

Nonprofit called Resource Generation helps wealthy students provide for others

Young people hope to use their wealth to work towards economic justice.

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(https://s3.amazonaws.com/media.dpn/41476_dsc_4997f.jpg)

In 2011, Holly Fetter joined Resource Generation after experiencing a conflicting sense of identity over her wealth.

The apparent contradiction between her class background and political identity led Fetter to become involved with Resource Generation, a national nonprofit organization of wealthy young people who hope to create a more equitable distribution of resources and power. RG turns its ideology into practice by collectively donating to charities across the country.

On Monday night, the Philadelphia chapter held a private meeting for prospective members. Kate Poole, a leader of the local chapter, said that many of the 15 attendees identified as students from local colleges, including Penn.

“The potential members wanted to learn more about how to leverage their resources for social justice, to talk more about issues of wealth and class and to find community,” Poole said.

With 12 chapters across the country, RG is now looking to grow its membership base by targeting college students. Sarah Burgess, one of the leaders of the Philadelphia chapter, said that many college-aged people “start to question what it means to have wealth and deal with the possible guilt of not knowing what to do about it.”

RG has begun reaching out to students at Brown University, Barnard College and Vassar College. Colleges are ideal places to center the organization, not only due to the concentration of ideological young people, Fetter said, but also because universities tend to be embedded in low-income neighborhoods.

“Universities like Penn that are next to these types of neighborhoods draw attention to the contrast,” Fetter said. “College students are ripe for pursuing their political and personal desires to understand their identities and be able to affect change around them,” she added.

As the Occupy Wall Street movement illuminated the gap between the rich and the poor, Fetter — a junior at Stanford University at the time — felt disillusioned by her privilege. Although she technically fit into the top percentage of society, her political values strongly aligned with the protesters’ calls for greater social and economic equality.

In addition to fostering open discussions for its members, RG addresses political shortcomings that contribute to economic injustice. One of its priorities has been to push for heavier taxes on the wealthiest sector of society.

“Taxes are really connected to the way our country functions so we want to see a stronger tax base, and we are ready and willing to pay that,” Burgess said.

On a local level, the Philadelphia chapter has focused its attention on improving the unbalanced quality of education throughout the city. The organization specifically critiques the unsettling influence of private funds in an education system that should be based on public consensus.

“The fact that we’re relying on private money means that wealthy people are the ones who get to make the decisions in communities,” Burgess said. “It should be a democratic system of government that is making that happen.”

Back when Fetter started the first college chapter of RG at Stanford, she hoped it would spark a dialogue over what it means to be wealthy and politically progressive — a goal that her national efforts to engage college students could achieve.

“We recognize that we have a unique position in the struggle for social justice, and we want to continue talking about how we can use our resources to shift the balance of power,” Fetter said.

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