

The Women's Fund

by Judy Kallestad

The Women's Fund is an exciting new fund within the Central Minnesota Community Foundation. The foundation is one of over 600 community public foundations nationwide that attract and administer charitable funds. The Women's Fund was established to create and support programs that enhance the lives of women and children while involving women as leaders and donors in this process. "We're enthusiastic about the project and we anticipate many men and women supporting it," says Molly Renslow, volunteer chair of the Women's Fund steering committee. "I'm impressed with the motivated people working together on this project," says Marilyn Obermiller, another steering committee volunteer.

"The Women's Fund is slightly different from other funds at the Foundation in the sense that it is an effort that a number of people are working on rather than an individual or a family," says Barbara Carlson, CMC Development Officer. With over 150 Women's Funds in the country, the concept is not new, it's just new to this area. Initially, the Central Minnesota Community Foundation wrote a proposal for a \$100,000 grant to the Otto Bremer Foundation to start the fund. The proposal was accepted and now must be double matched. With contributions and pledges of \$111,000 to date, the steering committee is moving toward its \$200,000 objective. From there, the initial target is \$1 million in one year. The steering committee is made up of a diverse group of

twelve women who have been meeting since last fall. "There was a wonderful turnout for one of our first events in June. Women of every age group came—mothers, daughters and grandmothers. There was so much energy that night," Obermiller says.

"What we have been doing together is defining the mission of the fund, identifying what our objectives are, what our vision is and what we hope to accomplish in the broad sense. We've identified three priority areas that we'll begin with," says Carlson. Those priority areas are:

- Middle school girls. Statistics show that while self-esteem for both girls and boys is strong as children, there is a significant drop in girls' self-esteem around the age of 12.
- Women at midpoint. While this covers a broad area, statistics show that women and the children they solely support represent more than 75 percent of those in poverty in the United States.
- Older women. Depression is the top ranking problem for older adults, especially women. Statistics also reveal that 10.5% of women age 65-75 are living below the poverty line, as are 15% of women age 75 and over.

"It's fluid. The fund is so new that we have to remain somewhat flexible and open," says Carlson. The broad objectives of the Women's Fund are:

- To strengthen the personal and financial resources of girls and women.
- To encourage non-profit organizations to see their services through the eyes of girls and women.
- To provide a vehicle that unites the community around a common theme.
- To help women understand and utilize their giving potential.

The Women's Fund will be used to leverage the efforts of non-profit organizations and provide resources that will make a difference to individuals and systems. "The traditional non-profits that serve girls and women would be clear possibilities, but they're not the only possibilities," says Carlson.

Carlson emphasized the important role of volunteers. The work of the volunteers on the steering committee has been crucial. "We all care enough about the project in front of us to make it work," says Renslow. They will be charting out collaborative activities and events

for the Women's Fund for the coming year. The role of men in the community is essential as well. "We want the women to be front and center in many ways in this but we also want the men in our lives to be a part of this," says Carlson. Contributions of all sizes and from all people are welcome. Contributors to the fund will receive a custom lapel pin donated by D.J. Bitzan Jewelers. "I think that the Women's Fund will be a wonderful community resource," says Carlson.

The St. Cloud Times' Style Magazine is a proud supporter of the Central MN Community Foundation Women's Fund. You can find updates about the Women's Fund in upcoming issues of Style Magazine. Watch for our holiday edition, coming October 15.

For more information or to give to the Women's Fund contact
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A special T-shirt featuring the Women's Fund logo will be available by August 1 in the customer service area at Herberger's Dept. Store. Proceeds from the shirt will support the Women's Fund.

