

Vermont Commission on Women

Meeting Minutes

December 11, 2013

Pavilion Office Building, 4th floor conference room

Montpelier, VT

Commissioners present:

Marcia Merrill (Chair), Eileen Boland,
Carol Buchdahl, Laine Dunham,
Ruth Finn, Danielle Martel, Marion Milne
Nancy LaVarnway, Gretchen Bailey
Ariel Wengroff, Jennie Gartner,
Charlotte Dennett

Commissioners absent:

Cathy Frey, Marion Milne, Susie Hudson
Shambulia Gadsden Sams

Advisors present: Traci Sawyer representing Building Bright Futures, Diane Derby representing Sen. Patrick Leahy's Office, Sarah Kenney representing Vermont Network Against Sexual and Domestic Violence, Ilisa Stalberg representing the Vermont Department of Health.

Guests: Bethany Pombar, Prevention Specialist, Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence; Lynn L. Webster, MD, Women's Health Medical Director, VA Medical Center of White River Junction; Jill Evans, Women and Family Services Coordinator, Vermont Department of Corrections.

Staff: Cary Brown, Lilly Talbert, Claire Greene

Presiding: Marcia Merrill

Recording: Claire Greene

Welcome/Introductions: Marcia welcomed everyone and asked those present to briefly share something about themselves.

Approval November 2013 minutes

MOTION made by Carol Buchdahl, seconded by Laine Dunham

To approve the minutes as submitted with one correction on the top of page four—change the word state to federal.

MOTION APPROVED

50th Anniversary Discussion

Cary reminded those present that several commissioners have agreed to host events in their communities showcasing the women in leadership theme. Some of these events will take the form and structure of the "Taking your Place at the Table" panel discussions. Cary encouraged commissioners who have not volunteered to think some more about the prospects of their home town. If commissioners doubt their capacity, staff is here to help facilitate in any way possible. Confirmed events include:

- Marcia is in the infancy stages of planning a Burlington event in September
- Carol has decided upon a luncheon that will likely happen in Springfield on May 14th with the president of CCV
- Danielle will have an event in conjunction with the Women's Expo in St. Albans on October 11th and have the VCW business meeting happen in St. Albans before or after. Diane recommended we keep in mind potential time conflicts with WEOC and the Expo.
- Eileen is working with women legislators in the NE Kingdom
- Laine is currently polling women leaders in Bennington County to get a sense of a good time and place.

Lilly passed around a sheet outlining dates of note in the next six months. Cary informed commissioners that there is a regional conference happening next year focused on women in public policy. The event will likely take place in October at the Kennedy Library in Boston. She asked the commission to help brainstorm ways to engage more Vermonters to not only attend but participate in the planning process.

It was confirmed that VCW's signature event will be April 9th at the State House. The Commission's Business meeting will also take place earlier that day. Marion Milne has agreed to speak in addition to Governor Peter Shumlin and former Governor Madeleine Kunin. The program will focus on women's progress and highlight former commissioners, advisors and crucial supporters along the way. Commissioners were asked to please take another look at our growing guest list to add new names and/or detail to those already listed. Lilly requested folks send along any meaningful lists or sources of lists they might have to staff. "Save the dates" will be sent out before the holidays. Overall, the tone of the event will be low key and informal. This is not an invite only event-- anyone can stop in at any point.

Governor's Task Force on the Prevention of Domestic and Sexual Violence – Report

Lilly welcomed and introduced Bethany Pombar, the chair of the Governor's Prevention of Domestic and Sexual Violence Task force. The task force was initially formed by the Governor in 2011 to engage men in the conversation, but focus quickly shifted into assessing the landscape of violence prevention in the state. Within small workgroups of three, members of the task force sought out as much information as possible (seeking both gaps and richness in the DV/SV prevention community) to compile a comprehensive report. The full report encompassed over 70 recommendations and is available on VCW's website for those interested. From these standalone reports, Bethany sited many overlaps and areas of cohesion with high potential for leveraging power. Currently, there is an incredible amount of support, energy and dedication from both the governor's administration and community partners. Despite this desire for the initiatives, existing capacity is low and prevention is one of the most notoriously underfunded areas within the domestic and sexual violence network. An executive summary of the task force's final report was handed out to those present. All recommendations focused on primary prevention: the stages before domestic violence occurs.

