

# Voices

If we are to achieve the goal of welfare reform—breaking the cycle of poverty and welfare dependency — we must resist the temptation to

indulge in quick-fix job training that prepares women for nothing but more poverty. Instead, we must acknowledge that education is the key.

AAUW

*Education & Training: The Path Out of Poverty for Women*

Creating a stronger voice  
for women and girls.

161 Ottawa NW  
Suite 305-C  
Grand Rapids, MI 49503

The  
Nokomis  
Foundation



Nonprofit  
organization  
US postage  
PAID  
Grand Rapids, MI  
Permit no. 368

April 2000  Issue Sixteen

# Inside Story

As the AAUW quote on the front page of this issue of Voices states, education is the key. Just think about these relationships:

The more education women have,

- the more likely they are to participate in the labor force,
- the less likely they are to be unemployed and/or dependent on welfare,
- the more years they work,
- the higher their earning are,
- the better their children's early language and reading skills,
- the greater the likelihood that their children will be successful students.

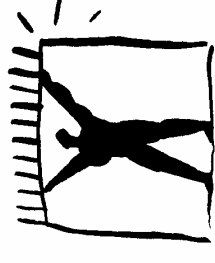
In general, the risk of living in poverty falls rapidly as women attain higher education levels.

These benefits extend to all people — education is important for men and women, boys and girls. We must, however, look at education issues with a gender lens. Historically, women and girls have been shortchanged when it comes to education and job training opportunities. (Remember, it's only been 28 years since the passage of Title IX!) We need to stay informed and pay attention to education issues as they impact women and girls.

This issue of Voices covers a wide variety of topics in the broad area of "education." We are pleased to include information from a ground-breaking new study done by the University of Michigan Center for the Education of Women exploring whether Michigan is a "smart state" for women. This report clearly spells out the current realities for women seeking post-secondary education and lays out policy recommendations. Erin Trahan has included a basic analysis of Title IX issues as they relate to girls in the Taking Flight section of this newsletter.

We hope this issue of Voices piques your interest to learn more and get involved in education issues for women and girls.

*Kym Mulhern, Executive Director*



## Herstory

### The Story Behind Women's History Month

By the time you read this issue of Voices, Women's History Month will be over. Technically, that is. At the Nokomis Foundation we celebrate the contributions of women and girls every day. So, despite the fact that we've officially left Women's History Month behind for another year, we hope you'll enjoy learning the story behind Women's History Month.

Women's History Month got its start when the Sonoma County (California) Commission on the Status of Women initiated a "Women's History Week" celebration in 1978. They chose the week of March 8 so that International Women's Day would be the focal point of the observance. Within a few years dozens of schools planned special programs for Women's History Week, an annual "Real Woman" Essay Contest drew hundreds of entries, and an annual parade and program were staged in downtown Santa Rosa, California. The Women's History movement spread, and in 1981 Congress passed a bipartisan resolution declaring a "National Women's History Week."

In 1987, the National Women's History Project petitioned Congress to expand the national celebration to the entire month of March. Every year since, the National Women's History Month Resolution has been approved with bipartisan support in both the House and Senate. Each year, programs and activities in schools, workplaces, and communities have become more extensive as information and program ideas have been developed and shared.

*Facts provided by the Washington Feminist Faxnet.*

# Women Around the World



## Perspective

- The 3 richest people in the world own assets exceeding the combined gross domestic products of the world's poorest 48 countries.
- Among the 4.4 billion people who live in developing countries:
  - 3/5 have no access to basic sanitation
  - Nearly 1/3 are without safe drinking water
  - 1/4 lack adequate housing
  - 1/5 live beyond reach of modern health services
  - 1/5 of the children do not get as far as grade five in school
  - 1/5 are undernourished
- Basic education for all would cost \$6 billion per year . . . \$8 billion is spent annually for cosmetics in the US alone.
- Installation of water and sanitation for all would cost \$9 billion plus some annual costs . . . \$11 billion is spent annually on ice cream in Europe.
- Reproductive health services for all women would cost \$12 billion per year . . . \$12 billion a year is spent on perfumes in Europe and the US.
- Basic health care and nutrition would cost \$13 billion . . .
  - \$17 billion a year is spent on pet food in Europe and the U.S.;
  - \$35 billion a year is spent on business entertainment in Japan;
  - \$50 billion a year is spent on cigarettes in Europe;
  - \$105 billion a year is spent on alcoholic drinks in Europe;
  - \$400 billion a year on narcotic drugs around the world;
  - and \$780 billion a year is spent on the world's militaries.

