

State of Vermont**Vermont Commission on Women**

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Vermont Commission on Women**Meeting Minutes****Wednesday, September 9, 2020 | 9:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.****Remote Meeting via video and teleconferencing****Commissioners present:**

Lisa Senecal (Chair), Ed Adrian, Kellie Campbell, Mary Daly,
Erica Hare, Sarah Mell, Ashley Messier, Kim Nolan, Heidi
Tringe, Marybeth Christie Redmond, Lisa Ryan

Commissioners absent:

Nancy Brooks, Lisa Carlson,
Charlotte Dennett, Emilie
Kornheiser

Advisors present:

Jen Horwitz of Let's Grow Kids
Alison Lamagna of Vermont Works for Women
Marguerite Adelman of Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, Burlington Chapter
Diane Derby of the Office of Senator Leahy
Amy Russo-Perler of Vermont Early childhood Advocacy Alliance
Kaitie Armstrong, Vermont Women in Law Enforcement
Meredith Roberts of ANA Vermont
Katarina Lisaius of the Office of Senator Sanders
Thea Wurzburg of the Office of Congressman Welch

Guests: Aly Johnson-Kurts of Change The Story Vermont, Molly Goodspeed, VCW intern, Holly
Morehouse, Vermont Afterschool

Staff: Cary Brown, Hannah Lane, Lilly Talbert

Presiding: Lisa Senecal

Recording: Hannah Lane

1. Welcome/Introductions

Meeting called to order at 9:36 a.m.

Lisa warmly welcomed Ashley and Sarah, and invited both to introduce themselves. Lisa asked the group to briefly introduce themselves, and asked the group to share what they each are doing to stay physically and mentally healthy.

Approval of June & July 2020 Meeting Minutes

Approval of July 2020 Minutes

MOTION made by Erica Hare, seconded by Marybeth Redmond:

To approve the July 2020 minutes as submitted.

MOTION made by Mary:

To amend the motion to include June 2020 minutes as submitted in the motion.

No discussion.

AMENDMENT & MOTION APPROVED BY ROLL CALL VOTE. Adopted as presented.

Marybeth Redmond – Yes

Heidi – Yes

Sarah – Yes

Ed – Yes

Mary – Yes

Kellie – Yes

Erica – Yes

Kim – Yes

Ashely – Yes

2. Staff Updates

Agenda item skipped for the sake of time. Commissioners were encouraged to read the written staff update circulated in advance of the meeting and to reach out with any questions.

3. Child Care and K-12 education updates

Holly Morehouse – Afterschool Vermont

Holly has been working on uncovering misconceptions about afterschool programs amid COVID. Afterschool programs happen in a variety of forms, and many shifted to meet community needs when schools closed in March. Programs created virtual spaces for support and connection, and programs were offering full-day, week-long, in-person programs this summer. Holly highlighted disparities in our state; Newport and South Royalton elementary schools are going back to school every day with a robust afterschool program that covers the remainder of the time and offers many options, while some schools in the south are fully remote, and many places have hybrid schedules. Child care doesn't end at 5, it can get more complicated for older children as families may need to utilize several programs to fill in the gaps.

Universal access to afterschool is a priority. There was a bill that made it through the Senate, is now in the House, that would create a task force to look at universal access to afterschool programs, but that's stalled out with the pandemic. Vermont Afterschool is partnering with DCF to create the new childcare hubs for kids when schools are remote. Advocating to use the existing providers to be the backbone for this program, and to strengthen them and create additional capacity that will exist beyond COVID. 30 identified entities to open these hubs, some have several locations. One role is connecting people with space and providers who need it.

A staffing campaign was launched yesterday, see it as driving more people to early childhood settings, afterschool programs, etc. Training is a critical component of this program to ensure the programs they set up are safe for the children they serve and have a free fall training “boot camp” coming up.

Afterschool has been working with local communities to set up youth councils to support youth voice, and they planned out a state youth council and what its responsibilities could be.

Kellie asked about retention.

Afterschool has a reputation as being transient, and that’s true to an extent. There are a number of college students, young professionals who do turnover, but many programs have directors and leadership who have been there for many years. The closer the position is to full-time, the easier it is for people to stay. In other places in the world, these jobs are seen as professional and they recognize the skills involved, and that makes it easier.

Stabilization funds were initially limited to programs serving 0-5 year-olds. Afterschool staff retention has suffered; there has not been targeted funding and with schools closing to in-person activity it’s meant layoffs, and those extended to summer programs as well; increasing the challenge in hiring for those positions. Afterschool staffers are frequently paraeducators or part-time specialists that teach specific populations and they round out work schedules to be full time.

COVID-19 has changed staffing needs and staff responsibilities significantly. It’s difficult to find candidates who can take positions for 15 hours/week, and that coupled with the lack of respect, unlike in places like Scandinavia, where the public regards them as experts, for these positions makes this a need that is difficult to fill right now.

