

Voices

The Nokomis Foundation
is on the leading edge of
philanthropy's new wave.

We have just released our first white paper, "Unique Approach Helps Small Foundation Make A Big Difference." Written by Polly Hewitt, the paper highlights our innovative approach to grantmaking. Check inside this issue of Voices for a summary article or call us for a copy of the complete paper. You'll also be able to find the white paper on our website after May 1.

Creating a stronger voice
for women and girls.

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The
Nokomis
Foundation



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Inside Story

Last year it was El Nino. Every time I picked up a newspaper or listened to the news it seemed there was a new report about El Nino. This year it's Y2K. For a time, every report about the Y2K Problem sent me screaming from the room. But, it's time to face the music. Y2K is something we should concern ourselves with. It's particularly important that nonprofits dig in and determine the impact Y2K will have on their organizations.

In my research, I have discovered CompuMentor, a San Francisco-based nonprofit organization dedicated to providing appropriate technical assistance to institutions that serve low-income populations. They have an excellent website that includes Y2K information in plain English, frequently asked questions about Y2K, links to other Y2K sites, and best of all, a comprehensive workbook specially designed to help non-profit organizations perform their own Y2K audits. This workbook can be downloaded without cost from the site, AND there's an email and fax-based Y2K helpdesk available to all users of the workbook. You can find CompuMentor at www.compumentor.org. (If you don't have Internet access and would like to see a copy of the workbook, please give me a call.)

I'm also pleased to announce that Erin Trahan has joined the Nokomis Foundation staff as Program Director for our girls program. Erin joins us with experience advocating for youth community involvement and girls' and women's issues. Most recently she worked as the Manager of Youth Outreach for the Michigan Nonprofit Association. In her volunteer time Erin facilitated a girls' self-expression group called OUTLOUD! for a Lansing-based community arts organization.

Currently, Erin is reading, compiling, sorting and organizing volumes of information on youth development and gender issues. In the next few months she will create a database for these resources, develop a website, and start building relationships with key community members. Feel free to contact Erin at the Nokomis Foundation with ideas, suggestions or questions.

Kym Mulhern, Executive Director

So do we use *feminist* in order to promote the word for its own sake? Realistically, we run the risk of alienating our wide audience. Do we use *girls* so people will know what issues we mean (pay and curriculum equity, eating disorders, sexual assault, etc.) even though boys are just as much part of the solution? Do we use *gender*—a description of social behavior often mistaken for a biological distinction—a word almost always misused and misunderstood?

What language will speak to the widest audience without the immediate judgment and recoil? How can feminists describe their programs in a way that uses the power that language has to create and pass on meaning? Perhaps we need to start talking more . . .

If you have any clever, creative suggestions for naming the above-mentioned program, please contact Erin Trahan.

Save the Date

Celebrate the 100th anniversary of Susan B. Anthony's National American Woman Suffrage Association's annual convention on **Tuesday, April 27 at 7:30 pm at St. Cecilia Music Society, Grand Rapids, Michigan**, site of the original 5-day convention held in April 1899. Several area organizations are sponsoring the celebration, which will feature a re-enactment of portions of the original convention. Local suffragist, Emily Burton Ketcham, will also be remembered. The event is open to the public and free of charge. For more information call 454-7457.

Take Action for Girls

Sticks and Stones: Those Names Don't Hurt Me!

by *Erin Trahan*

Women. Girls. Gender. Feminist.

Did you see red flags? It seems that all of those words signal mainstream thinkers into cautious “concern” about what exactly lies behind them. Most often it’s fear of difference, fear of change, and a narrow conception of the issues at hand. For those of us who are comfortable wielding these terms, using them by necessity to explain our jobs, or politically to further our cause, we often fear miscommunication. What is a feminist program anyway?

The Nokomis Foundation has been developing a youth feminist program dubbed “Focus on Girls.” Still in its infancy, the program now has staff (me!) and the need to refine and define its purpose, mission, and action plan. Currently I describe the program as “seeing youth development through a gender lens.” Because “FOG” intends to engage all youth, female and male, in thinking critically about gender, one of my tasks is re-naming the project. Carrying out the goals of the program seems a breeze in comparison to naming and explaining the project in one inviting and engaging title and tagline—one that doesn’t raise hairs or coats of armor.

