

Voices

Even if we dismiss the claim that women's rights are central to human rights, there are centuries of evidence that physical, political and economic violence against women is a harbinger of other forms of violence.

Amy Caiazza, Ph.D.

Why Gender Matters in Understanding September 11: Women, Militarism, and Violence

Creating a stronger voice
for women and girls.

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The
Nokomis
Foundation



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Inside Story



Women's philanthropy at work in New York . . .

After September 11, all of us here at the Nokomis Foundation tried to think of an appropriate way to respond to the tragedies in New York and Washington DC. Sharing the sentiment of so many others, we wanted to *do something* to help. But what? Although we typically don't provide funds for projects and programs outside the Grand Rapids area, we wanted to support the women and girls of New York City in a manner consistent with our mission.

We learned that one of our sister funds, the New York Women's Foundation—located just a few miles from the World Trade Center buildings, had created the Women's Disaster Relief Fund to support women-serving organizations affected by the tragedy. The Nokomis Foundation provided a \$10,000 grant to this new fund. This special fund seemed to be an excellent vehicle for our support.

The economic impact of the terror attacks on women and women-serving organizations in New York is almost unfathomable. Thousands of displaced, unskilled, low-income employees are without work — most of them are uninsured and many of them are women. Thousands of women have lost family members who were primary breadwinners. Small, community-based nonprofit organizations serving women and girls are stretched to their limits as they provide services during the crisis.

By establishing the Disaster Relief Fund, the New York Women's Fund has spoken out on behalf of low-income women and girls affected by the devastating tragedy in New York City. We salute the New York Women's Fund in their efforts to provide support for the organizations assisting women affected by the September 11 attacks.

Kym Mulhern, President/CEO

evidenced by the fact that more than 35 community organizations are involved in the project. We have also been gratified by the level of commitment participating members have made to the issue.

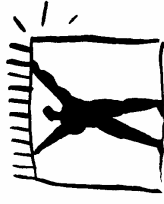
In addition to attending monthly meetings, **PRT** participants have read volumes of background materials, shared their insights and learning with others, and initiated the idea of going beyond the original commitment to a nine-month project. The most exciting impacts of the project are the changes in perspectives reported by **PRT** members, their willingness to apply this learning in their work, and the organizational/programmatic changes that are taking place throughout the community as a result.

In the months ahead, the **Prostitution Round Table** is taking two big steps to cascade the learning to the Grand Rapids community at large:

- Publication of ***We Can Do Better: Helping Prostituted Women and Girls in Grand Rapids Make Healthy Choices***. This 80+ page report aims to reframe the issue of prostitution in our community as a foundation for effectively helping prostituted women and girls make healthy choices *We Can Do Better* will be available in March 2002 in both print and electronic formats.
- Sponsorship of the ***Prostitution: Reframing Issues, Making Connections*** conference on April 12, 2002 at Grand Valley State University's DeVos Center. This day-long conference, open to the entire community, will include presentations by survivors of prostitution and pioneers in helping prostituted women and girls make healthy choices.

Additional information about the ***Prostitution: Reframing Issues, Making Connections*** conference and obtaining copies of ***We Can Do Better: Helping Prostituted Women and Girls in Grand Rapids Make Healthy Choices*** will be available on the Nokomis Foundation web site or by calling 616.451.0267 after March 1, 2002.

Project Update



The New Voices Initiative

The Prostitution Round Table: A Community Learning Venture

By *Dotti Clune and Jeannie Hosey*

Two years ago we launched a new venture, the **New Voices Initiative**. **New Voices** is an effort to gain a better understanding of women and girls who are marginalized in our community – whose voices are usually unsolicited, unheard or ignored. The first project of the **New Voices Initiative** is the **Prostitution Round Table**, which aims to help women and girls involved in street prostitution in Grand Rapids make positive choices for their lives.

Prostituted women and girls are a nearly invisible population in our community. We hear about them primarily through news coverage – when a prostituted woman is murdered, for example, or when police stings are carried out in response to neighborhood concerns. We have few opportunities to see prostituted women as mothers, daughters, partners, friends – real people whose life circumstances have created vulnerability to exploitation. And we have few venues for examining whether and how our community could more effectively support their health and well-being.

