



Susan Wisely knows the value of asking questions. For nearly 30 years at the Indianapolis-based Lilly Endowment Inc., first as a program officer and then as director of evaluation, her probing inquiries helped Lilly Endowment grantees define their missions and solidify their purposes. More importantly though, her queries led her to affect the lives of thousands of young Hoosiers, Indiana's youth workers, and organizations dedicated to playing significant roles in the lives of young people. Her work furthering Lilly Endowment's youth-development grantmaking was rooted in research. She always began by posing questions, and hers catapulted Indiana's youth-development work forward.

During her tenure at Lilly Endowment (1973- 2002), the number and quality of programs designed to benefit young people that were informed by academic research increased in the state.

Not surprising, Wisely's innate curiosity led her to explore how youth development was part of Lilly Endowment's history. Wisely discovered that since its founding in 1937 by three members of the Lilly family – J.K. Lilly, Sr. and sons Eli and J.K. Jr., – Lilly Endowment had nurtured its commitment to young people. In an essay, she wrote: "Reflecting this altruistic spirit, the Lilly family had a strong sense of responsibility towards others, and toward the younger generation in particular. They viewed their lives and wealth as a "trust," carrying with it stewardship obligations."

Eli Lilly, who was Lilly Endowment's chairman until 1975 and passed away in 1977, expressed his view of that trust thus: "Owing everything we are to the past and present generations, each of us must be willing to give unstinted help to others." Wisely learned, too, that character development was an important part of the Lilly family's philanthropy, and in another essay penned in 1997, she wrote: "Eli Lilly stated (the Endowment's) mission in his own manner when he said, "I would hope we could help improve the character of the American people."

The interests of Lilly Endowment's founders were not the only driver of her work. At the state level there was widespread concern about Indiana's economic development and its ability to be competitive. There was also a desire to be known as a state that cared about its young people.

In 1974, a simple letter to Lilly Endowment was impetus for action. A request on pink stationery from the Camp Fire Girls' national office asked for funds to hire an additional staff person to study the needs of girls and focus on retention.

That singular request prompted a query that would change the youth-development landscape. It led to an internal conversation and ultimately to an important question: Might Camp Fire's request, while organizationally specific, be symptomatic of a larger problem extending beyond the scope of the Camp Fire Girls' organizational issue?

Wisely wondered more broadly if program offerings were meeting the needs of girls, and more specifically, what research informed program design. Through conversations and probes, she learned that, although hard to believe, at that time there actually was no significant research on girls' needs that included their voices and input.

As a Lilly Endowment program director, Wisely helped to make the case that Lilly Endowment grants should fund academic research.

In 1974 the first national study about the needs, concerns and aspirations of girls was led by the nation's most highly regarded academic in the field, Dr. Gisela Knopka, a pioneer in the study of adolescent female development at the University of Minnesota: Center for Youth Development and Research.

This Lilly Endowment-funded study led by Knopka was titled "Young Girls, A Portrait of Adolescents (1976)." It contained candid interviews with American adolescent girls from a variety of social, economic, and ethnic backgrounds and provided moving and compassionate insights. In conjunction with the national training program that the University of Minnesota developed, this seminal research had profound impact on the development of programs for girls.

At the same time, there was a national effort afoot for another vulnerable population. The federal Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDPA) was passed in 1974 to provide crucial support for state programs that help communities take comprehensive approaches to juvenile crime prevention and address the needs of these youth and their families early and effectively.

As the study of girls concluded, its findings were shared with eight girl-serving organizations and juvenile justice staff (Camp Fire Girls, Girl Scouts, 4-H, Big Sisters, Red Cross, National Settlements Houses, YWCA and Girls Clubs).

From 1976 to 1981, Lilly Endowment funded the National Youth Workers Education Project, a training program run by the Center for Youth Development and Research at the University of Minnesota and Indiana State University. Application of the research was the second phase of this effort, and youth workers from these core organizations traveled to Minnesota for training, and learned how to apply research to program design, which resulted in more effective programs. Indiana State designed a parallel program for state youth workers. During this time period, nearly 500 adults completed the training and the effects on the agencies and girls served were significant and long lasting.

As these programs were concluding, Girls Clubs of America, now Girls Incorporated, picked up the torch to promote research, advocacy and effective programs to serve

young women. First in 1978, it hosted a national seminar, "Today's Girls, Tomorrow's Women," at Wingspread Conference Center in Wisconsin. Then in 1981, it established a National Resource Center in Indianapolis. Lilly Endowment grants supported both efforts.

At this juncture, Wisely turned her sights again to the larger youth field. She wondered if there were other groups of young people whose needs were not well understood and services to them could be strengthened.

