

Women's Foundation of Minnesota launches campaign to end the prostitution of Minnesota girls

(Nov. 1, Minneapolis) — Today, the Women's Foundation of Minnesota announced the public launch of MN Girls Are Not For Sale, its five year, \$4 million campaign to end the prostitution of Minnesota girls. The Women's Foundation will use the \$4 million it raises to make grants, fund research, convene stakeholders, and educate and mobilize the public on this issue. The online headquarters for the campaign is www.MNGirlsNotForSale.org.



According to the FBI, the Twin Cities is among the nation's 13 largest centers in the country for the prostitution of adolescent girls. The U.S. Justice Department reports that the average age a girl is first prostituted is 13, many as young as 11. State law enforcement and nonprofit service providers confirm that the buying and selling of underage girls for sex is a reality in Minnesota and on the rise.

The ease and anonymity of the Internet has made it the primary way to sell and buy girls for sex. Research conducted during a 10-month period in 2010 found that the number of adolescent girls sold for sex in Minnesota through Internet classified advertising and escort services increased 166 percent. By very conservative measures, the same research determined that in Minnesota approximately 213 girls are sold an average of four to six times per day each month through the Internet and escort services. This number does not include hotel, street or gang activity.

"The MN Girls Are Not For Sale campaign has three goals," said Lee Roper-Batker, president and CEO of the Women's Foundation of Minnesota. "First, we will advocate policy change that redefines girls under the age of 18 who have been sold for sex in our state as victims of a crime and ensure that they have access to safe housing and holistic, healing services. Two, we want to decrease the demand for sex with girls. And three, we want to mobilize and engage the public around this issue."

The Women's Foundation's work to build the MN Girls Are Not For Sale campaign began in July 2010 when it convened 85 stakeholders from across the state — elected officials, state agencies, advocates, law enforcement, judges, faith communities, community leaders — and created a

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strategic blueprint to end the prostitution of Minnesota girls. Today, 55 individuals from these stakeholder groups make up the campaign's fundraising, grantmaking, and public education committees.

The Women's Foundation quietly launched the campaign in January 2011 and has already raised \$2.6 million towards the \$4 million goal. The first round of grants totaling \$340,000 will be awarded in January 2012.

"Through MN Girls Are Not For Sale, we will ensure that all girls in Minnesota experience the world as a place of safety, and thrive," said Roper-Batker.

For more information about the MN Girls Are Not For Sale campaign, the issue of child prostitution in Minnesota, and what you can do, visit www.MNGirlsNotForSale.org.

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About the Women's Foundation of Minnesota

The Women's Foundation of Minnesota is a statewide community foundation that invests in social change to achieve equality for all women and girls in Minnesota. The Foundation funds innovative social change programs, builds women's philanthropy, conducts and reports research, advocates public policy, and educates the public about the successes and challenges of Minnesota's women and girls. Founded in 1983, it is the oldest statewide women's foundation in the country. More at www.wfmn.org.