Our work on this project has focused on facilitating a learning process designed to enable community organizations to more effectively address both the needs of prostituted women and girls and the issues surrounding prostitution. This process has involved a broad spectrum of community members in a collective learning process, with participants providing information and expertise, offering feedback, engaging in consensus-building, and instigating community change.

Although the **Prostitution Round Table** is a work in process, the project has exceeded our expectations in several ways. We are heartened by the recognition that prostitution is a significant issue in our community, as

Point to Ponder



The UN Human Rights Commission reports that two thirds of all people who have been turned into refugees in recent years have been women and their dependent children.

Amy Caiazza, Ph.D.

Did You Know. . .

- Before the Taliban seized control of Afghanistan in 1996, over half of the students and 60% of the teachers at Kabul University were women, and 70% of schoolteachers, 50% of civilian government workers, and 40% of health care workers in Kabul were women. (*Feminist Majority Foundation*)
- The literacy rate in Afghanistan is 33% for men, and 13% for women. (*UN Population Fund www.unfpa.org*)
- Afghanistan is the second most heavily land mined nation in the world (Cambodia is first), with 10 million mines still in the ground. Women and children are the chief victims of land mines in Afghanistan. (*CARE*)
- The life expectancy is 44 years for Afghan women, 43 years for men. (*UN Population Fund www.unfpa.org*)
- Afghan infant mortality is 152 per 1,000 live births. A stunning one-quarter of all Afghan children die before they are five years old. (*UN Population Fund www.unfpa.org*)
- About 70% of Afghanistan's people are undernourished, and only 13% have access to treated, safe water. (*United Nations www.un.org*)
- Before September 11, relief agencies were feeding an estimated 3.8 million people. Now, one in four Afghans is at risk of starvation. (*Oxfam International www.oxfam.org*)

Gender Matters

Understanding September 11

By Kym Mulhern

In the days immediately following September 11 the American public was exposed to many unfamiliar words and phrases. Taliban. Burqa. Gender apartheid. Jihad. These words, however, were not new to feminists and feminist organizations. Thanks to the Feminist Majority Foundation and their campaign to fight gender apartheid in Afghanistan (launched in 1997 – immediately following the Taliban’s rise to power), feminists knew that women had been banished from the Afghanistan work force. We knew that schools and universities in Afghanistan were closed to women and girls. We knew that women in Afghanistan were prohibited from leaving their homes unless accompanied by close male relatives. We knew women were being publicly executed for breaking Taliban law. We knew about the burqa.

We were outraged at the treatment of our sisters in Afghanistan – and we were disturbed because we understood the greater implications of society’s acceptance of violence against women. But we weren’t prepared for what happened on September 11.

Shouldn’t we, as a nation, have had a clue based on the treatment of women in Afghanistan? Shouldn’t we have known that a society with no regard for women’s human rights – a society where violence against women was accepted and encouraged – would be a society capable of other unthinkable acts of violence? Did our collective neglect of the treatment of women in Afghanistan contribute to the events of September 11?

In a recent article published by the Institute for Women’s Policy Research, Amy Caiazza tells us “Societies that condone and even promote violence against women have shown over and over again that they tend to be violent in other ways as well.” Studies show the inextricable link between violence against women and other types of violence – demonstrating that men who beat, rape, and kill women are more inclined to use violence as a means of achieving other goals. In Afghanistan, where women were subject to daily terrorism, violence

And



the sorrow, the images of that day, are tucked deeper into the recesses of our minds, as if we might forget them if we stuff them down enough. Our attention has turned to the economy as it stumbles along, the “campaign against terror,” the hatred building up in the Middle East – again. Our world is still unstable, but we are not taking it quite so personally. Perhaps we still wash our hands after opening the mail or fly with whiter knuckles, but certainly nothing dreadful can be eminent – the government hasn’t issued any warnings in months...

