.A.N. Society and some kick-off funds from Partners Healthcare System. The grant from CVS “really put us over the top,” Means said, noting that Women of Means took out an ad last week for a nurse practitioner. “This grant is certainly very strong evidence about how much they care about the community,” she said about CVS.

With foundations and donors cutting back Women of Means had to cut back its budget by 40 percent in 2009, although it does have a very strong individual donor base, Means said.

Now 10 years old, Women of Means is going to have an event to celebrate next fall. For more information, visit [www.womenofmeans.org](http://www.womenofmeans.org)