The non-profit field describes its programs in a language of its own—a language of action and efficiency adopted from corporations with “high productivity rates” and “total quality management.” For example, “Focus on Girls” plans to be a “first-stop for resources,” to provide “networking opportunities,” and to provide “consultation, training and technical assistance” to youth professionals, educators, and parents. Social service agencies with diverse missions are busy doing all of those things! But talking feminist isn’t as common as non-profit lingo. And it’s a tad more threatening.



She Said It

“What we are learning around the world is that, if women are healthy and educated, their families will flourish. If women are free from violence, their families will flourish. If women have a chance to work and earn as full and equal partners in society, their families will flourish. And when families flourish, communities and nations will flourish.”

Hillary Rodham Clinton

Did You Know. . .

Things you should know about the Y2K Problem:

- The core problem is simple
- There are several different kinds of Y2K problems
- Problems can occur on or before January 1, 1999
- Y2K failures can be severe and expensive
- Upgrading to compliant software doesn’t necessarily solve your problem
- The problem is everywhere
- Prepare and fix problems sooner than later

Learn more about Y2K in plain English. Visit [CompuMentor](http://CompuMentor.org) at www.compumentor.org.

Economics & Women

Women, Work, and Wages

Guest column By Laura Stivers, Just Economics

We know women earn 74 cents for every dollar men earn, but why?

Start with the reality that 80 percent of U.S. workers do routine production or service work, like answering phones or selling clothes, and their paychecks have shrunk. The other 20 percent of workers use advanced technology or make decisions about money, like engineers or stockbrokers, and their pay has increased. Yes, most women are in the first category.

Why do those jobs pay less now? Because legislators have backed away from regulating employment, and given businesses more “freedom.” For example, businesses have been allowed to turn permanent jobs into temp jobs that pay less, and don’t have health or retirement benefits. The fastest growing segment of the work force is “contingent,” which means involuntarily part-time, temporary, or self-employed, and two-thirds of those jobs are filled by women. Plus, our government failed to make the minimum wage keep up with inflation, and more than two-thirds of minimum wage workers are women. That’s why you can work full-time and still be flat broke.

Another big factor is that the deck has been stacked against unions. Women in unions make almost 40% more than non-union women. As for women of color, the union advantage is greater.

One strategy to improve women’s economic status is to promote education and training to help more women get the good paying jobs. But more education doesn’t always translate into a fatter paycheck. For example, college educated childcare workers make less than auto assemblers just out of high school. Any time women dominate a job category the pay goes down. A pay equity policy, where wages are based on what it takes to do the job – rather than who does the job – will increase women’s income.

Women Around the World

Women and Education

- 70% of the world’s illiterates are female.
- Two-thirds of the children who receive less than four years of education are girls.
- For every year beyond fourth grade that girls go to school, family size drops 20%, child deaths drop 10%, and wages rise 20%; yet the international aid dedicated to education is declining.
- Worldwide, more than half the population of women over age 15 cannot read or write.

Statistics provided by SIGI, the Sisterhood is Global Institute. SIGI seeks to deepen the understanding of women’s human rights at the local, national, regional and global levels, and to strengthen the capacity of women to exercise their rights.

Visit SIGI at www.sigi.org.

Learn more about Y2K:

- www.compumentor.org
- www.utne.com/y2k
- www.year2000.com
- <http://millenia-bcs.com/nfclass.htm>
- www.cpsr.org/program/Y2K
- www.brainstorm-group.com/Y2K_Events.html

Herstory

Grace Murray Hopper became the mother of modern computer software when she invented the first computer “compiler” in 1952. Up until her retirement at age 80 in 1986, she was the oldest person on active duty in the U.S. Navy. She worked on the original UNIVAC computer and developed COBOL, the first friendly business computer software.

(from www.smartgirls.org)

Women and Social Security

As the national debate begins over Social Security it is important that women stay informed. Social Security is a women's issue. Women live longer than men, women are the majority of Social Security recipients (60% overall) and the vast majority of the oldest recipients (72% of those over age 85). For many retired women, Social Security is their primary means of support.

Heidi Hartmann, President and Director of the Institute for Women's Policy Research, encourages us to "keep the heart in Social Security" and suggests we keep these thoughts in mind as we evaluate changes to Social Security.