Is it possible for the fear, as it fades, to be helpful? It is a privileged freedom that many of us need not live in a constant state of alarm, but it is also our responsibility, now knowing what it is like, to care for those who do. For those of us committed to improving the world for all people, our mission has been reinforced; there is no doubt that things need to change, on a global level. But I’ve also learned that in order to know what’s important, one must begin with personal awareness. For a generation faced with a fear never before known to us, this has been a wake-up call. In order to turn our actions outward, we need to turn our thoughts inward. We cannot truly care for the people of this world running on the treadmill we already know too well. It is not until we slow down and turn our newly heightened awareness towards our own lives that we will know what action we need to take, how we will really change the world. Fear has taught us to pay attention, and if this is a revolution, it’s got to begin as a personal one.

Katie is currently a senior at Hope College majoring in English and Women’s Studies. Katie is a member of the Nokomis Foundation Grant Committee and was a Nokomis intern during the summer of 2001.

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Taking It Personally

By Katie Bode-Lang

These days, Americans store fear in their upstairs closets like bottled water, flashlights, canned food. Like the small wall of supplies around the unused dress clothes, the unspoken apprehension has built up like fences around us. Nearly five months since that tragic day, we still don't know how often to unlock the gate, let others in. For the first few days after September 11, as a nation, we were paralyzed. Who could work, even if they felt their work was important or meaningful? Perhaps we donated blood or went to prayer service, but for the most part, we sat in a stupor around the quiet glows of our televisions waiting for a break in the clouds, a break in the mystery of the event, a break from the flood of bad, bad news. If we had not lost someone, we knew someone who had. The immediate question was not, "When does it get back to normal?" The question was, "When do we, how do we grieve?"

The terror of the time directly following that Tuesday was palpable. I would lie awake at night in my tidy town waiting for the sirens, the sky to open up like an angry mouth. Often it was just my husband lying next to me quietly admitting that he couldn't sleep either. Not knowing what might come next, around the country people stockpiled medicines or family memories, talked on the phone more or bought gas masks. What more could we all do? The trembling e-mails stumbled across the wires, like the phone call my husband and I got early September 12 from a friend in New York who couldn't reach another friend in Washington, D.C. And had we heard from him? I spoke across the triangle of friends trying to reunite. We were so personally lucky, and yet the fear was the magnetic cohesiveness of our lives. Did we have enough water for two weeks, was the gas tank full, had my husband called his sister in Chicago — how close is her office to the Sears Tower?

And as the hunt to "root out evil" began, as a nation we were not necessarily assuaged. The fear only migrated, hiding with the passing of time. We have almost forgotten what that anxiety is like falling asleep at night, asking, "What's next?" We have moved the bottled water and tape for the windows to the back of the closet, along with our trepidation.

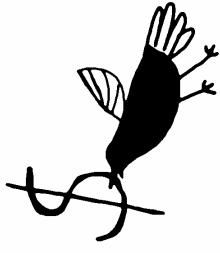


was an official and acceptable strategy for attaining political, social, and economic power.

It seems that we, as a nation, need to pay closer attention to women's human rights around the globe. How can we counteract terrorism and encourage more peaceful and democratic political systems if we are not working for women's human rights? If violence against women is accepted and ignored, can a society experience peace? If women continue to be terrorized in their own countries, if they are powerless and voiceless, can we really address the root causes of terrorism? Amy Caiazza suggests the United States should "look at both the victims and perpetrators of violence and terrorism. We should pay particularly close attention to the work of those who are effective opponents of violence against women. By doing so, we are more likely to address the root causes of terrorism and violence at home and in the wider world."

It is time for the United States to adopt an international policy that explicitly opposes violence against women and the regimes that condone it. While violence against women exists (directly or indirectly) in virtually every country, we should not consider it "incidental to other forms of violence." When countries are marked by political violence, violence against women is usually rampant. By opening our eyes to violence against women around the globe perhaps we will be able to avoid another September 11.

Caiazza, Amy. *Why Gender Matters in Understanding September 11: Women, Militarism, and Violence. Institute for Women's Policy Research, publication # 1908, November 2001.* You can download a copy of this article from the IWPR website at www.iwpr.org.



