



2021 Women in Professional Services: Harriet Karr-McDonald, The Doe Fund

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Name: Harriet Karr-McDonald

Title: President

Company Name: The Doe Fund

Real estate associations or organizations that you are currently a member of:

Supportive Housing Network of NY (SHNNY);
NYS Association for Affordable Housing (NYSFAH)

In the past year, what project, transaction or accomplishment are you most proud of?

The Doe Fund closed two crucial, interlinked deals this year on Gates Ave. in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn via separate Dept. of Homeless Services contracts. For one, we refinanced our original transitional housing residence, allowing us to redevelop the facility to address obsolete building systems, client quarters, and program space. For the other, we acquired an adjacent site to develop a new 200-bed Center for Opportunity. The \$7 million in funding we received for these projects came at a critical time when we as an organization were weathering COVID-19's financial toll. More importantly, these deals will greatly improve our ability to assist the homeless and formerly incarcerated men our programs serve.

Women have made significant progress in the last year towards equality in the workplace. How do you advocate for your fellow women in real estate?

The Doe Fund is founded on the premise that society—and especially the workplace—needs to be more inclusive and to empower marginalized people. As a female leader, I work to create opportunities for women both within The Doe Fund and outside of it. Recently, I'm proud to have brought on another woman to lead The Doe Fund by my side: Isabel McDevitt, our new executive vice president. Creating this opportunity for another woman to carry on The Doe Fund's legacy and mission is just one example of how we advocate for more women in the field. It is the relationships we build and the partnerships we share, after all, that drive change.

What steps have you taken to ensure the continued success of your firm?

As we recover from a pandemic that has disproportionately devastated the populations we serve, The Doe Fund is providing a comprehensive spectrum of care to New York City's most vulnerable. We have five residences in development in 2021 that will add over 650 affordable and supportive housing units to the city. Our growing real estate portfolio serves individuals with histories of substance abuse, homelessness, incarceration, mental and physical disabilities; low-income families; and veterans. Our workforce development team—which provides career training and job placement services to the men in our reentry program—has innovated in response to a dramatically-altered labor market. Our classes went remote, we added computer literacy courses, and we pivoted to preparing the men we serve for “pandemic-proof,” living wage jobs, including skilled trades.

Why should women consider a career in commercial real estate and related services?

Although women have made progress in real estate, we are still under-represented. Entering this field can mean making a difference not just by breaking barriers, but also by helping address the systemic problems our society faces. Developing transitional and permanent supportive housing for vulnerable New Yorkers, for example, is more critical today than ever before as homelessness threatens more Americans. Women can lead the way in creating change, restoring communities, and rebuilding families, neighborhoods, and the fabric of our nation.

How have you adapted and changed in the last 12 months?

In May, The Doe Fund moved half of the men living in our transitional residences into a commercial hotel to allow for social distancing. This presented considerable challenges, but we are proud not only to have stopped the spread of COVID-19 in our community before it even started, but to have actually been embraced by the neighborhood where we relocated these men, while other providers have faced considerable resistance and controversy. This is in part because of the vital services that the men in our programs offer to the neighborhood. As part of our Community Improvement Project, they became frontline heroes, providing enhanced sanitation services across 115 miles of NYC streets daily.

How do you keep your team motivated despite conflicts and obstacles?

It is the men we serve who our team motivated when facing roadblocks. Sharing their stories of triumph and transformation—from living on the streets or returning from incarceration with nothing to their names, to being able to provide for themselves and their families—inspires my team to continue expanding opportunity to those among us most in need. Over 80% of the men we serve are people of color; the deep, historical trauma they have experienced and overcome—incarceration, poverty, homelessness, lack of healthcare and educational opportunities, addiction, and the systemic racism that underpins each of these issues—also keeps us motivated to break these devastating cycles.

What books or social media influencers would you recommend to other women?

For other women interested in learning more about America's crises of homelessness and mass incarceration, I highly recommend three books from across the political spectrum. First, “The New Jim Crow” by Michelle Alexander is rightly considered the Holy Grail on exploring the irrefutable link between systemic racism, mass incarceration, and recidivism. Next, “The Conservative Heart” by

Arthur Brooks envisions a GOP re-centered around a platform of reducing poverty and spreading economic opportunity to marginalized Americans. Finally, “Tightrope” by Nicholas Kristof chronicles the evaporation of America’s working class, and speaks to the urgent need to provide the millions among us who have been left behind with the ability to ascend the economic ladder.

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