

Voices

Taking Flight: Resources for People Who Care About Girls

In our last issue of Voices we left you pondering the “perfect” name for the Nokomis Girls’ Project. Many thanks to those who lasted through long brow-bending brainstorm sessions in person and over email. Taking Flight: Resources for People Who Care About Girls will hereafter describe the Nokomis Girls’ Project. We hope to kickoff our database and web page later this fall — stay tuned for details. If you are interested in joining the Taking Flight listserv, an interactive email network of people who care about girls, please email your request to etrahan@nokomisfoundation.org.

Creating a stronger voice
for women and girls.

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The
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Inside Story

Although women and girls are still overwhelmingly underrepresented in academic courses and careers in technology fields and computer science, more and more women are using computers and going online. In fact, a recent study by Nielsen Media Research/CommerceNet found that 46% of the 92 million Internet users in North America are women. Other studies document that women use the Internet as a tool (versus a toy), for both information and communication. For example, women are far more likely than men to research specific questions via Internet, and, according to Odyssey, a market research firm in San Francisco, 91% of women online use email (compared with 83% of men).

In our work with grantees, however, we have found that most non-profit organizations serving women and girls have less than adequate computer hardware, piecemeal software, and limited access to technology and information via the Internet, world wide web, and email communication. While most of these organizations desire updated computer equipment and advanced technology, lack of staff time and finances are huge barriers.

At the Nokomis Foundation, we believe that enhanced email correspondence and a strong web presence would improve the communication and collaboration between local/statewide women's organizations, as well as build the capacity of those organizations to provide services and expand programs for their constituents. We know, however, that the costs of maintaining up-to-date computer equipment, software, Internet access, and web design skills are extremely prohibitive.

This summer we launched the Nokomis Foundation *Women, Girls, and Technology* project with the ultimate goal of forming a regional women's computer consortium – exploring the potential of group purchase power, training, and technical support. We're currently wrapping up the Needs Assessment phase of the project, thanks to the organization and hard work of summer intern, Tracey O'Neil. Watch for more information in future editions of *Voices*.

Kym Mulhern, Executive Director

Good Reads

Extraordinary Girls

A Book Review by Erin Mulhern, age 10

This summer I read a book called *Extraordinary Girls* written by Maya Ajmera, Olateju Omolaturu, and Sarah Strunk. SHAKTI for Children developed the book. SHAKTI for Children is a program to teach children about diversity. A portion of the proceeds from the sales of the book will be donated to support programs for girls around the world. The book was funded by many foundations, including the Nokomis Foundation.

The pictures in this book are very special. They show what other girls do around the world. They make me feel good and like I'm not alone with different ideas. The pictures are real and not drawn, so you get the feeling of the real girl.

The authors are trying to tell us that all girls are special. It's interesting to read stories about what other girls are doing. I liked the story about Alexis Brown. Her story makes me feel happy that she did things for sick kids. All the stories are inspirational. I never knew kids could have their own web sites — now I want to do one too.

I think most girls ages 6 and up would be interested in this book. When I was little I would have probably been bored with this book, but now I think it is really cool. I don't think boys would like the book because it's all about girls, but if boys want to look at it they would learn about girls.

I would like to meet the authors of *Extraordinary Girls*. I would tell them I really liked the book, and I would ask how they got all that information about girls!

Erin Mulhern will be a fifth grader at Alward Elementary School this fall. She enjoys acting, dancing, and playing the piano. She spent four weeks during the summer working with us at the Nokomis Foundation, where she is known as "Little Erin."

Taking Flight

Extraordinary Girls Prevail!

by Erin Trahan

Remember your favorite fairy tale---the one featuring a young woman who overcomes adversity with cunning, not beauty---the one where she is not rewarded by living happily ever after with the prince---the one without evil sisters or mothers of any kind . . . the one where the heroine prevails over . . . well, the one with the heroine?

Girls need stories that tell their stories. They need to learn about girls who share their aspirations and challenges. Girls need to know that girlhood is not just the pink aisle in the toy section. Girls need role models, fictional and real, who defy stereotypes and expand girls' vision of the possible. Globally, girlhood is rich with celebration and ritual, courage and leadership, competition and athletics, and creative expression.

How do you support girls who defy stereotypes? Which stereotypes do you perpetuate? Which stereotypes have you overcome? Cumulatively, the books girls read, the history they learn, the movies they watch and the toys they play with have great power. For the most part, this power is in the hands of the adult creators and gatekeepers. How many of us remember reading a book that unashamedly featured girls and girlhood? A book that celebrated girls' extraordinary strengths?