Jen Horwitz, Let’s Grow Kids

There were grants made available for programs to support them in reopening, the ReStart grants, available to child care and school-age programs, with very narrow guidelines about how the funds could be used. It was a very detail-oriented program, and so funds are remaining. The legislature is discussing how to use those funds to support the industry. The Senate is working on an amendment that would allow the funds to be spent on prospective labor development. Hiring is a challenge, and one of the challenges is that providers have their own childcare issues, and how do we manage all of this?

Vermont’s Child Care Financial Assistance Program (CCFAP) is for kids 0-13, or 19 if the child has specialized needs. Every year, the program needs more funding, and this year, the House has proposed that the program’s income thresholds match the 2020 federal poverty guidelines. A five-year redesign plan was proposed to ensure that the amount the CCFAP pays out what it costs to provide care. Costs have gone up because of COVID. Right now, the state bases CCFAP rates based on 2015 rates of what child care providers were charging. This is a key issue, and they are asking the legislature to do a market rate survey so we can understand how COVID-19 has impacted tuition and to better understand what the reimbursement gap is and how we can address it.

Daycare centers are having to limit the number of kids coming in, but incur all the same, and some additional costs. Some programs are having staffing problems that mean they can't operate at their capacity.

4. Racial Justice

As we're continuing on with our racial equity learning community, Cary wanted to solicit feedback from the Commission about our priorities, what changes would we like to see, how might we make progress? Looking for thoughts on this. This project has been a year and a half in development.

What is it that the Commission needs to learn, to do differently, where we want to go with this? The first session was a lot of introspective work about our own blinders and biases.

Discussion points raised included:

- concerned about there not being people of color on the committee.
- who should be part of that consideration?
- White spaces for unlearning white supremacy can be helpful, but if there is no accountability structure they turn into an echo chamber.
- It's problematic that there are no women of color in this learning community.
- Named that a problem is that we don't have adequate representation of BIPOC Vermonters on the Commission; we don't have enough BIPOC people in our organizations to participate without being tokenized.
- Change The Story is having a similar reckoning, and they've asked the facilitators to join CTS's Steering Committee to join the full group, rather than the smaller groups.
- This seems like a passive, not an active approach.
- It doesn't sound like Cary & Lisa are running this group, and the best that can be done is to go back and represent VCW's opinion that this isn't the best direction for this group, and we need a total re-do.
- Meeting September 14th, and VCW Commissioners should be invited to attend.

5. Ongoing supports for women, Sue Minter, Capstone Community Action

Capstone is one of five community actions in the state of Vermont, all of whom have evolved around a mission of lifting people out of poverty. The poverty rate of female female-headed households is four times that of single-male-headed households. For Capstone, 95% of Head Start families are women, in three counties, Washington, Lamoille, and Orange, they serve 350 families. Pre-pandemic, 30% were homeless. Fighting for funding for microbusiness development programs in the legislature, zeroed out in the Governor's recommended budget. Created a program called Embrace. Capstone does have funding available for underserved microbusinesses, which need to be spent by December.

Everyone Eats is a new program building on their food security work, puts federal dollars into local restaurants to provide meals to food-insecure families.

Vermont is allocating critical resources towards people who are homeless to being successfully housed and are helping with utility arrearages. Mileage Smart is a new program related to climate justice and directing vehicle subsidies for used hybrid vehicles for low-income folks.

They've received a grant to work on how we support single-headed households in Washington County.

Cary – do you have thoughts about broader policy approaches so that when the money for specific programs run out, are there some policy decisions that could be made that would get at the underlying economic structures that contribute to poverty?

Economic impact checks were a success. Universal basic income as an approach.

Sarah – Thinking about intersections of race and gender in our state, and is wondering about statewide reparations as a tool to address systemic poverty. She's wondering about community action agencies' connection to racial equity work.

Capstone isn't as actively connected with racial equity as maybe in other states, because they are implementing so many programs, and the boards that oversee these programs are getting there, it's an evolution.

6. Announcements

U.S. Senate Republicans have introduced their next stimulus proposal, with less money than their proposal in April. Sen. Sanders is working on the budget that needs to pass this month.

It's Pride Week in Vermont, Pride Center of Vermont is hosting many events virtually and in person.

Amy – The Vermont Early Childhood Advocacy Alliance's annual meeting is one week from today, all here welcome and encouraged to attend.

Kellie – Normally this time of year that we are thinking about the year ahead, and with so many new folks, maybe we could consider an exercise to get input from Commissioners about their thoughts and goals. It's been beneficial in the past to do a round-table with advisors in the past, maybe we could do materials in advance and have a more conversational meeting.

Any ideas about the November meeting with Advisory Council organizations should be shared with staff. Intern Molly will be working on this.

Meeting Adjourned at 12:14 p.m.