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'Half the Sky' Exhibit Challenges Inspires Families

Best for middle schoolers and above, this Gates Foundation exhibit explores tough issues and inspires action

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“It deals with hard topics, but it’s hopeful,” says David Wertheimer, Director of Comm and Civic Engagement at the [Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation](#), about a new exhibit called *Women Hold Up Half the Sky*. “The exhibit highlights how women around the world are turning oppression into power.”

The new special exhibition at the Gates Foundation’s [Visitor Center](#) is inspired by the [Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide](#), by Nichola Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn.

The small exhibit addresses the worldwide oppression of women and girls and the individual’s role in fostering workable solutions. Three distinct, significant challenges by women around the world are showcased in the displays: maternal health, violence against women and sex trafficking. Each of these topics is addressed on panels and in its own mini-gallery within the exhibit, housed under an art installation containing thousands of handwritten wishes of gallery visitors. Designed as a visual testament to the power of collective action, the artwork will evolve as thousands of visitors “hold up the sky” with wishes in response to these prompts: “Share a wish for a woman or girl you know” or a wish for a woman or girl facing a difficult situation.”



Women enrolled in Women for Women International's programs in Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Photograph by Les Stone.

While the Foundation's programs are data-driven, the exhibit puts a human face on these issues by focusing on individual stories of women who have changed their lives through education, economic empowerment, courage and hope. *Women Hold Up Half the Sky* challenges visitors to act on the inspiration provided by the women's stories and offer concrete ideas for what to do. Some of these ideas can be completed onsite: creating your own social media education message or filling out action pledge postcards that the Foundation "matches" with \$5 donations. A variety of free bookmarks identify actions families can take after they leave the exhibit, such as exploring the #DefendHer campaign or sponsoring a woman in a war-torn country through the organization [Women for Women International](#).

Events that bring the exhibit home and inspire action

In addition to the static displays, the Visitor Center is planning a series of public programs that take communal action and bring home the global themes of the exhibition with local organizations. The interactive elements of these events also make the exhibit more engaging for young people.

On [Wednesday, June 28](#), Storytellers for Change will bring immigrant and refugee women

from Iraq, Somalia, Mexico and Burma to tell their personal stories. Other local partner organizations, including the Refugee Women's Alliance, CARE, International Rescue Committee and more will attend to share details of their work.

Ongoing "Partner Wednesdays" will also connect visitors to local organizations whose is complementary to the Foundation's. The first two featured partners are [Real Escape the Sex Trade](#) (REST) on Wednesday, June 21, and [First Aid Arts](#) on Wednesday, June 22. Action Saturdays, held on the second Saturday of the month, will engage visitors in hands-on activities that make a difference, like packaging donated clothes for deliver women in need.

Girls and boys offer a prayer before eating. They are students at Prajwala, an education center in Hyderabad, India, dedicated to preventing sex trafficking and to rehabilitating survivors. Photograph by Nicholas D. ...

Parents should know: best for middle schoolers and up

Both for logistical reasons (ahem, downtown traffic) and to maximize the educational benefits, families will get the most out of the exhibit if they attend one of the community events. Visit the Gates Foundation Visitor Center's [Facebook page](#) for details about upcoming events.

Women Hold Up Half the Sky describes issues that directly affect females and features stories of changes wrought by women, but it clearly demonstrates the impact that the issues have on the entire human race. This exhibit is every bit as valuable for sons and brothers and it is for daughters and sisters.

However, it is not for little kids. The exhibit is text-heavy (even the videos are subtitled) and the subject matter is mature. Although all ages are welcome, this is probably not the place to introduce the concept of rape. The Gates Foundation suggests middle school as the minimum age to benefit from this exhibit, and parents should be prepared to talk with tweens and teens about what they learn. The websites of partner organizations and reference copies of the book can help you answer your child's more difficult questions. Please help to remember that action is an antidote to the feelings of fear and helplessness that

topics can bring up.

If you go ...

When: The Gates Foundation Visitor Center is open Tuesday–Saturday, 10 a.m.–6 (5 p.m. in winter); this exhibit is on view through Jan. 27, 2018.

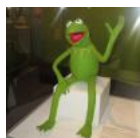
Where: Gates Foundation Visitor Center, 440 5th Ave. N., Seattle

Cost: Admission is free

Events: Visit the Gates Foundation Visitor Center [Facebook page](#) for details about upcoming events that help families learn about the issues and take action

Parking: Paid parking is available onsite in the Fifth Avenue Garage (\$6 for 1 hour; for 2 hours; \$15 all day). Entrances are just east of Fifth Ave. on both Harrison and Republican Streets.

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