

## Nomination of Katherine Gross for Donaldson Fellow

Katherine Gross ('83 MPPM) is keenly attuned to what's broken in her world – public education, racism, treatment of the mentally ill – and she works relentlessly to fix what is wrong. Just as remarkable are her powers of empathy and listening – almost everyone I interviewed while writing this nomination spoke about Katherine making them feel valued and listened to. If Maya Angelou is correct about people remembering how you made them feel above all else, Katherine's kindness will be remembered by many of us for years to come. It's my honor to nominate her as a Donaldson Fellow.

After earning her BA from Stanford, Katherine spent several years as a VISTA (now known as AmeriCorps VISTA) volunteer campaigning against redlining in Boston. Here she witnessed firsthand the intersection of business and racism. Banks would redline entire neighborhoods inhabited by African-Americans and refuse to lend to them. Katherine concluded that she would have to upgrade her business acumen to advocate more effectively for racial equity. She applied to business school. SOM was a perfect choice because of its socially conscious bent.

Katherine went to work for the Bank of Boston after SOM for three years as a mid-market lender to further hone her financial skills, but she couldn't stay away from the social impact space for long. In 1986 she began working for the Industrial Cooperative Association (ICA), which raises money from churches and charities to invest in worker-owned businesses. She was the director of the loan fund with another individual who left while Katherine was relatively new in her position, leaving Katherine to act in a capacity she didn't necessarily feel qualified for. Jan Saglio ('79 MPPM), Katherine's colleague at the ICA, told me that Katherine rose to the occasion and brought on talented staff to support her. She was able to both steward the resources of the organization while making high-risk loans that brought in other capital to grow the fund.

In 1997 Katherine moved to the Merck Family Foundation. Her portfolio focused on economic development in urban areas. It was around this time that a development at home altered her life's course. She began realizing that her adopted son, Lang, who was two at the time, had severe mental health issues that would require a high degree of care and supervision. She also learned how unequipped the system was to accommodate children like him. When he was in kindergarten, she received a call informing her that Lang would have to leave school that very day and wouldn't be allowed to return. Eventually, she had to leave Merck altogether to care for him full-time.

When I spoke to Susan Musinsky, Executive Director of the Social Innovation Forum, of which Katherine is a board member, she said that Katherine could have become the CEO of a company. She has the wisdom, skill set, commitment, and knowledge. (Susan, who often interacts with senior executives, would know.) But circumstances took her in a different direction, so she found other ways to make an impact. In Jan's words, Katherine serves as a catalyst, empowering others to make cutting-edge change in their communities.

In the early 2000's, Katherine's husband, Peter, a tech investor, was able to use the proceeds from some lucrative exits to hire health professionals to help with Lang's care. He started a charitable family foundation, the Charlotte Foundation, which Katherine helms. As a result of Katherine having experienced the failings of Boston's public education system through Lang, the foundation supports urban education reform and the promotion of civic engagement in the Boston area.

The Charlotte Foundation also has a particular focus on the connection between race, ethnicity and poverty. These days, said Susan, it's common for nonprofits and the social sector to have an intersectional lens and pay attention to race. But this is an area Katherine has emphasized for decades in her work, long before it became popular, and likely because of her anti-redlining experience. For Katherine, the causes that she supports are not mere bullet points on her resume. They become indelible parts of her life. She invites them into her home and family. Literally. In fact, that's how I met her.

As an undergraduate at Yale in the 2000's, I was a member of Shades of Yale (<https://www.shadesofyale.org/>), an a cappella group singing music of the African-American tradition and composed primarily of minority students. Katherine had seen the group performing in Boston in the 90's and had effectively adopted us. One weekend every year, she and Peter host all ~14-18 members of Shades at their house and tap into their network to book performances for the group. I recently learned that Shades is just one of several organizations like it that Katherine supports. It's one of the ways in which she seeks to effect change. She engages future leaders of color in an intimate way while they are young and mentors them throughout their careers to boost the impact they ultimately have in their communities.

Katherine has become a well-known and respected fixture in Boston's nonprofit and social impact community. She sits on the boards of the Social Innovation Forum (SIF), which connects supporters of nonprofits to practitioners, and EdVestors, a highly regarded school improvement organization whose CEO was recently hired as superintendent of Boston Public Schools. Susan said she appreciates Katherine's strategic, data-driven mind – whenever a new initiative is presented to the SIF board, Katherine toggles effortlessly between the big picture (How does this initiative further the organization's objectives?) and the data (what is the evidence that this initiative will succeed?). Tanya Inwald ('11 MBA), Director of Programs at SIF, told me how Katherine often goes above and beyond the call of duty of a board member. If there is ever a crisis, she is the first to jump in and help.

Amy Luster ('94 MPPM), VP of Finance & Operations at EdVestors, echoed similar sentiments about Katherine when I spoke to her. Katherine improved board governance by proposing the creation of governance and fundraising subcommittees. She can also be counted on to attend EdVestors events and goes out of her way to introduce potential donors to the organization.

Kenneth Galdston ('82 MPPM), who overlapped with Katherine at SOM, spoke to me about her support for his organization, the InterValley Project (IVP), which is a network of six New England organizations promoting social and economic justice for their communities. Unsolicited, she proposed helping him with fundraising in 2013. She and Peter hosted fundraisers for IVP at their house. In a matter of three years, the organization went from raising \$12,000 annually to \$100,000 in a year.

As a trustee of the board of Skidmore College, which her daughter attended, Katherine has advocated for students who are the first in their families to attend college. For at least 40 years Skidmore has run a program supporting first-generation college students. Katherine called for a two-year, rigorous evaluation of this program to glean how helpful it had been to its alumni and determine how it could be improved. At SOM, she and Peter have endowed a speaker series on social entrepreneurship.

The ways in which Katherine uses her privilege to lift up those less fortunate than her are endless and varied. Be it caring for Lang, relentlessly supporting the causes she is passionate about, or insisting on

data-driven analyses to drive organization strategy, she is a jack of all trades. Her clear-eyed vision for a kinder world is matched by her success in nurturing deep and lasting relationships with the individuals and communities she supports. In my mind, Katherine is the type of SOM graduate we should all strive to be. She would make the consummate Donaldson Fellow.