Source: UN Development Programme, *Human Development Report 1998*

## Point to Ponder

Studies in several states have found that post-secondary education not only increases women's income, it improves their self-esteem, increases their children's educational ambitions, and has a dramatic impact on their quality of life, enriching the women's personal lives and improving their relationships with their children. The more educated a woman is, the better her children's early language and reading skills, and the greater the likelihood that her children will be successful students.

*Michigan: A "Smart State" for Women?*  
*University of Michigan Center for the Education of Women*

## Did You Know. . .

- Nearly a quarter of all Michigan households are headed by single mothers, and among those households, nearly 50% live in poverty.
- In Michigan, women earn only 62% of what men earn.
- According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, between 1998 and 2008 occupations requiring an associate's degree or more education will account for 40% of total job growth.
- The largest and fastest occupational growth will be in professional specialties; the smallest and slowest increases will be in agricultural and manufacturing/production occupations.
- Between 1980 and 1990, college-educated women in Michigan saw their earnings increase by 12.8%, but the earnings of women with limited or no post-secondary education declined as much as 10.5%.

*Michigan: a "Smart State" for Women?*  
*University of Michigan Center for the Education of Women*

# Education & Women

## Is Michigan: A “Smart State” for Women?



The University of Michigan Center for the Education of Women has recently released a report highlighting the importance of post-secondary education for women in Michigan and examining the effects of tuition, state and federal financial aid programs, child care, and welfare policies on Michigan women's access to higher education.

Since 1964, the mission of the University of Michigan Center for the Education of Women has been to lower barriers to women's full participation in education and employment within the University and the larger society. For those with the means to pay for the cost of college or eligibility for enough financial aid to make up the difference, access has been increasing. In fact, significantly more women than men are currently completing bachelor's degrees. However, poor women, some of whom in the past have been able to pursue education while receiving public assistance, now face nearly insurmountable obstacles. Their inability to achieve higher education is a loss to themselves, their children, and the state.

Education is the best investment we, as a society, can make in women and their families. It is the most consistently effective means of lifting families out of poverty. It is the only way to create the highly skilled workforce than employers increasingly require.

*For a copy of the report, contact the Center for the Education of Women at 734-998-7080 or online at [www.umich.edu/~cew](http://www.umich.edu/~cew).*

# Literacy & Women

The National Literacy Act defines literacy as “an individual's ability to read, write, and speak in English, compute and solve problems at levels of proficiency necessary to function on the job and in society, to achieve one's goals, and develop one's knowledge and potential.”

According to Laubach Literacy, twenty million American women either cannot read at all, or can only read isolated words in a text. Seventeen percent of American women 25 years of age and older (15.4 million by number) have not graduated from high school.

Lack of education has a measurable impact on women's economic status. Women who drop out of high school have a higher unemployment rate (19.3% compared to the 9.9% of women with a high school education). If employed, they have lower earnings (\$10,725 annually, compared to \$16,906 for women with a diploma).

The United Nations has declared literacy to be a basic human right – along with the right to adequate food, health care, and housing. One might think that food, health care, and housing are more pressing needs than literacy education, but literacy is a major tool to help address these other needs.

Adult literacy has a huge impact on the education of children. As the education level of adults improves, so does their children's success in school. Helping low-literate adults improve their basic skills has a direct and measurable impact on both the education and quality of life of their children.

To find out more about literacy issues, check out the web resources included in this newsletter. In Grand Rapids, contact the Kent County Literacy Council at 616-459-5151.

# Be Counted

Women across the country should take part in the US Census! Congressional district reapportionment depends on the census – and so does funding for many programs affecting women. Stand up and be counted!

## Be Counted Again!

The Feminist Majority Foundation is conducting an online feminist census to let Congress, big business, and the public know there are millions of feminists – women and men – demanding equality.

The census will help you make your priorities known! Log on now at [www.feminist.org/welcome/census-1.html](http://www.feminist.org/welcome/census-1.html)

# Film Festival

The Jewish Film Festival will be Sunday, May 14—Thursday, May 18, 2000 at UICA in Grand Rapids. Please check out the schedule of films and events on the Nokomis Foundation website, or call the Jewish Federation of Grand Rapids at 616-456-5553.



# Recent Grants

- **Wealthy Street Theatre** – Grand Rapids, MI – support for the Harlem Girls Choir
- **Inner City Christian Federation** – Grand Rapids, MI – support for a gender-lens program evaluation and follow-up
- **GRACE** – Grand Rapids, MI – support for the 2nd Summit on Racism sponsored by the Racial Justice Institute
- **Rock for a Cure** – Arlington, VA – support for Campus Awareness Program at Michigan colleges
- **YWCA of Grand Rapids** – Grand Rapids, MI – support for planning phases of a program for high-risk girls

# Education and Job Training Needs of Very Low Income Women

The Better Homes Fund has been engaged in a comprehensive study of the lives of homeless and low-income housed families and their children. Based on extensive interviews with mothers, the study findings highlight the important roles education and training play in families' efforts to become self-supporting and clearly demonstrate the need for increased educational and job training opportunities for TANF recipients.

