

Hmong Women's Giving Circle

In each issue, *Nonprofit News* features Nonprofit Mission Awards recipients, highlighting the work of some of the most promising nonprofits in the state. In this issue, we highlight the Hmong Women's Giving Circle, recipient of the 2005 Nonprofit Mission Award for Responsive Philanthropy.

In 2004, Hmong staff from the Women's Foundation of Minnesota convened a group of Hmong women and girls to create new initiatives that would have a meaningful impact on their lives. Participants felt strongly that while recent years have seen much progress in serving the needs of the Hmong community, conditions affecting Hmong women and girls have actually worsened due to the changing political climate in the areas of health, family, economic independence, racism and access to education. The discussion highlighted a need for community-initiated philanthropy to address these concerns, and as a result the nation's first Hmong Women's Giving Circle (HWGC) was born with many of the founding members still participating today.

The Hmong Women's Giving Circle is composed of sixteen Hmong women and girls with a mission to "promote philanthropy within the community, encourage activism and create social change for Hmong women and girls" in Minnesota. It is a volunteer-driven membership organization, sponsored initially as a pilot program by the Women's Foundation of Minnesota.

With the help of the Foundation and donors, HWGC successfully raised \$15,000 in its first year to fund three community organizations. One of its fundees, Hmong American Institute for Learning (HAIL), used the seed money granted by HWGC to create and publish stories of marginalized Hmong women and girls in its premier national literary journal, *Paj Ntaub Voice*. The journal is a regularly published series of fiction, poetry, personal stories and memoirs written by and about Hmong women. Collected on a regular basis by HAIL, the writings in each issue are centered around a theme, such as loss and separation or sacrifice.

Since being funded, HAIL has taken the telling of Hmong women's stories to a wider audience. They are currently working with local schools to promote the *Paj Ntaub Voice* as an educational tool for secondary students. By including the journal in its required readings, Hmong women's stories are woven into the fabric of our history and identity as Americans. Next year, HAIL plans to take the use of the *Paj Ntaub Voice* from the secondary school level to the university level for inclusion in college course curriculums.

HWGC has grown its own goals as well. Originally established as a two-year pilot program under the support of the Women's Foundation of Minnesota, HWGC is on its way to becoming an independent nonprofit organization, and is now sponsored by Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders in Philanthropy (AAPIP). The Circle is completing a five-year business plan and expects continued growth as a funder of organizations supporting the Hmong community in Minnesota.

Cynthia Yongvang joins Ka Vue in co-chairing the organization and providing leadership and direction to the organization in the coming years. HWGC member Mala Thao expects more success ahead for the HWGC and the organizations it funds. She said, "We're very hopeful about the future. All of us are working to build something permanent for our community. Our goal is to encourage the community to invest in its own members through the work we are doing." She adds that the Circle is always looking for new members to join and help guide it through this growth period.

For more information about the Hmong Women's Giving Circle, contact Mala Thao at mala@aapip.org or 612-729-9597.



The Hmong Women's Giving Circle gathers to discuss fundraising strategies in the Hmong Community.



Members of the Hmong Women's Giving Circle from left to right: Cynthia Yongvang, Co-Chair, Khaothong Sinwongsa, Mala Thao, D. Mala Thao-Her, Secretary, Ka Vue, Co-Chair, and Linda Thao.