Discovering that the needs of young adolescents, ages 10 to 15, were largely unmet, she again sought and found academic experts. The Center for Early Adolescence (CEA) at the University of North Carolina, nationally known for groundbreaking research into the distinctive needs of this age group, were significantly influencing the development of middle grades education and offering similar practical help to groups serving this age group in after-school hours programming.

From 1986 to 1989, Lilly Endowment Leadership Education Program (LELEP) partnered with CEA to immerse 53 Fellows in a training program to learn about the needs of early adolescents, and how to create effective and responsive programs to serve them. Indiana Fellows were community youth workers, teachers, youth ministers and juvenile justice personnel who shared what they learned within their communities.

Using the three-pronged approach – targeted academic research, training of adult professionals and investment in an organization to carry on the work – along with CEA's Seven Developmental Needs of Adolescent framework, these Fellows then led the work in Indiana that would be the underpinning of Lilly Endowment's grantmaking in youth programs. This effort would help strengthen youth programs, improve the trusteeship of youth-serving organizations and influence the development of middle-grade education.

These resources were widely disseminated to hundreds of youth-serving organizations and professionals through the Trustee Leadership Development (TLD) program, one of several significant programs that grew out of LELEP. This model -- funding solid academic research, and then using that research as the foundation for program curriculum and activities -- became synonymous with

Wisely's effective philanthropy and transformed the youth-development field. Two significant evaluations demonstrated that programs thrived if the needs of young people were met and youth-development professionals were trained to develop programming that reflected that research.

But Wisely's efforts weren't only externally focused. Internally, Lilly Endowment was engaged in its own reflection. With a strong interest in investment in youth, Jim Morris, its president from 1984 to 1988, established two cross-divisional committees – youth development and the leadership education. Wisely chaired the youth committee and served on the leadership education committee.

Not surprisingly, the committees' work was rooted in questions, and one specifically was important to youth-development: Are there other Lilly Endowment efforts that could include youth? As part of this investigation, Morris sent Wisely to Seattle on a reconnaissance mission. With Seattle's reputation as a kids' place, both believed it could provide valuable insight. Wisely returned with a recommendation: Since Indianapolis had won the bid to host the 1987 Pan American Games, what if Lilly Endowment investigated the role young people could play during this event on the world stage?

As an integral part of the Pan Am Games celebration, Lilly Endowment funded two new youth efforts: The Youth Diplomat Corps and the Youth Sports Program. In addition, the Endowment offered invitational grants to Indianapolis youth and cultural organizations to design effective programs related to the Games. A panoply of youth programs resulted. Lilly Endowment committees and the model Wisely established springboarded a wide range of youth-development efforts. Programs like Youth as Resources, the Children's Choir and Children's Express gained traction. With this increased programming, the Endowment added personnel with expertise in youth development. Willis Bright, a professor at the University of Minnesota's Center for Youth Development and Research, and the Center for Early Adolescence's Director Joan Lipsitz and Director of Training Gayle Dorman, joined the staff and added significantly to the Endowment's youth portfolio efforts.

At the same time, the leadership education committee that was working to affect governance for nonprofits sought to answer yet another query: How could Lilly Endowment further develop the leadership and governance of youth

organizations and also think more expansively about the role youth could play in the larger community?

Its Trustee Leadership Development work expanded with programs like Community Partnerships for Youth (CPY) that involved young people as stakeholders in their communities. Through training, young people not only in Indiana, but in the entire country, were introduced to the idea of trusteeship, governance and philanthropy. Youth organizations, as well as other nonprofits, benefited from the significant efforts of Trustee Leadership Development. Following on the success of the Lilly Endowment Leadership Education Program, Katherine Tyler Scott began this new and expanded effort. Trustee Leadership Development continued to strengthen leadership of youth organizations, but also broadened its focus to include a broader array of community nonprofits.

On Wisely's recommendation, Lilly Endowment also funded the Organizational Renewal Program that identified, rewarded and recognized outstanding youth-service programs and agencies from around Indiana. Programs were chosen for their commitments to youth and demonstrated creativity in addressing the developmental needs of today's youth to face a complicated world.

A looming question for Wisely was how to sustain this youth-development effort: Should there be a more permanent organization that focused on equipping youth workers to serve Indiana's young people? To determine its viability, Lilly Endowment deployed two individuals to converse with Indiana business and community leaders. Their research led to the founding of the Indiana Youth Institute in 1989.

Ultimately, it was Wisely's tireless support of youth programming that changed the landscape of Indiana youth-development efforts.

The establishment of the D. Susan Wisely Youth Worker of the Year award in 2014 was meant to honor her legacy and champion the efforts of Indiana youth workers.