

GIVING GIRLS ROOM TO THRIVE

• More and more, philanthropic groups are funding programs focused on giving women and girls an opportunity for professional success.

By JEAN HOPFENSBERGER • hopfen@startribune.com

Call it the power of the purse — and it's spreading across Minnesota.

In Minneapolis, girls are learning how to start a flower shop business.

Teen girls in Milaca have launched a "Teens Against Dating Abuse" campaign.

And in Marshall, girls are getting green-thumb training to become small farmers.

The girls don't know it, but they're part of a growing trend in philanthropy — a heightened interest in girls and women. It's a drive fueled by the growing economic success of women, and the resulting increase in grants by women's foundations, which soared from \$30 million to \$65 million in the past decade.

When it comes to targeting girls, the Women's Foundation of Minnesota is considered a national model. Its "GirlsBEST" program marks its 10-year anniversary this year, and the foundation is poised to expand it nationally.

"We know that more girls than boys face depression, poor self-esteem ... and are more likely to be physically and sexually assaulted," said Lee Roper-Batker, president of the Women's Foundation of Minnesota.

"These programs offer little cocoons that allow these girls to thrive," she said.

Thriving girls become thriving women, which is what these foundations are all about.

"I think we're starting to pull back and say,

Girls continues on A12 ►

"If we really want to impact women's lives, we need to start much younger," said Roper-Batker.

For Sandy: 'Opportunity'

Sandy Hubbard is among the roughly 1,000 Minnesota girls who have tapped the trend. A high school senior, she's a regular at the girls programs run by Old Arizona perfor-

mance art center in south Minneapolis.

Last month, Old Arizona was awarded a GirlsBEST grant to help reopen a log cabin flower shop operated by women since 1945 and to teach girls to run it. (By the way, half the foundation committee voting on the grants were teenage girls.)

"When they told me about the flower shop, I thought, "Opportunity!" said an upbeat Hubbard, 17. "Small things can lead to great things."

Hubbard and a half-dozen other girls learned how to draft a business plan last spring. This fall, they'll get hands-on training from a professional florist and then teach flower arranging to other girls at Old Arizona. They'll also start selling Christmas wreaths.

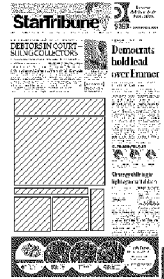
They can't open the floral shop, however, until Old Arizona raises enough money to refurbish the log cabin.

It doesn't matter to Hubbard that she may, or may not, someday start a business.

"I think I'll look back at this and realize I've learned responsibility, and how to take care of myself," she said.

The "29th Street Petal Shop" is just one opportunity for girls at Old Arizona. The girls can take classes in fashion design, hip hop, yoga, theater and other arts classes. Last week, an aerial artist offered trapeze lessons.

"We encourage the girls to pursue their dreams," said Elizabeth Trimble, a co-founder of Old Arizona. "We want to be their cheerleaders, to say, 'If that's what you want to do, we'll do whatever it is to help you achieve it.'"



Hubbard is grateful for the opportunities. She lives with her grandmother in a lower-income neighborhood. She says when she feels stressed out, typically over "school, family issues and guy problems," she remembers she has a place to go and opportunities to learn.

"When I have a really bad day, I know there's something else going on here," said Hubbard.

Change inside and out

About 50 girl-run projects have taken off across the state, thanks in part to women's foundation funding, said Roper-Batke. They include a coffee shop in Staples, a dance academy for Latina girls in Minneapolis and a digital arts programs for girls on the Leech Lake Indian Reservation.

The Teens Against Dating Abuse has been particularly successful, said Roper-Batker. It was launched in 2005 in Milaca with seven members. It now has 100 members, including boys, in Princeton and Onamia. The teens, concerned about escalating violence among younger girls, lobbied state legislators last session to require that teen dating curriculum be extended in middle schools. They'll be back next year, she said.

A study of these programs showed they transform the hearts and minds of girls, said Roper-Batker.

More than 90 percent of the participants in GirlsBEST-funded projects reported they wanted to pursue higher education, would refrain from getting pregnant until they were ready to raise a baby, and believed they could "accomplish anything," she said.

In spite of the success, funding for such programs remains small compared to all foundation giving. About 3 percent of Minnesota grantmaking goes to programs specifically for women and girls programs, said Roper-Batker. Nationally the figure is 7 percent.

Minnesota leads again

Not so long ago, there were no foundations that focused on women and girls. Ms Magazine, the femi-

nist icon, launched the nation's first women's foundation in 1973, said Deborah Richardson, chief program officer for the Women's Funding Network, the umbrella organizations for the world's women's foundations and funds. It was later joined by a handful of city and regional foundations.

In 1983, Minnesota launched the first statewide women's foundation.

In 1985, there were 20 members of the Women's Funding Network, making \$1.2 million in grants. Today there are 163 members, the vast majority in the United States making \$65 million in grants, the network reports.

The number is growing, in particular in developing countries, where the rights of women and girls lag far behind the United States. A new Arab Women's Foundation, for example, was just launched in Dubai.

When it comes to a micro-focus on local girls, Minnesota has long been a leader, said Richardson. GirlsBEST, for example, has a \$3 million endowment that guarantees it will continue.

"We know that prevention is more effective than a cure, and Minnesota was one of the first to recognize it," said Richardson. "GirlsBEST did that, and they did it early in the game."

With 10 years of experience under its belt, the Women's Foundation of Minnesota is planning to promote the GirlsBEST model more aggressively. Women's foundations from around the country have expressed interest in setting up similar programs, said Roper-Batker, adding, "it's now a matter of attracting a national funder."

"We've learned that people in our communities really do care about girls," said Roper-Batker, whose foundation recently conducted a "listening tour" around the state. "With the complex problems facing our state and the world, I think everyone realizes we need the full talents and skills of both boys and girls as future leaders."

Jean Hopfensperger • 612-673-4511

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Elizabeth Trimble, co-founder of
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Lee Roper-Batker,
president of the
Women's Founda-
tion of Minnesota



RENEE JONES SCHNEIDER • reneejones@startribune.com

Circus aerialist Kenny Kiser gave a lesson to Sandy Hubbard at Old Arizona performance art center in Minneapolis, which has received a grant to help girls pursue their career dreams.



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Mentor Kerry Riley of Needle and Black designs laughed with student Mady Morgan during a fashion design class for girls at the Old Arizona performance art center in Minneapolis.

GROWTH OF WOMEN'S FOUNDATIONS AND FUNDS

	No. of women's foundations/Funds	Grantmaking	Assets
1985	20	\$1.2 million	N/A
1990	N/A	\$6.2 million	N/A
2000	94	\$30 million	\$200 million
2010	163	\$65 million	\$535 million

Source: Women's Funding Network