Recent Grants

The Nokomis Foundation has recently awarded the following grants:

Advocacy

Afghan Women's Mission, Pasadena, California, \$2,000 in support of the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan

Communities for Equity, Grand Rapids, Michigan, \$20,000 to develop messages promoting sports equity for girls in Michigan

Capacity Building

Freedom House Ministries, Grand Rapids, Michigan, \$4,000 for technology support

West Michigan Academy of Music for Girls, Grand Rapids, Michigan, \$45,000 over two years in support of fund development staff and training

Celebrating Women

Grand Rapids Women's Chorus, Grand Rapids, Michigan, \$2,000 for the production of a concert and reception honoring breast cancer survivors

GVSU Women's Center, Grand Rapids, Michigan, \$2,500 in support of *The Vagina Monologues*

Economic Self-Sufficiency

Hispanic Center of Western Michigan, Grand Rapids, Michigan, \$16,155 for *Mujeres Unidas Sin Fronteras* (Women United Without Borders)

Legal Services of Southern Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan, \$5,000 for the Farmworker Legal Services program

New York Women's Foundation, New York, New York, \$10,000 for the Women's Disaster Relief Fund supporting women-serving organizations displaced by the events of September 11

Women's Resource Center, Grand Rapids, Michigan, \$45,500 over two years for the Workplace Initiative program



News Worthy

What would news look like if women mattered? Check out these feminist news websites to find out. You can sign up for daily or weekly news updates by email at either site.

Women's E-News

www.womensenews.com

News We Can Use

www.newsweccanuse.com

Report Released

We Can Do Better: Helping Prostituted Women and Girls in Grand Rapids Make Healthy Choices

To be released by the Nokomis Foundation in March 2002 in print and electronic format, this 80 page report is the culmination of our work through the Prostitution Round Table. For more information, call our office at 616-451-0267 or visit our website at www.nokomisfoundation.org.

Save the Date

Friday, April 12

8:30 am—4:30 pm

Prostitution: Reframing Issues, Making Connections

Conference co-sponsored by the Nokomis Foundation and the GVSU School of Social Work; for details call 616-451-0267; registration required

Wednesday, February 13

Noon—1:00 pm

A Reason for Hope: An Afternoon with Jane Goodall

Wege Center Ballroom, Aquinas College; admission free

Wednesday, February 13

8:00 pm

Vagina Monologues

Grand Valley State University, Louis Armstrong Theatre; advance tickets required

Monday, April 1

Time and location TBA

Lani Guinier

Part of the Nokomis Lecture Series of the Womens' Studies Council

Web Wise



Browsing the Web with a Gender Lens

The **Feminist Majority Foundation**, a group that runs a campaign on behalf of Afghan women, has launched a Web site to stop gender apartheid in Afghanistan. The site, HelpAfghanWomen.com, urges visitors to donate to the cause and join an action team to help Afghan women. Visitors can also purchase crafts made by Afghan refugees living in Pakistan. All proceeds go directly to Afghan women and girls.

Check out these sites to learn more about women around the world:

Women's Alliance for Peace and Human Rights in Afghanistan

www.wapha.org

Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA)

www.rawa.false.net

Women for Women International

www.womenforwomen.org

Association for Women's Rights and Development (AWID)

www.awid.org

Human Rights Watch

www.hrw.org

Women Waging Peace (WWP)

www.womenwagingpeace.net

Women Living Under Muslim Laws

www.wluml.org

In the Spotlight

We welcome the following members of the **Nokomis Foundation**

Grant Committee:

Katie Bode-Lang, Delvenia Daniels Beason, Patricia Gardner,

Kay Griffith Hammond, Julie Guevara, L'Tanya Haith Ojo,

Kevin O'Neill, Susan Shannon, and Mary Alice Williams, chair

Girls

Grand Rapids Girls' School, Grand Rapids, Michigan, \$5,000 for student population expansion efforts

Henry Paideia Academy, Grand Rapids, Michigan, \$2,500 for girls' programming at Henry School

Hispanic Center of Western Michigan, Grand Rapids, Michigan, \$2,000 for the high school girls' dance project

Society of Manufacturing Engineers Education Foundation (SME), Dearborn, Michigan, \$60,000 over three years for expansion of the STEPS program in West Michigan (Science, Technology & Engineering Preview Summer Camp for Girls)