Fortunately, you can count on *Extraordinary Girls* to do just that. Geared towards an audience age 7-13, the book *Extraordinary Girls* empowers readers with vivid photographs and true stories of spunky, innovative, and amazing girls from around the world. A perfect gift for young people and a perfect tool for adults who care about girls, copies of this book are available through a grant from Nokomis and at bookstores. Save the date! Be sure to catch Maya Ajmera, Co-author and Founder of The Global Fund for Children, in person in Grand Rapids between October 7-9, 1999. Maya will meet with young people at local girl-serving agencies and schools, as well as with educators and adults who influence girls' lives.



Point to Ponder

The United Nations has officially set October 12, 1999 as the day the world population will reach 6 billion people. Forty years ago the world population was just under 3 billion people.

Did You Know. . .

- Nationwide, schools will spend \$88 per student on computer equipment this year but just \$6 per student on training teachers to use the technology.
- By the year 2000, 60% of the new jobs in America will require advanced technological skills.
- In 1993, African-Americans were 57% less likely to have a computer in the home, and Hispanics 59% less likely, than non-Hispanic Whites.
- Sixty-nine percent of computer scientists are men; 31% are women.
- In 1994 and 1995, 17% of computer science PhDs were awarded to women; in 1996 that figure fell to 12%.
- In 1998 educational software sales (excluding games) reached \$500 million.
- A 1995 study of elementary mathematics software found that only 12% of gender-identifiable characters in the games were girls.

Economics & Women

Social Security: An Alliance

Guest column By Ellen Teninty, Just Economics

Proposals to “salvage” our social security system are stained with Wall Street’s drool. The stakes are astronomical. Brokers stand to gain hundreds of billions in profit if the system is changed. We stand to lose a program that keeps millions of women out of poverty.

The PR campaign to destroy social security is using the standard privatization formula:

- Use misinformation to create a frightening crisis of impending bankruptcy. “There isn’t enough for everybody!”
- Sell your “solution” by playing on myths about choice and efficiency.

The proclamation that the community’s ship is sinking is quickly followed with a plan to “save yourself.” This call to “man (sic) the lifeboats” will leave women to drown in poverty.

Social Security is a defined benefit program, which means you can count on how much the monthly payment is, it is adjusted to the cost of living, and it continues for a woman’s longer life span. Like your best girlfriend, it isn’t perfect, but it will be there when you need it. Contrast this with the privateers’ defined contribution proposal, which guarantees exactly zippo. There’s no inflation adjustment, and when you use it up, “there ain’t no mo’.”

If women’s retirement income depends upon the size of their investment portfolio, it will be smaller due to disrupted work histories, lower wages, and fewer jobs with pensions. Social Security takes such structural, gender-based economic damage into account; currently, women contribute 38% of the payroll taxes, yet receive 53% of the benefits. A woman who devoted her life to caring for her family gets her own retirement benefits, and can collect even if divorced. Social Security has lowered the poverty rate for women over 65 from 52% to 13%.

She Said It

“Something which we think is impossible now is not impossible in another decade.”

Constance Baker Motley (First

Black Woman in the U.S. to become a Federal Judge)

Recent Grants

Greater Grand Rapids Women’s History Council –

support for video documentation of the Suffrage Centennial 99 event in Grand Rapids

Independent Sector – support for general operations

Center for Policy Alternatives, Washington DC – support for national and Michigan Women’s Voices 2000 polling project

WITNESS, Grand Rapids, MI – support for the West Michigan satellite program of the Women’s Leadership Institute

Urban Produce, Inc., Grand

Rapids, MI – support for the Girls Program Coordinator staff position

GROW, Grand Rapids, MI – support for the publication “Seeds

Sown . . . a History of the First Ten Years”

Women Around the World

- Only 1% of the world’s assets are in the name of women
- 70% of people in abject poverty (living on less than \$1 per day) are women.
- There is no country in the world where women’s wages are equal to those of men.
- Only 5% of those in need of microcredit access receive. Statistics provided by SIGI, the Sisterhood is Global Institute.

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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Grantee News

Women Matter will be holding an Advocacy Training for Business and Professional Women on October 15, 1999 from 8am – Noon in the Eberhard Center in Grand Rapids, Michigan. The session will provide business and professional women with the knowledge and tools they need to develop effective leadership skills in policy advocacy and coalition building. For more information, contact Deb Bloom at 616-458-8711. Be sure to check out the new Women Matter website at www.womenmatter.org.

The fourteen Michigan Girl Scout Councils, including **Michigan Trails Girl Scout Council**, have developed a new Philanthropy Badge. The badge program has 5 age-appropriate segments for girls ages 5 to 17 and will be accompanied by a video tape to help the adult leaders. The councils hope to reach all 133,000 Girl Scouts in the state of Michigan.

WITNESS announces a special event on November 4, 1999 -- *Witnessing Leadership*: A reception and evening address by Jennifer Granholm, Michigan State Attorney General, and her husband, Dan Mulhern. Jennifer and Dan will share their thoughts and reflections on integrating faith and leadership at the Gerald Ford Museum in Grand Rapids. For information contact Diane Maodush-Pitzer at the WITNESS office, 616.459.7214.

