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A New Generation of Women Leaders Join The Aspire Foundation's Campaign To Make a Difference to One Million Women and Girls by 2015

Recent financial and political events have created a backlash against leaders who demonstrate a lack of character or those who abuse power for selfish ends. Research by Aspire, a leader in bringing gender diversity to the workplace, shows that what's wanted in corporations across the globe are leaders who are more socially conscious and willing to give something back.

Aspire has devised a way for leaders to do just that by creating the Aspire Foundation. This not-for-profit foundation harnesses a new generation of corporate leaders' ambition to make a difference through an innovative, charitable mentoring program with the goal of having a positive impact on one million women and girls by 2015.

The program works by senior leaders from the corporate sector donating their unique business skills and leadership experience to mentor managers in not-for-profit organizations that work to make a positive difference for women and girls all over the world. It's a kind of pay-it-forward scheme for doing good—helping those who are making a difference for women so that they can make a bigger difference.

“More responsible leadership is no longer a nice idea. It is seen as a necessary step for socio-economic and political progress in the world,” says Dr. Samantha Collins, creator of the Aspire Foundation. “I think people want to be part of something big and impactful and by building a bridge between the corporate and not-for-profit sectors we believe we can create a massive ripple of positive change.”

The idea for the Aspire Foundation was brewing at the same time that Collins was starting up Aspire, now an internationally-recognized and award-winning gender diversity and women’s leadership development company working in the banking, law, accountancy, retail and telecoms industries. Since its inception ten years ago, Aspire has gone from strength to strength and Collins felt that it was time to make more of a difference—drawing on the success of the company by channeling the desire of her senior corporate clients to make a difference.

The important work begins

The Aspire Foundation has begun work already with WOMANKIND, a charity working with 37 community groups in 15 developing countries enabling women to understand their legal rights. Members of WOMANKIND’S senior leadership team are now being mentored by senior leaders from the corporate sector.

“Being approached by the Aspire Foundation and being offered the chance to work with a mentor has come at just the right time for me,” says Sian Newton, Head of Fundraising and Communications for WOMANKIND. “I really value the chance to take time out from the day-to-day routine and opportunity to hear useful advice and to focus on practical solutions.”

Newton job-shares with Ellie Fujioka, who is also being mentored through the Foundation: “When the Aspire Foundation offered me the opportunity to be paired with a mentor it felt like the ideal support. I can use time with my mentor to step back and reflect, to brainstorm ideas and can rely on her to provide insights and support.”

Jane Swift, a program director with British Telecom (BT), was one of the first corporate mentors to sign up: “I love my career with BT and have always wanted to be more involved with a charity

without quitting my job. The Aspire Foundation provides the perfect solution to give small, manageable chunks of time every month to mentor amazing women. It's a win:win – they get our experience, network, challenge and support; we get an opportunity to make a difference and hone our own mentoring and leadership skills.”

There are no parameters with regard to the types of organizations the Foundation hopes will participate, so long as they work to improve the lives of women and girls. “It could be education, health care, development, microfinance, etc.,” says Collins. “It’s broad because then the mentors can think about the areas where they feel particularly passionate and they’d like to make a difference as well as their own learning and self development.”

Some of Aspire’s own team of executive coaches are donating their expertise too. A program has already begun with the global senior management team at Women for Women International (WFW). WFW provides year-long programs of direct aid, rights education, job skills training, and small business development to women survivors of war. So far, Aspire’s work with WFW has had an impact on an estimated 84,573 women, according to the organization’s President and COO Andrée Simon.

“Aspire’s work across the senior leadership team at Women for Women International will undoubtedly have an immediate and lasting impact on the work that we do,” says Simon. “It is accelerating the progress of the organization towards achieving our strategic and operating goals—adding directly to our ability to serve some of the most socially excluded women survivors of conflict in the world.”

“This is a real opportunity for mutual shared learning,” says Aspire Coach Rebecca Hourston, one of the Aspire team participating in the Foundation’s work with WFW. “Not only is it enabling me to help women in need all over the world, but it’s giving me an opportunity to learn something about myself.”

What does the future hold?

Ultimately, the goal is that the Foundation will run as a self-sufficient system wherein mentors and mentees will connect to offer and take up opportunities via a dedicated website. The project is a

little while off from that stage, according to Collins, but based on her track record and enthusiasm, it won't be long.

“If there's one thing that drives me and is the most exciting to me—it's this Foundation. I wake up in the middle of the night thinking about it. It's something that I'd love to see go on for generations. Maybe my sons might continue it after I've gone!”

If you'd like to get involved with the Aspire Foundation either as a mentor or a mentee, visit the website to register your interest at www.theaspirefoundation.org



About Aspire

Aspire was founded in 2000 by Dr. Samantha Collins, voted one of the Top Ten Coaches in the UK by *The Independent* and recognized by Her Majesty The Queen as one of the UK's Top 200 Women to Impact Business & Industry.

With experts in place around the world, Aspire partners with corporate diversity and inclusion leaders, human resources professionals, and business leaders to assess organizational need, address female talent attraction and retention, and execute tailor-made plans that advance women business leaders' careers.

Aspire's clients have included some of the most well-known and influential companies and charitable organizations in the world, including KPMG, Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer, BDO Stoy Hayward, Vodafone, Yahoo! and the Equality and Human Rights Commission. Aspire is committed to working with organizations like these that recognize the importance of attracting, retaining and advancing women in the workplace.

Dr. Collins has contributed to *The Financial Times*, *CNN*, *The Times* and the *BBC Global Business Report*. Her PhD thesis examined the future world of work for senior women in law, banking and accountancy firms and she is currently writing *Go MAD – Women Leaders Making a Difference*.

For more information on Aspire, visit: www.aspirecompanies.com or call, from the UK: 44(0) 207 556 1018; from the US: (001) 212 504 8255.