Health

Center for Women in Transition, Holland, Michigan, \$60,000 over three years for the Lakeshore SANE (Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner) program

Grand Rapids REACH, Inc., Grand Rapids, Michigan, \$4,500 for a community awareness HIV/AIDS program

Michigan AIDS Fund, Southfield, Michigan, \$2,000 for a statewide, pooled funding resource

Weed & Seed, Grand Rapids, Michigan, \$4,000 for the Westside Women in Transition program

Planned Parenthood Centers of West Michigan, Grand Rapids, Michigan,

\$133,000 over three years for an initiative designed to build grassroots community support and increase the agency's visibility

Reach Us



The Nokomis Foundation

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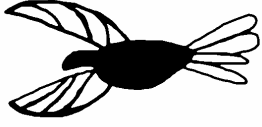
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Taking Flight: Grants for Girls



During 2001 the Nokomis Foundation introduced a new grantmaking initiative — **Taking Flight: Grants for Girls**. By creating a separate grantmaking program for girls, we can ensure ongoing, concentrated support for girls in our community. This initiative will also strengthen our Taking Flight partner organizations as they meet together for networking and technical assistance sessions. The structure of the Taking Flight program also supports young women interested in philanthropy—with interns coordinating the Taking Flight grantmaking process. In 2001, Katie Bode-Lang, our intern from Hope College, managed the Taking Flight program with the assistance of Anna Floch, our high school intern from Holland High School.

We awarded the following Taking Flight grants in 2001:

- Center for Women in Transition**, Holland, \$25,000 for the Girls on the Run program
- Family Planning & Women's Health of Allegan County**, Allegan, \$6,500 for the Horizon Club program
- Family Talk**, Grand Rapids, \$10,000 for the Girl Talk program
- Girl Scouts of Michigan Trails**, Grand Rapids, \$17,500 for the PAVE Initiative (Project Anti-Violence Education)
- Godfrey-Lee Alternative Education**, Wyoming, \$5,500 for the New Directions program for girls
- Planned Parenthood Centers of West Michigan**, Grand Rapids, \$7,790 for the Safe Girls project
- Restorers, Inc.**, Grand Rapids, \$12,000 for Young Women United
- United Methodist Community House**, Grand Rapids, \$20,500 for the ISEE program (Individual Support, Encouragement, & Empowerment)

Details about the 2002 Taking Flight grant cycle will be available in May. Check our website, watch the mail for our brochure, or call our office at 616-451-0267 for more information.

Herstory:

A personal reflection

By *Anna Floch*

A peanut butter and jelly sandwich changed my life. The kind that you make on white bread with thick, creamy peanut butter and raspberry jelly that has little seeds that get caught in your teeth. It is funny how you can go through your daily life and many things happen, and you make a lot of decisions, and you can be eating a peanut butter and jelly sandwich and it changes your life. It is the littlest things that make the biggest difference.

I guess that it was really the person behind the peanut butter and jelly sandwich that made it so life-changing. Every morning my father would lovingly spread, slice and pack my sandwich and lunch. It was at this early point in life that I formed my opinions of roles that often had such “gender specific” labels on them. Although both of my parents worked and my mother went to school, it was my father who assumed the chores and tasks usually attributed to women — such tasks as making my lunches, getting me ready for school, and doing the wash. The reason this had such a profound effect on me is that it showed me that there are no “man’s jobs” or “woman’s jobs,” but that women can do the same things as men and succeed.

This realization has led to who I am today. I have decided to devote and commit myself to the endless search for equality between men and women, as well as to ending the stigmas, violence, and exclusion that cripple women and act as roadblocks on their path to success. In short, the simple act of making a peanut butter and jelly sandwich broke down the gender barriers that society teaches us, and led to the awareness of myself as a women’s advocate and feminist. This act was the first thing in a long line of motivations that has inspired me to fight for women, and to succeed as a woman.

Anna Floch was a Nokomis intern during the summer of 2001. Currently a senior at Holland High School, Anna will be attending New York University next fall, where she will major in gender studies.