

PRESS RELEASE

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First Hmong Women's Giving Circle in Nation is Launched

(St. Paul, MN)

On Thursday, July 29, 2004, the Women's Foundation of Minnesota will celebrate the first Hmong Women's Giving Circle (HWGC) in the nation. A giving circle is started by a group of people who care about a particular issue or concern. Members deposit money into a group fund administered by the Women's Foundation. Collectively, members recommend charitable grants to projects that will advance their cause.

The Women's Foundation is a statewide community foundation championing the social, economic and political equality of women and girls. According to Lee Roper-Batker, president of the Women's Foundation, "The Hmong Women's Giving Circle is a terrific model of developing philanthropy with, by and for women underrepresented in traditional philanthropy. This cutting-edge group of women is leading the way, and philanthropic institutions across the nation are watching."

The HWGC is creating history with 20 Hmong women and girls raising funds and investing it in their community. The mission of the HWGC is to promote philanthropy within the community, to encourage activism and create social change for Hmong women and girls throughout Minnesota. "Every person is a philanthropist, whether it's in the form of supporting extended family members or writing out a check to a particular charity. We're honored to support this innovative group of philanthropists at the Women's Foundation," Ms. Roper-Batker added. "The HWGC aligns with the Women's Foundation commitment to pluralism and vision to promote collective philanthropy as a way to attain equality between the sexes."

"It is well known that the Hmong community is extremely charitable, however, we do not join mainstream philanthropic institutions. Our monetary gifts are given during weddings, funerals, times of hardship and religious faith," said Mala Thao, a founder of the HWGC and Community Asset Builder and Operations Manager for the Women's Foundation. "We formed the giving circle to create a bridge between the Hmong community and an institution like the Women's Foundation. The giving circle is a vehicle for the Hmong community to think of their philanthropy as investing in one's own community."

(more)

Why are investments required? Ms. Thao points to the Women's Foundation of Minnesota research report, the *Status of Women in Minnesota Counties*, "This report shows that women in Minnesota make up nearly 50% of the workforce (full time year-round workers) but only earn \$0.73 to a man's dollar. For Hmong women the disparity becomes even more pronounced, Hmong women make \$0.56 to a man's dollar. This is just one example of the disparity that our giving circle hopes to remedy." The relocation of thousands of Hmong families from Thailand to the Twin Cities area this summer is also a concern. According to Ms. Thao, "As members of a refugee population, we already know the challenges that these new refugee women will face as they and their families strive to make a good life here in Minnesota. I hope there is something we can do to help them."

In addition to support from the Women's Foundation of Minnesota, HWGC is also supported by the Women's Funding Network Venture Fund, designed to grow and broaden women's philanthropy across the nation. The giving circle will start with small investments and evaluate their impact. This year the HWGC will award \$15,000 in social change grants to organizations serving Hmong women and girls by the end of this year.

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The Women's Foundation of Minnesota is a public, charitable foundation established in 1983. The Women's Foundation is the only foundation in the state that devotes its resources to promote economic, political, and social equality for women and girls. In the course of its grantmaking history, WFM has awarded over 600 grants totaling over six million dollars. Today, WFM grants nearly \$1 million annually to programs serving women and girls and actively advocates, researches and educates on issues and trends impacting women across the state. WFM is the oldest, and second largest, statewide women's foundation in the nation.