- Substantive education and job training programs increase chances for obtaining higher-skilled jobs and the likelihood of sustained employment to help families leave poverty.
- Helping women gain the education and skills needed to obtain living wage jobs should be a critical element/component of any welfare-to-work program. Education is a critical component of securing and maintaining a job.
- Very low-income women who are working or who have worked are much more likely to have a high school diploma or GED than those who have not worked.

Recommendations from the study include:

- Expanding educational and job training opportunities for welfare recipients.
- Lengthen the time needed to obtain education/job skills necessary to access jobs that offer livable wages.
- Increase education/job training opportunities to include post-secondary education.
- Allow participation in education/job training programs to satisfy work requirements.
- Policies and programs must recognize and support the importance of single mothers' multiple roles as parents, care givers, and breadwinners if they are to be successful in assisting low-income families to become self-supporting.

For more information, contact *The Better Homes Fund* at 617-964-3834 or [www.tbhf.org](http://www.tbhf.org).

# Take Action for Girls

## Gender Equity and School-To-Work

School-to-Work programs encourage educational systems to facilitate students' transition from school to the workplace by exposing them to a variety of industries and providing them with the knowledge and skills necessary for success in the workplace of the future. School-to-Work stands to greatly expand career options for young women — but frequently there are barriers (visible and invisible) to young women's full participation in these programs. Stereotypic attitudes and assumptions abound — limiting the horizons of young women and girls. Here's a "reality check" on gender equity and School-to-Work programs:

- Gender-based stereotypes limit young women's career choices. The reality is that gender bias and stereotypes have a significant impact on young women's educational and employment opportunities. Strongly-held attitudes about what is and isn't "feminine" limit young women's potential for success in non-traditional fields — and opportunities for increased earning power and promotion potential.
- Sex discrimination is a persistent barrier to education, despite the fact that Title IX has been around for over twenty-five years. There are several barriers related to sex discrimination:

\***Gender-biased assessment** — Standardized testing is used to determine eligibility for many educational opportunities, but many of these tests have a documented gender gap.

\***Gender-based "tracking"** in vocational education and job training programs sees young women frequently steered into low-wage, low skill jobs offering little hope of advancement or economic self-sufficiency.

\***Sexual harassment** is pervasive in schools today, with some studies showing about 85% of female students experiencing some form of sexual harassment at school.

# School Violence

School violence is a relatively "new" education issue — and one women care about deeply. Here are some web sites you can visit to learn more about school violence prevention projects:

The Lion & Lamb Project

[www.lionlamb.org](http://www.lionlamb.org)

A national grassroots initiative by parents for parents focusing on the peace movement; information on violent entertainment, toys and games

Keep Schools Safe

[www.keepschoolsafe.org](http://www.keepschoolsafe.org)

A collection of resources to help make schools safer

National Crime Prevention Council — Stopping School Violence

[www.ncpc.org/2schvio.htm](http://www.ncpc.org/2schvio.htm)

General information and action steps for parents, teachers, and students

## Make your voice heard through the Million Mom March

On Mother's Day 2000, one million moms are expected to march in Washington DC to call on Congress to enact common sense gun control legislation. Want to find out more? Call (toll free) 1-888-989-MOMS or visit the Million Mom March website at [www.millionmommmarch.com](http://www.millionmommmarch.com) (get more information, learn how to organize a march in your community, make a contribution, or buy a tee-shirt).

For information about how you can become involved locally (West Michigan), contact [gmmommarch@hotmail.com](mailto:gmmommarch@hotmail.com) or call 616-456-7775.

# Web Resources

Check out these links for more information about:

## Gender Equity

Expect the Best From a Girl  
[www.academic.org](http://www.academic.org)  
Part of a national campaign for educational equity for girls in their early teens

Women's Educational Equity Act (WEEA)  
[www.edc.org/WomensEquity](http://www.edc.org/WomensEquity)  
National clearinghouse and publisher of gender-fair materials

Martha's Gender Equity in Education Page  
[www.crpc.rice.edu/CRPC/GT/mborrowman/GenderEquity/gendsite.html](http://www.crpc.rice.edu/CRPC/GT/mborrowman/GenderEquity/gendsite.html)  
Hundreds of links to sites and information on gender equity

American Association of University Women (AAUW)  
[www.aauw.org](http://www.aauw.org)  
Information on several AAUW initiatives and highlights from AAUW reports

## Literacy

National Institute for Literacy  
[www.nifl.gov](http://www.nifl.gov)  
Resources, programs, and fact sheets on literacy in the U.S.

