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## Speaking up for the girls

By Rae Kruger

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Karen L. Brinkman doesn't live or work in Marshall, but she plans to be in Marshall on Monday afternoon.

Brinkman, a psychologist with a practice in Windom, is worried about the future of girls in southwest Minnesota. That's why she will be in Marshall for a public meeting by the Women's Foundation of Minnesota. The foundation will share findings from its latest research report "Status of Girls In Minnesota" from 3-4 p.m. in the conference center at Southwest Minnesota State University.

Girls, especially those in southwest Minnesota, need opportunities to learn leadership skills and to excel, Brinkman said.

"Unfortunately, in southwest Minnesota, and this is just my personal opinion from having lived and worked 30 years here after being raised in a metropolitan area, is that we are 10 years behind the rest of the state in just about everything."

Brinkman is involved with Girl Scouts and said the organization provides many opportunities for girls to gain in three key areas of confidence, character and courage.

She wants to share those opportunities and hear of others during Monday's public meeting and during a more private focus group meeting after. Brinkman is also a member of a smaller focus group working with the Women's Foundation.

The foundation wants to hear from people like Brinkman, said Mary Beth Hanson.

"This will be an interactive presentation," Hanson said of the 3 p.m. public meeting. "We want to learn more from the folks in the region about what's happening in their communities."

Marshall is one of several communities where public meetings and focus group meetings will be held as part of the foundation's Road to Equality Tour.

Brinkman said people from the region should attend the meeting to learn more about what's happening in terms of opportunities and the future for girls.

The opportunities and roles girls will have in the future will have an impact on the future of the region, Hanson said.

"Research shows that when women thrive, a community thrives," Hanson said.

Brinkman listed a few issues that face women today and that today's girls could also face. Single parenting, lack of affordable daycare, struggling to get ahead in a male-dominated society are just some, Brinkman said.

Information from the public meeting and the focus group meeting will be used to help make policy to share with legislators, Hanson said.

"People need to come, people need to pay attention, because it is very important," Brinkman said.

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