



For Immediate Release
March 25, 2010

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FISA Foundation Announces Retirement of Executive Director

After 14 years of visionary leadership, FISA Foundation announces the retirement of Executive Director Dee Delaney in August 2010. Ms. Delaney served as the Foundation's executive director since its founding in 1996, and has been focused and strategic in advancing its mission: to improve the lives of women, girls, and people with disabilities. Under her leadership, FISA's endowment has grown to over \$37 million and the Foundation has awarded over \$17 million in grants (727 grants to 298 organizations).

Ms. Delaney's commitment to the disability community dates back 30 years to her work as a volunteer for Harmarville Rehabilitation Center and her close involvement with FISA's predecessor organization, the Federation of Independent School Alumnae. FISA Foundation honors the legacy of the Federation through its mission and its tradition of being created, led and governed by women. Board President Missy Unkovic said, "Dee created FISA's vision and led the Foundation to its prominence today. She is a well respected leader in the nonprofit community and will be greatly missed by FISA and the community at large."

Ms. Delaney is a highly recognized leader in promoting inclusion of people with disabilities as well as quality accessible health care. She has been recognized by Women and Girls Foundation (Art of Justice Honoree, 2009), the University of Pittsburgh School of Dental Medicine (Appreciation Award, 2009), United Cerebral Palsy of Pittsburgh (Gertrude Lebowitz Lifetime Achievement Award, 2008), and ACHIEVA (Excellence in Professional Service, 2007).

In her tenure, Ms. Delaney has worked with numerous grantees and community partners and leaves a legacy of justice and inclusion for women, girls, and people with disabilities. Ten years ago, she learned that a shocking number of women could not access the most basic preventative health care – mammograms, thorough physical examinations, pap smears, and bone density tests – because physical disabilities made it impossible to stand or to access an exam table. Many more had not been weighed, counseled about diet/exercise/smoking or received family planning information – in spite of the fact that people with disabilities routinely see multiple health care specialists. Since then, Ms. Delaney has led the campaign and marshaled FISA Foundation's resources to commission reports, convene experts, and award numerous grants to remedy this significant health care disparity and bring the issues to public attention. As a result, today many health care facilities have fully accessible equipment and providers have participated in disability awareness trainings. She also launched and guided a parallel initiative to improve access to dental care for people with significant physical and intellectual disabilities. Ms. Delaney has engaged local dentists, disability advocates and the University of Pittsburgh School of Dental Medicine to bring attention to this need and is proud of the success of ACHIEVA's Health Policy Forum on Dental Care for People with Disabilities in coordinating statewide action and promoting policy change.

More recently, Ms. Delaney launched a crusade to encourage nonprofits to think about web site accessibility for those who are blind or who cannot use a mouse. Many website developers have not been trained in website accessibility guidelines and best practices and few nonprofits or companies knew to ask their technical experts about even the most basic accessibility features (including text tags to explain graphics, text enlargement shortcuts, or appropriate visual contrast between text and background). As a result of her influence, the Bayer Center for Nonprofit Management at Robert Morris University now offers classes in website accessibility.

In the last year, Ms. Delaney has focused on bringing attention to all of the strides Pittsburgh has made in increasing accessibility. She has convened regional arts and culture organizations for training on how to better welcome and include people with disabilities as patrons, as well as how to advertise the many helpful accommodations that are already in place (including assistive listening devices and captioning services for patrons with hearing impairments and audio described performances to allow theater goers who are blind to fully appreciate performances).

Ms. Delaney recognized the importance of supporting needs in the rural areas of the ten-county region served by FISA Foundation. For example, 10 years ago she encouraged the Board to make a small grant of \$15,000 to help start the Mother's Fund within the Washington County Community Foundation. Due to local donations, the fund has grown to over \$250,000 today and the income from it supports nonprofits that help underserved women in Washington County. She also recently worked to supply funding to distribute free copies of *Strength and Courage*, an exercise DVD created by and for breast cancer survivors.

Ms. Delaney serves on numerous boards and committees including the national Disability Funders Network, UPMC Disabilities Resource Council, ACHIEVA Statewide Taskforce on Dental Care for People with Disabilities, University of Pittsburgh Rehabilitation Counseling Program, United Way Review Committee on Seniors and People with Disabilities, and Magee-Womens Hospital Center for Women with Disabilities. In addition, she is a past board member of Grantmakers of Western Pennsylvania and the Health Policy Institute, and is a graduate of Leadership Pittsburgh, Class XXII.

In commenting on her decision, Ms. Delaney said, "I am proud and grateful to have worked with our dedicated board and staff to lead FISA Foundation over the past 14 years. Most importantly, I have great respect for our many grantees who work so hard to provide essential services to our region. I am optimistic that the Foundation will continue its vision of making this region a better place for women, girls and people with disabilities."

FISA Foundation (www.fisafoundation.org) provides grants to nonprofit organizations in southwestern Pennsylvania to improve the lives of women, girls, and people with disabilities. The Foundation was formed in 1996 with the proceeds of the sale of Harmarville Rehabilitation Center to HealthSouth. Dee was the Foundation's first Executive Director, but she has been closely associated with the predecessor organization (Federation of Independent School Alumnae) and with Harmarville since 1980.

The Board has formed a search committee to help with the transition.

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Note to Editor:

“FISA Foundation” is a legal name and not an acronym. The organization was previously known as the Federation of Independent School Alumnae; however, the name was formally changed in 2000 to FISA Foundation. Please refer to the organization as FISA Foundation in any print media.