Bethany offered a brief overview of each of the seven recommendations in the report:

- Support a comprehensive statewide plan that is action oriented and grounded in our communities. Ensuring that implementation with programs and stakeholders are mutually informing one another and that these initiatives align with other public prevention initiatives.
- Develop a multi-pronged prevention campaign. Bethany noted that the Step Up program has a great model for developing this campaign. Bethany emphasized a the need to create messages that resonate, build on each other year after year, well thought out are Longview oriented. Social media as a real change tool!
- Foster an engaged bystander who has both the motivation and skill to be actively involved. For example, offering our youth tools for calling others out on sexist conversations, jokes or put downs. Encouraging earlier intervention before imminent threat of harm.
- Bring men into the conversation in a meaningful way. Offer action orientated training with a menu of options for them to plug into the movement. Part if this would include figuring out ways for men to become allies on their own and in their own terms. Reducing toxic masculinity and patriarchy by equipping men with tools for understanding their privilege and any feeling of guilt they might embody.
- Strengthen Vermont college campuses' response to prevention. Every campus in the state acknowledged that sexual violence is a problem and are hungry for more information. Current organized prevention involves occasional discussions during orientation, often within the context of drinking. Plans to creating prepackaged toolkits with a diversity of prevention options, small scale and large scale best practice prevention initiatives. There are options to utilize the Networks resources to help build college capacity.
- Enhance data collection.
 - Building the capacity to better evaluate and track prevention efforts. (No current baseline data and/or grassroots organizers often lack scientific data skill sets).
 - De-scattering this data into a centralized collection site to build consistency.
- Making all efforts more centralized via state help and alignment. Hire state point person equipped with answers, data, resource, and referral to ultimately keep track of the DV/SV 'big picture'.

A small budget request is currently being developed in the governor's office in addition to some local and community funding. The hope is that jump-start funding will leverage more capacity building and initiatives.

Sarah Kenney assured the group that the secondary and tertiary levels of abuse prevention will not be shortchanged as we address this primary level.

Women Veterans Health Care

Cary welcomed and introduced Lynn L. Webster, MD, Women's Health Medical Director the VA Medical Center in White River Junction. Lynn offered a history of women in the military over the past thirty years. Trends predict that in the next 20 years women serving will double. Currently, veteran health care providers are retaining a higher percentage of female veterans (62%). Of this user group, 58% are over the age of 45 and require more intensive services. Nationally, women average more primary care visits and use more mental health services than their male counterparts. Women often do not identify themselves as veterans. Moreover, around 40% have no knowledge of or misperceptions around veteran health care. Some barriers include a lack of information on eligibility of care, navigating the application process, and challenges of access to care (too far from home).

The role of the WRJ VAMC health care system is to serve as a linchpin for improved women's health services. Care provided at WRJ VAMC includes:

Primary

Mental health: depression, anxiety, military sexual trauma, drug abuse, parenting/caregiver issues, adjustment from deployment.

Emergency

Impatient

Physical therapy/occupational therapy (including breast cancer)

Contraception (including emergency contraception)

Maternity (evidence based)

Menopausal

Newborn

Special programs:

Vocational rehabilitation

Educational opportunities

Services for homeless veterans

MOVE! Managing Obesity in Veterans Everywhere

Healthy aging services

Long term end of life services

Sacred stories circle.

Emergency medical services

There is no funding of abortions in VA hospitals, addressed in a similar way as other private sector health institutions. Transgender veterans are given the option of where they want to be seen-- accommodations based on desire of the individual. WRJ VAMC 's goal is to find all the "lost users" who were enrolled but are no longer coming to the VA for health care. WRJ VAMC has community health

clinics in Burlington, Newport, Bennington, Brattleboro, and Rutland, but a vast majority of the specialized care is in WRJ.

Women in Corrections

Marcia welcomed Jill Evans to the meeting. Jill gave an overview of her job/role within corrections.

Commissioners requested information about the current status of CRCF to which Jill responded:

- Stricter, more security oriented administration
- High turnover in staff and lack of training
- Lack of gender responsive programming
- Discussed number of incarcerated women, unsure of what plan B was if at capacity but was told that contingency plan would not involve sending longer-term women out of state.

Issues of detentions-- detention rates for women are on the rise for non-violent crimes. Anecdotal reports that we are detaining women to protect them from themselves (for example substance abuse) which is what detention is not intended for (intended for risks of fight or flight). There is a critical need to evaluate the criminal justice system's response to the criminalization of poverty, trauma, and homelessness. Women are doing time for gender based survival crimes based on the external constraints imposed on their lives and the reliance of drugs to get by. Women are forgetting that they have a voice when no one is around to remind/expose them.

Some discussion and interest in having next business meeting at CRCF-- including a tour and listening forum with a group of inmates.

Announcements

Lilly was pleased to report that Alex Stetter, VCW's current intern from Montpelier High School, will be joining us once again after her winter break to help out with the legislative session. A letter of thanks was passed around the room for all to sign.

Meeting adjourned at 12:30 p.m.