The *Michigan Pension Rights Hotline* is a project of the **Legal Hotline for Older Michigianians** designed to provide basic pension rights information to Michigan retirees of any age via the LHOM and to assist low income, women, minorities, and vulnerable retirees with pension counseling and investigations. To access the MPRH, retirees of any age should call the LHOM at 1.800.347.5297 and specify they are calling about a pension question. The receptionist will take their name, telephone number, and other pertinent information. An Attorney will return their call in 1-2 business days to provide basic pension rights information over the telephone. Further counseling and investigations will be provided on a case by case basis by the MPRH.

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 .

Government-run Social Security is an award-winning model of efficiency. This massive public program costs LESS THAN A PENNY per dollar paid out. If privatization happens, AT LEAST 15% of the fund will go to private administrators.

Social security represents different values than "every man for himself." Through Social Security, we insure financial support to each other during rough times, both unexpected and predictable. We do our best to build stability, but shocks, like a spouse's death or disability, are an undeniable part of life. While privateers chant, "You made your bed. You lie in it!" the truth is that some of us are born with satin sheets, while others are born onto a dirt floor.

Social security is structured with a guiding value that cooperation creates a higher quality of life for all. High wage workers, whose jobs often include private pensions and salaries large enough to save money, help less privileged workers stay above the poverty line in their old age. Healthy workers help those who suffer a serious disability. Families who get to hug each other goodnight help families to survive financially whose dad or mom have died too young.

An enduring institution must be adapted over time, as Social Security has been, and will continue to be. Its founding values of alliance and dignity produce a better country, and should never be abandoned for selfish, short-sighted privatization proposals.

Ellen Teninty is a Senior Trainer with Just Economics in Berkeley, California. Ellen has been helping people combine sophisticated economic information with their values for almost two decades. Ellen, who lives in Eugene, Oregon, is the mother of 3 adventurous daughters and dances several times a week. Ellen received Social Security Survivors' Benefits that contributed to her Harvard tuition.

Women's Voices 2000

by Anne Mosle, Vice President, *Women's Policy and Programs*, Center for Policy Alternatives

With the support of the Nokomis Foundation, the Center for Policy Alternatives (CPA) will launch *Women's Voices 2000*, our third national public opinion research initiative to amplify women's values and policy priorities. This comprehensive initiative will include national and statewide polls, a series of focus groups, and a sophisticated outreach and media strategy that will place women's priorities and concerns at the center of the debate during a critical election cycle. The Center for Policy Alternatives is a progressive policy and leadership development institute that works at the state level.

As part of this initiative, Nokomis is supporting a partnership with Women Matter to conduct a *Michigan Women's Voices* poll in coordination with the national poll. "This will be an opportunity to help ensure that Michigan women are included in the policy and funding debates, which is especially critical since devolution has shifted funding decisions to the state and local level," said Deb Bloom, executive director of Women Matter. Nokomis also supported CPA and Women Matter in conducting the state and national Women's Voices polls in 1996.

The polling and focus groups will put forth not only women's policy priorities, but also the values that underlie them. Progressive leaders must communicate their values if they are to make their policies feel real to American women and men. Fairness, equality, empowerment, respect and compassion are core values that anchor the policies that women care about. Building a values-based economic agenda framework is critical to forging solutions and engaging the public in this increasingly bitter partisan era. The Women's Voices 2000 polling initiative will be a critical tool for continuing to develop and refine our agenda framework and how we talk about it.

Surf Sites

- Look for excerpts from *Our Bodies, Ourselves for the New Century: A Book by and for Women* (by the Boston Women's Health Book Collective) at www.feminist.com/ourbodies.htm.
- Take the AFL-CIO Working Women Survey (findings to be released in March, 2000) online OR print out the survey for distribution at www.affcio.org/women/survey1.htm.
- Find a new report on "The State of the World's Mothers" released by Save the Children at www.savethechildren.org/women.html.
- Visit The Hunger Site at www.thehungersite.com and do something about world hunger.

Special Thanks

We would like to express our thanks to Tracey O'Neill, Nokomis Foundation summer intern. Tracey led the Needs Assessment phase of our Women, Girls, & Technology project by designing, administering, and interpreting a survey document for organizations serving women and girls in the West Michigan region. Tracey's excellent organizational skills got this project off to a strong start. Tracey enjoyed working on this project, and tells us, "I think technology will positively impact girls and women in the future. This project is a good first step in linking together organizations that advocate for women and girls."

In addition to her work for the Nokomis Foundation, Tracey worked for the Tri-Cities Area United Way in Grand Haven over the summer. Tracey will soon be returning to school as a junior at the University of Minnesota studying non-profit management and finance. Tracey plans to pursue a career in philanthropy. Thanks, Tracey!