There are many protections for women in the current Social Security system, among them higher relative benefits for lower earners; benefits as wives, widows, and divorced wives of retired or deceased working men; and protections for minor children of disabled and deceased workers.

Every reform proposal that is considered should be evaluated in terms of its impact on women. Since women and men have different life and work experiences, virtually any public policy affects women differently than it affects men.

Because Social Security is such an important issue for women and because any proposed reform will affect women differently than it does men, we need to insist that women leaders have a seat at the table when decisions about reform are made.

Contact IWPR at 202-785-5100 for more resources on Social Security and a copy of the women's checklist on Social Security Reform.

In the past it was good advice to tell a woman to get a government job, because of strong affirmative action programs, and better pay and benefits resulting from unionization. But now government jobs are being cut. We are also contracting government work out to private businesses – attempting to cut government costs by using lower paid workers.

Other economic policies suppress wages by intensifying the competition. For example, one study predicts that absorbing the nearly one million new workers dumped on the labor market by welfare reform will reduce wages on the bottom third of workers by 11.9 percent.

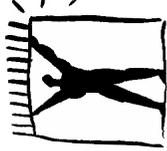
There's no economic mystery about how to solve these problems, but it will take political power. Since 99 out of 100 women will work for pay at some time in their lives, we ought to get together to raise our wages. And when we do, the benefit will go to our families, the businesses where we spend our money, and the government we support with our taxes.

Laura Stivers is a Trainer for Just Economics. She is earning her Ph.D. in Ethics at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, CA and is an avid swimmer and white water river rafter. You can reach Just Economics at justecon@igcc.org.

Landmarks for Women

You can find an Interactive Time Line for Women at www.csmonitor.com/durable/1998/07/20/fp7s2-csm.html.

The Interactive Time Line features women's history highlights for each year since 1848. You click on the year and the Time Line will display a relevant women's history "factoid."



Nokomis On Leading Edge Of Philanthropy's New Wave

by Polly Hewitt

The philanthropic community is being turned on its end by a new approach to giving. Various called "capacity building," "venture philanthropy," and "strategic philanthropy," this approach involves a much different relationship between grantmaker and grantee. Instead of simply making annual project grants, a handful of innovative foundations are developing long-term partnerships with their grantees, through which they are able to have a sustaining impact on the organization's future. As a significant investor in West Michigan's women's community, Nokomis is truly on the leading edge of this new wave of philanthropy.

Although it is a relatively small foundation, Nokomis has a big mission: to make a difference in the lives of women and girls in the West Michigan area. Because of this bold agenda and its limited resources, the foundation realized early on that it had to be very strategic in its grantmaking. Instead of making traditional program grants, Executive Director Kym Mulhern chose to invest significant resources in a few key members of the local women's community: the YWCA, GROW, and the Women's Resource Center. These grants were dedicated to funding previously "unfundable" projects – the unglamorous, day-to-day work involved in building a strong organization. From strategic planning to state-of-the-art computer systems and fund development campaigns, Nokomis has played a key role in helping these organizations get ready for the 21st century. And by strengthening the capacity of individual organizations, it has improved the entire community's ability to meet the critical needs of women and girls.

If you would like more information on Nokomis' innovative approach to grantmaking, ask for our new white paper, "UNIQUE APPROACH HELPS SMALL FOUNDATION MAKE A BIG DIFFERENCE." It is available on our website (after May 1) or by calling our office (451-0267).

Recent Grants

Just Economics (Berkeley, CA) - support for media training and a series of economics articles

Community Media Center (Grand Rapids, MI) - support for the purchase of a video series and related community forums.

Grantseeker Information

The Nokomis Foundation primarily funds grants in the West Michigan area. However, we are open to proposals with a state or national focus, providing they include a West Michigan component. We are particularly interested in pilot programs, and give priority to organizations that do not have access to traditional funding sources. We have no funding deadlines, however, formal proposals are reviewed by our Board of Advisors, which meet quarterly. If you would like a complete copy of the Nokomis Foundation funding guidelines, please give us a call at 616-451-0267. You may also access our guidelines on-line at www.nokomisfoundation.org.

Reach Us

Need to contact us at the Nokomis Foundation? Our office hours are from 9:00 - 3:00 each Monday through Thursday.

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