International Literacy Explorer  
[www.ili2.literacy.upenn.edu/explorer](http://www.ili2.literacy.upenn.edu/explorer)  
Resources, projects and extensive statistics on international literacy

Laubach Literacy  
[www.laubach.org](http://www.laubach.org)  
Many programs including the Women in Literacy initiative

**Gateways to Information about Women and Girls**

Feminist Majority Foundation  
[www.feminist.org](http://www.feminist.org)  
Great information source, extensive links, and the Feminist Gateway

Feminist.com  
[www.feminist.com](http://www.feminist.com)  
Comprehensive site with news, action items, and lots of links

Gender equity is critical to young women's future economic well-being. Most households rely on two working parents for financial support. Only 28% of American families consist of a father who works and mother who stays home to raise the children. Data show that almost 90% of single-parent households are headed by women. It is vital for young women to have access to training opportunities with high paying employment.

What can you do about it? Identify problems in your School-to-Work program and provide strategies for combating them. Use a tool like the National Women's Law Center's EquityCheck — contact the National Women's Law Center at (202)588-5180 or find it online at [www.edc.org/WomensEquity/check.html](http://www.edc.org/WomensEquity/check.html).

**Learn more about Title IX and related resources for girls in the Taking Flight insert of this issue of Voices.**

## Extraordinary Girl

### Melissa Nall — Junior, Central High School

For two years Melissa actively participated in the Teen Conflict Resolution Project where she demonstrated extraordinary working habits and skills. As a Youth Leader, Melissa intervened in fights and arguments over games and playground equipment among children playing at local parks. She also bravely participated in an interview for a local radio station where she discussed the teen training and employment program, and the teen's role in resolving conflict. Way to go, Melissa, for being a role model to peers and younger children alike!

# Grantee News

**WITNESS**, a non-profit, ecumenical center in West Michigan is accepting registrations for the 2000-2001 class of The Women's Leadership Institute – a nine-month, one weekend-per-month certificate program designed to help women integrate spirituality, theology and leadership from a feminist perspective. The Women's Leadership Institute provides a forum to explore issues that are important to women seeking to be faithful through seminars, lectures, course work and collegial sharing. For more information, and to request registration materials, contact the WITNESS office at 616-459-7214.

**WOMEN MATTER** invites you to participate in the Grand Rapids area Women Matter Forum on Tuesday, April 18, 2000 from 5:00 pm to 8:30 pm (registration at 4:45 pm) at the Dominican Center at Marywood. Come together with women from the Grand Rapids area to talk about the issues facing Michigan women today and reach consensus on the top five priority issues. Open to all women. Scholarships available. Child care provided. There is a \$10 registration fee. For more information contact Women Matter at 616-458-8711 or email [dzwbwm@jgc.org](mailto:dzwbwm@jgc.org).

**Legal Hotline for Michigan Seniors** houses the Michigan Pension Rights Project designed to assist Michigan seniors statewide. Through the Michigan Pension Rights Project, Michigan residents of any age can speak directly to knowledgeable attorneys for free, and receive assistance about pension laws and pension rights. The pension project places a special emphasis on assisting women, low-income retirees, vulnerable retirees, minorities, retirees from rural areas and seniors over the age of 60 with pension investigations. Retirees can call the Michigan Pension Rights Project for assistance at 1-800-347-5297 Monday through Friday from 9:00 am – 5:00 pm.

*If you are a past or present grantee of the Nokomis Foundation, please feel free to share your announcements with us. We will include them on a space-available basis in the next issue of Voices .*



## Save the Date

### Being a Player: Lobbying Rules for Nonprofits

– a workshop designed for leaders of 501(c)(3) organizations who feel compelled to act on public policies that impact their organizations, but are uncertain of the extent they can lobby and be “players” in their community. Presenters will provide federal, state, and local experiences.

- Friday, May 12, 2000 from 10:00 am – 3:00 pm (registration at 9:30 am)
- Heart of West Michigan United Way (118 Commerce SW)
- There is a \$25 registration fee. Lunch will be provided.

*Sponsored by the Child & Family Resource Council, Michigan's Children, and Women Matter. For information contact the Child & Family Resource Council at 616-454-4673 or Women Matter at 616-458-8711.*

## She Said It

“It takes an educated woman to maintain a quality home. It takes an educated woman to raise healthy, well-nourished children. It takes an educated woman to raise the educational level of an entire family. It takes an educated woman to be an agent of social change.”

*Joan Chittister*

## Reach Us

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

The Nokomis Foundation  
161 Ottawa NW, Suite 305-C  
Grand Rapids, MI 49503  
phone 616-451-0267  
fax 616-451-9914  
[www.nokomisfoundation.org](http://www.nokomisfoundation.org)