

Press Release – Dana Dakin
Isabel Benham Award
Women’s Bond Club

On Wednesday, April 28, in New York City, Dana Dakin, Wilmot resident and founder of WomensTrust, received the prestigious Isabel Benham Award sponsored by the Women’s Bond Club, a vital community of experienced women across financial services who share the mission “lead, learn, return”. The organization was founded to advance women's leadership, grow their intellectual capital, and return worth to their companies, communities and upcoming generations.

Each year WBC recognizes extraordinary women who have made outstanding contributions in improving the lives of women, especially those who are most in need. Dakin is this year’s recipient of \$25,000, which will be donated to her non-profit microlending program, WomensTrust.

According to Heidi Solomon, who made the introductions at the award ceremony, “Dana’s [microlending] model addresses the holistic needs of women, their families, and their communities, all of which are necessary to surmount the cycle of poverty. As part of its strategy, WomensTrust creates volunteer opportunities, recruits business school faculty and retired executives to teach small business classes, and enlists college students to help Ghanaian women learn about business. Most of all, through WomensTrust. Dana has empowered a group of extraordinary African women to lift up their lives, their families, and their communities.”

Having retired from her marketing consulting practice at the age of 60, Dakin decided to put her creative talents to use by spending her “retirement” years actively engaged in supporting women who had not had the opportunities that she had in growing a successful business. Her vision, was sparked by a college paper she once authored about Africa. At some point, she knew that whatever she did, it had to benefit women and girls. Her next step was to start a microlending project in Pokuase.

That was seven years ago. Today, Dakin’s non-profit microfinance program, which currently has over 1000 clients in the village of Pokuase, Ghana, is unique in its scope. Because she believes that the climb out of poverty cannot be sustained by access to credit alone, Dakin integrated critical supplementary programs of education and healthcare into her model in order to ensure long-term economic growth of the program and the community it serves.

While thanking the group for this award, Dakin explained, "I am here in front of the Women's Bond Club of New York, accepting an award for what is becoming recognized as a vital 'bottom-up' community-based model on the international development landscape. Our clients take the resources we provide and, against daunting odds, create a path of their own: safety for their families and the opportunity to advance economically and socially. At WomensTrust, we use microlending as the base upon which to lay an integrated set of tools for women and girls to move forward. May I invite you to bring your incredible strengths - as successful women in the financial world - and direct them to women in the developing world. There is no better investment. You can personally be part of this change. The affinity is great, the need even greater."

Named after one of the Women's Bond Club founders, the Isabel Benham Award includes the privilege of directing a \$25,000 donation by the WBC to a charity of the winner's choice. Winners of the Isabel Benham "Women Helping Women" have included Rear Admiral Marsha J. Evans, U.S. Navy (retired), who gained a reputation for forging new ground for women in the military, Nancy Lublin, Founder of Dress for Success, a non-profit organization which offers services worldwide to help low-income women enter the workforce and stay employed, Jill Ker Conway, first woman President of Smith College and noted author, Janet Tiebout Hanson, Founder of 85 Broads, a noted "Best Practices" global, online network for professional women, and Lynn Martin, Former Secretary of Labor in the George H. W. Bush Administration, whose initiatives focused on shattering the glass ceiling, creating programs to assist displaced homemakers and opening opportunities for women in non-traditional jobs.